

# Does Online Viral Marketing Contribute to the Tourists' Intention to Visit a Destination?

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## Abstract

*The background of this study is the decline in tourist visits to Sabda Alam Water Park in Garut. Viral marketing plays an important role in raising brand awareness and may affect tourists' intention to visit a tourism object. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of viral marketing on brand awareness and tourist visit intentions. To this end, an explanatory survey was conducted on a sample of 100 visitors to Sabda Alam Water Park selected using a proportionate random sampling technique. Data analysis was performed using path analysis using SPSS 21. The results of this study indicate that viral marketing has a significant positive effect on brand awareness. It was also revealed that brand awareness and viral marketing had a positive influence on tourists' visiting intention.*

**Keywords:** viral marketing, intention to visit, brand awareness

## 1. Introduction

Viral marketing plays an important role in raising brand awareness and may affect tourists' intention to visit a tourism object. With abundant and beautiful natural resources, creative human resources, more than 600 ethnic groups with diverse cultures, traditions and characters, Indonesia has more competitive advantages in tourism than other countries. The tourism industry sector can contribute to the country's development, reduce unemployment, increase income and welfare [1].

**Table 1. Tourist Visits in Indonesia in 2014-2017**

Year	Foreign Tourists	Domestic Tourist	Total
2014	7,002,944	46,585,657	53,588,601
2015	7,649,731	60,342,947	67,992,678
2016	8,044,462	63,677,383	71,721,845
2017	8,802,129	79,342,459	88,144,588

As one of the tourist destinations in Indonesia, Garut offers various attractions, ranging from hot springs, lakes, beaches, waterfalls, and volcanoes. It comes as no surprise that tourist visits to Garut continue to increase from year to year in Table 1. One of the most popular hot springs in Garut is Sabda Alam Water Park. This water park is usually crowded with tourists, both domestic and foreign, especially during the holiday season. However, based on an interview with its marketing manager, the number of visits to this attraction has decreased in the last 5 years as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Tourist Visits to Sabda Alam Water Park Garut in 2013- 2017**

Year	Number of Visits	Growth Rate	53,588,601
2013	598,856	-	-
2014	588,748	(-10,108)	-2.5%
2015	412,682	(-176,066)	-45.2%
2016	400,888	(-11,794)	-5.5%
2017	381,693	(-19,195)	-10.6%

Sabda Alam Water Park offers unique tourism products in the sense that its products, both tangible and intangible, can build brand awareness. The importance of a physical product does not lie on its own but in the services it can provide. Therefore, tourism products contain a comprehensive concept of physical objects and processes that provide several values to consumers. One of the main features in social media is "following" which makes users or consumers connected to the company [2]. With the help of social media, companies may do viral marketing, which is deemed an effective promoting strategy. The term viral marketing firstly appeared in an article entitled The Virus of Marketing [3]. It is suggested that if a virus is used for a marketing program, the marketing messages will be widespread in a short time at a very low cost.

Viral Marketing is part of Electronic Word of Mouth (E-WOM), which is considered more effective than offline word of mouth because E-WOM has broader accessibility and reach than WOM [4]. Viral marketing uses marketing techniques that develop rapidly in the spread of news or content by reaching out to customers to increase widespread [5]. Viral marketing is believed to originate from utilizing a consumer network where colleagues deliver messages to colleagues [6]. Viral marketing is a new phenomenon that continues to develop in a dynamic market, and both companies and consumers are still adapting to it. Its long-term role in the marketing mix is unclear. For example, this is an open question whether the dissemination of marketing messages through the "send to friends" program will remain effective over time [7]. In the first stage, companies actively send out their promotional campaigns to targeted or non-targeted audiences. In the second stage, companies rely on peer-to-peer communication between consumers for efficient diffusion of promotional campaigns on their social networks. Companies return to viral marketing campaigns primarily for a broad reach and cost-effectiveness. The results of a wide range of companies that encourage customers to spread the message among their colleagues [8].

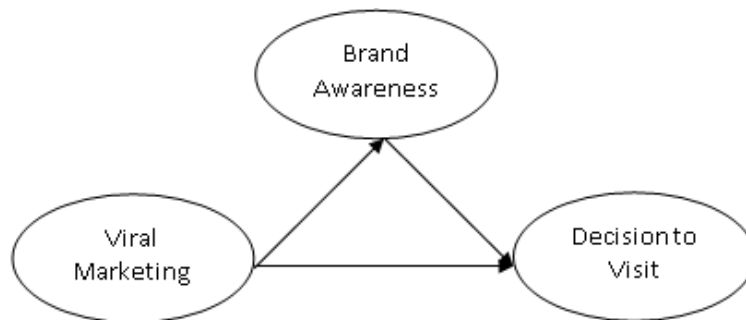
Brand equity is an abstract affective construct, which cannot be measured directly, which is contained in the minds of consumers [9]. Brand awareness is part of brand equity. This refers to "the ability of potential buyers to recognize or remember that a brand is a member of a particular product category" [10]. Brand awareness is the process of not knowing a brand to ensure that the brand in question is the only one in a particular class of product or service. Brand awareness refers to "personal meanings about brands that are stored in consumers' memories, that is, all information related to descriptive and evaluative brands" [11]. Above the hierarchy is the peak of mind awareness, referring to the brand that first appeared when customers were asked to think of certain categories [12]. Brand recognition is part of brand awareness, and the minimum level of brand awareness is the brand recall. Marketers can benefit from advocacy that leads to new customers, brand awareness, customer service channels, support for campaigns above the line, brand equity, positioning, and integrated marketing programs [13].

Decision making for first-time consumers is largely based on information collected from various sources which result in expectations from the desired meeting of tourism service providers [14]. The main resources and attractions are the reasons why tourists visit certain destinations [1]. Visitor perception. Descriptive studies of tourist opinion about and reactions to World Heritage status as tourist markers and potential withdrawals reveal a lack of consensus about the strength of World Heritage status as a tourist attraction [15]. Customers may first feel

the physical environment of poor quality, which can then negatively influence their perception of the quality of interactions and results. Based on the explanation above, this study intends to examine the effect of Viral Marketing on Brand Awareness and Visitor Tourist Intention.

## 2. Methodology

This study was conducted using an explanatory approach. Data were collected through questionnaires addressed to 100 sample visitors to Sabda Alam Water Park selected using accidental simple random sampling. 35 of the respondents were male, and the rest were female. They were aged between 25 and 34 years old. They worked for private sectors with an income range from IDR 2,500,000 to 5,000,000.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Model**

1. The Effect of Viral Marketing on Brand Awareness
2. The Effect of Brand Awareness on Visiting Decisions
3. The Effects of Viral Marketing on Visiting Decisions

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Effect of Viral Marketing on Brand Awareness

It was revealed that viral marketing had a statistically significant effect on brand awareness with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.736 and a probability (Sig) of 0.000 < 0.05. Customer trust in the brand has resulted from post online purchase satisfaction. Satisfied customers will eventually encourage their friends, neighbors or family members to buy the same brand by providing good testimony about the brand in question. From the introduction of consumer referrals in the online context and encouraging each stream of research on viral marketing among interactive marketing scholars, thereby helping marketers in designing effective online promotion campaigns that will trigger a viral cycle around their offerings [8].

### 3.2. Effect of Brand Awareness on Visiting Decision

It was statistically revealed that brand awareness had a significant influence on visiting decision with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.401 and probability (Sig) of 0.001 < 0.05. Attractive website design and photos can increase customer trust. From a practical point of view, greater effort is needed to increase WH brand awareness among potential visitors. Brand promises made regarding high-quality heritage resources will be valued with the value and quality of conscious consumers [15]. Low brand awareness, below the threshold, in this case, luxury brands cannot perform their signaling functions. Regarding the quality or idiosyncrasy of the product or service, the brand cannot use the fame of its name as an important mark of value among consumers who are not buyers but who might recognize the brand displayed by the luxury owner [17].

### 3.3. Effect of Brand Awareness on Visiting Decision

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### 3.4. The Effect of Viral Marketing on Visiting Decision

Viral marketing was statistically proven to have a significant direct effect on the decision of visiting as much as 0.247 with a probability (t) of  $0.034 < 0.05$ . Consumers will be more interested in a product that friends, family or neighbors have purchased. Viral online tourism promotion helps spread information about travel deals in Jordan, where information on tourism products sent via the Internet is read comfortably, easily, and readily [18]. This promotion provides a wealth of information and travel deals and helps to easily make innovative offers. Because mobile viral marketing campaigns are a fairly new form of advertising, consumers with high usage intensity are more likely to participate in mobile viral marketing campaigns and are more likely to forward messages than consumers with low use intensity [19].

## 4. Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that viral marketing can provide added value for brand awareness. Brand awareness will rationally provide a positive impact on tourists' visiting decision. Besides, tourists' visiting decision can also be facilitated by good viral marketing. The relationship between the three variables can be said that the better viral marketing performs, the better brand awareness, and this will in turn influence tourists' visiting decisions.

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