# Developing an Attitudinal Model of Viral Marketing Acceptance: Moderating Effects of Consumer Traits and Situational Factors

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With the ever increasingly competitive business environment, more marketers are using viral marketing campaigns to reach consumers more efficiently at lower cost. The goal is to motivate consumers to take action as a result of the message including selecting the products, services or brands promoted while passing the message to others through individuals' social networks. Research indicates the great potentials of viral marketing campaign to marketers, however, little is known about the motivations, attitudes, and behaviors of consumers engaged in this marketing instrument (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). As the social media platform continues to advance, understanding the traits and motivations of consumers is invaluable for marketers and communicators who deal with message strategy and media outreach.

The phenomenon of social media has become very popular among fashion consumers and companies within recent years. The fashion industry has changed tremendously with adoption and diffusion of information technologies and the change continues as new types of online business models are needed to reach ever more demanding and digitalized consumers (Kulmala, Mesiranta, & Tuominen, 2013). In the fashion cycle, great emphasis is placed on fashion leaders and their role played in influencing the followers. However, in the social media environment, marketers could reach and influence a large body of audience at same time rather than following traditional adoption and diffusion cycle where the leaders adopt the idea first and then influence the followers. Consumer traits determine how consumers will evaluate and form intentions for using viral marketing.

Fashion marketer experimenting with viral campaigns may find that some consumers are not interested. Therefore the question which personality characteristics determine consumer interest in viral marketing becoming increasingly relevant for fashion marketers as they consider (1) whether to use viral marketing, (2) how to design it to appeal to different consumers, (3) to which type of consumer to promote such service options and (4) how to do so. Also, as more consumers become comfortable with social media, both fashion leaders and followers are actively using the media. These two groups play an important role in the process of a viral campaign. Thus, the question of whether situational factors are important in impacting the spread of viral messages becoming increasingly important for marketers.

The objective of current study is to propose an attitudinal model for viral marketing to illustrate the moderating effects of consumer traits and situational factors on the relationship of social media usage and gratification. The research model (Figure 1) is developed through integrating attitude theories. Elaboration likelihood theory/model ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) a persuasion model attempts to explain how the attitude of a receiver can be changed by a persuasive message. ELM examines consumer traits and situational factors. Relevant consumer



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traits for fashion viral marketing are examined and include fashion leadership, fashion involvement, viral dynamics and structural social capital (Aron, 2004; Hirschman & Adcock, 1978; Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Perceived fun and usefulness of a message are used as situational factors (Cialdini, 2006).

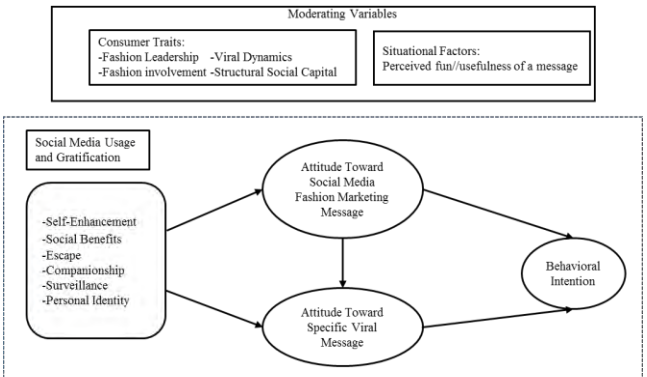


**Figure 1: An Attitudinal Model of Viral Marketing Acceptance: Moderating Effects of Consumer Traits and Situational Factors**

Uses and gratification theory explores consumer social media usage and gratification, the theory propose that when individuals face media choices, they choose a media that gratify their needs the best. Researchers have argued that fashion behaviors are deeply rooted in motivations, uncovering the mechanisms of the complex motivations behind fashion behaviors can advance our understanding of fashion consumers and enable marketers to seed effective marketing messages that can satisfy targeted or desired motivations and thus influence forwarding behaviors.

Understanding of consumer behavior patterns is always the major focus of marketing and brand managers. Having a better understanding of consumers and gaining insights about their behavior and attitude towards fashion viral messages enable marketers to interact and communicate directly with consumers efficiently and improve their marketing efforts to enhance business performance.

The proposed framework will contribute in advancing consumer understanding.

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