THE IMPACT OF USER INTERACTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND AWARENESS AND PURCHASE INTENTION – VIRAL CONTENT

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THE IMPACT OF USER INTERACTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND AWARENESS AND PURCHASE INTENTION – VIRAL CONTENT

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ABSTRACT

The purchase intentions are progressively influenced by social media interaction where it presents both challenges and opportunities for companies to adapt and make used of this new marketing communication. When making purchase decision, people tend to rely more than ever on information consumed from social networks. The effects of social media campaigns on consumers' perception of products and brands as well as the effects on purchase decisions have yet to be better understood. The purpose of this article is to analyze how social media mediate on viral content, in specifically Thai insurance ads (approximately twenty-six millions viewers), and user interactions with the brand affect the perception of brands and eventually influence consumer purchase decision. An exploration of the study practice qualitative method to obtain inclusive and detailed data from in-depth interview. Therefore this study demonstrates a perspective of Thai consumer who has high exposure to the social media towards the viral marketing. The author's finding shows the positive effect of viral content on brand awareness.

From a theoretical perspective the outcomes of this study support to understanding of the value-enhancing potential of social media campaigns and demonstrate how the perception of brands is influenced through this new communication channel. For brand managers this study is of value, as it shows that social media activities do have a positive influence on brands as they support their management of the purchase process.

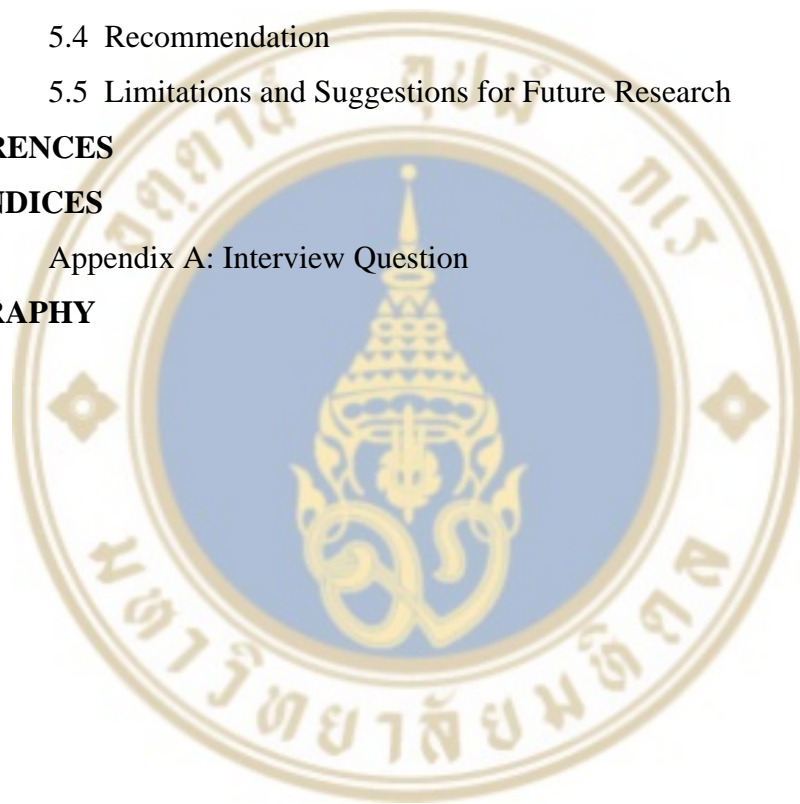KEY WORDS: Social Media / Viral Marketing / Brand Awareness

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

As the internet has become a mass media vehicle for consumer-sponsored communications nowadays every individual lives have been significantly affected by the rapidly growing of the online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This rising of the new platform of social network has stimulated the new mean of advertising for products and brands. Not only does it allow the brands to communicate effectively with the target and existing users, it is also create the consumers network which allow person to person interaction. According to Foux (2006) "Social media is perceived by consumers as a more trustworthy source of information regarding products and services than corporate-sponsored communications transmitted via the traditional elements of the promotion mix". Consequently, the online advertisements of creating the brand awareness are just about capture consumer interests (Fagerstrom and Ghinea, 2010). And due to this new emerging communication setting, the consumer has been transformed from being passive participants in marketing to being active creator and influencers (Kozinets et al., 2008, Merz et al., 2009). Traditional one-way communication in marketing has been transformed into a multi-dimensional two-way peer-to-peer communication reality (Berthon et al., 2008).

Nowadays the tradition source, such as television, magazines and newspaper has been disregarded from the new generation of the consumers. Instead, they demand for the access to the information on the social media at their own convenience (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). One of the emerging techniques of product and brand promotion through the use of the social media is viral marketing which perceived as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has played the crucial role in communicating product and service (Ferguson, 2008). According to Palka et al. (2009, p. 172) *"the term viral describes a type of marketing that infects customers with an advertising message which passes from one customer to the next like a rampant flu virus"*. On the social network, the viral

marketing can be passed on consumer to consumer about the product information which enhances the particular brand awareness. In addition, viral marketing is ranked as an effective technique that consumers use not only for acquiring information about product and service but also for making purchase decisions (Cruz and Fill, 2008).

1.2 The Aim and Purpose

According to statistics, the social media penetration rate in Thailand is at 36% of the population and about 93% of active social media users accessed social media, e.g. Twitter and Facebook on their mobile devices with the time spent almost four hours per day. Thailand is among top ten countries in the Asia Pacific region which has high penetration rate of Facebook equal to 93% of the social media users (Go-Globe, 2015). The internet users had significantly increased from 28.9% in 2013 to 34.9% in 2014 similarly, the mobile cellular subscriptions to a public mobile telephone service in 2014 raised to 144% of population (World Bank, 2015). According to the data retrieved from the World Bank website, we can see on-going trends in the rise of internet users. With the increasing popularity of social media, statistics have also shown a tremendous rise in the number of social media users over the years. It is likewise fascinating to perceive how Thailand is getting to be one of rising pioneers in Southeast Asia as far as online networking reception and tech advancements.

Consequently, brands can exploit these growing trends by studying whether the viral contents has extremely effect on the consumer attitude towards brands. Online interactions can be studied via several online channels including social networking sites for example Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and social applications such as Socialcam and Instagram and other online channels such as blogs and forums.

We all have witnessed the 'Like' and 'Share' phenomenon on Facebook and realized how it influences to the users. For instance, the immensely successful viral campaign last year was "the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge". The campaign drives both awareness and generates results. According to an article by BBC News, the challenge has raised awareness with 2.4 million ice bucket related videos posted to Facebook. About 28 million people have uploaded, commented on, or liked and share an ice-bucket CHALLENGES related video. It also raised the fund over $100 million

for the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Association (Townsend, 2014). Thus, we should understand the factors that result in increased consumers' acceptance of viral marketing that drive the product and brand awareness.

1.3 Problem Statement

Nevertheless, the results of online networking exercises are still debated among experts and managers (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). The impacts of social media campaigns on consumers' perception of products and brands have yet to be better understood. (Edelman, 2010; Barwise and Meehan, 2010). Spreading negative word of mouth and information overload in social media considered as the potential disadvantage which could create disturbance and annoyance (McCoy et al., 2007). Moreover, since brands cannot take the danger of being missing in such a compelling correspondence channel, notwithstanding the dangers and questions, organizations are putting progressively into their social media activities.

1.4 Research Scope

This study therefore explore how social media activities, in specific the viral content of the insurance firms, affect the perception of brands, and ultimately influence the purchase decision process of consumers while considering the risk of creating annoyance. The results of this study should foster understanding of the value-enhancing potential of social media campaigns and reveal how the perception of brands is influenced through this new communication channel. And hopefully it can be utilized to help build a rationale for more thoughtful and more effective viral marketing.

1.5 Research Questions

To fulfill the aim and purpose of this study, the author has framed the research questions by relying on the background, the aim and purpose and problem statement as the following:

"How the viral content can enhance the brand awareness and purchase intention of Thai consumers toward brands?"

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The social media is perceived as a new marketing channel. It favors the relationship and network building as well as promotes active engagement of consumers. According to Hutter et al., (2013) *"The direct involvement social media enables in respect to the creation of brand value gives consumers ever more power to influence brands and posits challenges for brand managers' efforts to manage their brand. With the increasing relevance of social media platforms in the daily life of consumers, their marketing potential for brands increases as well."* Consequently, it is vital to brands in order to shed light on where and how social media effects brand perception and brand related decisions of customers.

Every day, there are uncountable decisions that consumer have to make and thus have to cope with increasing excess of information. Therefore the curtain habits and "heuristics" are developed which could be considered as the shortcuts and "rules of thumb" using in decision making while dealing with the mental overload (Scammon, 1977; Jacoby et al., 1977; Jacoby, 1984). The most common rule of thumb in the existing marketplace is Brands. Brands not only helps facilitate the purchase decision but also offer reassurance as they unite current and future decision to encounters, satisfaction, and learning (Keller, 2008; Kapferer, 2008). Hence, brands play an important role in consumer decision-making and guide consumers in the process of making a purchase decision. Olshavsky and Granbois (1979) pinpoint that the consumer decision-making process consists of several steps one consumer go through when making a purchase decision. The process includes various steps, starting from the recognition of a need through the information searching for the possible ways to fulfill the need during the pre-purchase stage, the assessment of other options to the actual purchase and post-purchase processes which comprise experience and evaluation of product.

2.1 Hierarchy of effects (HOE) model

Many scholars (e.g. Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999; Ray, 1973) have studied "hierarchy of effects" (HOE) models in communication and advertising which similar to the framework of decision-making process. The model focus on the mental stages of the relationship between the consumers and specific product or brand instead of relating the series of steps a consumer runs through when making a purchase decision. According to Barry and Howard (1990) hierarchy of effects refers to the stable order where consumer perceive, process, and use advertising and other marketing communication information: first cognitively (thinking), second affectively (feeling), and third conatively (do). This implies that the consumer attains awareness and knowledge about product and creates either positive or negative sentiments towards the product and end with the actions of buying and using or rejecting and avoiding the product (Kotler and Bliemel, 2001).

Hutter et al., (2013) claimed that AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, and Action), purchase decision and/or attitude building phases, is the most well-known and widely applied hierarchy of effects model. Still, another broadly recognized model proposed by Lavidge and Steiner (1961) (see Figure 2.1).
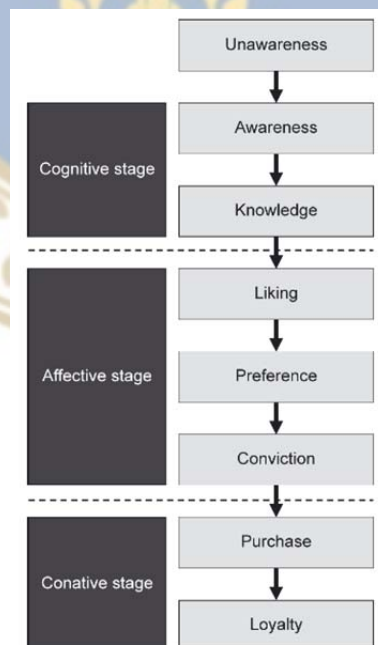

Figure 2.1 Hierarchy of effects (HOE) model

Source: "The impact of user interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention: the case of MINI on Facebook" by Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Dennhardt, S., & Füller, J. (2013).

Hutter et al., (2013) summarized that the model includes the seven phases; awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase. Toward the start of the displayed process, the buyer is unaware of the brand. In the following stage consumer forms the awareness. Consequently, the consumer obtains brand related information through advertising or word-of-mouth or online searching wherein he/she builds knowledge about the brand offering. After the cognitive stage, the consumer decides whether he/she like the product or not in the affective stage (feeling stage). Consumer's preferences are built based on positive or negative attitude towards the brands. Toward the end of the feeling stage, the consumer is convinced by the usefulness of the purchase, hence the intention to purchase is enhanced. Barry and Howard (1990), Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) and Smith et al., (2008) point out that even though not included in most HOE models, consumer loyalty and advocacy ideally follow the purchase phase.

The researcher has selected the conceptual model proposed by Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, & Füller (2013) to be the key model for this research. Originally the purpose of this conceptual model is based on an online survey with users of the corporation's Facebook fanpage to investigate the effect of fanpage engagement on consumers' brand awareness, word of mouth (WOM) activities, and purchase intention. The model comprise of three distinctive constructs to analyze how marketing activities in social media such as the social media influence the consumer purchase decision-making process, modeled through the hierarchy of effects (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Conceptual model

Source: "The impact of user interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention: the case of MINI on Facebook" by Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Dennhardt, S., & Füller, J. (2013).

However, the modification to the original conceptual model is mandatory in order to answer the research question; how the viral content can enhance the purchase intention of Thai consumers toward brands? and also to facilitate the method of this research. The proposed model consist of brand awareness, word-of-mouth and purchase intention, each related to one of the three mental stages - the cognitive, the affective, and the conative stage – respectively. Brand page commitment is removed and replaced with the viral content shared among users in social media, researcher also keeps the annoyance which originally served as independent variable (see Figure 2.3).

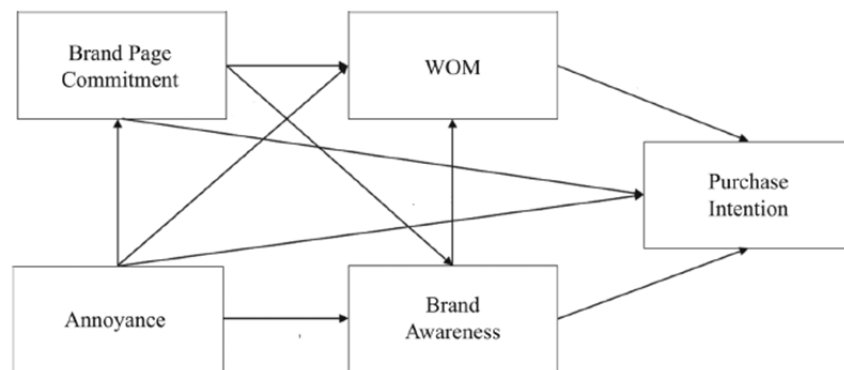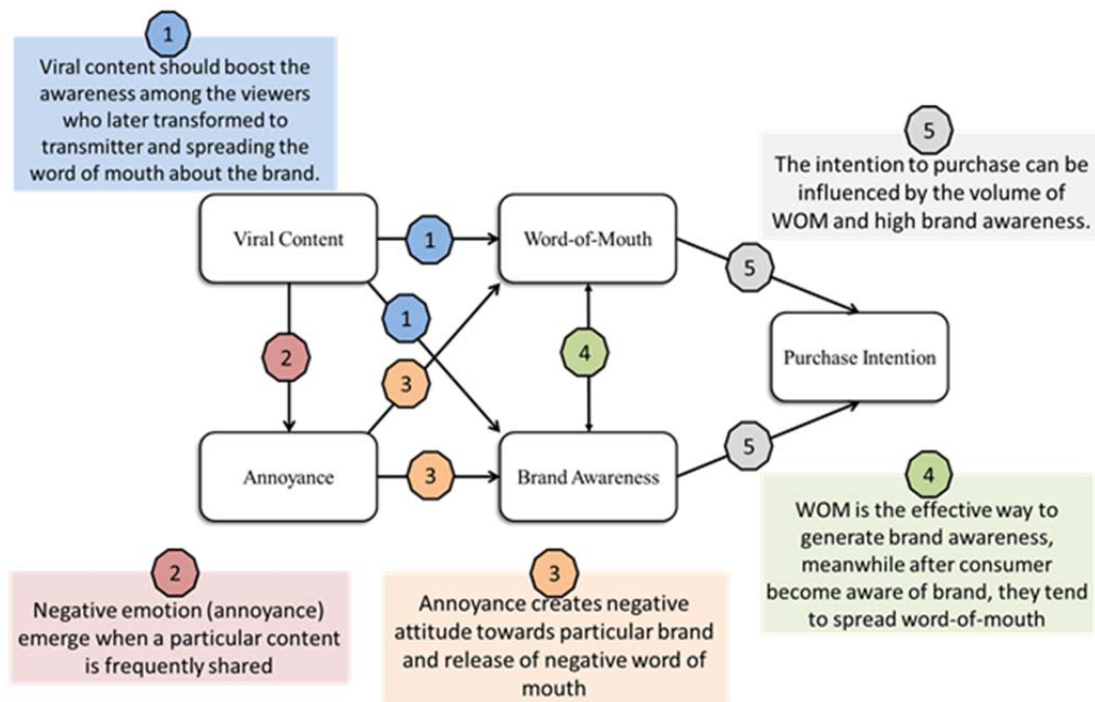**Figure 2.3 Proposed conceptual model adapted from "*The impact of user interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention: the case of MINI on Facebook*"**

Source: Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Dennhardt, S., & Füller, J. (2013).

2.2 Viral Marketing/ Viral Content

Before we study the consumer attitude towards the viral marketing, it is important that the term definition should be clearly identified. Kulp (2007) has state that the viral marketing is commonly used in advertising industry and the meaning has changed to suite with the particular context. The term viral marketing was introduced by Steve Jurvetson and Tim Draper in 1997. As the time passed by, viral marketing has rapidly grown since then. Several of studies had presented with the diverse definitions. Subramani and Rajagopalan (2003) state that viral marketing is *"- the tactic of creating process where interested people can market to each other – is therefore emerging as an important means to spread the word and stimulate the trail, adoption, and use of products and services"*. Later on, some (e.g. Kiss and Bichler, 2008) define viral marketing as utilizing the usefulness of social network to generate brand awareness through self-

replicating viral diffusion of message and spread it like the computer virus. Grifoni et al. (2012) point out that the given definitions contain two element; communicative and technological which characterize the 'viral' aspect. In the view of viral on communicative, once the marketing message hit the potential customers, they are transformed to the active agents who sharing message to peer and the message become viral. With help of technological prospective, it enhances the flexibility, accessibility and highly integrated with social which allow a quickly sharing of the message. At the present time, a clear definition term is established to suitable the online social media phenomenon as quoted from Gunawan and Huarng (2015) Viral marketing is the consumers' act of electronic word-of-mouth on social network and media sites; viral marketing spreads like a virus and takes advantage of multiplication to transmit the message (e.g. e-mail, blogs, video content, ads) to thousands and even millions. The process of the viral marketing is illustrated in Figure 2.4.
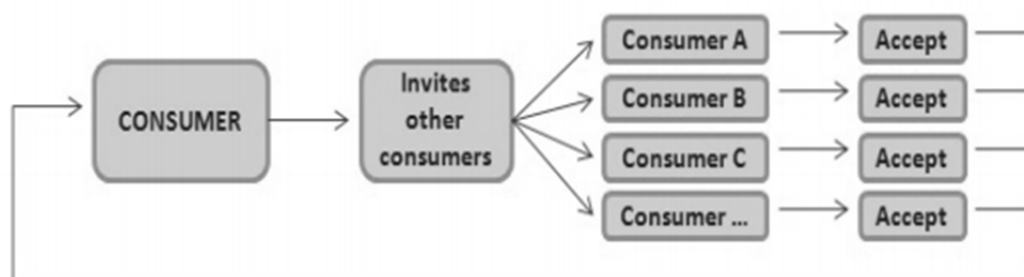
Figure 2.4 The viral marketing process
Source: "An integrated framework for on-line viral marketing campaign planning" by Grifoni, P., D'Andrea, A., & Ferri, F., 2012

While people willing to pass on viral content to their social networks, this will potentially increase the reliability of the product in service in the viewer perception. At this point a strong viral marketing that reach thousands of consumers can capture their awareness and inspire them to buy the products (Chiu et al., 2007; Bampo et al., 2008).

Berger and Milkman (2013) claim that as the result of social media blooming, the interest in word-of-mouth and viral marketing are boosted. Consumers share contents online which influence product adoption and sale. Such behaviors originated from two

reasons. One reason that consumer shares the content is for the useful that information contained. For example, they share the content to appear knowledgeable and enhance their image. Another reason is the emotional aspects of content as people often discuss emotions or experience with others. The study shows that the great of satisfaction; extremely satisfied or dissatisfied, when they perceived the content can generate more word-of-mouth than the average. Therefore, the viral content can be viewed as the active and psychological involvement of a consumer with the social media activities of a brand.

2.3 Annoyance

Hutter et al., (2013) note that "*When consumer commitment and enjoyment of social media content by companies or brands turn into annoyance, the consumer turns away quickly*". Recent study has point out that social media marketing is less intrusive when comparing to some traditional marketing techniques. Hence, the content tends to be less annoying once the consumers can decide and select to consume what they are interested. In the other word, consumer has more power to control over their exposure to the content. As the result, it is critical for the firm to be diligent in entertaining consumers with their marketing efforts while using this marketing channel in order to keep their attention. While enjoyment is viewed as a pleasure response to the experience of (entertainment) media (Tamborini et al., 2010), annoyance in contrary, is the unpleasant responsive to overexposure to a certain kind of media. McCoy et al., (2007) have pointed out that the annoyance may result from unwanted exposure to advertising or intrusive direct marketing (Lee and McGowan, 1998). Therefore, companies should be thorough when approaching target audience via social media in order to avoid annoyance. Such content that disturbs and ultimately annoys consumers is not only ineffective from a marketing perspective, but can even have negative effects for the brand.

2.4 Brand Awareness

The brand awareness is defined as a component of brand knowledge (Keller, 1993). No matter if the knowledge about the particular brand is active or passive, the consumers' awareness toward the certain product or service is considered as high

(Valkenburg & Buijzen, 2005). To define the term brand awareness, scholars (Keller, 1993; Rossiter & Percy, 1997) propose that brand recognition and brand recall do not occur simultaneously when the level of brand awareness is evaluated. Keller (1993) explains that brand recognition denote consumer's ability to detect brand once the brand name is give as a clue where as brand recall means consumer's ability to recall a brand when given the product. In a view of degree of involvement, brand recall is more likely to require more consumers' effort to recover a brand from their memory than the brand recognition. Aaker (1991) defines brand awareness as an ability of buyers to recognize or recall specific brand name and its certain product or service categories. Several researches show that brand familiarity can increase consumers' confidence and trust towards the brand (Smith & Wheeler, 2002). Macdonald and Sharp (2000) state that consumers have a strong tendency to purchase the product that they recognize rather than the one that they have not heard of, from this we imply that the brand awareness is used as a heuristic in consumer purchasing process.

The created Brand awareness "is related to the strength of the resulting brand node or trace in memory, as reflected by consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions" (Keller, 2008). In other words brand awareness represent the strength of a brand's presence in consumes' minds. According to Keller (1993), there are three major reasons why brand awareness is important in consumer decision making. First, increasing brand awareness also increase the probability that brand will be involve in the consideration set when making a purchase decision (Baker et al., 1986; Chakravarti et al., 2003).

If refer back to the hierarchy of effects, brand awareness denotes the first phase. Second, it is important that brand awareness can influence decisions about brands in consideration set even if there are no relations with the brand. Scholars (Roselius 1971; Jacoby et al., 1977) claim that the brands which consumers are more familiar with or well-known tend to be purchased. The basic brand awareness alone may be sufficient to inspire the choice of brands, especially in low involvement situation (Hoyer and Brown, 1990; Bettman and Park, 1980). Third, in making up brand image - brand associations are formed and strengthened by the brand awareness. A fundamental condition for purchasers to make relationship with the brand is the presence of the brand in consumers'

minds. The ease of information to attach to the brand is depending on the strength of the presence of the brand to consumer (Keller, 2008).

As quoted from Hutter et al., (2013) "*Brand awareness is created by anything that causes the consumer to experience the brand – advertising, promotion, publicity, public relations, etc*". Once the brand awareness is high, the studies shows that consumer tend to believe in the products and services and overlook if deceptive marketing tactics is used against them (Smith & Wheeler, 2002). Thus, the consumer would have positive attitude towards the advertisement of those brands. Many scholars have found that a credible advertising source is positively related to consumer attitudes toward advertisements (Brackett & Carr, 2001; Wang, Zhang, Choi, & Eredita, 2002).

Social media represents one way to expose consumers to the brand and thereby create brand awareness. We can see that the more effectively consumers engage with the social media activities for instance receiving numerous of viral content or ads, the higher the brand awareness presence in consumers' minds.

2.5 Word of Mouth (WOM)

According to Kozinets et al., (2010) word-of-mouth is natural phenomenon in consumer behavior. It includes the social communication either positive or negative attitude or experience regarding companies, brands or products and services. This communication is constructed between receivers and communicators, who are perceived as noncommercial (Arndt, 1967; Goyette et al., 2010). WOM is viewed as a source of information in the purchase decision making process. Since the consumers are familiar with the source – the information received turned to be more reliable, credible and trustworthy (Solomon, 2011). Consequently, WOM is claimed to be more effective marketing communication channel, in persuading consumer's decision making than others (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Kozinets et al., 2010).

Referring to the hierarchy of effects model, the cognitive and affecting stages are intensely influenced by WOM which could potentially be result to the loyalty phase. When the consumers are loyal to a product or brands they tend to talk positively about it, in other word, the spreading of WOM is boosted.

Social media has provided the alternative of spreading the WOM and expose consumers to WOM. The flow of WOM has been increased substantially through the social media due to the ease of accessibility, reach, and transparency of the internet. Researchers are interested in investigating the motives for seeking and sharing WOM (e.g. Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2006), which implication has provided a great deal for marketers to have better understanding of online consumer behavior. The above studies make obvious that WOM has become a permanent element of the online marketing mix by contributing a great deal to the purchasing decisions of online consumers (Cheung et al., 2008).

The involvement between consumers and brand via social media for example, the viral content or ads obtains abundant 'Likes' and 'Share' as well as brand awareness may be the indicator of positive WOM activities. It follows that the stronger a presence of a brand in consumers' minds is, the likelier is it for consumers to think and talk about a brand or vice versa.

2.6 Purchase intention

The last stage of Hierarchy of effects model; the affective stage, the intention to purchase the brand is created (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961). In decision making process, purchase intention as the mental stage where the actual willingness to purchase products or brands has been developed by consumers (Wells et al., 2011; Dodds et al., 1991). As the primary goal of marketing activities is to establish consumers' intention to purchase the brands, therefore the effectiveness of contents or ads delivered by companies should also be measured against this goal. We proposed that the higher brand awareness and/or WOM should positively influence consumer purchase intention.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

To answer our research questions the qualitative approach is conducted in this study by using semi-structure interviews. The purpose of qualitative study adoption is to explore insight and experience of interviewees (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), who exposed to using social media or are interactive with online channels. Through the interview process, it allows the conversation to unfold in as fluid and natural as possible. Sinkovics et al., (2005) point out that unclear information can be clarified to enable the precision of information. In addition, further questions could be asked during the semi-structured interviews, to broaden the views on the research issues (Denscombe, 2007). Once the interviewees engage in the topic, the researcher could possibly obtain unexpected information beyond research scope, this circumstance could occur during the semi-structured interview.

3.2 Data Collection Methodology

The study aims to provide an insight on Thai consumers' interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention. The study seeks to identify the effect on consumers' attitude towards the brands through viral marketing and how it drives the product and brand awareness and their purchase decision.

Small samples of social media users who have high tendency to receive, view and share the viral content were selected. The number of hours spent on social media should be at least 2 hours per day. The researcher limits the sample only in Bangkok, Thailand with the practical consideration in terms of data collection. The age range should be above 30 as considered to have the moderate of purchasing power as the product and service that in researcher's focus is the insurance which considered as high involvement product, therefore the subject range of age is most likely to consider

buying the insurance for certain reasons such as income tax deduction and lifesaving plan. Moreover, the majority of these selected age range have a moderate to high level of technology knowledge and familiar with social network.

Data Collection was conducted with interview participants about their perception, feelings, behaviors, attitudes and actions to explore the influence of brands' social media activities and participants' social media involvement on the purchase decision process of consumers. Each interview began with seeking the interviewees' approval for audio-record throughout the interview. Yet, if the researcher is not granted with permission to record, the extensive note would be taken. Afterwards, the collection of all necessary demographic information for example name, age and occupation are noted. The intention of this opening is to create ease and comfort feeling to the participants. Then the research interest in social media and purchase decision process as well as the general purpose of the interview should be briefly introduced to the interviewees. Keeping the tone of the conversation open-ended keeps the conversation informal which allows the subjects to speak freely and openly about their opinions.

According to sampling method, qualitative research with the semi-structured interview was applied to explore key aspects of Thai consumers' interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention. Therefore, the researcher recruited 13 participants with various backgrounds (gender, age, number of hours spent on internet/ day, exposure to receiving, viewing and sharing contents online/week, occupation).

3.3 Instrument

The interview questions were developed from (Hutter, K., Hautz, J., Dennhardt, S., & Füller, J. 2013), the impact of user interactions in social media on brand awareness and purchase intention: the case of MINI on Facebook, which was modified to comply with the situations. The constructs are measured as follows;

1) *Viral content* is captured the extent to which participants actively engage in and are emotionally connected to the content. This should boost the awareness among the viewers who later transformed to transmitter and spreading the word of mouth about the brand. In the other word, the advertising campaign/ content then would be widely recognized by the consumers.

2) *Annoyance* is examined with items measuring the acceptance of shared content. It refers to the negative emotion when a particular content is frequently shared; social media users have continuously receive and reject the content. Later on, this could result in negative attitude towards particular brand and release of negative word of mouth.

3) *Brand awareness* is measured by the items related to the brand presence on consumers' minds.

4) *Word-of-mouth (WOM)* is captured by items that related to tendency to spreading brand's information either positive or negative to the peer on social media.

5) *Purchase intention* is measured by items according to whether the consumer has or planning to purchase the brand. And we propose that the intention to purchase can be influenced by the volume of WOM and high brand awareness.
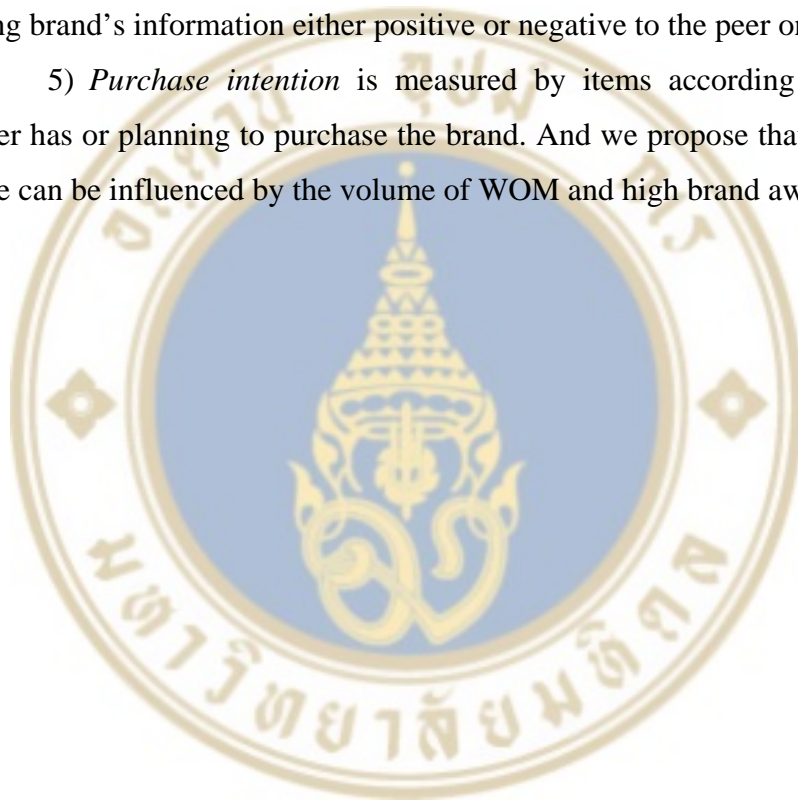
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The interview result consists of 15 respondents that were collected during Oct 26 – Nov 6, 2015 in a metropolitan Bangkok area. Briefly, 15 participants who are regular social media users were interviewed. A face – to face, one - on - one interview was conducted. Most of them are exposed to using social networking sites and other online channels almost every day. Since these participants are quite active on social media and regularly receive or view the advertisement in the form of viral content, therefore, it would be interesting to see whether the viral content shared in frequently used social application have influence on them. According to the framework, there are 4 domains which we consider to have the impact on consumers' intention to purchase and their decision making.

Furthermore, in respect to the decision making process for high involvement products like cars and insurance, consumers usually take more time when they for example search and process information and therefore need longer to get to the subsequent phase While low involvement products the affective and conative phases could precede the cognitive one as consumers do not "think" when buying the product but build attitude after the purchase in the stage of using.

Table 4.1 Participant's Biography

Paticiant No.	Name (Age)	Number of hours on internet/ day
1	Tanya (34)	4-5
2	Wanjan (33)	4
3	Jang (32)	5
4	Mui (32)	4
5	Prea (30)	4-5
6	Sine (30)	2
7	Nad (31)	4
8	Porjai (33)	3-4

Table 4.1 Participant's Biography (cont.)

Paticiant No.	Name (Age)	Number of hours on internet/ day
9	Safee (35)	3-4
10	Hong (44)	3-4
11	Namwan (33)	4-5
12	Vanich (35)	4-5
13	Ling (32)	4-5
14	Kate (31)	7-8
15	Pang (32)	4-5

All participants interviewed graduated from university with bachelor's degree and some with master's degree while the other are in the middle of pursuing a master degree. Most informants discoursed to use social media to be connected with friends, updated on status or newsfeed and seek for new interesting information's.

4.1 The Result of Viral Content

According to the interview, most of participants are aware what the viral marketing or content is. They can describe some of the viral content aspect when asked to define the meaning of it. They are aware and suspect that the contents that shared on social media are made for marketing purpose. This thought does not have any negative impact on the brand image as the people appreciate that the main point of making a good advertisement is to commercialize the service or product or campaign otherwise the firms would not invest on it.

"It's about advertisement through the people who use social network. Those firms who release viral marketing think that social media can be used as a powerful tool to widely communicate to viewer. Unlike advertise on television which cost more than social network. If you do something and people talk about it on social media, there is a high tendency that this activity or event or trend turn into the news on television." – Participant 1

"I think that it's about event, or product or brand that trying to seek a new way to promote it by using the social media as a tool for extensively share the content to most people." – Participant 6

In addition, all of the interviewees stated that they have been frequently receiving the viral content through the social media such as Facebook and LINE group. When they were asked about the feeling while watching the content, most of them have different range of emotional attachment to the content. Some of the contents were very touching for particular person while others seems to have less emotional toward the same content.

Once the selected viral content (Thai Insurance Company advertisement) is showed, the audience seems to recognize it immediately. Most of them actually 'Like' and 'Share' the content since the first time they watched. This content was viewed more than 26 million times in YouTube and unaccountable 'Like' and 'Share' via Facebook

Figure 4.1 "Unsung Hero" (Official HD) :TVC Thai Life Insurance
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaWA2GbcnJU

The exploration of this research on the viral effect for particular content found that, the viral content positively influences brand awareness as most of the participants point out similar comments as follows.

"The content helps the brand to stick in the customer mind and become aware that if they want to purchase insurance, Thai insurance will be options for them to further investigate on the profit." – Participant 2

In comparison with the main paper which studied on the interaction of user with fan page commitment we found that the viral content adopts the same character as the brand page commitment on the awareness. However, as per our observation, Facebook fan page seems to have stronger impact on the consumer. Facebook users choose to follow specific products or services or brands pages that they basically interested in or after there is a need of pursuing information or purchase the products, while the viral content are randomly picked to their attention without prior purchase intention in place. So the attention given to the viral content seems to be much less than the Facebook fan page.

4.2 The Result of Annoyance

According to McCoy et al., (2007) and Lee and McGowan (1998) studies, annoyance can be resulted from unwelcome experience to advertising or disturbing direct marketing, therefore this could deliver negative word-of-mouth and lead to undesired outcome. The mentioned statement is in contrast with this research. We found that the viral contents that scattered in social media perform differently on the consumer mindset unlike TV commercial and direct marketing. In social media, the audience has more control on what they want to view. This is supported by comments from the interviewees when they were questioned if the same viral content is appeared on the newsfeed all the time, or sent from their friends via 'Line' chat application. Some may say, if they had watched it they just skip the content to go to the next one. There is no negative feeling against seeing the content shared multiple times. The worst feeling that one interviewee expressed was:

"I'm bored of seeing same content many times on my newsfeed but if I recognized that I have watch it already, I will just skip it, no negative feeling to the brand" – Participant 4

Therefore most of the attitudes of most interviewees are more similar to below statement:

"… sometimes if I recognize that I have watch this content I would just stop and leave it" – Participant 1

Interestingly, some of the interviewees even commented that the more they see the more they interested in the content. Here are couples of positive feedback on the annoyance, in terms of number of share and multiple times that the viewer has seen the content via newsfeed or 'Line' chat group:

"It is not annoying for me as I can select what to watch. It might benefit me if the content still around while I need the product or service" – Participant 7

"It is quite interesting to me, I want to know more about the brand on why there are so many people interested in. and there is no negative feeling toward to brand" – Participant 3

Even though, the annoyance was expected to lead the negative word of mouth (Hutter et al., 2013), we are unable to find the evidence to support this statement as there is no annoyed feeling towards the brands presented in all interview of 15 applicants. Therefore, if the firm is choosing to promote the product through viral marketing, the challenge of this new channel would be keeping the consumer entertained and attain their full attention.

4.3 The Result of Brand Awareness

We have found the contrast point while exploring on brand awareness through the interview. Referring to some studies (Barry and Howard (1990), Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) and Smith et al., (2008)) about the Hierarchy of effect, there are seven phases sequentially indicated as awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase. Thus, we have found that the brand awareness could be shaped within the consumers mind if there is a need to purchase. This means the 'liking' or 'preference' stage or the need to purchase can come prior the awareness or knowledge about the brand. And the good advertisement (content) will trigger the consumer to automatically memorize the brand for further search for information which correspondingly to Hutter et al., (2013) that stated *"Brand awareness is created by anything that causes the consumer to experience the brand either through advertising, promotion, publicity, public relations, etc.".* Therefore, it should follows that the more frequently consumers involve with the brand related content, the higher the awareness of the brand is. Social

media acts as the mediator to expose the consumer to the brand and thus create the brand awareness.

Although Tsang et al., (2004) and Bauer et al., (2005) claim that the most important feature that affects consumers' attitude is entertainment. We had recognized the entertainment differently in the research. Generally, once advertising has become viewed as entertainment, it seems that some of the interviewees forget about the commercial aspect of advertising altogether. Another subject, discussing an ad she particularly enjoyed, was unable to remember what the ad was actually for. As a result, we can pinpoint the obstacle of creating brand awareness is that the audiences do not care if the content is an advertisement or not, they watch it for entertaining purpose and the marketing message cannot get through and attain the consumer attention.

"I Like watching advertisements, I watch the story that the production house trying to make. However, I pay too much attention on the story most of the time not on the product that they try to promote. Unless, the production team really emphasize on the product or brand otherwise there is no way for me to remember it" – Participant 11

As this last statement makes clear, the entertainment component of a viral advertisement can disrupt and completely obscure the commercial intent of a marketing message. Viewers look to these videos for entertainment, find it, and move on. Whether it is or is not an advertisement and brand awareness falls by the wayside.

Hutter et al., (2013) proposed that the brand awareness is positively influenced when consumers engage with the social media activity, in this research viral content. Interestingly, for the selected content of Thai insurance, the company has reputation on its touching advertisement which has an impact on emotional side of the viewer. Since the beginning of the content, most of the people can recognize the theme and sense the ads atmosphere that this kind of ads is usually for the insurance product from some insurance company but, the brand cannot be identified. This is supported by Keller (1993), brand recall require more consumer's effort to recover the brand from their memory. While brand awareness is used as a heuristic in consumer purchasing process, (Macdonald and Sharp, 2000) failing to make the brand outstanding from the others could lower the purchase intention. The following are unprompted statements from four different subjects, illustrating this point:

"I think it's Thai Insurance as they always do this kind of content" – Participant 3

"At first I cannot recall what is the brand and product. But I can guess that it's insurance ads.I think I shared the content before." – Participant 4

"I know that it's insurance. But I cannot recall the brand." – Participant 7

"I cannot exactly say that the ads is for insurance. I'm not sure either insurance or bank. Because these industries are using the same theme for advertisement. I cannot remember the brand" – Participant 13

As the interview was conducted in a casual atmosphere, the interviewees feel free to express their thoughts about this particular insurance commercial. The discussion went on to what the insurance firm could improve when consider releasing the ads and become viral. Two of the participants even suggested that:

"The advertisement nowadays especially insurance ads, the content does not contain anything regarding the product or service they provided. …. I think for insurance, only the benefit or return that the client will get if they apply with the firm, then it could be interesting, for example, if there is some stunning benefit offered included in the content, then it would be more interesting for me. if it is just normal, emotional content, it cannot influent me to purchase the product." – Participant 3

"If compare this content to another content of Muang Thai Insurance. I used to be impressed by Thai Insurance's advertisement. They were like shot movies which are stunning. By that time, I was able to tell that particular contents are from Thai Insurance. But once they make too many ads that has the same theme (no new idea), I tend to pay more attention for another end of the ads which more straight to the point, Muang Thai launches one ads which consists of the activities that they would support if the consumer apply for their insurance. So I feel that Muang Thai Insurance is better than Thai Insurance. And if I want to purchase insurance I would search the internet for information.....I like Muang Thai as they offers previleage activities and promotion for members. It matches my lifestyle." – Participant 13

With the above statement, the advertisement production house and the insurance firms should explore on the content more carefully to enhance the product and brand awareness in the consumer perception.

4.4 The Result of Word of Mouth (WOM)

Marketer's needs to better recognize and analyze how word of mouth might influence customer's intention to purchase certain product. As well as, the corporate image was found to mediate the relationship between word of mouth and the purchase intention. We have acknowledged that the WOM that drive from watching the viral content is very powerful in creating the consumer awareness. The responses from most interviewees, when they are asked about how such content come into their attention, intrigues the researcher of how powerful of the number of 'Like' and 'Share' can capture their awareness. This is in accordance with previous study of WOM which show that WOM can generate the higher level of awareness when comparing to the conventional advertising (Lopez and Sicilia, 2013). This study is also in line with the study of Trusov et al., (2009), who stated that the consumer's views, preferences or experiences are easily shared and sprinkled through the internet and can capture multiple of viewer awareness and creating conversation through the internet which can be read by a crowd of consumer around the world (Steffes and Burgee, 2009), thereby the potential exposure of the marketing campaign is increased.

Despite the annoyance, most of the interviewees choose to view the content if it has been shared or liked from hundreds or thousands of people. They feel invited to view the content. And if the contents are interesting enough, most of the participant would pass it forward or share with their social media.

"Sometimes when a lot of people share the same thing, it seems to be interesting. For example, on Facebook newsfeed, if the same content is shared multiple times, I normally watch the content. But sometimes when you see one content that is shared too many times, it turns to be suspicious, I have to re-think if it could be the virus. Should or should not I click and watch the content. I have to check first, if there is no report of virus in the comment, I then will watch it and afraid if I miss the talk of the town content, I would not be able to chitchat with my friends." – Participant 1

Even though Kozinets et al., (2010) claim that the WOM is more effective in term of marketing communication channel in persuading consumer's decision making than others. Base on the research that exploring for high involvement product or service, the volume of the message through social networking sites seem to have less influence on the purchasing decision of prospects customers. If the WOM, as number of 'Like',

'Share' and 'Viewer' after seeing the viral content online could help drive the consumer to purchase the product or service, our research found that there is no linkage between the number of 'Like', 'Share' and 'Viewer' – WOM by sharing the content to the purchase intention. In the other word, even though there are a lot of people talking about or sharing the particular viral content, the intention to purchase the product does not appear at this phase. The important of this result reside in the fact that they contrast to those previous studies which have shown that the higher the volume of WOM, the faster consumers' adoption of the new product and even impact positively on product sales (Shen and Hahn, 2008; Duan et al., 2008).

The interviewees tend to rely and trust on other additional sources of information such as friends and family, Google, Pantip.com (online community) and reviews/comments before they decide whether to purchase the product order service. These sources can make them sense and believe that they are taking a reasonable purchasing decision. Furthermore, understandable, helpful, and convincing reviews/comments possibly will have a powerful impact on readers' purchasing intention. Evidently, once the interviewees explain about their process of decision making to purchase the products, peer reviews and internet search for information frequently occur as the first step of the process.

4.5 The Result of Purchase Intention

Scholars (Roselius 1971; Jacoby et al., 1977) claim that the brands which consumers are more familiar with or well-known tend to be purchased. The basic brand awareness alone may be sufficient to inspire the choice of brands, especially in low involvement situation (Hoyer and Brown, 1990; Bettman and Park, 1980). Thus, from our research we argue that purchase intention is found to be moderately influenced by brand awareness – when consumer view the content, it successfully create the brand awareness and when people acknowledge the brand. This awareness enhances the brand to be distinguished from others and become consumer option when the purchase intention is presented. The study result is supported from several researches that show the brand familiarity can increase consumers' confidence and trust towards the brand (Smith & Wheeler, 2002). This study has explore the strength of brand awareness of

Thai Insurance Company towards customers' purchase intention from the interview it shows that when customer become aware of the brand. It does not directly influent the intention to purchase. But what the brand awareness can enhance is that Thai Insurance Company would be in the consumer top three options if they need to apply for.

Moreover, the purchase intentions of product depended on what types of product were being involved. This argument is supported by the research from Rapp et al., (2013) that higher involvement may increase their tendency to engage with retailers and suppliers via social media. Therefore, the more the product is risky, high investment and consumers have low knowledge about; peer communications is most likely or unlikely to cause consumers to purchase a product. This study is in line with the recent research of Poynter (2008), who state that the information appears in the social networking sites can greatly affecting the users.

While Cheung et al., (2008) claim that the WOM has become a permanent of marketing mix and contributing the great deal to the purchasing decision of online consumer, in contrary, our result demonstrate the impact of WOM from 'Like' or 'Share' the viral content via social media can create the only minimum impact on the purchase intention. Whereas, the consumers admit that they would rather acquire the information regarding the brand from their relatives or friends who are more reliable and trustworthy if the decision must be made whether to purchase the brand or not.

Table 4.2 Findings

Items	Viral contents (in general)	Thai Life Insurance	findings - key point
Viral content - WOM & Brand Awareness	• Viral content is viewed as the entertainment – numerous of views and pass it forward. • But marketing message cannot get through	• Impact on emotional side of the viewer - people can recognize that it's insurance ads. • viral content positively influences brand awareness	• Firms should carefully plan the content and its marketing message to enhance the product and brand awareness in the consumer perception

Table 4.2 Findings (cont.)

Items	Viral contents (in general)	Thai Life Insurance	findings - key point
Viral content - Annoyance	• The audience has more control on what they want to view, therefore no negative feeling towards brands.	• The more they see the more they interested in the content – No annoyed feeling	• The firm need to keep the consumer entertained and attain their full attention
WOM - Brand Awareness	• If the contents are interesting, most of the participant would pass it forward or share with their social media.	• Number of 'Like' and 'Share' can capture awareness.	• Blogger's or influencers such as celebrities' reviews are consider to have more impact on consumers awareness and even purchase intention.
WOM & Brand Awareness - Purchase Intention	• No linkage between the number of 'Like', 'Share' and 'Viewer' (WOM) to the purchase intention. • Even when customer become aware of the brand. It does not directly influent the intention to purchase.	• People seek references/ information from their friends and relatives rather than depending only on advertisement.	• In high involvement product – people seek for understandable, helpful, and convincing reviews/comments which have powerful impact on readers' purchasing intention.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

This study examined to explore from qualitative perspective, how social media activities, in specific the viral content of the insurance firms, affect the perception of brands, and ultimately influence consumer's purchase decision process with all participants chosen in Bangkok, Thailand. The purpose of this study was (1) How the viral content can enhance the brand awareness and purchase intention of Thai consumers toward brands?

5.1 Conclusion

Research Question: How the viral content can enhance the brand awareness and purchase intention of Thai consumers toward brands?

On the purchase decision process of consumers and explore how social media activities, in specific the viral content of the insurance firms, affect the perception of brands, and ultimately influence the purchase decision process of consumers, The results of this study should foster understanding of the value-enhancing potential of social media campaigns and reveal how the perception of brands is influenced through this new communication channel. Our findings demonstrate that engagement with viral content has positive effects on consumers' brand awareness, and neutral effect on purchase intention. When particular content goes viral and mediated to the viewer by social network, there is a higher possibility that the content will be seen by countless consumers and create higher chance for the brand to imprint in their memory or at least for the consumer to be familiar with the product. Results further indicate that annoyance with the viral content does not lead to negative effects in respect to the overall brand image. But keep seeing certain content shared, instead of annoying, the curiosity towards the content is raising and later on enhance the brand awareness. People get interested by the viral phenomenon; many people sharing or viewing the content and this drive the

positive effect on the brand awareness and eventually resulted in spreading the content to others which consider being the word of mouth activity. It continuously went on and on as a loop. Understand the factors that result in increased consumers' acceptance of viral marketing that drive the product.

5.2 Managerial Implication

From the investigation through in-depth interview, author found that social media should be made as an integral part of firm's marketing communication. The consumers dedicate more of their time connecting via applications. The firm must understand that when creating the marketing campaigns, it must be conducted within the different platform as the social media has given the challenges and opportunity for the business organization. By knowing that the brand awareness is important since it indicates that the brand exists in a consumer's mind and consumer bias towards familiar brands suggest that awareness may alone determine choice. From this study we found that the brand awareness can be influenced by the consumer's engagement via viral marketing. Therefore, the effective viral content should established and launched with strategic planning to ensure the success of making firm's content or advertisement go viral. When such content is circulated in social network, higher possibility that the content will be seen by countless consumers and create higher chance for the brand to stamp in consumers' memory

5.3 Theoretical Implication

Unlike the Facebook brand page commitment, viral content of the Thai insurance brand has generate the diverse results on 3 elements; annoyance, word of mouth and purchase intention. While the negative influence was found from the annoyance, people tend to turn away once they receive too many information from the brand page. On the contrary, no support of the influence from the annoyance found on the viral content or purchase intention as the consumer have been transformed from passive recipients of marketing activities to a position of being able to decide and control what they want to perceive.

Further work is needed to better understand what might trigger amusement of viewer is equally worth of research. Academics might also consider viral content from other product categories or the others social media activities. Additional factors which influence consumer purchase behavior could be further explored. In addition, further examine on HOE to determine whether social media engagement could change the order of the model's steps.

5.4 Recommendation

Social media should not be something companies engage in because everyone else is doing or because it is thought to be important for a modern and open image of brands. Also, brand managers today use social media activities mostly as means to gather information and learn about consumers and their attitude towards the products and the brand. Those reasons to be active in social media are relevant, but managers have to realize that social media is a viable marketing instrument as well, which, if applied correctly, can have positive economic effects for the brand and the company.

5.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study was focused only Bangkok, a city of Thailand and the sample size was only 15 participants, which consider quite small comparing to the people in social network community. It would be more productive to expand the sample size by adopting the quantitative approach in the research, taking into consideration the difference of sample size in demographics such as age group and occupation to investigate the differences in other aspects. Besides, interviewer and interviewees may have a diverse understanding of the definition and some technical term from interview question and answer. Therefore the respondent may comprehend the query and rely on their understanding. The time spent on this study was limited and interviewed only once while; trends of consumers could possibly change over time. Willingness to participate in a depth-interview was also another restriction. Also, other factors influencing the purchase decision process could be included to refine the model and deepen the understanding of social media's

influence on the decision making. More empirical research is needed which focuses on theories and applied to the decision-making process specifically with regard to industry specific products and services and the impact of social media. Finally, the suggestion for future research of this topic would be conducting a questionnaire.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Question

This study then developed to conclude the analysis as the following questions which originated from the main paper:

Demographic:

- How often do you use social media and why do you use it?
- What types of things do you look at regularly online?
- How would you define viral marketing from your opinion?
- Could you give me some specific examples of viral marketing?

Viral content

- Have you receive the viral content in social media e.g. Facebook?
- How often do you receive the viral content, particularly insurance ads via social media?
- How this item did come to your attention?
- How do you feel about the content?
- How aware were you that particular item was a marketing message?

Word-of-mouth (WOM)

- Did you pass it along to others in any way? Why/why not?
- What factors affected that decision? Content? Need to share?
- If you had seen this message on television, with no way to share it online, would you feel compelled to tell people about it? Why/Why not?

Brand awareness

- What is a new product that you've recently become aware of?
- How did you become aware of it? (Interviewer identifies type of marketing message: viral, traditional, WOM, etc.)

- To be specific, can you recall any of the insurance ads that go viral recently?

    o What's the brand? What do you know about the brand?

    o Do you have any difficulties to distinguish the brand from others?

    o How do you feel towards this particular brand?

Purchase intention

- Do you currently have medical insurance (social welfare is excluded)?

- What are the factors to drive you to purchase any insurance?

- Do you feel that receiving and viewing the viral content has given you the desire to purchase the brand?

Annoyance

- Have you received the same content many times?

- How do you feel about that particular content or brands (if you can recall)?

- How would you feel if you found out that the particular brand always about advertisement and marketing?