

## Users' Perceptions about SMS and SMS Advertising: A Case Study of Pakistan

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**Abstract:** Marketers are interested in exploring customers' perceptions, because they want to assess unmet needs; delight needs and even secret needs of their potential customers. SMS advertising is a simple, easily manageable mode of communication. Due to its cost effectiveness, it has gained more popularity. Proper target audience selection, compatible message with easy language at appropriate timing and persuasiveness are the key for success. This research work was specifically intended to find the customers' perceptions regarding the SMS and SMS advertising, so that the firms can evolve their strategies according to the existing needs of the customers. It is imperative that any strategy formulated according to the customers' needs will be successful in the future.

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**Key words:** perceptions, advertising, customer behavior, Pakistan.

### 1. Introduction

Significant commercial opportunities are being created by the growth and convergence of mobile telecommunications. To communicate and understand customer wants technology advancements enhances the capabilities of brands based on the features and benefits. Knowledge of the customer's perception helps the companies to know the customers.

Consumer adoption of mobile telecommunications is growing with a very fast rate in most countries of the world, which created enormous opportunities for marketing through SMS advertisement (Perlado and Barwise 2005). According to Organization for Economic Co-ordination and Development (OECD), there is nearly one mobile phone per person in much of the developed world (Economist 2005). Australian IT (2008) has reported that global mobile phones has soared to more than 3.3 billion in recent years, which shows escalation in the mobile commerce, which shows that there is a lot of scope for the SMS ads and its role in the world of marketing.

Such an approach will result in better understanding of the prospect customers and evolving strategies that will help in building the brand equity in the most proper way. With many companies fighting over the emerging market of SMS adv, variation occurs in communications policy, because the consumer is not always asked for his or her permission before receiving SMS advertisements. As the relative importance of SMS advertisement is increasing day by day, yet there is relatively little academic research and empirical support for it. Regarding the applications of mobile communications technologies to be applied in marketing, SMS is a technological buzzword for transmitting business-to-customer messages to mobile phones, pagers, and personal data assistants (PDAs). SMS advertising is now a substantial source of revenue

for many operators, particularly because it has been incorporated in the "instant messaging culture" among teenagers and young professionals (Sadeh, 2002). One key advantage of SMS is that it can capitalize on the "always on" trend, in which people have access to the Internet virtually the entire day and always connected. SMS also allows for more interactivity with the consumer than traditional media. Many firms deliver alerts, news updates, traffic information, or promotional coupons via SMS. In the future, GPS (Global Positioning System) technology may also be incorporated in SMS advertising for those who seek timely information at the right place.

The study divided in to following sections: after introduction which is presented in Section 1 above, Section 2 shows review of literature. Material and methods are shown in Section 3. Results are discussed in Section 4. Final Section concludes the study.

### 2. Review of Literature

The emergence of cell phone technology, marketers has got a lot of opportunities to approach the customers. Different forms of SMS advertising campaigns are adopted by various commercial organizations to bring their products to the customers. Multifaceted research work is being conducted to find out the overall impact of SMS advertising.

The use of SMS as a communication tool is most prevalent in the young consumer segment (Maneesoonthorn and Fortin, 2004; Carroll et al., 2007; Leung, 2007). DeBaillon and Rockwell (2005) found that mobile phones have replaced landline telephones for daily use for these young consumers. Mobile phones are necessities in the young consumers' lifestyles, not only as a form of fashion statement but a portal to keep a "presence" and connection to peer networks (Grant and O'Donohoe, 2007; Carroll et al., 2007). The mobile

telecommunications technology has made consumer's life more "mobile" and the most significant benefit is the accessibility and freedom for people to remain in contact, while on the move (Sultan and Rohm, 2005).

It is found that the use of SMS is particularly attractive to young consumers falling within the age group of 15-24 (Barnes, 2002). With the increase usage of mobile technology, it is believed that SMS is the new advertising medium.

Cronin et al (2000) concluded that SMS advertisements lead to more positive attitudes towards the advertisement and the brand and to more positive purchase intentions when the perceived effort to buy the advertised product is low.

Lohtia et al (2003) highlighted that objectives of ads can be accomplished providing involvement by creating two-way communication in real time, instead of the usual more traditional one-way types of advertising. This was further supported by Sundar and Kim (2005), that the level of interactivity with the customers is positively associated with ads and product attitudes.

Baltas (2003) concluded that users usually pay very little attention to the lengthy messages which usually require close attention. Same conclusion has been derived by Barwise and Colin (2002) for the lengthy SMS ads through cell phones.

Motes and Fielden (1992) reported that in current mobile advertising practice the authors are inferring the use of acronyms heavily employed probably to produce desired reader effects through the use of a colorful language which may ultimately result in producing desirable intentions on the part of the users. Keeping with the same trend as part of the effectiveness of mobile SMS, concreteness of the message will influence the user to recall and visualize the specific details [(Pettus and Diener (1977), and Johnson and Kisielius (1985)].

**3. Materials and Methods**

Data were collected using a convenience sampling method via a self administered questionnaire.

Youngsters and students are an ideal target to examine young consumers as they fall within the age group of 20-40 years, which is the segment of largest mobile phone and SMS user (DeBaillon and Rockwell, 2005). Further more it is also being observed that usually youngsters also take advantages of the routine packages announced by the cell phone providers.

A total of 225 responses were collected. The data were analyzed using SPSS. The questionnaire consisted of the responses from the respondents and grouped on the basis of gender. Further the age factor was also ranged from 21-60 years, but the main target was the youngsters from 21-40 years. Responses also consisted on the basis of number of SMS received during a specific period, dealing with the messages, and the kind of messages. Regarding the quality of SMS, responses were mainly based on the accuracy, instantaneity, interactiveness, authenticity and also diffusibility. Responses were collected for usefulness, likeability, and also for further applications. The questionnaire also consisted about the responses whether that the respondents purchased any product on any of the SMS ad received so far. Questions were also asked for regarding the length and appropriateness of the language used in the SMS ad.

**4. Results and Discussion**

Target audience for this research was 225 participants, out of which 72 percent were males and 28 percent were females.

Table 1 shows that 77 percent of the respondents fall with in the age group of 21-40 years, which supports the point that use of SMS/SMS ads is most prevalent in the young consumers segment and constitute a large segment of our demography (Maneesoonthorn and Fortin, 2004; Carroll et al., 2007; Leung, 2007; Barnes, 2007). Furthermore Grant and O'Donohoe, 2007; and Carroll et al., 2007, have termed the cell phones as the integral part of the young consumer's life style, and also to keep the presence and a source of connectivity with the peers. The same point was highlighted by Sultan and Rohm, 2005.

**Table 1: Division of respondents on age**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<20	46	20.4	20.5	20.5
	21-40	174	77.3	77.7	98.2
	41-60	3	1.3	1.3	99.6
	above 60 years	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 indicates that maximum number of respondents (61%) received more than 20 SMS ads during the last 12 months.

**Table 2: Number of SMS ads received during the last 12 months**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-5	21	9.3	9.4	9.4
	6-10	14	6.2	6.3	15.6
	11-15	25	11.1	11.2	26.8
	16-20	26	11.6	11.6	38.4
	above 20	138	61.3	61.6	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

As regarding the dealing with the SMS ads (Table 3), response were that 33 percent respondents delete without reading and 36 percent delete after reading. 31 percent response was that delete the SMS ads when they are free. In total 67 percent respondents do read the

SMS ads and find any utility for it. This also depict that customers do look for the convenience while reading any SMS ads and taking any further action, and the same factor was highlighted by Phau and Teah (2009).

**Table 3: Deal with the SMS advertising**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Delete without reading	74	32.9	33.0	33.0
	Delete after reading	80	35.6	35.7	68.8
	Read it when you are free	70	31.1	31.3	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

According to the respondents 25 percent SMS messages are regarded as “good”, 44 percent as “average”, while 26 percent are regarded as “poor/junk” (Table 4). If compared, the results show that 67 percent

of the respondents do bother to read the SMS ads and 69 percent respondent opinion is that SMS ads are excellent/good/average.

**Table 4: Opinion about the SMS advertising received**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Excellent	10	4.4	4.5	4.5
	Good	56	24.9	25.0	29.5
	Average	99	44.0	44.2	73.7
	Poor	26	11.6	11.6	85.3
	Junk	33	14.7	14.7	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

Table 5, indicates that 75 percent SMSs are received in the text format, and the trend of multimedia

SMS ads is only 3 percent.

**Table 5: Kind of SMS advertising received**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Text advertising	168	74.7	75.0	75.0
	Multimedia message	7	3.1	3.1	78.1
	Both	49	21.8	21.9	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

Participants for see the benefits of SMS advertising as: an accurate message, which means suitable as per the perception of the participants and it accounts for up to 22 percent , while 26 percent

messages were having the instantaneity effect which means that SMS was received at the right time when there was the need for that specific product. 29 percent of SMS ads have an effect of interactive value and the

remaining 23 percent of the messages have gone into the diffusible state (Table 6). Dimitris et al., 2007, has pointed that little is known about the effectiveness of the SMS ads, which clearly supported in the findings shown in the Table 6, because there is a mix of responses and do not indicate any specific reason which will indicate to clear the way to any particular reason

which can show the effectiveness of the SMS ads and also the customers' behavior. The results also indicates, keeping in view the advantages mentioned, that the customers can not decide on the reasons to show the effectiveness of the SMS ads as reported by Okazaki (2005).

**Table 6: Measuring Accuracy, Instantaneity, Interactive and Diffusibility**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Accuracy	49	21.8	21.9	21.9
	Instantaneity	59	26.2	26.3	48.2
	Interactive	65	28.9	29.0	77.2
	Diffusibility	51	22.7	22.8	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 also indicates that interactivity with the customers is a major part of responses and Sundar and Kim (2005), has highlighted that this factor has got positive association with the ads and product attitudes. As per perception of the respondents regarding the authenticity of SMS ads 53 percent regarded it as believable and the remaining 47 percent of the

respondents do not believe on the contents of the messages (Table 7). Mackenzie and Lutz (1989) have recommended that credibility strongly influences the attitudes towards the ads and also towards the advertiser which is the most important predictor of the customer's attitudes.

**Table 7: Credibility of SMS advertising**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Believable	118	52.4	52.7	52.7
	Unbelievable	106	47.1	47.3	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

Table 8-9 show that 48 percent of the respondents feel some curiosity to further investigates for the offers made in the SMS ads and 38 percent responded that

they will use internet to gain further information and to make the final decision.

**Table 8: SMS advertising make investigate of the promotional offer**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	108	48.0	48.2	48.2
	No	116	51.6	51.8	100.0
	Total	224	99.6	100.0	

Come together it can be said that as 47 percent of the respondents do not believe on the authenticity of the SMS ads, contrary to that 52 percent believe that there is no need to further investigate for the SMS offers and

continuing with the same trend, 62 percent believe that they would not opt to get further information from other source if they are interested in any offers (Table 8, 9, 10).

**Table 9: Willingness to gather further information on internet or other ways when interested in specific SMS**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, I will	85	37.8	37.9	37.9
	No, I won't	139	61.8	62.1	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

**Table 10: Willingness to forward the promotional SMS to friends or family members**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, I will	95	42.2	42.4	42.4
	No, I won't	129	57.3	57.6	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

Out of the total 225 respondents, about 40 percent frequent to forward to SMS ads to their friends or feel it comfortable to forward the SMS ads to very family members (Table 11). frequently/frequently. While 28 percent regard it as less

**Table 11: Frequency to forward a SMS to your family/friends**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very frequently	27	12.0	12.1	12.1
	Frequently	60	26.7	26.8	38.8
	Less frequently	63	28.0	28.1	67.0
	Rarely	49	21.8	21.9	88.8
	Not at all	25	11.1	11.2	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

The results show that 36 percent of the respondents say appropriate and 22 percent disagree about the that the language used in the SMS ads, is quite appropriateness of the language used.

**Table 12: Opinion about the appropriateness of language used in SMS messages**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	14	6.2	6.3	6.3
	Disagree	49	21.8	21.9	28.1
	Neutral	69	30.7	30.8	58.9
	Agree	81	36.0	36.2	95.1
	Strongly agree	11	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

67 percent of respondents say that usually the length of the SMS ads are of medium length and 14 percent say that the SMS ads are lengthy Table 13. As the length of the messages also play a vital role in delivering the proper message, Baltas (2003) and Barwise and Colin (2002) have highlighted that users usually pay very little attention to the lengthy messages and a close attention should be given to this aspect of the SMS advertising.

**Table 13: Length of SMS Ads Received**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Usually very lengthy	17	7.6	7.6	7.6
	Lengthy	32	14.2	14.3	21.9
	Medium	150	66.7	67.0	88.8
	Short	20	8.9	8.9	97.8
	Very short	5	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	225	100.0	100.0	

Table 14, shows that 41 percent of the respondents are neutral in their opinion about the annoyance and interference of SMS ads in their every day activities. Along with this 26 percent of the respondents agree that SMS ads do annoy and interfere in their daily activities.

**Table 14: SMS received are annoying and interfere in every day activities**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	15	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	39	17.3	17.4	24.1
	Neutral	92	40.9	41.1	65.2
	Agree	58	25.8	25.9	91.1
	Strongly agree	20	8.9	8.9	100.0
Total		225	100.0	100.0	

Table 15 shows that 84 percent of the respondents network getting benefits from it. have activated the different packages offered on the

**Table 15: Receiving any SMS bundle package at your cell phone**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	189	84.0	84.4	84.4
	No	35	15.6	15.6	100.0
Total		225	100.0	100.0	

**5. Conclusion**

With the declaration of the whole world as a global village and the concept of globalization, which is mainly possible due the fast communication and the emergence of new technology, mobile cell phone technology has got a prime position on the global arena. Users are adopting this source of communication at a very fast rate and still it is projected to continue this trend (Maneesoonthorn and Fortin, 2004). In the world of marketing, where a strong relationship is the integral part of the CRM, this medium of communication, can play a very major role. To communicate effectively with the customers, the companies involved in this business must think about the ways and means to study the customers’ perceptions and also to find out the unmet needs that how effectively the companies can communicate in the most appropriate way. Pakistan is a growing economy and youth constitute a major part of the demography. Therefore the cell phone service providers and the use of this medium as a source of advertisement has got great options to be used.

It is further concluded that companies should concentrate on the mentioned aspects of the SMS ads and also the appropriateness of the SMS ads. SMS ads highlight the features and benefits of the brands by various companies, and also to create an environment of goodwill with the customers. Factors mentioned in this paper, the research has proved many of the factors have got positive impact on the performance of the brands.

**5.1. Recommendations**

According to the findings following are some proposed recommendations, if implemented by the firms can improve their performance:

- As the trend of the SMS advertising is increasing day by day, so much as the majority of the customers have got good response towards the SMS advertising.
- SMS advertising can as an effective tool in building a strong relationship with the customers and hence can increase their trust level.
- SMS advertising can help the firms in disseminating the required information in the most effective way.
- Firms should make the SMS advertising more acceptable to the customers by working out on the appropriateness, length and timing of the SMS.

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