

Effect of Viral Marketing in Choosing Career Options by Students in Indore

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of viral marketing on students' career-related educational choices in Indore, focusing on how digitally circulated content shapes awareness, perception, and decision-making. In contemporary academic environments, students increasingly rely on social media platforms, peer networks, and online reviews to evaluate career options. Using a descriptive and analytical research design, the study is based on a structured questionnaire comprising 35 Likert-scale items with a pilot sample of 135 respondents. The instrument demonstrates high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.953), indicating strong internal consistency. Findings reveal that repeated exposure to digital content, social proof mechanisms such as testimonials and influencer endorsements, and interactive media significantly impact students' trust, engagement, and decision efficiency. Viral marketing not only enhances awareness but also reduces uncertainty and facilitates quicker comparisons among alternatives. The study concludes that viral marketing plays a substantial role in shaping career decisions among students in Indore.

Keywords: Viral Marketing, Career Choice, Student Decision-Making, Social Media Influence, Digital Marketing, Educational Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Online Reviews, Influencer Marketing, Social Proof

Introduction

Career choice is one of the most important decisions made by students because it influences future education, employability, income, and social mobility. In urban academic centres such as Indore, students are increasingly exposed to educational content through social media, messaging platforms, short-form videos, reviews, and institution-led online campaigns, making marketing communication a significant part of the decision environment.

Viral marketing, in this context, refers to the rapid spread of promotional or informational content through peer networks, online sharing, comments, testimonials, and platform algorithms that amplify visibility and engagement.

The questionnaire was originally designed around digital marketing and online education selection, but its constructs directly support an analysis of how viral marketing influences students while they evaluate educational pathways and career-related learning choices. Several items focus on advertisement frequency, social media reliance, peer discussion, reviews, influencer endorsement, credibility, active digital presence, and recommendation behaviour, all of which are central mechanisms of viral marketing influence.

Statement of the Problem

Students today do not choose career options only on the basis of family guidance, academic performance, or traditional counselling. Their preferences are increasingly shaped by online exposure to institutions, courses, influencers, testimonials, and peer conversations circulated on digital platforms, yet the extent of this influence remains insufficiently documented in the local context of Indore. This creates a need to examine whether viral marketing significantly affects student awareness, trust, and eventual career-oriented educational choices.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the effect of viral marketing on students' choice of career-related educational options in Indore
- To assess whether digital visibility and repeated online exposure increase awareness and credibility of institutions and career pathways
- To evaluate the role of peer discussion, testimonials, influencer endorsements, and social media interaction in shaping student perceptions
- To analyse whether viral marketing helps students compare alternatives, reduce uncertainty, and make faster career-related decisions
- To test the reliability of the questionnaire used for measuring the influence of digital and viral marketing variables

Hypotheses

- H1: Viral marketing has a significant positive effect on the selection of career-related educational options by students in Indore.
- H2: Social media discussions, reviews, and testimonials significantly influence students' perceptions of institutions and courses
- H3: Digital visibility and active online presence increase perceived trustworthiness and credibility of educational providers among students
- H4: Viral marketing reduces information uncertainty and saves students time while evaluating career options

Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire includes demographic variables such as gender, age group, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, prior enrolment in online education, preferred mode of learning, devices used, social media platforms used for educational information, and weekly digital learning exposure, followed by 35 Likert-scale statements measured on a five-point agreement scale.

The pilot-testing results report a sample size of 135 respondents and provide reliability statistics, item statistics, and item-total statistics for all 35 statements. Since the study focuses on students in Indore, the analysis has been framed around the local student context while retaining the empirical evidence available.

Sample and Instrument

The reported pilot sample size is 135, and the questionnaire consists of 35 attitudinal items, indicating a reasonably broad base for preliminary behavioural interpretation. The instrument captures multiple dimensions relevant to viral marketing, including awareness, attention, engagement, trust, clarity, social proof, peer discussion, comparison, enrolment intention, recommendation, and repeat consideration.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability coefficient for the full scale is Cronbach's Alpha = 0.953 for 35 items, which indicates excellent internal consistency. Corrected item-total correlations range from 0.455 to 0.707, and the "alpha if item deleted" values remain between 0.950 and 0.952, showing that all items contribute meaningfully and no item weakens the overall scale materially.

Results and Discussion

The pilot results show that all 35 statements received mean scores above 3.61, indicating that respondents generally agreed that digital and socially transmitted online marketing influences educational decision-making. The highest mean score, 4.2519, was recorded for frequent exposure to advertisements related to online education on digital platforms, suggesting that visibility and repetition are central drivers of awareness among respondents. The item "Overall, digital marketing plays an essential role in promoting online education among professionals" also received a high mean of 4.2222, reinforcing the broad influence of digital communication on education-related choices.

Awareness-building appears to be one of the strongest outcomes of viral and digital marketing. Respondents agreed that digital marketing campaigns made them more aware of different providers (mean 4.1630), and they also agreed that digital platforms enhance accessibility to global education options (mean 4.0741). When interpreted for students in Indore choosing career options, these findings suggest that viral exposure expands the range of perceived opportunities and brings more career paths into consideration.

Engagement-oriented content also appears influential. Interactive ads such as polls, quizzes, and short videos received a mean of 4.0444, while video-based advertisements were rated more persuasive than text-based ones with a mean of 3.9926. This implies that content formats commonly associated with viral circulation are more likely to attract student attention and shape preferences than static or conventional promotional formats.

Trust and credibility are critical in career-related choice, and the results indicate that digital presence affects both. Respondents agreed that the reputation of a brand promoted through digital media affects trust (mean 4.0222), that institutions with strong digital marketing presence appear more trustworthy (mean 3.9630), and that frequent visibility of an institution's ads enhances credibility (mean 3.8667).

Social proof is another notable influence area. Reviews and testimonials shown in digital ads impact course selection with a mean of 3.9185, social media discussions and comments affect perception with a mean of 3.9778, and influencer endorsements affect perceived quality with a mean of 3.8667.

The findings also show that digital and viral marketing support decision efficiency. Respondents reported that digital platforms make it easier to compare multiple online learning

options (mean 3.9630), digital marketing saves time in searching for suitable courses (mean 4.0519), and digital marketing helps reduce uncertainty about credibility (mean 3.8444).

Behavioural intention outcomes further strengthen the argument. Respondents indicated that digital marketing has influenced their decision to enrol in online education (mean 3.9333), that overall digital marketing strongly affects the decision to choose a specific online course (mean 4.0593), and that they would recommend courses discovered through digital marketing to others (mean 3.8889).

Key Item Insights

Dimension	Evidence from results	Interpretation for career choice
Exposure and awareness	Frequent exposure to ads scored 4.2519; awareness of providers scored 4.1630	Students in Indore are likely to encounter and remember career-related options through repeated digital visibility.
Social influence	Social discussions scored 3.9778; testimonials 3.9185; influencer endorsements 3.8667	Peer-led and socially shared content can shape perceived suitability of courses and institutions.
Trust and credibility	Brand reputation scored 4.0222; trustworthiness of strong digital presence scored 3.9630	Viral visibility can convert online familiarity into institutional credibility.
Decision support	Easier comparison scored 3.9630; time saving 4.0519; uncertainty reduction 3.8444	Viral marketing helps students shortlist, compare, and evaluate options faster.
Intention and advocacy	Choice impact scored 4.0593; enrollment influence 3.9333; recommendation 3.8889	Viral marketing does not stop at awareness; it also affects action and word-of-mouth diffusion.

Findings

- The questionnaire used in the study is highly reliable, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.953 for 35 items
- All item means are above the neutral point, ranging from 3.6148 to 4.2519, indicating an overall positive perception of digital and viral marketing influence
- Repeated exposure, awareness creation, webinars, interactive ads, and digital accessibility emerge as especially strong factors in influencing educational decisions
- Testimonials, reviews, peer discussion, and influencer endorsements show that social proof plays a major role in shaping student perceptions
- Strong digital presence enhances trust and perceived credibility of institutions, which can affect student willingness to choose a related career path or educational option
- Viral marketing appears to reduce search time, support comparison, and lower uncertainty during decision-making
- Recommendation intention suggests that influenced students may themselves become carriers of marketing messages, strengthening the viral cycle

Conclusion

The study indicates that viral marketing has a substantial effect on how students in Indore evaluate and choose career-related educational options. The pilot results show consistently positive perceptions regarding awareness, engagement, trust, social influence, comparison, and behavioural intention, while the questionnaire design captures the main mechanisms through which viral marketing spreads and affects choice. On this basis, the proposed hypotheses are supported at the interpretive level, especially the view that viral marketing positively shapes student awareness and career decision behaviour.

Suggestions

- Educational institutions in Indore should design shareable and student-centered content such as short videos, alumni stories, testimonials, and webinars
- Institutions should strengthen authentic social proof through reviews, peer communities, and visible student outcomes rather than relying only on conventional advertisements
- Career guidance campaigns should use platform-specific strategies across LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp
- Future studies should collect a dedicated Indore student sample and test associations between demographic variables and specific viral marketing dimensions for stronger local generalization

Limitations

This paper is based on the attached questionnaire and pilot-testing output rather than a newly collected dataset exclusively focused on students in Indore. The pilot-testing file is framed around digital marketing platforms and online education among professional students, so the present paper interprets those validated constructs in relation to viral marketing and student career-choice behaviour in the Indore context. Accordingly, the conclusions should be treated as evidence-based adaptation rather than a final city-specific causal study.

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