CONSUMERS PERCEIVED ADVERTISING VALUE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS SMS ADVERTISEMENTS: THE CASE OF UAE

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ABSTRACT

Mobile marketing also known as short service message service (SMS) is a form of advertising used to send promotions to customers via text messages on cell phones and had-held devices (PDAs). Mobile or SMS Marketing allows direct communication with the consumers, targeted audience and potential market of the company with much ease and in less time. In view of its instant reach to potential consumers it is being increasingly used by the marketers all over the world. A large number of studies have been done across different countries mostly focused on its effectiveness as an instant marketing tool; however, no such study has been done in the U.A.E. The study looks at the SMS marketing in U.A.E.as to how it affects consumers behavior their motivations and attitude towards the advertised brand and products. The study identified important variables in the literature which could also be applied and tested in the U.A.E. The research methodology was based on the quantitative research survey from 50 participants selected on the basis of different gender and ages this to achieve data variability and offset low numbers of sample due to the time constraint of the research. The hypothesis was tested by employing two bi-variate regressions, two Pearson correlations and one T-test. The results show new findings on effectiveness of SMS as a marketing tool in the U.A.E and carry significant operational and managerial implications for the region. The findings, the identified variables and methodology adopted provide a good basis for future research direction elsewhere looking at SMS as an effective marketing tool by a company.

Keywords: SMS Marketers, Consumer behavior, Perceived Value, Attitude, Motivations.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Significance of the Study

In a time of economic recovery post COVID-19, many firms have embraced a digital transformation that has permanently impacted the way they operate. From Marketing to HR virtually all businesses in this time and age need to be digital to survive. However, even through this digital transformation we still see SMS marketing as an ongoing practice among many reputable firms in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in which the effectiveness and efficiency of this marketing platform remains questionable.

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The purpose and motivation behind this study come from a variation of factors. The UAE has an impressive seventeen million active mobile connections which is almost double the country's population (Kemp, 2021) with a reach rate this high and the potential ability to target the same consumer on two mobile devices, it needs to be asked:

i. are consumers positively reacting and responding to these marketing campaigns
ii. are firms only motivated by a higher reach and ease of using this platform to target consumers.

To answer; it needs to be looked at in-depth to understand the causes, benefits and possible return on investments behind SMS marketing in the UAE.

This study has targeted two specific sectors of consumer behavior when it comes to looking into the topic of SMS marketing. It seeks to evaluate consumer value and attitude towards SMS marketing. From a consumer perspective and from analysis of day to day habits with SMS marketing it is noticed that while SMS marketing messages are usually seen but not read many consumers in the UAE often get important notifications through SMS regarding a government service or delivery of goods, this matched with the fact that "SMS messages have a 97% read rate within 15 minutes of delivery" (Gilhooley, 2021). The study focuses primarily toanalyze how consumers value and what attitudes / reactions do they have when interacting with these text messages.

Furthermore, the study looks at into the recent news articles published about SMS marketing, which give valuable insight about consumers' perceived value and attitude towards SMS marketing demonstrating the significance and relevance of this study. An article published in the 'National' cited a local study in which "54 percent of consumers that receive unsolicited communication, would stop using that brand" (Webster, 2021). This shows strong perception of consumers value and their attitudes towards SMS marketing in the UAE whereby a negative attitude towards a brand could be formed if the consumer is unfamiliar with the brand. Furthermore, an article published in Khaleej times discussed how consumers are now able to block out SMS advertisements in the UAE (Serkal et al., 2021). With this option that consumers have, it will be vital to examine what consumers are blocking and what consumers are not blocking in SMS advertisements. This information willyield valuable insight into how consumer's perceived value and attitudes are shifting with the ability to stop receiving SMS advertisements.

The significance of this study has benefits across multiple industries and impacts many firms. The benefits range and apply to advertising marketing agencies, large FMCG companies, small to medium sized businesses and entrepreneurs, this is because by getting a further understanding of how consumers value and react to the SMS advertising campaigns that these firms send out, it will better help them understand if it is effective and efficient for the type of business and purpose. For example, a marketing agency will know which firms will benefit from a SMS marketing campaign and which firms will not, this could be because customers may positively react to a SMS from a brand they like or if they are a loyal customer versus a firm that is new to the customer in which they may react negatively. This is just preliminary assumptions; itwill be discussed further in the paper. Moreover, as discussed above the UAE has an impressive mobile connection rate (Kemp, 2021) and thus itis vital for firms to benefit from a wide range of potential customers on this platform and not discount them in search for digital marketing solutions. Thus, understanding the consumers' perceived value and attitude towards SMS marketingwill benefit the firms in industries by knowing how customers would react positively.

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Ultimately, the study will help firms evaluate their marketing mediums and understand if SMS marketing will yield them any value.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

It is important for the success of the study to look into what is published in the literature previously looking into consumer value and attitudes towards SMS marketing. This is vital for hypothesis, research question and problem statement formation as part of research methodology section. The study will be discussing the themes in various articles and groupings in the literature based on the theme.

The first theme identified looks into "Consumer attention" this theme has been chosen because it is an important topic in consumer behavior and relevant to this research. An article in the literature found that "the credibility of a sender does not impact attention" (Makudza, et al, 2020) thus when consumers receive a SMS marketing message consumer seem to approach it with an automated reaction; they notice it regardless of the credibility behind the message without giving much attention. Furthermore, another interesting finding in the same paper indicated that the simpler the message(Makudza, et al. 2020) the higher the chance that it will be noticed by the consumer.The most interesting finding of the study was that, messages in terms of "bulk or frequency" should be dispatched less to have a positive impact on attention, thus their final finding was that for an SMS marketing message to appeal to consumers attention it would need to be "simple, informative and sent out gradually" (Makudza, et al. 2020). These are very interesting variables that can be tested toknow they are statistically significant in the UAE. Furthermore, another study regarding consumer attention looked into which types of SMS marketing campaigns spark consumers; persuading them to act. Campaigns that focus on "price offers, time sensitive offers and location-based offers" were "66%, 52% and 50%" effective respectively (Baig and Abdullah, 2014). Again, this is interesting regarding the characteristics and focus of the SMS marketing campaigns as to how consumers react differently based on the variables just discussed, thus it would be interesting to see which of these variables would be statistically significant in the UAE.

The second theme which this research would focus on is consumer perception, this is important for the study and will be part of hypothesis and research questions. In one of the research papers it has been found thatit has discussed four variables which were tested; theseare "Entertainment, Informativeness, credibility and irritating" (Firdous, 2018). The first variable of "Entertainment" was examined in relation to "customer perception", it had "a positive and significant effect" (Firdous, 2018), the second variable of "informativeness" also has a "positive impact on customer perception" (Firdous, 2018), the third variable of "irritating had a negative impact on customer perception" and finally "credibility had a positive effect on customer perception" (Firdous, 2018). Thus, these are very interesting variables that the author has chosen to use in examining SMS marketing's impact on the theme of perception. The author chose the variables based on their respective literature reviews and it would be very interesting as part of this study to see if the same variables are statistically significant here in the UAE. The paper discussed above also touches the topic of perception. As a part of its finding the consumers perceive "Push and Pull" SMS marketing campaigns differently. For the push campaign "65% of respondents considered the messages spam" (Baig and Abdullah, 2014). However, with a pull campaign it was the total opposite with "70% of consumers actually liked it" the main difference being that the ability to interact with the brand was the factor that changed this perception (Baig and Abdullah, 2014). Thus, this brings a new variable of 'interaction' which the study would

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look at. As it seems that if a firm sends out a marketing message, if the consumer is interested and able to read more or interact with the brand this changes their perception from negative to positive and thus this would make for a great variable to test in this study to see if interaction changes the perception from negative to positive here in the UAE for SMS marketing. Another study that has been looked into also focuses on perceptionwhich concluded that "SMS marketing ads, has a generally negative perception" (Bamba and Barnes, 2008). It seems that this is a common theme across the literaturereview whichshows consumers do not like to receive advertisements and automatically have a negative perception about them. The study goes into further detail and states that the level of negative perception increases when "the SMS ad is unsolicited"(Bamba and Barnes, 2008) , therefore consumers seem to negatively perceive any form of SMS marketing message but this level of frustration increases further when there mobile number was not given to the brand behind the SMS marketing message, this is aninteresting insight and isimportant for anyone thinking of an SMS marketing campaign as it could unintentionally harm and make consumers negatively perceive a brand. This was a very interesting finding in the literature review as to ' how solicited vs unsolicited marketing' messages impact the perceived value of consumers in the UAE , and more importantly if the same hypothesis applies for the study discussed above in which if the SMS marketing message is unsolicited does it mean consumers perceive it more negatively or do they perceive both solicited and unsolicited SMS marketing messages in a unified and equal level of negative perception.

Furthermore, it is also consideredimportant to look into the consumer attitudes, this will be a factor for both research questions and hypothesis testing. It was found that a previous study used the same variables focused on perception. Since these variables seem to feature frequently in the literature this study considers it important to incorporatethem here as well to give insight into the consumer perceived value and attitude towards SMS marketing. It found that "64.5% of consumers had a negative attitude towards SMS advertising" (Aydin, 2017). This finding is similar to what has been found in other studies and thus is statistically significant in the UAE. It could reveal some serious implications as any SMS marketing message sent out by a brand could mean consumers will not only have negative perceived value but could also have a negative attitude towards a brand. Other variables that the paper examined included "credibility" as a variable which mentions as being the "second most important factor" when it comes to attitude, in which consumers in that study did not react positively to SMS marketing (Aydin, 2017).This means that consumers are likely to doubt and question the content of each SMS marketing message, this may impact other campaigns that a firm could release and thus this is a factor worth investigating in this study. In addition to credibility issues SMS marketing also has other negative issues. In the study it is discussed how consumers find "SMS advertisements as less entertaining" (Aydin, 2017), another variable was "irritation" in which the study found that consumers do find SMS marketing advertisements irritating (Aydin, 2017). This brings strong implications for any brand,as a simple SMS campaign can cause consumers to form many negative perceptions about the brand.As seen from the outcomes of the study, negative attitudes are formed as consumers do not find SMS advertisements, "entertaining, credible" and it is "irritating" for consumers (Aydin, 2017). So a firm could potentially lose its credibility and cause consumers to form negative attitudes towards their brand. These are serious implications for a brand and thus these variables will be important for this study to look into.

The final theme which the study would discuss is consumer buying behaviorto know what ultimately SMS marketing does and how it shapes buying behavior. The variables in the previous studies are similar and this study toowould focus on how it impacts buying behavior; as

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to how "SMS marketing messages impact buying decisions towards commercial banks" (Megdadi & Hammouri, 2016). These findings are interesting as it reveals that there are four important variables for perceived value and attitude which are "entertainment, informativeness, irritation and credibility" (Megdadi & Hammouri, 2016), in which across all these 4 variables it was found it had "no influence on buying decisions" (Megdadi & Hammouri, 2016). Although the authors still make the recommendation of a perfect SMS marketing message should be "brief, direct with information related to customer needs" (Megdadi & Hammouri, 2016).The fact that it did not influence buying decisions means that customers could have negative impressions based on the SMS marketing campaign but that does not necessarily mean that it would change their buying behavior as seen in this study.

The final theme in the literature review which this study looked into also found that it has has no effect on consumers, does not affect sales ratios and is not attractive from a consumers perspective" (Duzgun& Yamamoto 2017). Thus, it will be important for this study to look into these variables and see if SMS marketing has a minimal impact on buying behavior in the UAE. it will be important to keep the findings and variable identified in the literature and incorporate them in the research questions hypothesis and survey.

METHODOLOGY

As found in the literature review the most common variables for studying both the perceived value and attitudes towards SMS marketing are "Entertainment, informativeness, irritation and credibility" (Firdous, 2018), thus it is important tofocusthe research questions and hypothesis around these variables. Additionally, the questions in the survey should be based around these variables to ensure that the testingof variables by this study are the same asthe previous studiesto get anunderstanding of SMS marketing's perceived value and attitudes among consumers in the UAE.

The research methodology opted for a survey consists of 28 questions, based on the variables mentioned above. Different questions have been asked regarding the same variable across to get an unambiguous and reliable understanding behind each variable; this way it gave the option to test more of the variables using SPSS to determine their statistical significance. Due to the time constraint of the research the population and the sample size had to be curtailed though ensuring the quality of the results by bringing in variability and reliability in the data collection as normally done to overcome the small sample size and population. The sample of 50 participants was chosen before the results were exported into SPSS. This target was achieved as a total number of 50 respondents answered the survey which consisted of 19 females and 31 males which would enable the study to investigate the impact of gender and age on the variables mentioned above. Furthermore, in terms of the targeted age groups it was considered; that since every member of society who has a mobile phone is a potential recipient of SMS marketing messages the study should open the survey to all age groups. At the close of the survey, it was found that 60% of respondents were aged between 18 and 25 and 34% of respondents were aged between 26 to 34, thus since 94% of respondents were within the age category of 18-34 it gave a good insight on the perceived values and attitudes for teenagers and young adults in the UAE. This will be very beneficial for marketers in the UAE as they will be able to see based on this research findings if traditional SMS marketing methods could be used and the potential. implications or benefits encountered with the generation that is soon to dominate the workforce

Research Question

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The main research question of this study is;‘ How SMS marketing affects consumers perceived value , attitude, motivation towards a brand and a product in the U.A.E.’ .To highlight its component details it has been made into following sub-questions as a part of the main question above to achieve clarity and focus.

i. How do consumers who find SMS marketing messages as fun and entertaining to read react to SMS marketing?
ii. Does gender play a role in SMS marketing’s perceived value and consumer attitude?
iii. How do consumers who believe they have a negative perception towards SMS marketing change their buying behavior?
iv. Do easy to read SMS messages mean a higher chance of reaction from the receiver? Building on the above research questions the hypothesis are as below.

Research Question, Small Sample and Population Explained

As can be seen from the research question above the study is focused on theimportant SMS components identified in the literature reviewas “Entertainment, informativeness, irritation and credibility” (Firdous, 2018). As explained earlier the 28 survey questions incorporated these elements to solicit a credible response from 50 participants.

Population: The population for this study was focused on primarily the younger group mostly aged between 18-36 as it was evident from the literature review that most users of the mobile phones susceptible to SMS marketing belong to this group. The variation in sample based on different gender, age and regions were done to achieve research validity, reliability and repeatability to offset the limitation of small sample size due to time constraint however, another researchers could decide to increase the sample size and a larger population over a longerperiod unhindered by the time constraint which this study faced it would be interesting to see if their findings targeted at the same age and gender group would be the same.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis below have been formulated to address above research question components

H1: There is a linear relationship between consumers finding SMS marketing messages annoying and irritating and consumers avoiding these stores in the population.

H2: There is a linear relationship between consumers who find SMS marketing messages entertaining and have a positive attitude towards the firm who sent the SMS marketing message in the population.

H3: There is an impact of a simple SMS marketing message on consumers trusting the content of the message regardless of the brand in the population.

H4: There is a difference between males and females in using the information in SMS marketing messages to make a buying decision in the population.

H5: There is an impact of consumers who negatively perceive firms who send them SMS marketing advertisements and consumers who have a negative attitude towards any firm who sends them a SMS marketing advertisement in the population.

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Taking the research questions and hypothesis into consideration the survey questions were constructed keeping in view all of the elements of the study. The first two questions of the survey were general it aimed for a general overview of how many SMS marketing messages respondents receive each week and if they believe if it's an effective medium in 2021.Based on the variable of "informativeness" in questions 3 & 4 it was asked if the simplicity or depth of information in a SMS marketing message impacts readability of the message. This was continued in question 18 which further asked consumers if SMS marketing advertisements has enough information for them to make a buying decision. In question 20 it was asked if consumers find SMS marketing as a good way to find out about product information and offers. Based on the variable of "irritation", question 5 focused on if multiple SMS marketing messages sparked negative perceptions about a firm, question 17 asked consumers if they find SMS marketing messages "annoying and irritating" in an attempt to directly measure this variable's significance. Questions based on the variable of "credibility" were followed in questions 9 and 10 as it wanted to see if familiarity with the brand influenced and if customers believed the claims made in the SMS marketing message. This was continued in question 21 where it was asked if consumers trust / believe SMS marketing messages. Questions based on the variable of "entertainment" were in question 19 where it examined to see if consumers find SMS marketing messages as entertaining / fun to read. With regards to the theme of the paper the questions were built in line with examining the perceived value. Questions 11 and 12 focused on the perception customers have about firms who send them SMS marketing messages in which a strong focus is on if a negative or strong perception is formed. Question 13 focused on if interaction with the firm would enable for a positive value perception towards a firm, in Question 14 it was examined if customers perceived value behind the firm is more negative if they do not provide them with their contact details. Question 15 it examined if consumers have a negative attitude towards any firm who sends them a SMS marketing message, this was continued in question 16 which examined on the contrary if they have a positive attitude towards firms who send them SMS marketing advertisements. Question 22 and 23 were focused on consumer attitudes and if consumers change their buying behavior if a firm sends them a SMS marketing advertisement. Questions 6,7,8 were focused on if a "price, limited time or geographical" offers (Baig and Abdullah, 2014) influence consumers buying behavior again it was found that these variables were interesting in the literature review and needed to be researched further by this study. Finally, questions 24-28 were general questions regarding gender and survey feedback where respondents had the chance to write their opinion on SMS marketing.

Findings

After discussing the methodology which described the survey and how it was constructed; this section will go into the details of hypothesis testing and share results from SPSS. For each of the findings it will re-state the hypothesis and explain how it gotthe results with the meaning and implications behind each test.

The first test was a Pearson correlation test done on SPSS, whichrestated the hypothesis below. H0: There is no linear relationship between consumers finding SMS marketing messages annoying and irritating and consumers avoiding these stores in the population. $\rho = 0$.

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H1: There is a linear relationship between consumers finding SMS marketing messages annoying and irritating and consumers avoiding these stores in the population. ρ not equal to 0.

P= 0.159 > 0.05 reject H1 keep the H0 as ρ= 0

There is no linear relationship between consumers finding SMS marketing messages annoying and irritating and consumers avoiding these stores in the population. This is interesting and is valuable for SMS marketers in the UAE as based on this study it has been found that even if consumers find SMS marketing messages annoying and irritating this will not impact their buying behavior as they will not avoid these stores, thus even if the perceived value is low and the attitude is negative customers will still visit these stores.

The second test was also a Pearson correlation test done on SPSS with the following hypothesis. H0: There is no linear relationship between consumers who find SMS marketing messages entertaining and have a positive attitude towards the firm who sent the SMS marketing message in the population. ρ= 0.

H1: There is a linear relationship between consumers who find SMS marketing messages entertaining and have a positive attitude towards the firm who sent the SMS marketing message in the population. ρ not equal to 0.

P= 0.000000008 < 0.05 keep H1 reject H0 the test is statistically significant.

There is a linear relationship between consumers who find SMS marketing messages entertaining and have a positive attitude towards the firm who sent the SMS marketing message in the population. Thus SMS marketers should seek out customers who find these messages entertaining as this will increase the positive attitude they have of that brand and it may result in more purchasing behavior for that brand.

The third test is a Bi-variate regression which tested the following hypothesis. H0:There is no impact of a simple SMS marketing message on consumers trusting the content of the message regardless of the brand in the population. B=0

H1: There is an impact of a simple SMS marketing message on consumers trusting the content of the message regardless of the brand in the population. B not equal to 0.

P= 0.258 > 0.05 so Reject H1 and keep H0

There is no impact of a simple SMS marketing message on consumers trusting the content of the message regardless of the brand in the population. B=0. Thus even if the SMS marketing message is simple and easy to understand it is not enough for consumers to trust the content of the SMS marketing message, thus marketers should seek ways to enhance the trust between them and the recipient to find ways to increase the perceived value behind the message and get consumers to trust its contents.

The fourth test is a T- test which tested the following hypothesis on SPSS. H0: There is no difference between males and females in using the information in SMS marketing messages to make a buying decision in the population. ($\mu 1 = \mu 2$)

H1: There is a difference between males and females in using the information in SMS marketing messages to make a buying decision in the population. ($\mu 1$ is not equal to $\mu 2$)

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H0: No difference in the variances between females and males in the population. $\sigma 1^2 = \sigma 2^2$

H1: Difference in the variances between females and males in the population. $\sigma 1^2$ is not equal $\sigma 2^2$

P = 0.187 > 0.05, Reject H1 Keep H0, No difference in the variances between females and males in the population. $\sigma 1^2 = \sigma 2^2$

P= 0.602 > 0.05, Reject H1 keep H0, There is no difference between males and females in using the information in SMS marketing messages to make a buying decision in the population. ($\mu 1 = \mu 2$) Thus gender does not play a major role in consumers' perceived value and attitude towards SMS marketing messages and this is a very important factor that SMS markets must take into consideration.

The final test was a Bi variate regression which tested the following hypothesis. H0: There is no impact of consumers who negatively perceive firms who send them SMS marketing advertisements and consumers who have a negative attitude towards any firm who sends them a SMS marketing advertisement in the population. B=0

H1: There is an impact on consumers who negatively perceive firms who send them SMS marketing advertisements and consumers who have a negative attitude towards any firm who sends them a SMS marketing advertisement in the population. B not equal to 0.

P= 0.000436 < 0.05 reject H0 keep H1 regression is statistically significant.

There is an impact on consumers who negatively perceive firms who send them SMS marketing advertisements and consumers who have a negative attitude towards any firm who sends them a SMS marketing advertisement in the population. B not equal to 0. Thus,it canbe seen if consumers have a negative perception towards a firm who sends them SMS marketing messages as apparent in the regression the consumer will have a negative attitude towards that brand.

$Y = 1.422 + 0.568X$

R square = 0.229 *100 = 22.9%

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study identified the important variables to measure in the literature review, describedresearch methodology and means for carrying out the required survey; it proceeded to input the results from the survey in SPSS which ran two bi-variate regressions, two Pearson correlations and one T-test to evaluate and test the hypothesis. This section will summarize the study, discuss the limitations, and highlight its implications on consumer behavior.

With regard to the limitations the study experienced; the survey could only obtain 50 respondents to answer the study which is a small sample size due to constraints of time available for the research but the limitation of small size in sampling has to some extent been offset by employing variability in the data in terms of gender and age. . Although the study got good responses in survey and it was able to test the required hypothesis and got the results, a larger sample size would have enabled increased generalizability of results towards the population. It is noteworthy in terms of demographics; the study received more male (62%) than female (38%) and in terms of age groups the majority age group (60%) was aged 18-25% and 34% were aged

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from 25-34 in which the majority of respondents represent a younger age group again this will limit the study's ability to generalize the findings towards a larger population. Finally, if this study could be repeated over longer length of time it would in addition to the survey opt for in person focus groups where it would show customers different SMS marketing messages in an attempt to better understand their perceived value and attitudes towards SMS marketing. Despite the above-mentioned limitations, the study does answer research questions effectively through hypothesis testing and carry validity as well as repeatability.

In conclusion it can be summarized that this study carries significant implications for SMS marketers. While discussing the findings of the study, it shows that customers who have positive view and find SMS marketing messages entertaining will have a positive attitude towards the firm which sends them the SMS message thus what firms should seek to do is ; determine customers preference for marketing methods and focus on customers who say that they enjoy SMS marketing and push this medium on them, this will enable a further positive perception and attitude towards that brand which should lead to increased buying behavior from that segment of society. Furthermore, the perceived value and attitude towards SMS marketing does not differ between males and females, thus SMS marketers must take this into consideration and not try to differentiate between genders as it will be ineffective. Moreover, and arguably one of the important findings to come out of this study was that consumers do not change their buying behavior towards brand's even if they have a negative perception towards the firm that sent them the SMS marketing advertisement, this means that firms in the UAE can proceed to continue their SMS marketing campaigns but should not see this as an opportunity to continue to frequently send these messages as in the long terms consumers may not react to them causing negative implications for the firm. Also, even if the contents and information of the SMS marketing message is simple and easy to read this does not mean consumes will use it towards their buying behavior, thus SMS marketers should ensure that the contents of these message are not focused on limiting the number of words but to communicate information that is in line with customer needs to increase perceived value. Finally, it is important to say that consumers who have a negative perception of a firm that sends them SMS marketing advertisements will also form a negative attitude towards the brand, thus marketers should be aware of this implication and try to avoid sending SMS messages to these customers as a negative attitude towards the brand could have an effect on consumers buying behavior.

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