



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE IMPACT OF VIRAL MARKETING ON CUSTOMERS' CONTINUANCE INTENTION

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of viral marketing on the continuity of customer intention to use electronic banking applications among the customers of Sudanese banks, based on the theory of planned behavior. A structured questionnaire was used to examine the impact of viral marketing on the attitude of customers toward using and reusing banking apps or the continuance intention of using the service. A random convenience sampling technique was employed for data collection, and 200 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Demographic characteristics were not considered, as all respondents resided in Khartoum State, their ages were all over 18 years, and gender had no determined influence, according to our hypothesis. Findings revealed that the surveyed responses were neutral in many cases, while a significant relationship between viral marketing and customer continuance intention was found. Regression analysis also confirmed that viral marketing impacts the continuance intention of customers.

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Introduction:-

This study is investigating the impact of viral marketing on the continuity of customer intention in using banking electronic applications, considering specific challenges. These applications are relatively new in the Sudanese banking sector and have experienced some negative incidents recently, such as hacking, misuse, and technical complications, which allow negative word of mouth to potentially impact user perceptions through social media and direct contact.

Due to political, economic, and technical obstacles, online banking applications were introduced relatively late in Sudan's banking sector. Currently, several banks are using these applications with varying levels of efficiency. From general observation, many bank customers report frequent defects in these applications that often require customers to physically visit the bank to resolve issues or receive services. This raises the question: will customers continue to use these applications unless their quality improves? Will customers maintain their intention to engage with them in the future? This challenge is compounded by word of mouth that shapes specific impressions about the service.

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Literature review

Viral marketing is a social networking sharing of information, it helps in promoting ideas and information about companies, products, and services in both ways positive and negative. It is the spread of words and perceptions from person to person. With the massive technological development and excessive spread of social media, the word is being exchanged electronically more than orally. That is what makes Helm S. describe viral marketing as a pattern in which Internet companies spread by making use of customer referrals. According to Helm, viral marketing establishes customer relationships by 'Word-of-mouth' (Helm, 2000). Viral marketing was also defined as an approach that uses social networks to promote a product. Companies that use this approach encourage their customers to spread information about the product to others by using the consumers' social networks (Tricahyono et al., 2019).

As the clearest representation of viral marketing, word of mouth could be defined as the influence of customer-to-customer communications. As per Hayes, word-of-mouth marketing is when the daily dialogues of customers reflect their interest in a product or service (Adam Hayes, 2023). Some authors described word of mouth as the one that cuts through the noise speedily and effectively for its effective influence (Bughin et al., 2010). According to Mosley 2017, WOM is important as it is a free form of promotion, it's shared by customers and happens during an event that the customer experiences. It has also been defined as the social media era's version of simple word of mouth (Mosley, 2017).

On the other hand, electronic viral marketing faces some limitations, as mentioned by Bruyn and Lilien, where inappropriate messages and email-based viruses have muddled electronic communications, rendering electronic viral marketing challenging and difficult to circulate (de Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Ferguson R. argued that word-of-mouth or viral marketing efforts are not always a guaranteed success. At the same time, he mentioned that a well-organized campaign could be effective for years in unlimited new mediums like the Internet (Ferguson, 2008).

Customer intention (CI) as per several authors, refers to the attitude of the consumer's purchasing behavior and the degree of willingness to pay (Zhang et al., 2020). Considering the negative social influences several authors defined the influence of WOM as the apperceiving degree of users about the judgment of a product or service from the important people in their social circle, which influences the user's adoption intention (Lau, 2019). Continuance Intention (CI) is the customer's continued desire to continue dealing with the same product or service, or in other words, it is one's intention to continually use or reuse a system (T. & Ramayah, 2018).

Electronic banking or (e-banking) can be defined as changing banking services from traditional systems to modern electronic systems that use information technology to perform the banking business. E-banking has increasingly become an inescapable tool of the banking business. The banking industry has moved to specialized software programs called banking applications, which can carry out in practice all banking functions relying heavily on information storage, transfer, and processing (John & Rotimi, 2014).

Nowadays, the use of information technology (IT) in doing various works has become a necessity. Information technology is the processing of information by electronic means, including access, delivery, storage, and transmission (Idowu et al., 2002). However, despite this, the spread and use of this technology still face some resistance in many regions, according to the levels of education and knowledge of modern media. According to Khan et al., the acceptance of e-banking services has not been very positive, especially in rural areas of developing countries (Khan et al., 2019).

The relationship between viral marketing and customer intention

In research about riding the viral wave, researchers warn that focusing on the product over the brand during viral trends hinders customer retention, which explains the short lifespan of Generation Z customers. Furthermore, the proposed model identifies how to create customer desire to return and how to prolong customer retention (Husain Jinnah & Ismail, 2023). Another study from 2021 yielded interesting results, examining the role of viral marketing on behavioral intentions, with brand equity as a mediating variable. The study examined durable and non-durable goods, and the results indicated that brand equity mediates the relationship between viral marketing and behavioral intentions. Viral marketing positively affects word-of-mouth and purchase intention, but negatively affects brand switching. Marketers are most influential because consumers know and trust them. Consumers face an overwhelming influx of information and are overwhelmed by advertising, so they prefer to make their decisions through word-of-mouth (Fazeli Veisari et al., 2021). A study aimed at examining the impact of viral marketing on mobile app users' purchase intentions in Iran found that the most influential factor affecting the perceived usefulness of apps was the quality of the information presented. This was followed by the credibility of the source and the amount of information available. Perceived usefulness was also predicted by perceived ease of use through an indirect effect of information quality. Additionally, purchase intention was influenced by perceived ease of use, with perceived usefulness and purchase attitude also playing significant roles (Hendijani Fard & Marvi, 2020).

A study looked at the relationship between e-satisfaction, continuance intention, and e-loyalty toward mobile payment applications during COVID-19 to understand this relationship during that situation and any other unprecedented crisis. This research examined the factors influencing e-satisfaction, continuance intention, and e-loyalty in the context of mobile payment applications. It was found that information quality, service quality, system quality, perceived usefulness, and assurance all positively impacted both e-satisfaction and continuance intention. However, perceived threat and anxiety showed no significant impact on e-satisfaction; they were found to shape continuance intention. E-satisfaction, in turn, demonstrated a positive influence on both continuance intention and e-loyalty. Additionally, continuance intention itself was positively linked to e-loyalty. This study highlights the importance of perceived threat, e-satisfaction, perceived anxiety, and quality dimensions in e-customer satisfaction, continuance intention, and e-loyalty, employing an integrated framework that incorporates the health belief model, the expectancy-confirmation model, and the information systems success model. The findings of this research can help MPA service providers, online businesses, industry analysts, urban consumers, and relevant government authorities regarding the use of MPA during unprecedented crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Al Amin et al., 2023). In a study aimed at identifying the factors that influence continuity intention in food delivery apps, the objective was to uncover the drivers of continuity intention by integrating technology continuity theory with perceived task-technology fit, perceived food safety, and perceived value. Data were gathered from 398 individuals in Thailand. The findings supported the significance of all direct relationships, except the effect of perceived ease of use on attitude and the effect of perceived usefulness on continuity intention. Furthermore, perceived food safety positively influenced the relationship between perceived ease of use and attitudes. An analysis of food quality identified seven solutions with different combinations of factors that forecasted a greater intention for continuity (Foroughi et al., 2024).

A recent study investigated consumer attitudes towards mobile advertising notifications sent through branded mobile applications within the fashion sector. This research analyzes how consumer beliefs, data-driven mobile ad notifications, and perceived value collectively influence the acceptance of mobile advertising, intentions to repurchase, and the likelihood of recommending branded mobile apps on social media. 340 valid responses from Spanish customers of an online fashion retailer, all of whom were social media users and purchased exclusively through the company's branded mobile app, were analyzed to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed that mobile advertising acceptance, repurchase intention, and recommendation behavior are influenced by the perceived value of the branded mobile app. Perceived value is influenced by the app's utility, feelings about mobile advertising notifications, and levels of annoyance. The quality of mobile ads, particularly their informativeness and credibility, positively affects attitudes towards these alerts. An app's ease of use boosts perceived usefulness, whereas having control over notifications lessens annoyance. Additionally, the study offers managerial insights derived from its findings (Murillo-Zegarra et al., 2020). This recent study of 2024 seeks to examine the complex relationship between viral marketing and consumer purchase intention. Based on a database compiled from 479 customers of online fashion retailers, the results conclusively demonstrate a positive and statistically significant association between viral marketing and purchase intention (Shatnawi et al., 2024). In a study that examined the influence of brand image, viral marketing, and product quality on purchase intention, the results revealed that brand image and product quality partially had a positive and significant effect on buying interest, while viral marketing partially had a positive but insignificant effect on buying interest (Widyarsih & CAHAYA, 2023). The results of this study revealed that Islamic branding, viral marketing, and purchase intention positively and significantly influence purchase decisions. In contrast, online consumer reviews have a negative and insignificant effect on purchase decisions. Additionally, purchase intention can act as a mediator between Islamic branding and purchase decisions. However, purchase intention does not mediate between viral marketing and purchase decisions, nor does it mediate the influence of online consumer reviews on purchase decisions (Wandira & Rahman, 2021).

Theoretical Underpinning:

This study applied the theory of planned behavior (TPB) as a theoretical underpinning to investigate the behavior of users of electronic banking applications under the impact of viral marketing. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) originally stems from the theory of reasoned action and has been widely applied to explore various individual behaviors (Erul & Woosnam, 2022). Individuals' behavioral intentions are central factors in the basic TPB model in which there are three influential independent predictors, attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Erul et al., 2020), (Ajzen, 1991).

Materials And Method:

The theory of planned behavior (TPB), represented a theoretical background for this research. Descriptive analysis, correlations, and linear regression techniques were used to analyze the collected data. A structured questionnaire has been used to collect the needed data to examine the impact of viral marketing on the attitude of customers toward using and reusing banking applications or the continuance intention of using. A random convenience sampling technique was used for data collection, and 200 valid questionnaires were analyzed, demographic characteristics of residency were not considered, where all respondents are residents of Khartoum State, age is over 18 years for all, and gender has no definite influence according to our hypothesis.

Results

The reliability analysis shows a good level of reliability of the survey tool used for data collection (.761), which indicates a high internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for the items describing viral marketing, as shown in Table (1) below, reveals that four components were effective enough in representing all the characteristics or components highlighted by the stated 13 variables. According to Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings of the variance, we determine that four factors contribute to the impact of viral marketing on customer intentions. The total Variance Explained in the viral marketing scale is 56.558%.

Total Variance Explained in the viral marketing scale									
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.031	23.314	23.314	3.031	23.314	23.314	2.779	21.377	21.377
2	1.890	14.537	37.851	1.890	14.537	37.851	1.843	14.180	35.557
3	1.357	10.438	48.289	1.357	10.438	48.289	1.614	12.417	47.974
4	1.075	8.269	56.558	1.075	8.269	56.558	1.116	8.584	56.558
5	.977	7.513	64.071						
6	.762	5.860	69.931						
7	.750	5.766	75.697						
8	.684	5.259	80.955						
9	.662	5.090	86.045						
10	.614	4.723	90.768						
11	.502	3.859	94.627						
12	.406	3.125	97.752						
13	.292	2.248	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table (1) total variance explained in the viral marketing scale

Results from the Principal Component Analysis as shown in Table (2) show that factors of viral marketing are divided into four components. The higher the absolute value of the loading, the more the factor contributes to the variable. As presented in the previously mentioned table the loadings of all factors are more than 0.5, which is required for the factor to be considered effective. Looking at the data in the same table, we can see that the first six factors (ads help me, I am excited, Viral ads have a convincing way, the spread of information, the potential to change my attitudes, and following the electronic ads) are substantially loaded on Factor (Component) 1. while, the next four (advice of the same preferences, promoted by friends, other people's opinions, and friends' advice) are substantially loaded on component 2. The next two (I discuss user comments and I encourage my friends) are loaded on component 3. And the last one (I always focus on the security level of the app) loaded on component 4.

Rotated Component Matrix ^a				
	Component			
	1	2	3	4
ads help me get a clearer perception about banking apps.	.781			
The content of viral ads attracts me to search more about the banking apps.	.764			
Viral ads have a convincing way of making you try banking apps.	.662			
Viral advertising helps in the spread of information among browsers.	.648			
Viral ads have the potential to change my attitudes towards banking applications.	.591			
I am interested in following the electronic ads that show me information about banking apps while browsing the Internet	.558			
When using banking apps, I take the advice of those who have the same preferences as me		.712		
I prefer to use banking applications promoted by friends.		.656		
I usually listen to other people's opinions about the quality of banking app. services		.643		
I listen to friends' advice based on their experience with banking apps.		.553		
I discuss user comments on social media about their experience with banking apps.			.655	
I encourage my friends to use banking apps.			.636	
When a friend talks to me about a banking app, I always focus on the security level				.897
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. (EFA) Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.				

Table (2) principal component analysis for viral marketing items

EFA for the statements of the continuance intention of the customers to use the banking apps shows that three components are effective enough in representing all the characteristics or components highlighted by the stated ten variables. Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings of the variance show that three factors contribute to the continuance intentions of customers. The total Variance Explained in the intentions scale is 55.316% as appears in Table (3) below.

Total Variance Explained									
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.045	30.455	30.455	3.045	30.455	30.455	2.319	23.187	23.187
2	1.430	14.299	44.753	1.430	14.299	44.753	2.017	20.174	43.361
3	1.056	10.562	55.316	1.056	10.562	55.316	1.196	11.955	55.316
4	.957	9.573	64.888						
5	.823	8.228	73.116						
6	.696	6.958	80.074						

7	.648	6.478	86.552					
8	.544	5.444	91.996					
9	.470	4.698	96.694					
10	.331	3.306	100.000					
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.								

Table (3) total variance explained customer continuance intentions

Principal Component Analysis, Table (4), shows that factors of continuance intentions are divided into three components. The loadings of all factors are more than 0.5, which means all factors are effective. Four factors (I will continue if easy access, I will use if more protection, I will strongly encourage others, and I intend to continue sharing my knowledge) are loaded on component 1. The next four (I will continue despite technical issues, I will continue if no information in the bank, I will use more often, and I will continue to use increasingly) are loaded on component 2. The last two factors (I will continue using them if someone used them before me, and I will turn to an alternative) are loaded on component 3.

Rotated Component Matrix ^a			
	Component		
	1	2	3
I will continue using banking apps if I have access to the internet	.796		
I will use banking apps if they have more protection	.701		
I will strongly encourage others to use banking apps.	.701		
I intend to continue sharing my knowledge of banking apps instead of stopping them	.582		
I will continue using banking apps despite technical issues		.739	
I will continue using banking apps if I do not find information in the bank		.645	
I plan to use banking apps more often		.637	
I will continue to use banking apps increasingly		.557	
I would consider using banking apps if someone else used them before me			.792
I will turn to alternative banking apps more seriously as a better option			.586
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.			
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.			

Table (4) principal component analysis for customer continuance intentions items

Results from the descriptive analysis in Table (5) below show that the mean for the two groups of variables (viral marketing and continuance intentions) indicated moderate responses in general, which means that responses are found in the neutral area between the two extremities (strongly agree and strongly disagree).

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Viral index	171	2.46	4.92	3.6676	.49940
Intention index	170	1.30	5.00	3.8959	.54102
Valid N (listwise)	170				

Table (5) descriptive analysis for the items of the two main variables

Linear regression analysis, as shown in table (6) below, indicated that relationship between viral marketing and customer continuance intentions is highly significant at (.000). This result confirmed our main hypothesis that viral marketing is affecting the customer's continuance intention.

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	25.492	2.926		8.713	.000
	customers' opinion about viral marketing	.283	.061	.337	4.645	.000
a. Dependent Variable: the intention to continue using banking apps						

Table (6) regression analysis of viral marketing and countenance intentions

Discussion:

The results of our study agreed with the results of several studies conducted in different environments to examine the effect of viral marketing on continuance intention. This study agreed with a study conducted in Indonesia among clients of a music company to find the impact of viral marketing on consumers' intention to use, the study found that three out of four tested viral marketing dimensions influence the consumer's intention to use (Tricahyono et al., 2019).

Our study also agreed with a study that investigated the impact of mobile ads and perceived value on continuance intention for branded mobile apps in the Spanish fashion industry. Researchers in the mentioned study, examined the combined influence of consumer beliefs, mobile ads, and perceived value on mobile ads acceptance, intention to repurchase, and recommendation behavior towards branded mobile apps on social media. Results showed that mobile ads acceptance, intention to repurchase, and recommendation behavior, all are driven by the perceived value of the branded mobile apps (Murillo-Zegarra et al., 2020).

The results of our study are also compatible with the results of a study that examined the effect of viral marketing on the purchase intentions of mobile application users in Iran. The study's findings show that the most effective factor on perceived usefulness is the argument quality of information, followed by source credibility and quantity of information. It is also found that purchase intention is affected by perceived ease of use, followed by perceived usefulness through attitude towards the purchase (Hendijani Fard & Marvi, 2020).

Another study conducted in Taiwan attempted to find the interrelationships between viral marketing and purchase intention via customer-based brand equity. Results of the study reveal that viral marketing is made up of interesting, useful, and informative subjects that have differing effects on customer-based brand equity and purchase intention. Results also confirmed that interaction with viral marketing messages is essential for positively influencing both brand equity and purchase intentions (Liu & Wang, 2019).

In another research studies online consumer behavior toward product repurchase intentions among the consumers of traditional food products in Gresik, Indonesia. Assuming, that viral marketing and product innovation influence purchase decisions and repurchase intentions while purchasing decisions are intermediate. Findings reveal that viral marketing and product innovation directly influence purchasing decisions. The findings indicate a significant indirect effect of viral marketing and product innovation on repurchase intention through the mediation of purchase decisions. The results of this study also confirm the results of our study (M Rosyihuddin et al., 2022).

A study which was conducted in India attempted to examine the effect of viral marketing messages on the consumers' message process involvement, attitude, and purchase intention. The results indicate that viral marketing messages do not have a direct influence on the purchase intentions of consumers, but message process involvement and attitude towards the brand strongly mediate the relationship between viral marketing messages and purchase intentions. It can also be said that the results of this study are consistent with the results of our study (Trivedi, 2017).

Conclusion

Finally, we can conclude that there is an impact of viral marketing on the intention of bank customers to continue using bank applications, and that customer experience and word of mouth are playing decisive role in shaping customer intentions.

Recommendations

Accordingly, decision-makers in banks must pay attention to the quality and convenience of electronic services provided to customers to stabilize the service and ensure that customers would not retreat from it and return to the old traditional systems.

Limitations

This study is based on one service sector, which is the users of electronic banking applications in the state of Khartoum, so it will be difficult to generalize its results to all sectors.

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Contribution

All authors have actively contributed in all phases of theoretical and analytical work.

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