

VIRAL MARKETING AND CONTENT FORWARDING BEHAVIOR OF THE FILIPINO NETIZENS

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Abstract

This quantitative study aims to examine the topic of viral marketing by focusing on content forwarding behavior and viral content creation. The main point of the thesis is to find out how to create content that go viral, to outline what key elements affect the forwarding of viral content on social media and to know the content forwarding behavior of the Filipino netizens. A total of 200 participants were selected using cluster sampling. Results revealed that there is no significant difference among the factors that predict the content forwarding behavior of students. However, there is a significant difference among the content forwarding behavior based on how the respondents made an impression on the viral marketing videos. The researchers conclude that marketers need to carefully outline the key elements in order to create viral content for viral marketing campaigns on social media. These key elements are found to be triggers and incentives, emotional component and shareability.

Keywords: viral marketing, content creation, content forwarding, Filipino netizen

By taking advantage of or making their own online social networks, social media marketers can impact a brand network and potentially impact consumer behavior. To capitalize on present available opportunities, advertisers require discovering or setting up real brand network, hearing them out, and making unique projects and instruments that will engage potential and existing network individuals, rewarding existing consumers and inspiring conduct change from potential consumers.

The demand for new marketing techniques and strategies has been rapidly growing in recent years following the technological advances and the increasing need to understand and target consumers online (Leskovec, Adamic, & Huberman, 2008). There has been a significant change in how consumers are subjected to marketing messages, namely due to the fact that consumers nowadays recognize when they are being marketed to, and consciously choose to ignore those marketing messages (Scott, 2011).

Moreover, the creation of Internet and Web 2.0 has had a dramatic effect on the exchange of information between consumers. Social media platforms have enabled consumers to easily forward their opinions through posts, tweets, comments and reviews online, which has strengthened the interdependency between the marketer and the consumer (Darwish & Lakhtaria, 2011). However, this change has posed challenges for marketers, especially when managing brand reputation and the spread of negative messages. Today's marketers face the inevitable fact that if they cannot keep up and foresee the behaviors of consumers online, they will ultimately fail to adapt in online marketing environments (Leeflang, Verhoef, Dahlström, & T., 2014).

In a press statement, the Philippines topped the world in social media usage as the number of internet users in the country hit 67 million people, according to a new report by London, United Kingdom-based consultancy We Are Social (Camus, 2018). Interestingly, a large percentage of the Philippine population is composed of active Facebook users. Despite the country having an Internet penetration to only about half of Philippine population, at least 44.2 million Filipinos are active Internet users, and 32.0 million of such or 32% of the population use Facebook actively. The Philippines also largely has relatively young Facebook users (Areola, Evora, Maranan, & Maximo, 2016).

In a report presented by SocialBakers in 2012, 39% of the Filipino Facebook population are reportedly composed of users aged 18 to 24 years old while 24% are 25 to 34 years old.

By this, 63% of the entire Filipino Facebook population consists of relatively young users (Areola, Evora, Maranan, & Maximo, 2016).

Social networkers in the Philippines also showed the highest level of engagement on social networking sites averaging four hours per visitor. Across markets, the Philippines showed the highest penetration of social media usage with more than 90% of its entire Web population visiting a social media site during the month, followed by Australia (89.6%) and Indonesia (88.6%). This thesis was drawn out of the sheer interest in understanding the concept of viral marketing, as well as knowing how to create successful marketing messages online. The researchers decided that the best way to approach the subject would be by inspecting the pre-existing literature of an online marketing technique called viral marketing, combined with a questionnaire created by Hirvijarvi (2017). Viral marketing is also a marketing technique that is easily misunderstood and hard to successfully conduct (Scott, 2011). Therefore, the researchers wanted to find out how viral marketing can be used as a successful marketing technique on social media in regards to how viral content is created.

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is essentially a marketing strategy that utilizes pre-existing social networks such as social networking sites, video sharing sites, email providers, online forums and blogs. Viral marketing typically provides something free of charge and valuable to consumers, which encourages them to forward and spread the marketing message to others. Viral content typically takes its form as an advertisement in the format of a viral video, song, picture, meme or a message. (Chaffey & Smith, 2013). It also typically attracts smaller organizations and companies because it has a reputation of being effective and it is a relatively cheap alternative to traditional marketing mediums.

Origins of Viral Marketing

There is much debate from where the term “viral marketing” originated, and who popularized it, though one of the

first scholars' to use the term with its current meaning was Jeffrey Rayport in 1996. Rayport (1996) describes viral marketing as a form of virus marketing, and notes that viral marketing draws striking similarities to a biological virus, which usually spreads easily between different hosts and often goes unnoticed at first.

One of the earliest cases of viral marketing is the case of the successful launch of Hotmail in 1997 (Jurvetson, 2000). The strategy that Hotmail utilized was simple: there was an attached clickable URL tagline to every email they sent out, encouraging consumers to join Hotmail, because it was free of charge. The assumption was that the person receiving the email would notice that Hotmail was a free email account provider which differs to many other email providers on the market. This gave Hotmail a significant advantage to other competitors, which resulted in an explosive increase of new users of Hotmail, and made it the biggest email account provider worldwide within 10 months of its release (Wilson, 2012, p. 4)



Figure 1. The Hotmail example (Wilson, 2012).

As figure 1 depicts, the spread of Hotmail accounts was independent in its nature and did not rely on any traditional marketing mediums to get the word out for their new email account (Wilson, 2012). According to Jurvetson (2000), one of the most crucial benefits of viral marketing is that it turns consumers into salespeople simply by having the consumer use the product (in Hotmail's case sending an email). The more people forward the message, the bigger the audience becomes – and without any cost.

Jurvetson (2000) also adds that another key element of viral marketing is endorsement, specifically endorsement which is implied by a close friend or someone whose opinions and thoughts are trusted.

The concept of viral marketing is very similar to word-of-mouth, and according to Kirby (2004) viral marketing, or “word-of-mouth”, can be seen as a synthesis between advertised online marketing messages and offline word-of-mouth. Kirby (2004 p.4), argues that viral marketing does not need to have a specific product or service in order to raise awareness, buzz or peer-to-peer spread among consumers, but rather utilizes an online communication agent that serves the same purpose without the need for continuous marketing efforts.

Wilson's Six Principles of Viral Marketing

Wilson (2012) argues that there are six principles to follow when conducting viral marketing. He recognizes that a good viral marketing strategy needs certain elements in order to succeed. These elements are essential for a viral marketing strategy – the more elements that are implemented in the strategy, the more effective it will be (Wilson, 2012). These six strategies are giving away products and/or services for free; providing effortless transferring/sharing/forwarding to other people; scaling effortlessly from small to very large; exploiting common motivations and behaviors; using existing communication networks; and taking advantage of other resources to get the message out.

Viral Content on Social Media

For specific viral content to reach its targeted audience, it needs to be channeled through the right social media channels (Scott, 2011). Consumers can easily affect social media by sharing and forwarding information, ideas, content and thoughts online, which makes it unique and separates it from mass media (Scott, 2011). Social media consists mainly of advanced technologies and networking tools, which provide efficient ways for consumers to express their opinions through. The purpose that

each of the below social media channel serve is relevant when marketers want to target their online content to their target audiences (Scott, 2011). Table 2 simplifies the purpose of each social media channel;

Table 2. Social media vessels and content forwarding purpose (Scott, 2011).

Social media channel	Purpose
Social networking sites	To gather a community of friends that consumer wants to mediate information to. (i.e Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat LinkedIN)
Blogs	To share information through a personal website and build a community of active followers who comment on the author's post.
Video & photo sharing sites	To share videos and/or photos that get liked and commented on. (i.e. Youtube, Vimeo, Flickr, 9GAG)
Online chat rooms	To converse through online meeting forums and participate in discussion threads (i.e Reddit)

Social Media

According to We Are Social (2017), less than 10% of the population of Central Asia are active on social media each month. Social media growth shows no signs of slowing because social networking has quickly become one of the world's most popular online activities. Their latest research shows that more than one million people start using social media for the first time every single day – that's more than 12 new users every second.

Meanwhile, in the platform rankings, Facebook has consolidated its lead, adding an additional 50 million users in

just the few weeks since Mark Zuckerberg announced the platform had passed the 2 billion user mark. (WeAreSocial, 2017). Interestingly, a large percentage of the Philippine population consists of active Facebook users. Despite the country having an Internet penetration to only about half of Philippine population. At least 44.2 million Filipinos are active Internet users, and 32 million of such or 32% of the population use Facebook actively. The Philippines also largely has relatively young Facebook users (Areola, Evora, Maranan, & Maximo, 2016).

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Importance of Influencers to Social Media

According to Singh and Diamond (2013), influencers have a significant impact on the forwarding behavior of consumers. Influencers tend to efficiently utilize either their position, profession, social media followers, or their personal circle to spread a marketing message forward. Moreover, influencers efficiently affect the viral spread of marketing messages and should be considered when wanting to channel marketing messages on social media.

It is most important for marketers to be able to identify the key online communities and their influencers in regards to the marketing messages being spread. Expert influencers affect consumers' forwarding behavior with the position or profession they hold in regards to the topic of the marketing message (i.e. A doctor that refers an article about a new experimental weight loss method) while referent influencers utilize their followers or friends to channel a marketing message forwards. Positional influencers on the other hand rely on the loyalty of their family and friends to forward a marketing message through. (Singh & Diamond, 2013)

Theoretical Framework

Terry Lane (2017) explains the viral loop marketing theory as the “theory where users of a product are its primary marketers”. When companies start using viral loops in their marketing strategies, they aim to exponentially spread their marketing message to consumers with minimal cost. This aim is also supported by Wilson’s (2012) previously presented six principles. Usually small-to-medium-sized businesses harness viral marketing and the viral loop theory, since their marketing budgets are significantly smaller compared to bigger businesses.’

The advantage of using viral loops is mainly derived out of its low cost – high spread factor, which exposes a large audience to a company’s marketing message. Therefore, using viral expansion loops are a convenient way to tackle the struggles marketers face when seeking out the elements of content that become viral. The most important part of the Viral Loop marketing theory is creating viral expansion loops. These loops are categorized into User Actions, Notifications and Conversion. These loops rely on users sharing and re-posting a marketing message to their own network.

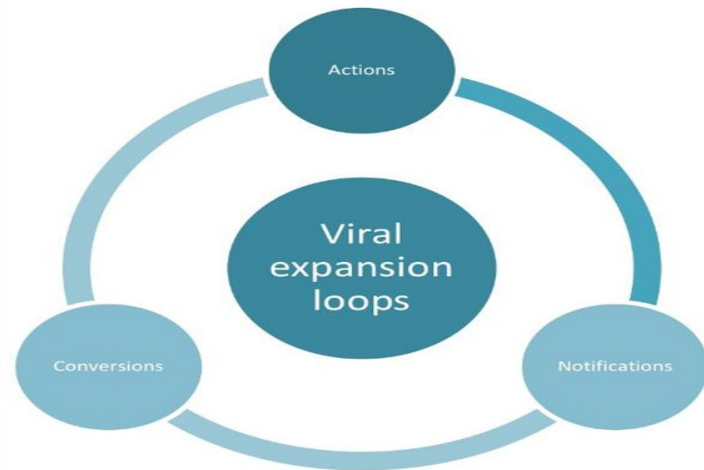


Figure 7. The viral loop marketing theory (Lane, 2017)

- **Actions:** Consumers buy a marketed product or service.
- **Notifications:** The notification that is sent to other possible buyers and a consumer buys a product or service. The notifications can be either synthetic in nature (i.e. automated emails or social media posts by the company) or organic (i.e. a user tags a friend in a post or posts about the product on their social media platform). The latter notification style is more prone to succeed, since it is seen as a more genuine form of notifying others of a product or service.
- **Conversions:** The sale or profit one consumer generates. If a marketing message does not generate enough conversions, the spread of the marketing message usually halts.

Penenberg (2016), on the other hand, explains the viral loop theory as an “engineering alchemy that, done right, almost guarantees a self-replicating, borglike growth.” (Fastcompany, 2016). He argues that viral expansion loops are separate from the online viral marketing strategies, since viral loops have long existed also in an offline world. He explains that if a person would host a Tupperware party, that person would be able to possibly convert some of the attendees into future salespeople, which would then result in the creation of a viral expansion loop in an offline environment.

Furthermore, he admits that viral expansion loops are more suitable for an online environment with unlimited opportunities. The viral expansion loops do not simply create viral content – they organize viral content. This means that they provide an infinitely expandable environment that is filled with material exerted from masses of people (Penenberg, 2016).

Ultimately, both Penenberg (2016) and Lane (2017) agree that the most sought out goal of the viral expansion loop is to create a strong user engagement, which will ultimately convert users into salespeople of a product or a service, just as in viral marketing. The better the quality of a user experience – the faster and bigger the viral expansion loop grows and spreads.

Conceptual Framework

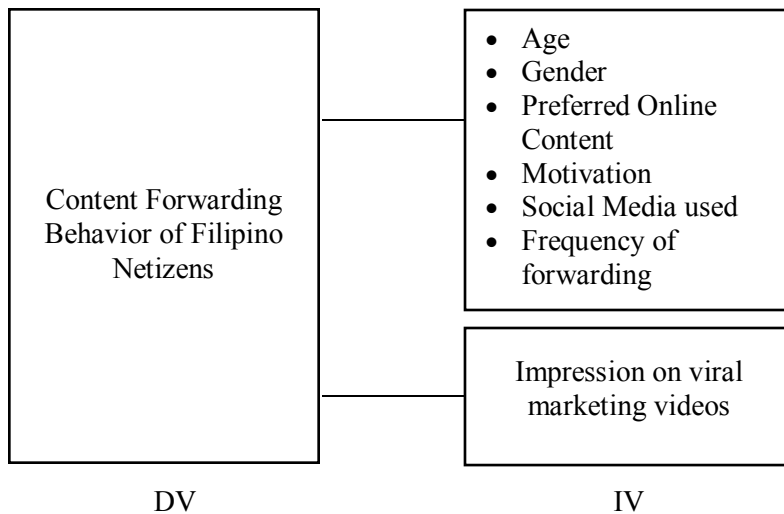


Figure 8. The conceptual paradigm of Filipino netizens on viral marketing and content forwarding behavior.

Statement of the Problem

Specifically, the researchers would like to answer the following questions:

1. What online content are most commonly forwarded by students?
2. How frequent do students forward viral content?
3. What are students' motivation for content forwarding?
4. Are online content, frequency of forwarding, and students' motivation predictors of content forwarding?

Hypotheses of the Study

Online content, frequency of forwarding, and students' motivation are not predictors of content forwarding.

Methods

This research used quantitative method and descriptive-inferential design. This study involves selecting random respondents around Bulacan, Philippines which the two variables, namely: the profile of the respondent and content forwarding behavior were investigated.

Participant and Sampling Procedure

Two hundred Filipino netizens served as the participants of this descriptive-inferential research using cluster sampling method. In this sampling technique, clusters of participants that represent the population are identified and included in the sample (Jackson, 2011). The researchers chose the province of Bulacan as the sample group for the whole population of the Philippines as the source to our primary data.

Research Instrument

This research adopted the instrument of Fanny Hirvijärvi (2017). The researchers adopted questions numbers 3-9 in the questionnaire of Hirvijarvi (2017) and modified the questionnaire which was validated by three communication experts. The instrument has two basic parts. The first is composed of the demographics and the second part is composed of assessment of the respondents regarding viral marketing and content forwarding behavior.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before distributing the survey questionnaire, the researchers presented a letter to each respondent asking permission to answer the copies of the validated questionnaire. The participants were given three minutes to complete the survey. The researchers then collected the surveys within the day.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

The following statistical tools were used to analyze and interpret the data.

The researchers used the descriptive statistics to describe the respondents' demographic profile and content forwarding behavior.

Alpha was set at 0.05 level for the rejection and acceptance of the null hypothesis. Regression analysis was used if it is equivalent to an independent t-test. If the single categorical variable has more than two levels, then the simple linear regression is equivalent to 1-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The t-tests are used to conduct hypothesis tests on the regression coefficients obtained in simple linear regression.



Figure 9. McDonald's "Tuloy Pa Rin" (2016).

On June 2016, McDo Philippines released the commercial entitled, "Tuloy Pa Rin" which featured a guy breaking up with his girlfriend. In the video, the girl was shown weeping as her boyfriend exits the restaurant. As she reminisced the past, she just couldn't help smiling as she took a bite from her burger. This video got 7.7 million views on Facebook.

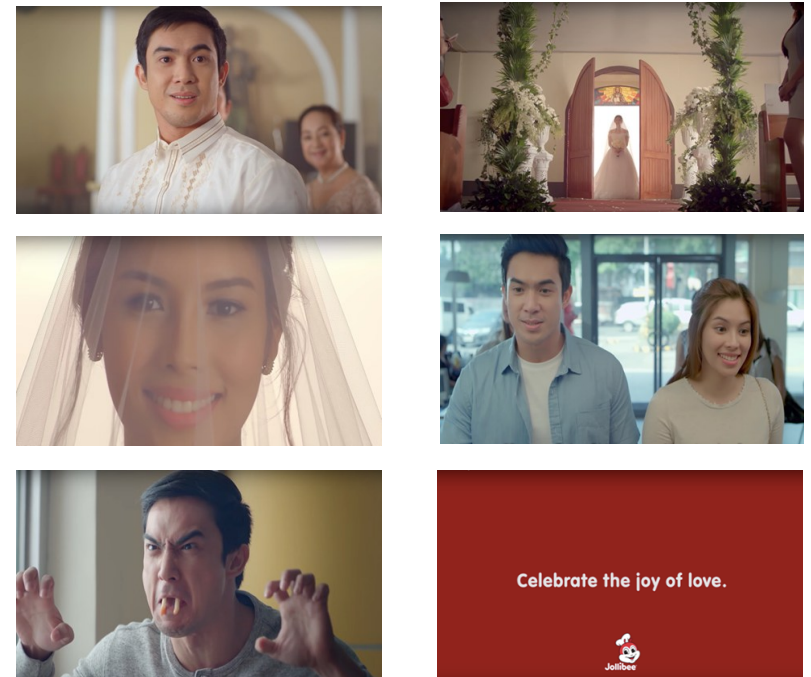


Figure 10. Jollibee's "Vow" (2017).

The video series entitled "Vow" instantly became viral shortly after it was posted on Jollibee's Facebook page on February 09, 2017. It's a story of a guy who meets "the one" at Jollibee and instantly fell in love with her. He then dedicates himself to her as he vowed to make her happy no matter what. At the end of the video, they're not meant to become a happy couple but only meant to become bestfriends. This video got 15 million views on Facebook.



Figure 11. Ariel’s “Finally” (2015).

On February 2015, Ariel Philippines released a video where a mother is washing their clothes while singing the Jingle “Finally.” It’s all about how Ariel works on cleaning and whitening the clothes. It also featured that Ariel is very convenient to everyone because it’s only ₱7.50. It went viral because of the very cheerful jingle. This video got 2 million views on Youtube.

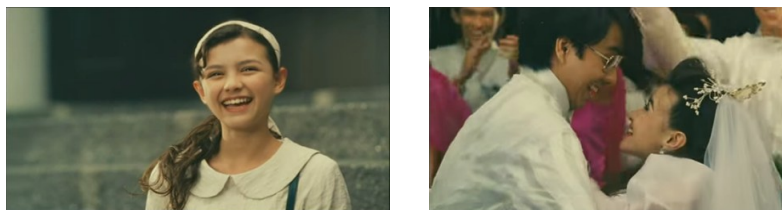


Figure 12. Nestle’s “Pag-ibig” (2011).

In April 2011, Nestle released a commercial for the celebration of 100 years in the Philippines. The centennial television commercial is inspired by love for the family, a cultural trait which unites Filipinos. The commercial with the song “*Pag-ibig*” written and composed by APO Hiking Society member Danny Javier, features an evocative and heartwarming storyline, describing a relationship that begins in childhood, progressing through adolescence, courtship, marriage, starting a home and a family, facing ups and downs together, raising children into adulthood, having grandchildren, and enjoying the senior years. Throughout the entire story, Nestlé and its brands are present as a constant companion. This video got 700 thousand views on Youtube.

Results and Discussion

Data were analyzed to identify, describe, and explore the significant differences among the Filipino netizens and their content forwarding behavior.

Table 3. Online content most commonly forwarded by the respondents.

Online Content	Frequency	Percentage
News items or blog post	50	25.0
Status updates	18	9.0
Audios	2	1.0
Videos	72	36.0
Photos, etc.	64	32.0
Opinions	10	5.0
Plans for future activities	2	1.0
Competitions and deals	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

The online content most commonly forwarded by the respondents has a total frequency of 200. These videos got the highest percentage of 36%, while the audios, plans for future activities and competition and deals got the lowest percentage of 1%.

Table 4. Motivation of the respondents for content forwarding.

Motivation	Frequency	Percentage
Share valuable/interesting content	76	38.0
Spread awareness about a topic	60	30.0
Keep connections about life	38	19.0
Define one's self to others	12	6.0
Gain personal benefits	14	7.0
Total	200	100.0

The motivation of the respondents for content forwarding has a total of frequency of 200. With this sharing valuable/interesting content got the highest percentage of 38%, while defining one's self to others got the lowest percentage of 6%. Phelps et al. (2004) examined consumers' motivations to pass along email and found that the most common motivation

mentioned by respondents was the desire to connect and share with others.

Table 5. Frequency of forwarding viral content.

Impression	Frequency	Percentage
Once a day or more	52	26.0
A few times a week	62	31.0
Once a week	40	20.0
Every now and then	38	19.0
Never	8	4.0
Total	200	100.0

The Frequency of Forwarding Viral has a total frequency of 200. 26% is once a day or more, while never got the lowest percentage of 4%.

Table 6. Regression analysis of selected factors in predicting content forwarding behaviour.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.979	.325		9.169	.000
Online Content	-.037	.027	-.099	-1.386	.167
Motivation	-.003	.060	-.004	-.051	.959
Frequency of Forwarding	-.050	.038	-.093	-1.315	.190

a. Dependent Variable: Content forwarding behavior

Results revealed that among the three variables, not one is a significant predictor of content forwarding behavior. The variables, preferred online content ($b=-.037$, $p=.167$), motivation ($b=-.003$, $p=.959$), and frequency of forwarding ($b=-.050$, $p=.190$) do not predict content forwarding behaviour of Filipino netizens.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The main objective of the study was to find out if online content, frequency of forwarding, and students' motivation significant predictors of content forwarding behavior of the Filipino netizens.

1. Online Content Most Commonly Forwarded

The primary research looked into what types of content are the most popular and most forwarded among Filipino netizens and found that videos (36%) are the most forwarded. This makes sense since they are formatted in a simple way and made easily shareable on a larger scale. Other types of content that is spread online were found to be (in order of popularity) photos, infographics, images, memes or illustrations, status updates, opinions, news items, blog posts, plans, audio files and competitions and deals. The hardest content to get Filipino netizens to forward is personal recommendations (0%), which also correlates to the theories presented.

2. Motivations of Filipino Netizens to Forward Viral Video

The results of the primary research show that Filipino netizens mostly share content on social media if they find the content valuable or interesting in nature (38%), or when they want to spread awareness about a certain topic (30%). They also want to keep their connections up-to-date about their life (19%) and define themselves to others through social media (7%). They would also share information to gain personal benefit (6%), but this was the least likely kind of content that they would share. These results are also backed up by the theories presented in the literature review. Consumers are generally motivated to forward content if they gain something from sharing content or if it is free of cost.

3. Frequency in Forwarding Viral Videos

The results of the questionnaire signify that 31% of Filipino netizens share viral content on their social media a few times a week.

Conclusions

After analyzing and interpreting the data, the researchers arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Frequency of Social Media used

Filipino netizens tend to channel content on social media mainly by using Facebook.

2. Online Content Most Commonly Forwarded

Video was the most shared or forwarded online.

3. Motivations of Filipino Netizens to Forward Viral Video

The results of the primary research show that Filipino netizens mostly share content on social media if they find the content valuable or interesting in nature.

4. Frequency in Forwarding Viral Videos

The results of the questionnaire signify that 31% of Filipino netizens share viral content on their social media a few times a week.

Recommendations

The results of this research indicate that there is definitely more to be known and researched in terms of viral marketing and viral content creation. The researchers have merely scratched the surface of what is to be known about the topic and recommend therefore that future research should be done in a larger scale compared to the author's research, which is limited in its nature due to the small sample size and demographic nature.

Future research could for example be conducted in the format of a case study, where the researcher tries to conduct a viral marketing campaign on social media and measures the expansion of the spread and forwarding of the viral content. The researchers suggest expanding the sample size to also include younger, as well as, older consumers, because this study only included consumers who are Filipino netizens residing in Bulacan.

The results of this study cannot therefore be generalized to the whole Philippine population, but provides insights into Filipino netizens. The analysis method for the primary data could also have been more scientific in nature and the use of proper statistical analysis tools are recommended for further research. All in all, the researchers enjoyed working with the topic and definitively gained a solid understanding in the background and processes of viral marketing and viral content creation.

Since the topic is relatively new, it is hard to draw proper scientific conclusions without much data and therefore more researches are needed in the future. The researchers assembled and outlined three key elements that future researchers can utilize in their studies into viral content creation. The researchers are satisfied with the outcome of the study and were positively surprised by the support and enthusiasm.

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