

## Exploring Perceived Informativeness of Viral Marketing Messages (PIVMM)

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### ABSTRACT

*The present empirical work aims to study different modes of Viral Marketing (VM) including Email (E), Social Media (SM), Fan Pages (FP), SMS (S) and Internet Blogging (IB). To explore the prominent factor(s) that influence these VM modes, an effort has been done to understand the influence of Age, Education Stream (ES) and Gender on the Perceived Informativeness of Viral Marketing Messages (PIVMM). The present study shows Gender has no influence on the PIVMM for all the five modes of VM. But, influence of Age and ES on PIVMM has been observed. The impact of Age on PIVMM has been established only for Email (E) and not for other four modes. Internet Blogs (IB) has been found to be the most informative mode of VM by respondents from all four different Education Stream (ES).*

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, Internet Blogs (IB), Social Media (SM), Viral Marketing (VM).

### INTRODUCTION:

Web has created enormous impact and profusion of opportunities for online marketplace and business models. Its influx has radically transformed traditional marketing and conceptualized Social Media Marketing (SMM) for creation and dissemination of marketing messages. Media and brand communications earlier administered by marketers are now gradually being shaped by consumers. There is paradigm shift of consumer from mere passive recipient of information to its creator and facilitator. Social Media (SM) platforms have empowered consumer to participate as catalyst by sharing online content. Its magnificent impact on branding and marketing outcomes makes it imperative to focus on Consumers Behavior (CB) towards Viral Marketing (VM).

With advent and adoption of technology, there is a drastic change in CB. Consumers now crosscheck product details online before purchasing. This behavioral change has compelled strategic decision makers to acclimatize to online marketing (Pelau & Zegreanu, 2010). VM also referred as Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM) (Ferguson, 2008) is a popular type of online marketing where product is advertised from one consumer to another like a rampant flu virus (Palka, Pousttchi, & Wiedemann, 2009). Different modes for VM like Email (E), Social Media (SM), Fan Pages (FP), SMS (S) and Internet Blogging (IB) (Woerdl, Papagiannidis, Bourlakis, & Li, 2008) are preferred as reliability of message is increased by getting information from a known source. VM not only aims at brand promotion, but also helps to focus on right audience. 2/3rd of world's population use SM and amongst the seventy five most popular online brands, Facebook has the maximum average time per visitor (Nielsen, 2009). In terms of sharing messages, SM is ahead of Email and messaging apps like WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook, Messenger and We Chat are major contributors for its success (BI Intelligence, 2016). This has implications to understand and analyze how and which mode of VM can magnetize the potential consumers.

According to study by (Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011), informativeness about the product is an indicator of identifying effectiveness of VM Messages (VMM). It aims at maximizing consumer satisfaction with regard to information shared (Van der Waladt, Rebello, & Brown, 2009).

Perceived informativeness refers to how well consumer considers information to its full utility (Oh & Xu, 2006). Since, buying decision of product is influenced by information shared and availability of Web portals, consumers consider internet as a reliable source for information (Tsang, Ho, & Liang, 2004). Thus, the focus of marketers is towards VM. It is a pathway of positive response of consumer towards product if they perceive VMM connected, reliable and applicable to them (Haghirian, Madlberger & Tanuskova, 2005).

In spite of this, there are challenges in adoption of VM as different consumers perceive messages differently which totally takes regard of demographic variables. India ranks second amongst mobile phone users (Wikipedia, 2017) and it includes people from different Background, Race, Culture, Age, Gender etc. It is very important for the organization to identify potential consumer and to advertise product in that line using appropriate mode.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

A study conducted to explore consumer perception, behavior and receptivity towards VM found that email, blogs, video, social networks and forum are the different modes of VM. Though VM has raised consumer awareness and VM messages are not treated as spam, but it does not extensively affect purchasing decision. Negative VM has much stronger impact and forum is perceived Forum as the most credible source of VM (Low & Goh, 2009).

Taking SMS as a mode for VM, positive and significant relation has been traced between entertainment, informativeness and CA in mobile advertising, yet improvement is desired as very low value of informativeness and entertainment has been perceived. Geo-marketing, sponsored applications, and iPhone apps have been suggested to improve CA towards VM (Blanco, Blasco, & Azorin, 2010). The study by (Chu & Kim, 2011) examined how social relationship factors (i.e. Facebook, Friendster, and MySpace) are related to E-WOM transmission via online social websites. Tie strength, normative, trust and informational influence are the factors which positively influence E-WOM behavior in social networking sites. Whereas, another factor called homophily is negatively related with users' overall E-WOM behavior. The impact of E-WOM in social networking sites has been identified as a unique method of influencing consumer behavior.

Source credibility (trust), informativeness and entertainment had positive relationship while irritation had no relationship with CA towards VM. Moreover, source credibility and informativeness are two major contributors towards CA. Also, permission based VM campaigns lead to better outcome (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012).

In a study conducted by (Wei, 2014) in Malaysia, perceived entertainment, perceived irritation, perceived informativeness, perceived source credibility and perceived incentives impact CA towards VM. Moreover, there is positive relationship between perceived incentives and CA, while negative relationship exists with perceived irritation. But, no relation of CA has been found with perceived informativeness, perceived source credibility and perceived entertainment.

From the seven factors including irrepressible, consumer dependency, escalating brand, message material, professed security, supportive access and immense efficacy which influence consumers perception towards VM, only immense efficacy has established impact of gender and influences the most followed by supportive access (Haryani & Motwani, 2015).

In Indian context, the work by (Poorvika & Kavitha, 2015) found that VM possesses enormous potential as a marketing tool. Though VM messages help to increase consumer awareness, but they do not significantly impact the buying decision or intention. It has been found by (Dawar & Dawar, 2015) that informativeness, relevancy, entertainment, credibility, message clarity, incentives and brand familiarity influence CA towards VM and have positive relationship whereas, irritation has negative impact.

Though, the literature points towards informativeness being treated as a positive factor that determines CA towards VM, but none has focused on the consumers Perceived Informativeness of Viral Marketing Messages (PIVMM) towards different modes of VM. The present work tends to bridge this gap.

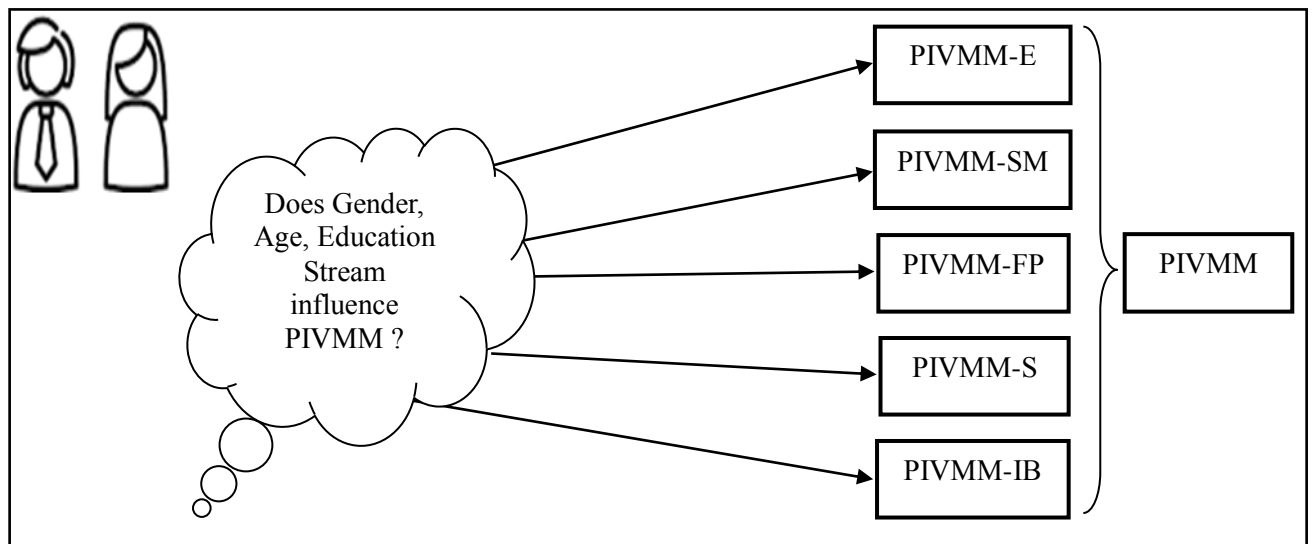
## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:**

- To study the difference in PIVMM by Female Students (FS) and Male Students (MS).
- To study whether there is an impact of Age and Education Stream (ES) on PIVMM.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

As illustrated in Figure 1, the study explores whether PIVMM is dependent on Gender, Age and Education Stream (ES) or not.

**Figure 1: Research Model**



- ❖ **Type of Study**  
 With cross-sectional time horizon, present work is based on pretested set of questions from a study by (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012).
- ❖ **Data Collection**  
 Primary Data has been gathered online using Google form.
- ❖ **Population**  
 Students of Panjab University, Chandigarh.
- ❖ **Sampling Used**  
 Non-Probability Quota Sampling with quota equally shared among students of four Education Stream (ES): Business and Management, Engineering, Law and Zoology.
- ❖ **Sample Size**  
 100, out of which 59 were Female Students (FS) and 41 Male Students (MS).
- ❖ **Data Type**  
 Not Normal Data.

Distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Respondents**

Education Stream	No. of respondents	Percentage of Respondents
<b>Business and Management</b>	25	
Female	13	52.00%
Male	12	48.00%
<b>Engineering</b>	25	
Female	7	28.00%
Male	18	72.00%
<b>Law</b>	25	
Female	18	72.00%
Male	7	28.00%
<b>Zoology</b>	25	
Female	21	84.00%
Male	4	16.00%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100</b>	

MS-Excel and SPSS has been used for tabular representation and data analysis. Mann-Whitney U Test and Mean values have been used to study the difference in PIVMM by FS and MS. For this, following five objectives have been framed:

**Objective 1:**

To study the difference in the PIVMM (E, SM, FP, S, IB) of FS and MS.

Kruskal-Wallis test has been used to study whether there is an impact of Age and Education Stream (ES) on PIVMM.

**Objective 2:**

To study whether there is an impact of Age on PIVMM (E, SM, FP, S, IB)

**Objective 3:**

To study whether there is an impact of Education Stream (ES) on PIVMM (E, SM, FP, S, IB)

**Table 2: Mean score of FS and MS of PIVMM for five different modes**

Gender	No. of Respondents	Mean PIVMM-E	Mean PIVMM-SM	Mean PIVMM-FP	Mean PIVMM-S	Mean PIVMM-IB
Female	59	3.288	3.475	3.237	3.186	3.864
Male	41	3.122	3.537	3.390	3.317	3.976
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3.220</b>	<b>3.500</b>	<b>3.300</b>	<b>3.240</b>	<b>3.910</b>

**DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:**

Among the five different modes of Viral Marketing (VM), IB is perceived as most informative with Mean = 3.91 (Table 2). E is perceived as least informative with Mean = 3.22 (Table 2). Perception for SM message as informative ranks higher than E, FP and S.

**Objective 1(a):**

**To study the difference in PIVMM-E (FS) and PIVMM-E (MS).**

Null Hypothesis  $H_{a0}$ : There is no significant difference in PIVMM-E (FS) and PIVMM-E (MS).

Mann-Whitney U test (non-parametric test for two-independent samples) has been applied. Here, Grouping Variable = Gender (Females = 59, Males = 41) and Test Variable = PIVMM-E. As illustrated in Table 3 for  $H_{a0}$ ,  $p = .463$ . Since  $p = .463 > .05$ , hence, the present study fails to reject Null Hypothesis  $H_{a0}$ . This confirms that there is no significant difference in PIVMM-E (FS) and PIVMM-E (MS). Mean PIVMM-E (FS) 3.288 > Mean PIVMM-E (MS) 3.122 (Table 2: Column 3), hence, in comparison to MS, FS perceive E messages more informative for VM.

**Objective 1(b):**

**To study the difference in PIVMM-SM (FS) and PIVMM-SM (MS).**

For  $H_{b0}$  (Table 3), there is no significant difference in PIVMM-SM (FS) and PIVMM-SM (MS). Mean PIVMM-SM (FS) 3.475 < Mean PIVMM-SM (MS) 3.537 (Table 2: Column 4), hence, in comparison to FS, MS perceive SM messages more informative for VM.

**Table 3: Test Statistics – Mann-Whitney U Test**

Null Hypothesis to be Tested	Grouping Variable	Test Variable	Type of p Value	p Value	Result
$H_{a0}$	Gender	PIVMM-E	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.463	$0.463 > 0.05$ Fail to reject $H_{a0}$
$H_{b0}$	Gender	PIVMM-SM	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.961	$0.961 > 0.05$ Fail to reject $H_{b0}$
$H_{c0}$	Gender	PIVMM-FP	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.456	$0.456 > 0.05$ Fail to reject $H_{c0}$
$H_{d0}$	Gender	PIVMM-E	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.756	$0.756 > 0.05$ Fail to reject $H_{d0}$
$H_{e0}$	Gender	PIVMM-IB	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.415	$0.515 > 0.05$ Fail to reject $H_{e0}$

**Objective 1(c):**

**To study the difference in PIVMM-FP (FS) and PIVMM-FP (MS).**

For  $H_{c0}$  (Table 3), there is no significant difference in PIVMM-FP (FS) and PIVMM-FP (MS). Mean PIVMM-FP (FS)  $3.237 <$  Mean PIVMM-FP (MS)  $3.390$  (Table 2: Column 5), hence, in comparison to FS, MS perceive FP messages more informative for VM.

**Objective 1(d):**

**To study the difference in PIVMM-S (FS) and PIVMM-S (MS).**

For  $H_{d0}$  (Table 3), there is no significant difference in PIVMM-S (FS) and PIVMM-S (MS). Mean PIVMM-S (FS)  $3.186 <$  Mean PIVMM-S (MS)  $3.317$  (Table 2: Column 6), hence, in comparison to FS, MS perceive S messages more informative for VM.

**Objective 1(e):**

**To study the difference in PIVMM-IB (FS) and PIVMM-IB (MS).**

For  $H_{e0}$  (Table 3), there is no significant difference in PIVMM-IB (FS) and PIVMM-IB (MS). Mean PIVMM-IB (FS)  $3.864 <$  Mean PIVMM-IB (MS)  $3.976$  (Table 2: Column 7), hence, in comparison to FS, MS perceive IB messages more informative for VM.

**Objective 2:**

**To study whether there is an impact of Age on PIVMM (E, SM, FP, S, IB).**

Null Hypothesis  $H_{f0}, H_{g0}, H_{h0}, H_{i0}, H_{j0}$ : There is no significant impact of Age on PIVMM-E, PIVMM-SM, PIVMM-FP, PIVMM-S and PIVMM-IB.

Kruskal Wallis test (one-way anova non-parametric test) with Grouping Variable = Age and Test Variable = PIVMM-E, PIVMM-SM, PIVMM-FP, PIVMM-S, PIVMM-IB has been applied. From Table 4 for  $H_{f0}$ ,  $p = 0.044$ . Since  $p = 0.044 < .05$ , hence, present study fails to accept Null Hypothesis  $H_{f0}$ . This confirms significant impact of Age on PIVMM-E. From Table 5 (Column 2), Mean PIVMM-E is lowest for Age = 23 to 27. Hence, these respondents perceive E least informative for VM.

For  $H_{g0}$  (Table 5), there is no significant impact of Age on PIVMM-SM. From Table 5 (Column 3), Mean PIVMM-SM is highest for Age = 28 to 32. Hence, these respondents perceive SM most informative for VM. For  $H_{h0}$  (Table 5), there is no significant impact of Age on PIVMM-FP. Moreover, from Table 5 (Column 4), Mean PIVMM-FP is highest for Age = 18 to 22. Hence, these respondents perceive FP most informative for VM.

For  $H_{i0}$  (Table 5), there is no significant impact of Age on PIVMM-S. From Table 5 (Column 5), Mean PIVMM-S is highest for Age = 18 to 22. Hence, these respondents perceive S most informative for VM. For  $H_{j0}$  (Table 5), there is no significant impact of Age on PIVMM-IB. Moreover, from Table 5 (Column 6), Mean PIVMM-SM is highest for Age = 28 to 32. Hence, these respondents perceive IB most informative for VM. From Table 5 (Row 2 i.e. Age = 18 to 22), Mean PIVMM-IB is highest. Hence, respondents of Age = 18 to 22 perceive IB more informative for VM. Similarly, respondents of Age = 23 to 27 and 28 to 33 also perceive IB more informative for VM. Hence, Age only impacts PIVMM-E.

**Table 4: Test Statistics - Kruskal Wallis Test for impact of Age on PIVMM**

Null Hypothesis to be tested	Test Type	Value	d.f.	Type of p Value	p Value	Result
$H_{f0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	6.261	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.044	$0.044 < 0.05$ Fail to accept $H_{f0}$
$H_{g0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	0.750	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.687	$0.687 > 0.05$ Fail to reject $H_{g0}$
$H_{h0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	1.393	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.498	$0.498 > 0.05$ Fail to reject $H_{h0}$
$H_{i0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	0.030	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.985	$0.985 > 0.05$ Fail to reject $H_{i0}$
$H_{j0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	0.249	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.883	$0.883 > 0.05$ Fail to reject $H_{j0}$

**Table 5: Mean score of PIVMM for different Age groups**

Age	Mean PIVMM-E	Mean PIVMM-SM	Mean PIVMM-FP	Mean PIVMM-S	Mean PIVMM-IB
18-22	3.377	3.522	3.362	3.261	3.942
23-27	2.731	3.462	3.231	3.192	3.846
28-32	3.250	3.750	2.750	3.250	4.000
>= 33	5.000	2.000	3.000	3.000	3.000
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3.220</b>	<b>3.500</b>	<b>3.300</b>	<b>3.240</b>	<b>3.910</b>

**Objective 3:**

To study whether there is a significant impact of Education Stream (ES) on PIVMM (E, SM, FP, S, IB).  
 Null Hypothesis  $H_{k0}, H_{l0}, H_{m0}, H_{n0}, H_{o0}$ : There is no significant impact of ES on PIVMM(E, SM, FP, S, IB).

**Table 6: Test Statistics - Kruskal Wallis Test for impact of ES on PIVMM**

Null Hypothesis to be tested	Test Type	Value	d.f.	Type of p Value	p Value	Result
$H_{k0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	5.168	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.160	0.160 > 0.05 Fail to reject $H_{k0}$
$H_{l0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	0.277	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.964	0.964 > 0.05 Fail to reject $H_{l0}$
$H_{m0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	0.976	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.807	0.807 > 0.05 Fail to reject $H_{m0}$
$H_{n0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	2.684	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.443	0.443 > 0.05 Fail to reject $H_{n0}$
$H_{o0}$	Pearson Chi-Square	2.340	2	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	0.505	0.505 > 0.05 Fail to reject $H_{o0}$

Kruskal Wallis test using Grouping Variable = ES and Test Variable = PIVMM-E, PIVMM-SM, PIVMM-FP, PIVMM-S, PIVMM-IB has been applied. From Table 6, **the present study fails to reject Null Hypothesis  $H_{k0}, H_{l0}, H_{m0}, H_{n0}, H_{o0}$ . This confirms that there is no significant impact of ES on PIVMM (E, SM, FP, S, IB).**

**Table 7: Mean score of PIVMM for Education Stream, Gender and Age**

Category	No. of Respondents	Mean PIVM M-E	Mean PIVM M-SM	Mean PIVMM -FP	Mean PIVMM -S	Mean PIVMM -IB		
<b>Business and Management</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3.000</b>	<b>3.480</b>	<b>3.280</b>	<b>3.120</b>	<b>3.920</b>		
<b>Female</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3.154</b>	<b>3.615</b>	<b>3.385</b>	<b>3.308</b>	<b>4.077</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.508</b>
18-22	6	3.333	3.667	3.833	3.667	4.333		
23-27	4	3.000	3.500	3.250	2.750	4.000		
28-32	3	3.000	3.667	2.667	3.333	3.667		
<b>Male</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2.833</b>	<b>3.333</b>	<b>3.167</b>	<b>2.917</b>	<b>3.750</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.20</b>
18-22	8	3.375	3.750	3.500	3.375	3.750		
23-27	4	1.750	2.500	2.500	2.000	3.750		
<b>Engineering</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>2.960</b>	<b>3.600</b>	<b>3.400</b>	<b>3.520</b>	<b>4.000</b>		
<b>Female</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3.000</b>	<b>3.571</b>	<b>3.286</b>	<b>3.000</b>	<b>4.143</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.400</b>
18-22	3	3.667	3.667	4.000	2.667	4.333		
23-27	3	2.000	3.333	2.667	3.333	3.667		
28-32	1	4.000	4.000	3.000	3.000	5.000		
<b>Male</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>2.944</b>	<b>3.611</b>	<b>3.444</b>	<b>3.722</b>	<b>3.944</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.53</b>
18-22	5	2.800	3.400	3.200	3.600	3.800		

Category	No. of Respondents	Mean PIVM M-E	Mean PIVM M-SM	Mean PIVMM -FP	Mean PIVMM -S	Mean PIVMM -IB		
23-27	13	3.000	3.692	3.538	3.769	4.000		
<b>Law</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3.480</b>	<b>3.520</b>	<b>3.320</b>	<b>3.160</b>	<b>4.040</b>		
<b>Female</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3.389</b>	<b>3.389</b>	<b>3.056</b>	<b>3.111</b>	<b>3.944</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.378</b>
18-22	18	3.389	3.389	3.056	3.111	3.944		
<b>Male</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3.714</b>	<b>3.857</b>	<b>4.000</b>	<b>3.286</b>	<b>4.286</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.829</b>
18-22	6	3.667	3.667	3.833	3.167	4.167		
23-27	1	4.000	5.000	5.000	4.000	5.000		
<b>Zoology</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3.440</b>	<b>3.400</b>	<b>3.200</b>	<b>3.160</b>	<b>3.680</b>		
<b>Female</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>3.381</b>	<b>3.429</b>	<b>3.286</b>	<b>3.238</b>	<b>3.571</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.381</b>
18-22	19	3.316	3.526	3.368	3.368	3.737		
23-27	1	3.000	3.000	2.000	1.000	1.000		
>= 33	1	5.000	2.000	3.000	3.000	3.000		
<b>Male</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3.750</b>	<b>3.250</b>	<b>2.750</b>	<b>2.750</b>	<b>4.250</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.350</b>
18-22	4	3.750	3.250	2.750	2.750	4.250		
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3.220</b>	<b>3.500</b>	<b>3.300</b>	<b>3.240</b>	<b>3.910</b>	<b>Total Mean for FS</b>	<b>3.417</b>
							<b>Total Mean for MS</b>	<b>3.478</b>

Table 7 illustrates that respondents of all four ES, perceive IB as most informative for VM.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:**

Both females and males have perceived Internet Blogs (IB) as the most informative mode leaving behind Email (E), Social Media (SM), Fan Pages (FP) and SMS (S). The perception for SM message as informative ranks higher than the perception for E, FP and S. Moreover, E has been perceived as least informative. The study concludes that there is no influence of Gender on PIVMM. But, mean values suggest that in comparison to FS, male counterparts consider VM messages more informative. There is acceptance for the impact of Age on PIVMM for Email, but not for other modes. Although, there is no impact of ES on PIVMM, but the respondents of all four ES perceive IB most informative for VM.

**LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK:**

To improvise strategy for VM, investigations are necessary to determine how CA is formed. Young respondents with a higher level of education were considered. Hence, considerate attention is desired when extrapolating the findings to other populations. The study can be replicated on a wider sample representative of the general consumer with diverse age group and education level that would seem reasonable to assess the stability of the present results. It is suggested to conduct a cross-cultural analysis of potential differences in the determinant since the main sample is taken from Panjab University. Thus, sample from different universities located in various regions can also be considered. Comparison based on job profile, city, income can be initiated. With the upsurge of SM, the study has implications to reframe organization’s Web presence and empower the consumer to actively participate in Content Creation (CC). It provides ample opportunities for Semantic Analysis of the content posted on Internet Blog, thereby encouraging research in Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Pattern Recognition.

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