



A STUDY ON IMPACT OF VIRAL MARKETING ON BRAND AWARENESS OF HEIS.

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Abstract

In an era dominated by digital connectivity and information sharing, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly turning to viral marketing strategies to enhance their brand awareness and reach prospective students. This study delves into the dynamic landscape of viral marketing and its influence on brand awareness within the context of HEIs. Employing an exploratory methods research design, this investigation aims to assess the effectiveness of viral marketing campaigns in elevating the visibility and perception of educational institutions. The subsequent sections of this study will unfold in a systematic exploration. The literature review will delve into foundational theories and empirical studies related to viral marketing, establishing a conceptual framework for understanding its implications in the higher education sector. The methodology section will outline the research design, data collection strategies, and analytical approaches employed to interrogate the impact of viral marketing on brand awareness. Subsequently, the findings and discussions will illuminate the nuanced dynamics that characterize the relationship between viral marketing initiatives and brand perception within the realm of HEIs.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Students, Brand awareness

Introduction:

In the rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, the advent of digital technologies has revolutionized the way educational institutions engage with prospective students. With the pervasive influence of social media and online platforms, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly leveraging viral marketing strategies to enhance their brand awareness and connect with a global audience. This study embarks on an exploration of the multifaceted relationship between viral marketing initiatives and the establishment of brand awareness within the context of HEIs.

The term Viral Marketing was coined by Jeffrey F. Rayport in his article titled The Virus of Marketing. The article discusses the potential of utilising the virus as a marketing tool, highlighting its ability to rapidly disseminate the marketing message within a short timeframe, requiring minimal budgetary resources, yet achieving a significant reach and impact. Viral Marketing, as defined by Kaplan and Haenlin, refers to the dissemination of a marketing message pertaining to a company, brand, or product through electronic word of mouth. This transmission occurs in an exponential manner, frequently facilitated by social media applications.

Brand awareness refers to a potential buyer's capacity to recognise or remember that a brand belongs to a specific product category. Brand awareness is considered to be a factor that can influence consumers when they are making selections about what to purchase. This is inherent to the character of consumers who have a tendency to seek out products that have undergone testing and are deemed safe. Consumers are more inclined to purchase a product that has a familiar brand compared to a product with a less recognised or completely unfamiliar brand name.

The significance of brand awareness in the competitive education sector cannot be overstated. As students navigate an abundance of choices in pursuit of academic excellence, the ability of an institution to effectively communicate its identity, values, and offerings becomes paramount. Viral marketing, characterized by the rapid dissemination of content through social networks, holds promise as a powerful tool for HEIs to amplify their brand messages and resonate with diverse audiences.

According to De Bruyn and Lilien (2008), marketers have sought to capitalise on the unusual phenomena of electronic peer-to-peer recommendations as a result of the expansion and development of the Internet by launching viral marketing initiatives. When an influential person in a group spreads a message to their followers, it can quickly become viral, as pointed out by Vilpponen et al. (2006). Thus, with the fast transmission of content and minimal expense, viral marketing becomes a viable choice. Because of this, it's crucial to analyse how viral marketing influences recognition of the brand. A dual purpose is what is driving this scientific endeavour. In the first place, it aspires to add to the scholarly conversation about viral marketing by looking at how it works in the specific context of universities. Second, it hopes to provide marketing experts and school administrators with actionable recommendations for improving their brand-building campaigns based on solid research.

By undertaking this study, we endeavor to unravel the intricacies of viral marketing's role in shaping the brand identities of educational institutions, thereby providing a roadmap for effective and impactful marketing practices in the higher education sector. As digital connectivity continues to redefine the contours of communication, this research holds the potential to inform strategic decisions that not only resonate with the current state of affairs but also pave the way for a more dynamic and responsive future for higher education branding.

Research Objectives

- To study different elements of viral marketing.
- To examine the impact of viral marketing elements on brand awareness of HEIs.

Literature Review

Viral Marketing

According to Ahuja et al. (2007) and Dobeles et al. (2005), marketers have been interested in strategies to spread product information, identify brands, and improve brand image since the early

1960s. In an article published in *Fast Company* magazine titled "The virus of marketing," Rayport (1996) explored the concept of Viral Marketing. The idea behind this approach is that when customers are happy with a company's products or services, they will always tell their friends and family about it (De Pelsmacker et al., 2010). According to Palka et al. (2009), "Viral" marketing is similar to the spread of the flu virus in that it involves the dissemination of promotional messages from one client to another. One powerful marketing tactic for building brand awareness is viral marketing, which is spreading product information through people's social networks. Marketing strategies and phenomena that attempt to inspire and encourage others to spread messages are referred to as "viral marketing" by Kim and Lowrey (2010). By capitalising on the interplay between consumers and various forms of media, viral marketing has emerged as a cutting-edge method of advertising and publicising brands. Numerous viral marketing strategies allow businesses to interact with customers via email, blogs, forums, video websites, chat rooms, social networks, and short message service (Woerndl et al., 2008). Most people are happy to share messages with their friends and family, which increases the likelihood that the message will be believed by others who receive it. According to research (Chiu et al., 2007; Bampo et al., 2008), viral marketing can efficiently reach a wide number of consumers and encourage them to buy products from a specific brand. Social media networks have recently attracted a lot of marketing attention because of their flexibility and the direct interaction they provide with consumers. With the help of these forms, marketers will be able to precisely quantify the number of views for a certain message, which will enable them to monitor their progress and evaluate the effectiveness of viral marketing on consumers. According to the sociological component, one's socioeconomic class greatly affects their purchasing behaviour. There will be more talk about the brand because people's natural curiosity is combined with consumers' own experiences. Content that makes people feel hot and fuzzy is more likely to get shared and end up going viral, according to studies (Berger and Milkman, 2011; Dobeles et al., 2007). Viral marketing is a low-cost method of reaching many people at once through the use of interactive advertising strategies. It enables the straightforward and rapid transmission of customised messages to prospective clients (Dawar & Dawar, 2015; Shashikala & Mahapatro, 2015). According to De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh (2007), it can quickly reach a large audience.

Marketing that aims to create a strong desire to spread a message or information within a network of individuals or their social media connections is called "viral marketing" according to Fitriana and Utami (2017). An online kind of word-of-mouth advertising, viral marketing is defined by Kotler and Armstrong (2018). It comprises making commercials, videos, and other forms of advertising that are so engaging that viewers can't help but seek them out or recommend them to their friends. The third Eltaj defines viral marketing as a form of marketing that employs social networks to achieve certain marketing objectives through a sequential process of communication (Alfifto and Hasman, 2022). Viral marketing is defined by Syahidah (2021) as the strategic and extensive use of electronic communications to successfully disseminate product information to an ever-growing audience. "Viral marketing" is defined by Astasari and Sudarwanto (2021) as an advertising approach that uses word-of-mouth to spread its message.

Brand Awareness

Brands are defined as "any combination of words, phrases, symbols, illustrations, or blends thereof used to identify and distinguish one seller's goods from another seller's similar goods" (Kotler, 1997). According to Keller (2002), brand awareness is the sum of two things: being able to recognise the brand and being able to recall it. Customers have brand awareness when they can distinguish one brand from another when they hear or see it, and when they see it again, they can also tell it apart from its competitors. Front of mind is the most elevated level of brand awareness, followed by spontaneous and finally prompt, the three tiers of which are separate yet complementary. Recognising the importance of digital environments makes it relatively easier to establish brand recognition and enhance company reputation via online platforms (Mason and Roger, 2008).

The ability of consumers to recognise or remember a brand with sufficient detail to enable a purchase is what Kotler and Keller (2016) mean when they talk about brand awareness. According to Firmansyah (2019), the main goal of marketing communication is to raise brand awareness. In an ideal world, people would think of the brand first when a need arises in a certain category, and they would also think of it when weighing their options. Aaker (2018) states that brand awareness is the ability of a prospective customer to recognise or recall that a brand is part of a particular brand category. Studies conducted by Ahuja et al. (2007) and Dobeles et al. (2005) indicate that marketers have been intrigued by methods to disseminate product details, recognise brands, and enhance their reputation since the early 1960s. In his 1996 *Fast Company* magazine piece "The virus of marketing," Rayport delved into the idea of Viral Marketing. According to De Pelsmacker et al. (2010), word-of-mouth marketing relies on satisfied consumers raving about a business's offerings. "Viral" marketing, as described by Palka et al. (2009), is like the flu in that it entails the transmission of promotional signals from one customer to another. Spreading product information through people's social networks is known as viral marketing and is an effective marketing approach for increasing brand awareness. According to Kim and Lowrey (2010), "viral marketing" describes marketing tactics and phenomena that aim to motivate and inspire people to share messages. Viral marketing is a relatively new kind of advertising and publicising brands that takes use of the interaction between customers and other types of media. Woerndl et al. (2008) listed a plethora of viral marketing tactics that facilitate consumer-brand interactions through various online mediums such as email, blogs, forums, video websites, chat rooms, social networks, and SMS. Because most people are delighted to share messages with those they care about, the message has a better chance of being believed by those who receive it. Evidence from studies (Chiu et al., 2007; Bampo et al., 2008) suggests that viral marketing is an effective way to promote a brand's wares to a large audience. The adaptability and direct communication that social media networks offer their users has recently garnered a great deal of marketing interest. Marketers may track their progress and assess the impact of viral marketing on customers with the aid of these forms, which exactly calculate the number of views for a given message. A person's socioeconomic status substantially impacts their buying habits, as stated in the sociological component. People will talk

more about the brand as a result of consumers' own experiences and the inherent curiosity of the general public. According to research (Berger and Milkman, 2011; Dobele et al., 2007), content that evokes positive emotions is more likely to be shared and eventually go viral. Using interactive advertising tactics, viral marketing can reach many individuals at once at a minimal cost. It makes it easy to send personalised communications to potential customers quickly and easily (Dawar & Dawar, 2015; Shashikala & Mahapatro, 2015). Quite a few people can see it right away, say De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh (2007).

According to Fitriana and Utami (2017), "viral marketing" refers to advertisements that successfully evoke a strong desire among users to share the message or information with their social media contacts. Viral marketing is characterised by Kotler and Armstrong (2018) as an online kind of word-of-mouth advertising. The goal is to create advertisements (commercials, videos, etc.) that people are so captivated by that they can't stop watching them or telling their friends about them. Eltaj 3 states that viral marketing is a method of reaching a target audience through a series of linked social media posts (Alfifto and Hasman, 2022). In order to effectively spread product information to a constantly expanding audience, Syahidah (2021) defines viral marketing as the strategic and broad use of electronic communications. According to Astarari and Sudarwanto (2021), "viral marketing" is a kind of advertising that relies on people talking about it amongst themselves to spread the word.

Nguyen et al. (2020) notes that as HEIs spread around the world, some nations have made branding a top priority. This is because branding allows HEIs to have fruitful discussions with potential students about the values that are connected with their brand. Higher education institutions (HEIs) compete in the market by building their brands around strong equity, which shows prospective students that the services they offer are legitimate and competent (Mclaughlin, Mclaughlin, and Mclaughlin 2018).

With the support of brand equity, HEIs can raise their profile, which in turn helps them draw in more students, hire better faculty, expand their customer base, and stand out from the competition (Mourad, Meshreki, and Sarofim 2020)..

Brand equity of higher education institutions

It is far more difficult to promote HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) than marketing tangible goods. The unique nature of the higher education industry is largely to blame for this, since it makes enrolling or making a purchase seem like a huge gamble (Zhang and Li 2019). With intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability comes a larger degree of uncertainty about the delivered higher education service's outcome (Posselt 2018). While evaluating HEIs, prospective students take a number of factors into account. Higher education institutions (HEIs) encounter difficulties in fulfilling their brand promise until students enrol and gain direct experience with their services (Sharabati, Alhileh, and Abusaimh 2019). Higher education institutions (HEIs) face difficulties in attracting prospective students to their high-quality educational services due to this issue, and prospective students face difficulties in making the risky

decision to invest in costly education (Endo, De Farias, and Coelho 2019). Feng and Horta (2021) note that the global student migration patterns cause the global education market to change rapidly, which brings forth new opportunities and challenges as well as a more competitive environment in higher education. As per Lu, Scholz, and Nguyen (2018), institutions that excel at offering courses abroad or through digital platforms often establish global brands to enhance their effectiveness in the global market. Lomer, Papatsiba, and Naidoo (2018) suggest that HEIs' efforts to increase their global brand reputation and equity could be useful in luring overseas students to their domestic campuses. The consistent application of brand positioning, according to Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007), helps HEIs maintain their competitiveness around the world. In order to boost their brand equity, HEIs should standardise their operations across international markets and incorporate other business procedures to support their branding efforts (Feng and Horta 2021).

Hypothesis:

H1: The brand awareness of Higher Education Institutions is significantly influenced by the utilization of social media in viral marketing.

H2: The brand awareness of Higher Education Institutions is significantly influenced by credibility of viral marketing.

H3: The brand awareness of Higher Education Institutions is significantly influenced by attractiveness of viral marketing.

Research Methodology

This study used a two-part structured questionnaire for its data collection. In the first phase, we ask questions designed to gather respondents' demographic and socioeconomic details. Part two includes questions that gauge both the independent variables and the level of brand recognition. This study employed a non-probability convenience sample technique to compile data from an online survey. Data was collected and checked after the surveys were sent to respondents through Google Form. Studying how viral marketing affects HEIs' brand awareness requires deciding which specific individuals or entities will serve as the sample unit for the data collecting and analysis processes. Here, we can classify the sample unit as those who are thinking about applying to college or university so that we can see how viral marketing has affected their knowledge of and attitude towards these institutions. There were 300 student samples distributed, but only 276 were considered legitimate (a response rate of 92% in the Bangalore area). Each participant's eligibility for this study was established according to two standards. Their primary qualification was that they must be a first-year student at the designated HEI. Secondly, having an active social media profile was a requirement, as the study relied on undergraduates' experiences with social media to inform several of its questions. In addition, the complete and relevant indicators for the model structure were provided by this study using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 20, which led to remarkable experimental results (Hair et al., 2009).

Results and discussion

Table 1: Demographic details of the students (n=276)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	163	49
Female	113	41
Undergraduate		
1 st year	119	43
2 nd year	58	21
3 rd year	47	17
4 th year	52	19

Source: Primary data

The interpretation of the gender and undergraduate year data reveals notable patterns within the surveyed population. In terms of gender distribution, the majority of respondents were male, constituting 49% of the sample, while females accounted for 41%. This gender imbalance suggests that, within the context of the study on the impact of viral marketing on brand awareness of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), there is a relatively higher participation rate among males. This finding prompts further exploration into potential gender-specific perceptions and reactions to viral marketing strategies employed by HEIs.

Concerning undergraduate year distribution, the data shows a concentration of respondents across different academic levels. The highest frequency is observed among first-year students, comprising 43% of the sample. This may indicate a higher level of engagement or receptivity to viral marketing campaigns among students in the initial stages of their higher education journey. As the academic years progress, the percentage distribution decreases, with second, third, and fourth-year students representing 21%, 17%, and 19%, respectively. This variation in distribution suggests a potential shift in the impact of viral marketing strategies across the academic years, highlighting the importance of considering the timing and content of these campaigns in relation to students' academic progression.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is a statistical technique employed in research to uncover latent structures within a set of observed variables. This method helps identify the underlying factors that contribute to the observed correlations among variables, offering valuable insights into the structure of a dataset. The primary objective of EFA is to reduce the complexity of data by identifying commonalities and organizing observed variables into meaningful dimensions or factors.

A preliminary factor analysis was carried out to ensure that the selected scale items were loaded adequately; no instances of cross-loading were found, and the factor loading score was more than 0.5. If a sample is large enough, further analysis can be performed, according to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value. This data set is well-suited for factor analysis, as indicated by the high Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and the high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) score of 0.877. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) using the Varimax Rotation Method Kaiser Normalization was applied to the thirteen elements. Based on the factor extraction criteria for Eigen values greater than 1, four components were identified, which together explain 77.21% of the overall variation.

Table 2: Factor loadings and reliability

Factor	Items	Loadings	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha
Social media	q1	.799	3.26	.898	0.865
	q2	.806	3.44	.959	
	q3	.761	3.43	.887	
	q4	.790	3.27	.929	
Credibility	q5	.845	3.56	.872	0.869
	q6	.848	3.58	.920	
	q7	.763	3.50	1.006	
Attractiveness	q8	.854	3.58	.866	0.873
	q9	.876	3.61	.831	
	q10	.812	3.51	.838	
Brand awareness for HEIs	q11	.816	3.60	1.018	0.896
	q12	.857	3.61	1.047	
	q13	.862	3.56	.973	

Source: Primary data

The interpretation of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) results for the identified factors—social media, Credibility, Attractiveness, and Brand Awareness for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)—reveals insightful information about the relationships between the latent constructs and their respective items.

1. Social media:

The factor loading values for items q1, q2, q3, and q4, ranging from .761 to .806, indicate a strong association between the latent factor of social media and the observed variables. The mean scores for the items (3.26 to 3.44) suggest a moderately positive perception of social media in the context of brand awareness for HEIs. The high Cronbach's alpha value of 0.865 indicates good internal consistency reliability among the items.

2. Credibility:

Items q5, q6, and q7 exhibit high factor loadings, ranging from .763 to .848, reflecting a robust relationship with the Credibility factor. Respondents' mean scores (3.50 to 3.58) suggest a generally positive perception of credibility in relation to HEI branding. The Cronbach's alpha of 0.869 indicates good internal consistency among the credibility-related items.

3. Attractiveness:

The Attractiveness factor, represented by items q8, q9, and q10, demonstrates high factor loadings (.812 to .876), indicating a strong connection between the latent construct and the observed variables. Mean scores (3.51 to 3.61) suggest a positive perception of attractiveness in the context of HEI branding. The Cronbach's alpha of 0.873 reflects good internal consistency reliability among the attractiveness-related items.

4. Brand Awareness for HEIs:

Items q11, q12, and q13 exhibit high factor loadings (.816 to .862), indicating a robust association with the latent factor of Brand Awareness for HEIs. Mean scores (3.56 to 3.60) suggest a positive perception of brand awareness in the sample. The Cronbach's alpha of 0.896 indicates good internal consistency reliability among the brand awareness-related items.

Overall, the EFA results provide evidence of the distinct factors contributing to brand awareness for HEIs. The high factor loadings, coupled with good internal consistency reliability, underscore the reliability and validity of the identified latent constructs. These findings offer valuable insights into the dimensions influencing brand awareness in the context of higher education, laying the groundwork for further analysis and strategic implications for marketing and communication efforts in educational institutions.

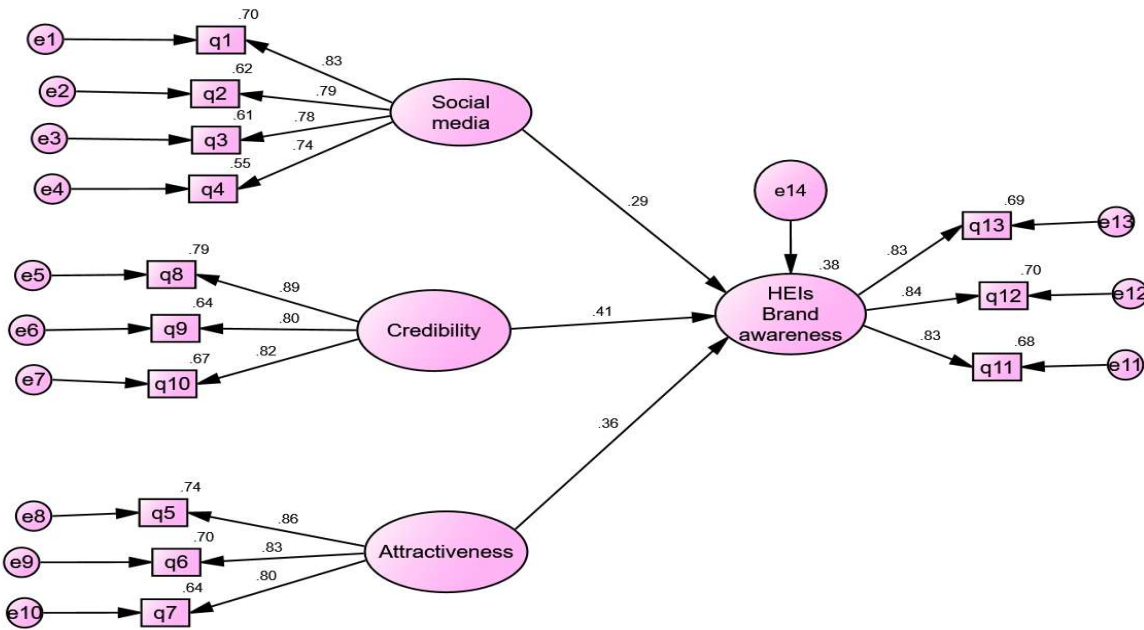
Table 3: Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Social media → HEIs brand awareness	0.293	.069	4.378	0.000	
Credibility → HEIs brand awareness	0.408	.068	5.972	0.000	
Attractiveness → HEIs brand awareness	0.359	.069	5.301	0.000	

The results of the hypothesis testing, examining the relationships between the latent constructs of social media, Credibility, Attractiveness, and brand awareness for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), reveal statistically significant and positive associations. For the hypothesis "Social media → HEIs brand awareness," the estimate of 0.293 with a standard error of 0.069 yields a critical ratio (C.R.) of 4.378, resulting in a p-value of 0.000. This indicates a strong and positive relationship between social media engagement and the brand awareness of HEIs. Similarly, for the

hypothesis "Credibility → HEIs brand awareness," the estimate of 0.408 with a standard error of 0.068 results in a C.R. of 5.972 and a p-value of 0.000. This signifies a significant and positive influence of credibility on HEI brand awareness. Likewise, for the hypothesis "Attractiveness → HEIs brand awareness," the estimate of 0.359 with a standard error of 0.069 produces a C.R. of 5.301 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating a substantial and positive impact of attractiveness on HEI brand awareness. Overall, these findings provide empirical support for the hypothesized relationships, affirming that social media engagement, credibility, and attractiveness significantly contribute to the brand awareness of Higher Education Institutions. The results offer valuable insights for marketing strategies in the educational sector, emphasizing the importance of these factors in shaping the perception and awareness of HEIs among the target audience.

Figure 1: Structure model for HEIs’ brand awareness



The findings of structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis, conducted using the maximum likelihood approach, are presented in Table 3. This analysis aims to investigate the links between viral marketing factors (social media, credibility, and attractiveness) and brand awareness of higher education institutions (HEIs). The study hypothesis is accepted or rejected based on a critical ratio value of 1.96 and a p value less than 0.05 at a significance level of 5%.

According to the data shown in table 3 and figure 1, the standardized regression weight (β) for social media is 0.293, with a p-value of 0.000. The critical ratio (C.R.) of 4.378 is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the usage of social media by higher education institutions (HEIs) in viral marketing has a positive and significant impact on their brand recognition. This

result confirmed acceptance of hypothesis H1. The brand recognition of HEIs is positively influenced by the credibility of viral marketing, with a beta coefficient (β) of 0.408 and a p-value of 0.000. This relationship is statistically significant with a p-value of less than 0.05. Therefore, the finding supports hypothesis H2. Ultimately, the attractiveness of viral marketing employed by HEIs has a substantial impact on their level of brand recognition/awareness. The β coefficient for this path is 0.359, with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 and the CR is above 1.96, hypothesis H3 is also supported.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) value is 0.382, indicating that 38.2% of variations in HEIs brand awareness is explained by three elements of viral marketing: social media, credibility and attractiveness.

The model fit indices for the brand awareness model of HEIs are as follows: Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.911, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.949, and Normalized Fit Index (NFI) = 0.943. All of these indices above the threshold criterion of 0.90. Nevertheless, the negative indication, as evaluated by the Root Mean Square of Approximation (RMSEA) value of 0.052, falls below the threshold limit of 0.08 (Hair et al., 2010).

Discussion and Implementations:

The study demonstrates the importance of social media, credibility, and attractiveness of viral marketing in influencing brand awareness for higher education institutions. The results confirmed significant and positive impact of these factors on brand recognition. Institutions should strategically manage these factors to enhance their visibility, credibility, and overall brand image in the competitive landscape. The positive and significant coefficient for social media underscores the influential role of social media platforms in promoting HEIs brand awareness. Institutions should leverage social media to engage with their audience, share relevant content, and strengthen their brand presence. The standardized regression coefficient is highest for credibility highlights its crucial role in shaping HEIs brand awareness. Institutions must prioritize building and maintaining credibility through transparent communication, expert endorsements, and reliable information. Similarly, the positive coefficient for attractiveness indicates that the visual appeal and overall attractiveness of HEIs contribute significantly to brand awareness. Investing in visually appealing content and a positive aesthetic can enhance brand recognition.

The study's findings carry significant implications for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their strategic approach to brand awareness in the contemporary digital landscape. By identifying the influential factors of social media engagement, credibility, and attractiveness, educational administrators and marketing professionals gain valuable insights to inform their strategic decision-making. Institutions can craft targeted marketing campaigns, allocating resources efficiently and focusing on platforms and strategies that resonate most with their audience. The emphasis on social media underscores the importance of a robust digital presence, prompting HEIs to enhance their online engagement and share compelling content. Furthermore, recognizing the impact of credibility and attractiveness, institutions are encouraged to invest in transparent

communication, visual appeal, and the cultivation of a positive reputation. Policymakers can utilize these insights to shape guidelines that foster effective marketing practices, contributing to a more competitive and dynamic higher education sector. The study emphasizes the need for continuous adaptation, urging institutions to monitor trends and regularly assess the effectiveness of their marketing initiatives to ensure sustained relevance and resonance with their target audience. Overall, the study provides actionable guidance for HEIs seeking to navigate the complexities of brand awareness in an evolving educational landscape.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the intricate dynamics of viral marketing and its impact on brand awareness for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The identification of influential factors such as social media engagement, credibility, and attractiveness provides a nuanced understanding that can guide strategic decision-making for educational administrators and marketing professionals. The study's findings emphasize the importance of leveraging digital platforms effectively, building credibility, and investing in visual appeal to enhance brand awareness. By aligning marketing strategies with these factors, HEIs can not only strengthen their competitive position but also cultivate positive perceptions among their target audience. The significance of continuous adaptation and monitoring trends underscores the dynamic nature of digital marketing in the higher education sector.

Limitations and Future Studies

While the study offers valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. The research may be confined by the specific context and demographics of the sampled population, limiting the generalizability of findings to a broader audience. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response bias, as participants may provide socially desirable responses. The cross-sectional nature of the study captures a snapshot in time, and longitudinal studies could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics of viral marketing and brand awareness in HEIs. Future research endeavors could address several avenues to further enrich the understanding of viral marketing and brand awareness in higher education. Longitudinal studies could explore how the impact of viral marketing evolves over time, considering changes in digital trends and educational landscapes. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts may uncover variations in the effectiveness of viral marketing strategies. Investigating the role of emerging technologies, such as virtual reality or artificial intelligence, in shaping brand awareness for HEIs could be a compelling area of exploration.

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