

Mediating Role of Brand Awareness in the Relationship between Viral Marketing and Online Purchase Intention: A Study of Sri Lanka's Clothing Industry

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Abstract

In the digital era, consumer engagement is increasingly shifting toward online platforms, making viral marketing a powerful strategy for influencing purchasing behaviour. Despite its global importance, the effectiveness of viral marketing in developing economies, particularly in Sri Lanka's clothing industry, remains underexplored. Few studies have specifically examined how viral marketing strategies shape consumer purchase intentions in this sector, creating a significant gap in the literature. Addressing this gap, the objective of this study was to examine the impact of viral marketing on online purchase intention, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of brand awareness. Drawing on the Advertising Value Model, the study evaluated four key dimensions of viral marketing, such as entertainment, informativeness, source credibility, and irritation, to determine their direct and indirect effects on consumer purchase intention. A quantitative research design was employed, using a validated structured questionnaire distributed to a convenience sample of 384 online consumers in Sri Lanka. Data were analysed through SPSS, incorporating descriptive statistics, correlation, multiple regression, and mediation analysis to ensure robust results. Findings revealed that entertainment, informativeness, and source credibility significantly and positively influence online purchase intention, whereas irritation has a negative effect. Furthermore, brand awareness was found to partially mediate the relationship between viral marketing and purchase intention, highlighting its critical role in shaping consumer decisions. These results not only extend the theoretical understanding of viral marketing and brand awareness but also provide practical insights for marketers. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of designing engaging and informative viral content while ensuring credibility and minimising consumer irritation in developing economies and offers actionable recommendations for practitioners in Sri Lanka's clothing sector.

Keywords: brand awareness, clothing industry, online purchase intention, viral marketing