

THE EFFECTS OF SMS ADVERTISING ON BRAND ATTITUDE AND PURCHASE INTENTION: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The role of SMS technology as a way of mobile messaging is diminishing while usage of mobile instant messaging applications is growing. This situation might lead marketing professionals to question the value of SMS technology as a way of effectively reaching consumers. However, it must not be overlooked that mobile phones are still capable of receiving SMS messages, even though less messages are being sent. This study examines the changes in brand attitude and purchase intention upon exposure to SMS advertising messages. In the study, experiment method is used and the data is analyzed which are gained from 47 university student participants. According to the findings, exposure to SMS advertising messages creates a statistically significant difference on attitude toward brand. The use of rational and emotional ad appeals did not lead to a significant difference on brand attitude. When users and non-users of the brand compared, statistically significant difference occurred only on the non-user group. There is no significant difference on any of the conditions tested for purchase intention. The findings indicate that SMS advertising is still a viable option for marketers who are trying to enhance brand attitude.

Keywords: Mobile marketing, SMS advertising, ad appeals, brand attitudes

SMS REKLAMLARININ MARKA TUTUMU VE SATIN ALMA DAVRANIŞI ÜZERİNE ETKİSİ: ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİ BAĞLAMINDA DENEYSEL BİR ÇALIŞMA

ÖZ

Mesajlaşmak için SMS teknolojisinin kullanımı azalmakta, yerini mobil anlık mesajlaşma yazılımlarının kullanımına bırakmaktadır. Bu durumda pazarlama profesyonelleri SMS teknolojisinin tüketicilere etkin bir şekilde erişmek açısından değerini koruyup korumadığını sorgulayabilir. Ancak tüketiciler daha az SMS gönderiyor olsa da, cep telefonları hâlâ SMS mesajlarını alma özelliklerini korumaktadır. Bu çalışma, SMS aracılığı ile gönderilen reklam mesajlarının marka tutumu ve satın alma niyeti üzerindeki etkisini ele almaktadır. Çalışmada deney yöntemi kullanılmış, üniversite öğrencilerinden oluşan 47 katılımcıdan elde edilen veriler analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgulara göre, SMS mesajına maruz kalmak marka tutumunda anlamlı bir değişime sebep olmaktadır. Rasyonel ve duygusal reklam çekiciliklerinin kullanımı anlamlı bir değişikliğe sebep olmamıştır. Markanın kullanıcı olmayan katılımcıların markaya yönelik tutumunda anlamlı bir değişim söz konusu iken, kullanıcı olan katılımcılarda böyle bir değişim söz konusu değildir. Markayı satın alma niyetinde anlamlı bir değişime rastlanmamıştır. Sonuç olarak, SMS reklam mesajlarının tüketicilere ulaşmakta etkili olmayı sürdürdüğü söylenebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mobil pazarlama, SMS reklamcılığı, reklam çekicilikleri, marka tutumları.

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Introduction

Since the first message sent, Short Message System (SMS) or “text messaging” became an important part of consumers’ lives. All mobile phones can send and receive SMS messages; and mobile phones are personal devices that are carried everywhere with its owner. When coupled with location based advertising, database marketing and similar technological advancements, this creates an enormous opportunity for the marketer.

The widespread use of SMS messaging by consumers is being challenged by a new type of messaging: Mobile instant messaging, through the use of mobile applications such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. According to Facebook, which owns both mobile applications, at 60 billion per day, the number of messages sent via these two applications triples the number of SMS messages sent worldwide in a day (Goode, 2016). The number of SMS messages sent in the fourth quarter of 2016 in Turkey is 23.6 million. SMS enjoyed its best quarter in Q4 2012 with 46.5 million messages sent. After this period, the SMS usage decreased every in quarter. It could be said that a similar declined happened for MMS (Multi Media Messaging) after Q3 2012. The number of SMS messages decline from a peak point of 78,3 million messages to 20,1 million in Q4 2016 (BTK Quarterly Report, 2013: 49; BTK Quarterly Report, 2016: 53). Although SMS usage by consumers may be slowing down, this does not mean that the ability of their phones to receive SMS messages are vanishing too.

This study examines the effects of SMS advertising messages on the brand attitudes and purchase intentions of youth. An experiment was conducted to test the general effects of exposure to an SMS, as well as the effects of such a message on users and non-users of the brand in question. The participants received one of the two different messages, a rational or an emotional message. In the following sections, mobile marketing and SMS advertising will be defined, and then the development, advantages and disadvantages of SMS will be discussed. Next, the ways to use SMS in marketing campaigns will be explained along with best practices for marketers. After the literature review, the methodology and result will be discussed.

1. Background and Definitions

1.1. Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing is defined by Sharl et.al (2005: 165) as “using a wireless medium to provide consumers with time- and location-sensitive, personalized information that promotes goods, services and ideas, thereby benefiting all stakeholders.” Mobile Marketing Association (2009) adds the element of interactivity to their definition: “Mobile Marketing is a set of practices that enables organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner through and with any mobile device or network.”

Mobile advertising can be either pull advertising, or push advertising: Ads can be pulled by the user (via mobile web browsers, applications, games etc.) or pushed to their devices (where they pop-up on the mobile devices’ screen) by sending messages (Barnes, 2002: 405; Dix et.al, 2017: 63).

Ads that are pulled by users are mainly display ads. These types of mobile ads range from simple banner ads to rich media ads. Banner ads are ads that are placed on top or the bottom of the screen. They rely heavily on brand recognition since their space is limited. Interstitials are ads that cover the entire screen, usually at key moments such as the opening or the closing of web pages and applications. Native ads are ads that look like in the context that it is presented. These types of ads are often used in mobile applications to seamlessly integrate to the look and feel of other content that the application presents. Mobile video is an important way of conveying advertising messages too. Video ads simply present ads in video format. They usually cover the whole screen and do not let users do anything else for a couple of seconds. And finally rich media ads are mobile ads that are highly dynamic and interactive (Mobileads.com, 2017; Gimbal.com). Ads that are pushed to consumers’ devices are mainly SMS and MMS ads, which are discussed in following chapters.

1.2. SMS Technology

SMS, sometimes referred as “text messaging”, relied on unused capacity of the GSM networks (Sadeh, 2002: 79). SMS messages can be sent from a mobile phone to another mobile phone. SMS messages can also be computer-to-phone (i.e. when a user gets an automated reply) or phone-to-computer (when a user texts to a short code). Hillebrand (2010: 126) quotes a mobile network operator director saying “Why would anybody want to send one of these messages when they can talk to them?” and adds that nobody saw mobile text messaging to be popular in 1992. However, it quickly became apparent that SMS can be an important part of mobile communication, since it is “less intrusive than a mobile phone call and more immediate than e-mail” (Leung, 2007: 116).

In its early years, SMS messages could only be sent within the same operator (Doyle, 2001: 274). Some operators also charged the “receiver” of the message, in addition to the sender. When these limitations were lifted, SMS started to thrive. Also the initial limit of 160 characters per message was partly lifted when the practice of combining multiple SMS messages into one become widespread (Dong, 2007: 439).

SMS technology has many advantages over voice calls for consumers. First of all, SMS as a text based communication is, asynchronous. The receiver can chose when to read and when to respond an SMS message (Ling, 2004: 151). As long as GSM networks are not having a problem and the mobile phone of the receiver is open, SMS messages reach to their destination almost immediately (Doyle, 2001: 274). SMS does not require a connection to the Internet or a special subscription, it just works out of the box. Another advantage of SMS over voice calls is the storing of messages. Similar to an actual mail box or a digital inbox, SMS messages are stored on the device and can be read later. This makes it possible for consumers to save important messages (such as coupon codes sent via SMS) and use them when needed. It is also possible to forward SMS messages. Although there is a potential for viral spread of messages this way, its more practical use might be to forward relevant messages to friends or family, limiting the viral effect.

2. SMS Advertising

SMS advertising, where marketers send marketing messages to consumers' mobile phones, is a form of push advertising. Marketers can use SMS advertising in two ways, the first is to attach marketing messages at the end of service messages, weather or news alerts and so on. It can be said that this method lost its appeal to marketers as consumers receive such information mostly from the mobile internet. The second way is to send a standalone SMS advertising message (Mobile Advertising Guidelines, 2008: 5). This study utilizes the second type of messages to reveal the attitudes and purchase intentions.

Marketing professionals are in constant search for better ways to reach their target audience. Advances in technology not only make our lives easier, but also provides many opportunities -along with challenges- for marketers. Mobile phones and their ever-growing popularity is one of the most important opportunities for marketers. Firms may use SMS advertising for brand-building (Okazaki and Taylor, 2008: 10) or direct response (Barwise and Strong, 2002: 17). However, the items discussed below can be both opportunities and challenges for consumers.

Personal: Mobile phones are personal devices. They are even more personal than desktop or laptop computers (Sadeh, 2002: 22). This makes it possible to target one person, the owner of the mobile phone when sending SMS advertising. Personalization is an important aspect of direct marketing practices. Depending on the willingness of the advertiser to harness the power of SMS, messages can be highly personalized or they can be indifferent as in mass media advertising. Research suggests that personalization on direct marketing media such as e-mail, direct mail, telemarketing and SMS leads to decreased ad skepticism (Baek and Morimoto, 2012: 71) and message relevance lowers perceived intrusiveness of SMS messages (Varnali, 2012: 346).

Additionally, since mobile phones are personal devices, it is essential to gain explicit permission of consumers before sending SMS messages (Barwise and Strong, 2002: 18) and not to over-personalize messages as receiving targeted messages may be perceived as an invasion of privacy by some consumers (Andrews et. al, 2016: 18).

Always close to the consumer: The mobile phone is the first thing consumers reach in the morning, and last thing they look at night. People may forget their wallets at home, but not their phones. As technology advanced, mobile phones became powerful enough to replace personal computers for most tasks consumers perform. In short, consumers are always with their phones, wherever they go. “It’s like my little baby. I bring it into the bathroom” were the words of one focus group member in one study conducted by Barwise and Strong (2002: 22). This makes it possible to reach consumers any time. Additionally, this makes it possible to reach them “at the right place”. Marketers may gain huge benefits by utilizing location based advertising (LBA) since it allows brands to send SMS messages when the consumer gets close to a location (might be the brand’s store or another location related to the brand). Consumers can also store relevant SMS messages on their phones and refer to them later. This helps them to use mobile coupon codes as needed.

Less irritating: There are several factors that may affect SMS ad irritation. Text messages can be read at any time, and there is no need of an immediate response as in voice calls. This makes it less intrusive than telemarketing calls (Tapp et. al, 2014: 401). Rettiet. al. (2005: 305) argued that computer mediation of SMS advertising reduced intrusiveness and gave some advantages of e-mail. However, poorly timed or targeted messages may still irritate consumers.

Among the factors that reduce irritation on non-personal media (TV) advertising are credibility, informativeness, and the use of positive message appeals (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985: 56). It can be said that those factors are still important in digital media. For example, a recent study by Shin and Lin (2016: 451) on location based mobile advertising revealed that messages that are perceived as useful and entertaining are less likely to be avoided by medium to heavy mobile phone users. However, direct marketing has the power of personalization, and in our digital age, it is easier than ever to create such messages.

Kim and Han (2014: 265) found that smart phone advertising in general annoyed consumers; however it did not influence consumer perception on the value advertising provided. Liu et. al. (2012: 28-29) had a sample consisting of Japanese and Austrian

consumers and found that irritation had a negative and greater impact on advertising value in Japan than Austria. They believe this result may be due to Japanese consumers receiving more advertising messages on their phones. Varnalı (2012: 346) found that relevant messages lower irritation and suggests advertisers to value personalization more than response rates.

Allows targeting: According to Barnes (2002: 414), it is important to be able to target an audience to deliver a relevant, value-adding message. If combined with an up-to-date database of consumers who gave their permission to receive marketing communications from brands, the items discussed above makes mobile phones perfect tools for targeting the right consumer, at the right place and time.

Simple: Unlike relatively complex methods of messaging like MMS or mobile instant messaging, SMS technology is simple: Every mobile phone can receive SMS messages and these messages are simple texts without formatting options or embedded graphics. From the perspective of marketers, SMS messages are easy to create and send. However, it should be noted that deciding on what to say is extremely important since marketers only have 160 simple characters that even lacks basic formatting, to impress their target audience, as Barwise and Strong (2002: 22) argued.

3. Advertising Appeals

Advertising appeal can be defined as “the approach used to attract the attention of consumers and/or to influence their feelings toward the product, service, or cause.” (Belch and Belch, 2004: 266). Elden and Bakır (2010: 76-77), upon reviewing different definitions of advertising appeals, compiled a list of shared traits. According to this list, advertising appeals are based on the foundation of tangible and intangible benefits that a product provides. Advertising appeals address the physical, psychological, societal needs of the consumer. The aim of advertising appeals is to attract the attention, create interest and desire and to affect consumer attitudes and behavior. Appeals are deliberate attempts of motivation. Advertising appeals make use of rational or emotional persuasion processes. Appeals help in differentiating from competing products and service. Advertising appeals reflect the core of the ads and the approaches embraced by these ads. They constitute the foundation of ad executions. Creative execution is formed according

to predetermined message appeals. An ad may contain more than one message appeals at once. Advertising appeals must be in accordance with the target audience, positioning choices, company policies, marketing and advertising goals, creative strategies, media strategies and various advertising medium.

Academics working on the subject listed various appeals ranging from basic ones as humor, fear and sex appeals to leisure, youth and humility (Elden and Bakır, 2010: 90). Some researchers like Pollay (1983: 80-84), Arens (2006: 377) and Moon and Chan (2005: 54-55) listed more than 30 appeals that are being used in advertising. On the other hand, some researchers such as Pickton and Broderick (2005: 455) limits the list of ad appealsto “product features, lowest prices, greatest value, product popularity, consumer self-enhancement, the ‘Ah!’ factor, fear, humor, sex, sympathy, compassion, guilt, empathy, nostalgia, escapism”.

Advertising appeals are mostly divided into two categories, such as rational and emotional (Yeshin, 1998: 150-153), informational and hedonic (Shimp, 2007: 296) or transmission and ritual (Taylor, 1999: 8). Rational advertising appeals provide factual information such as product attributes while emotional advertising appeals aim to create positive emotions (Drossos et.al., 2007: 18).

Appeals are important for every advertising medium, including mobile ones. SMS messages are short, text-only messages. Barwise and Strong (2002: 22) argued that consumers will respond to messages that grab their attention; either through humor, relevancy, or messages which have curiosity value. They also argued that SMS advertising is a challenge for copywriters. It can be said that this is still true for SMS advertising. The use of an appropriate message strategy is crucial. Drossos et.al. (2007: 22) studied SMS advertising effectiveness and found that the use of rational appeals leads to more positive attitudes and purchase intentions even on a “feel” product. Haq (2012: 282) studied attitudes toward SMS advertising in India and found appeal to be the most important attribute affecting consumer attitudes toward mobile advertising.

4. Method

4.1. Aimand Research Questions

This study was aimed to address the following research questions:

RQ1: Does the brand attitudes and purchase intentions of the participants change after exposure to SMS advertising message?

RQ2: Is there a statistically significant difference in the participants' brand attitudes and purchase intentions after exposure to different kinds of SMS advertising messages?

RQ3: Does the change in the participants' brand attitudes and purchase intentions differ among users and non-users of the brand?

4.2. Sample

The participants are social sciences students from a large Turkish university located in Anatolia, selected based on convenience sampling. A total of 50 respondents participated in the experiment. According to Neuman (2016: 359) the number of respondents can be considered as enough for experiments. Three of the forms collected from participants were removed from the sample due to incomplete responses. Out of the remaining 47 respondents, 53,2% were female and 46,8% were male. It can be said that the sample was balanced in terms of gender. The participants were aged between 18 and 24 with an average age of 20,6. Since the participants are all undergraduate students, their average income is very low (593 TL). Although a quarter (25,5%) of the participants stated that they never send SMS messages, the respondents who send one or more SMS messages per day accounts for the 44,7% of the participants.

All of the participants stated that they are aware of the brand in question (a global pizza brand). However, when asked about the purchase frequency of the brand, 38,3% of the participants stated that they never buy the brand while 61,7% buys at least rarely (8,5% are frequent buyers and 21,3% buys the brand "sometimes"). It can be said that more than half of the participants are users of the brand, but only 14,9% states that they have given permission to the brand to send SMS messages.

4.3. Procedure

The participants were informed about the experiment and told that they may leave the experiment at any point if they do not want to participate. In the first part, they were asked to respond to a number of questions about the brand such as “Do you know this brand” and “How often do you purchase this brand”. These are followed by four questions on brand attitude and three on purchase intention. Brand attitude scale consisted of questions such as “I like this brand a lot”, “I feel positive toward this brand” while purchase intention scale had questions like “I have a high purchase interest in this brand” and “I will definitely buy this brand”. Upon completion of the form, they started to watch a documentary. The employment of the documentary had two purposes, the first was to simulate real life conditions (such as, receiving an SMS message while watching TV), and the second was to distract participants from their prior responses to A_b and PI scales. About 15 minutes into the documentary, they received the second form, which contains the SMS message from the brand. On the form, prior to the SMS message, they were instructed to imagine that they had received this SMS message on their phones while watching the documentary. Participant were randomly assigned into two groups. The participants in the Group 1 received (n=22) the rational message while the participants in the Group 2 (n=25) received the emotional message. After about 5 more minutes, the documentary ended and the participants received the last form on which their attitudes and purchase intentions toward the brand in question were asked again. SMS messages on the forms were formatted to resemble an SMS message that is displayed on the screen of a mobile phone.

4.4. Measures

The attitude toward the brand scale was adapted from Holbrok and Batra (1987). The reliability of the scale was tested and yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0,96. A seven point Likert scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004) was used to measure purchase intention. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0,88 which indicates good scale reliability.

5. Results

The participants' A_b and PI were measured before and after exposure to SMS messages. As presented on the Table 1, without taking different message types into account, receiving an SMS message from the brand positively affected both A_b (+0,23) and PI (+0,14). Even though there is an increase in both mean values, statistically significant difference exists only in A_b ($t=-2,10$; $df=46$; $p<0,05$).

Table 1: Differences in Brand Attitudes and Purchase Intentions between Experimental Conditions

| | N | Min | Max | M | SD | Diff. | t | df | p |
|------------------------|----|------|------|------|------|-------|--------|----|------|
| A_b PrioritoExposure | 47 | 1,00 | 7,00 | 4,23 | 1,60 | +0,23 | -2,107 | 46 | 0,04 |
| A_b AfterExposure | 47 | 1,00 | 7,00 | 4,47 | 1,52 | | | | |
| PI PrioritoExposure | 47 | 1,00 | 7,00 | 4,19 | 1,70 | +0,14 | -1,177 | 46 | 0,24 |
| PI AfterExposure | 47 | 1,00 | 7,00 | 4,34 | 1,55 | | | | |

A_b : Attitudetowardbrand. PI: PurchaseIntention.

Table 2: Differences in Brand Attitudes and Purchase Intentions between Groups

| | Before | | After | | Diff. | t | df | p |
|-----------------|--------|------|-------|------|-------|--------|----|------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | | |
| A_b Rational | 3,77 | 1,81 | 4,15 | 1,72 | +0,38 | -1,714 | 21 | 0,10 |
| A_b Emotional | 4,65 | 1,30 | 4,75 | 1,29 | +0,10 | -1,633 | 24 | 0,11 |
| PI Rational | 4,12 | 1,70 | 4,27 | 1,49 | +0,15 | -,961 | 21 | 0,34 |
| PI Emotional | 4,26 | 1,74 | 4,41 | 1,63 | +0,14 | -,747 | 24 | 0,46 |

The participants in the group 1 were exposed to the rational SMS message, while the participants of group 2 were exposed to the emotional message. As shown in Table 2, there is an increase on the means of both groups. The participants exposed to the rational message reported the highest mean increase among the conditions tested (+0,38). However, according to the paired sample t-tests conducted, there is no statistically significant difference on any of the conditions.

Table 3: Difference Between the Users and Non-users of the Brand

| | Before | | After | | Diff. | t | df | p |
|---------------------------|--------|------|-------|------|-------|--------|----|-------------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | | |
| A _b (Non-user) | 3,08 | 1,54 | 3,44 | 1,38 | +0,36 | -2,322 | 17 | 0,03 |
| PI (Non-user) | 3,42 | 1,82 | 3,64 | 1,73 | +0,22 | -1,015 | 17 | 0,32 |
| A _b (User) | 4,95 | 1,18 | 5,11 | 1,23 | +0,16 | -1,020 | 28 | 0,31 |
| PI (User) | 4,67 | 1,46 | 4,78 | 1,28 | +0,11 | -,662 | 28 | 0,51 |

The responses to A_b and PI from the users (n=29) and non-users (n=18) of the brand are given on table 3. Again, a mean difference exists in every condition. Both for users and non-users of the brand, there is an increase on the A_b and PI values after exposure to the SMS message. Also it should be noted that the mean values for both A_b and PI are higher for non-users compared to the users of the brand. The paired sample t-tests revealed that there is a statistically significant difference on the A_b of non-users (t=-2,322; df=17; p<0,05). Other conditions showed no statistically significant difference.

Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of SMS messages on attitudes and purchase intentions of the youth. Mobile phones have an essential role on our daily lives, and SMS marketing is equally important for brands that want to reach their target audience effectively. Mobile phones are extremely personal devices that people carry everywhere they go. They allow marketers to target their audience at the individual level.

However, when used inappropriately, SMS marketing can be annoying to the consumer. This makes it crucial to understand what works and what doesn't.

The results from the experiment conducted indicate that exposure to an SMS advertising creates a positive difference on the mean values related to brand attitude and purchase intention. However statistically significant difference exists only on brand attitude.

Similar to the findings of Drossos et.al. (2007), the use of a rational message led to more positive attitudes (although there is no statistically significant difference, the mean difference for rational message is higher than emotional message). As in their study, the brand in question is a "feel" product. It can be said that simple-text messages are not suitable for emotional messages. A simple text message, lacking any graphics or formatting may be more suitable for conveying the rational message since there is nothing to imagine about the message. Emotional message, on the other hand, needs to be either imagined by the consumer or presented graphically by the advertiser. It can be advised to use MMS which allows the use of graphics instead of SMS when emotional messages need to be conveyed. It should also be noted that there is no significant difference of brand attitude among participants of differing income levels, so this result does not seem to be related to income. Nevertheless, this issue calls for further research.

There is a statistically significant difference on the brand attitudes of non-users after the exposure to SMS message. There is no significant difference on purchase intention, however means of both brand attitude and purchase intention increase more for non-users compared to users of the brand. This is a surprising result, but firms should not interpret it as a green light to send SMS messages to every mobile phone user randomly. First of all, the global pizza brand is relevant for the young participants of this study; even if they did not purchase it yet. It can be said that, a little bit of targeting exists in this situation. It remains to be seen how brand attitudes are affected when brands that are irrelevant to the participants send SMS messages. Another reason for this result might be that, the users of the brand are accustomed to the messages from the brand, so the messages conveyed might be less effective on them. Future research will shed light on these aspects.

This paper has some limitations. It can be said that future research should utilize more brands, more messages and more message types. Researchers working on this subject should also take involvement into consideration.

SMS usage rates may be declining, but consumers can still receive SMS messages, on every type of mobile phone. Marketers should not be discouraged by stats pertaining to the number of SMS messages sent by consumers. They should instead focus on crafting SMS messages perfectly tailored for their target audience; and try to send these messages at the right time and place.

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