



# Antecedents of Attitude of Mobile Phone Users towards Short Messaging Service (SMS) Advertising in Eswatini

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**Abstract:** This study determined the effect of antecedents of attitudes of mobile phone users towards short messaging service advertising in Eswatini. Two hypotheses: the informativeness of SMS significantly influence attitudes towards SMS advertising, and the entertainment nature of SMS significantly influences attitudes toward SMS advertising were tested. A cross-sectional design for the study was selected. The use of cross-sectional design is supported by Levin (2006), Wang and Cheng (2020), Zangirolami-Raimundo, Echeimberg, and Leone (2018) who advance that cross-sectional research design collects data at one point in time and enhances the establishment of preliminary evidence for future studies. The study adopted a non-probability sampling technique, targeting 500 Facebook users. To collect data, a research instrument (questionnaire) was administered using a digital survey, whereby a digital link was sent to Facebook users. To test for reliability, the study constructed a reliability analysis test to ascertain the presence of internal consistency. Informativeness, and entertainment reliability coefficients were found to be higher than 0.7 which indicates the existence of high internal consistency, and the overall reliability coefficient indicates an acceptable (0.834) internal consistency across all the variables when combined. The Analysis of variation was used to ascertain whether informativeness and entertainment were significant predictors of attitudes towards SMS advertising. The results from the ANOVA output revealed that informativeness and entertainment have a significant influence on mobile phone users' attitudes towards SMS advertising ( $F(2, 154) = 12.602, p = .000$ ). The study concludes that SMS advertising is a credible route to convey entertainment news via mobile phone devices. In essence, mobile phone consumers' attitudes towards SMS advertising are mainly dependent on entertainment nature of SMS adverts contained in a message, which further implies that mobile phone consumers are enticed by entertainment nature of SMS advertisements.

**Keyword:** Antecedents, Attitude, Informativeness, Entertainment, Advertising

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## 1. Introduction

Globally, the post-dotcom bubble burst period has experienced unprecedented growth rate in the Telecommunications industry (Perez, 2009). The introduction and further development of the mobile cellular phone have led to an exodus of consumers shifting from the use of fixed landline phones to the adoption of mobile

phones (Bento, 2016). Mobile phones have since become a source of comparative advantage in most countries, where consumers are offered more communication options compared to fixed-line phones. The need to grow and develop existing markets, as well as new ones, has led to the use of SMS as an avenue for advertising (Hall, 2022).

Short Message Service (SMS) is a travel feature that is standardized in the global system for mobile

communications and allows for messages of up to 160 characters to be interchanged from a mobile phone or a computer to one or more mobile phones simultaneously (Okunev, 2022). It is estimated that five billion people (65% of the world's population) send and receive SMS messages globally (Aydin & Karamehmet 2017). SMS messaging is very popular in developed countries. It is estimated that 292 million North Americans (about 80% of the continent's total population) use SMS as a means of communicating. According to Yu et al. (2022), China and India have the most people who use SMS as a means of communicating with more than one billion Chinese, and approximately 730 million in India use text messaging services (Paper & Wp 2020). The ability of SMS communication to reach multiple users at once has attracted marketing managers in developed countries to use the tool for marketing campaigns.

Robayo-Pinzon, Montoya, and Rojas-Berrio (2017) define mobile marketing as the use of wireless media to provide customers with time and location-sensitive, personalized information that promotes goods, services, and ideas, thereby generating value for stakeholders. Multiple studies have proved that mobile marketing is one of the cheapest means of advertising (Sabokwigina, Malima, & Mpogole 2013). Thus, understanding consumer behavior is one of the most critical elements in executing effective marketing campaigns presented through mobile marketing. It has been established that several factors affect the attitudes of the targeted group toward the use of this innovation (Salem et al., 2022). This extensive reach has opened the gates to SMS advertising but, there are still some difficulties in making it achieve its intended purpose efficiently.

As of January 2020, the number of mobile connections in Eswatini was equivalent to 99 percent of the country's total population (ITU, 2021). This presents a massive market for unlocking the potential of SMS-based advertising campaigns. However, Choi, Dutz, and Usman (2019) argue that mobile SMS-based marketing in Eswatini is still in its embryonic stages despite the country having one of the highest levels of mobile phone usage in Sub-Saharan Africa and globally. Shadkam (2017) argues that, despite the outspoken potential of SMS advertising, issues of non-adherence to consumer privacy laws also present a threat to this form of advertising medium, therefore advertisers need to align their campaigns with such laws and also seek permission from consumers to operate efficiently.

Recent studies have revealed that consumers are switching their media consumption patterns from traditional media to digital media for their social, informational, and entertainment requirements (Kurdi et al., 2022). According to Salem et al. (2022), advancement in media consumption habits may alter the magnitude of cognitive factors associated with attitudes toward the advertisement,

necessitating new groupings of factors that influence mobile phone users' attitudes towards SMS advertising. Interventions to boost market positioning and improve organizational competitiveness have seen an upsurge in the use of SMS as a tool for marketing. Although SMS emerged as a panacea for accessing a clientele at a low cost, results on attitudes towards SMS advertising are still mixed (Alubakah & Obuba, 2022). Although mobile phone connectivity in Eswatini is high, the attitude towards SMS advertising has not been investigated. It is against this backdrop that this study was conducted to ascertain the influence of antecedents of attitudes of mobile phone users towards SMS advertising.

## 1.1. Hypothesis

In order to determine the effect of antecedents of consumer attitude on SMS advertising, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- 1) Ha<sub>1</sub>: The informativeness of SMS significantly influence attitudes towards SMS advertising.
- 2) Ha<sub>2</sub>: The entertainment nature of SMS' significantly influences attitudes toward SMS advertising.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Concept of SMS Advertising

Short Message Service (SMS) is a form of mobile communications technology that allows sending and receiving short textual messages, up to 160 characters in English and a maximum of 70 characters in Arabic language (Alshura, World, & Science 2012). SMS advertising uses SMS to send personalized location-based promotional messages to consumers. This type of advertising is classified under mobile advertising. Mobile advertising separates into two broad categories, namely push and pull (Barnes & Barnes 2004). Pull advertising involves placing advertisements on wireless browsing content, such as mobile internet applications, games, and other media downloads, that consumers will find and follow (Bamba & Barnes 2004). Push advertising refers to sending advertising messages to consumers, (Hanley & Becker 2006). SMS advertising falls in the push category and is usually considered to be a form of direct marketing. The use of SMS has become more important for marketing managers, as the tool is very effective in accessing a large pool of potential customers through their mobile phones. Plessis (2010) reports that consumers are more likely to view SMS advertisements over e-mail advertisements due to several factors.

## 2.2 Theoretical Review

### *Marketing Orientation Theory*

This theory states that for any business to remain competitive, it must design products and content that align with the needs of its consumers better than what competitors do (Slater, Mohr, & Sengupta 2010). Arguably, it is the principle upon which all marketing activities emanate. However, in a setting where there are multiple market players, implementation of this principle demands creativity and innovation for businesses to flourish. In essence, this theory becomes important as it creates trust between a company and its users (Kosanke, 2019). SMS advertising can be explored by companies as an option for advertising and creating exposure for their products and services. The SMSs reach those customers who are subscribed to Mobile Network Operators.

### *Consumer Behaviour Theory*

According to Saeed, Amad, Faoq, Kersten, and Abdelaziz (2019) and Saeed (2019), consumer behavior is the analysis of the factors that influence customers' attitudes to purchase any product or service. It includes identifying the need, evaluating options, and eventually making a decision on the purchase. The role of advertising in mobile marketing is in influencing this decision. The way the message is conveyed enhances the customers as they go through the decision-making journey. Furthermore, the more the marketing activities appeal to the multifaceted nature of customers, the more likely they are to purchase a product.

## 2.3 Empirical Review

According to common consensus, consumers' perceptions of their level of information are crucial factors that could affect how they feel about advertising information (Wang, Lin & Spencer, 2019). Informational content has the power to alter perception, attitude, satisfaction, and the results of distributing resources. In a nutshell, people's perceptions of informativeness are used to determine whether or not the information they are given is valuable (Wang et al., 2019). According to Van den Broeck, Zarouali, and Poels, (2019), perception has a significant role in determining the efficacy of advertisements

According to Salem et al. (2022), customers want to get messages that are pertinent to them. Bakr, Tolba, and Meshreki (2019) also argue that perceived informativeness and consumers' attitudes toward SMS marketing are positively correlated. As a result, the information quality that is sent through SMS advertising messages should be

given more consideration. People typically view mobile advertisements as dull because they are not very informative. Consequently, they adopt a pessimistic outlook (Aydin & Karamehmet, 2017). Erlich et al. (2018) assert that consumers will be more receptive to mobile advertisements if they provide engaging and relevant content that is tailored to their interests. Additionally, a good client attitude toward mobile marketing may be influenced by message variety, suitable message delivery timings, and optimal message frequency.

Anyasor and Umeadi (2017) investigated consumers' perceptions of mobile phone advertising value and their attitudes towards mobile advertising. The study used 400 mobile phone users in the Onitsha metropolis to assess the correlation between consumer attitudes toward mobile advertising and their perception of the informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and irritativeness of mobile adverts in Anambra State, Nigeria. The data were analyzed using frequency tables and Spearman's correlation coefficient. According to the findings, consumers' attitudes about mobile advertising are positively influenced by mobile ads' entertainment value, informativeness, and credibility to the extent of 66.9%, 67.6%, and 66.7%, respectively, while their attitudes are negatively impacted by mobile infomercials' displeasure to the extent of 15.7%. In addition, the report advised marketers to make sure that messages are sent to customers at a sensible hour of the day based on their preferences. In order to prevent interrupting and upsetting consumers, messages should be sent in a reasonable amount. Furthermore, design innovative strategies for advertising content to boost the level of enjoyment that may be gained from SMS marketing.

Sharma et al. (2021) also provided empirical evidence on the relevance of SMS advertising on consumer purchasing intentions. The study validated a Stimulus-Organism-Response framework to expand the scope of SMS advertising perception research and its effect on purchase intention and found that SMS advertising perception has a significant effect on purchase intention, mediated by advertising value and attitude toward SMS advertisement.

Proponents of the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework studied factors that lead to the acceptance of SMS advertisements from South African college students. According to the findings, social influence surpasses attitudes as a predictor of the target market's intent to use SMS advertising. Attitudes, societal factors, levels of innovation, and the perceived value of studying were all found to influence students' behavioral intentions. However, there was no correlation between acceptance of SMS advertising and inherent risk (Radder et al., 2010).

Ample evidence from the literature suggests that people are likely to see entertainment as being appealing, enjoyable, fun to use, and thrilling (Ashenafi, 2019; El Kholly, 2019 &

Taye, 2020). According to Febriyantoro (2020) to increase the impact of advertising, marketers should heavily spend on the enjoyment and entertainment value of program surroundings. Entertainment, or stated enjoyment, and advertising efficacy have a positive link (Siraj, Syed & Sultan, 2021). Behavioral delight has a demonstrably favorable impact on attitudes toward advertising such as exhilaration and regard (Abdul & Muhammad, 2019). Additionally, entertainment features add value for the consumer while also increasing client loyalty (Ashenafi, 2019).

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework

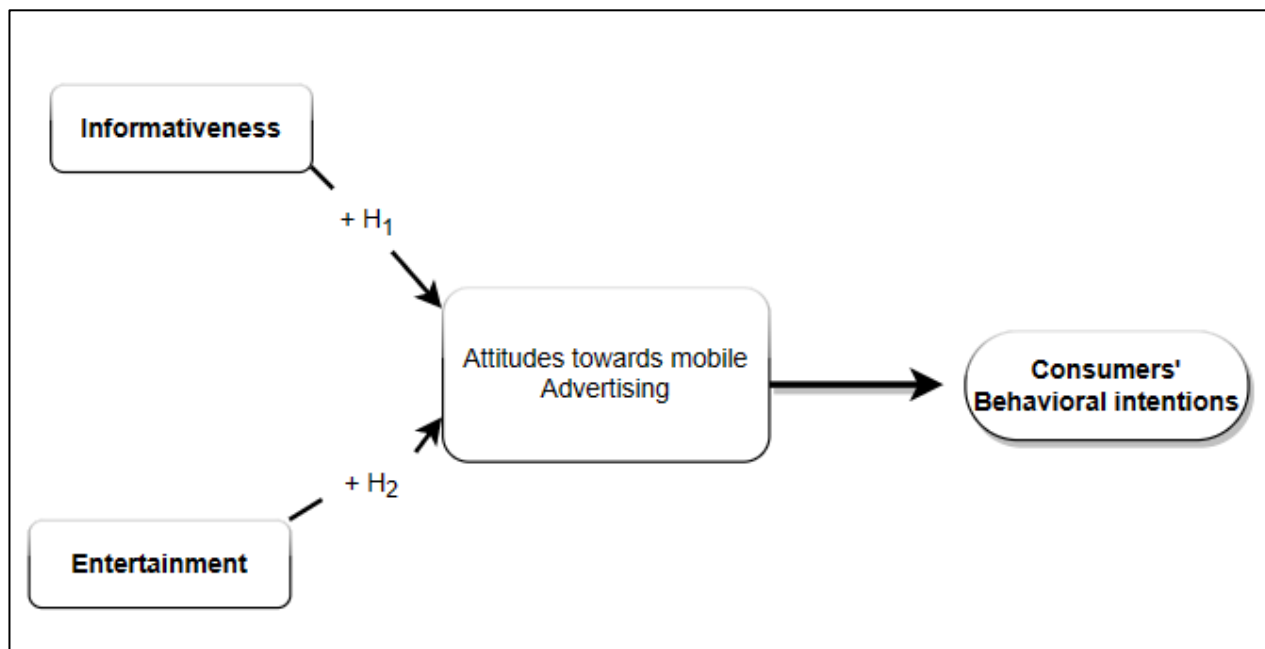
An essential idea in the study of marketing and information systems is the analysis of consumer attitudes toward advertisements. The term "attitude toward an advertisement" is more precisely used to refer to a learned propensity to react consistently favourably or unfavourably to advertising in general. The framework of the study relies on the models developed by Ducoffe (1996) in a study of consumer attitudes toward internet advertising. This study opines that consumer attitudes are affected by the five antecedents that are presented in the model below namely; Informativeness, Credibility, Irritation, Entertainment, and Frequency. However, for this study two constructs (entertainment and informativeness) have been investigated. A set of hypotheses are drawn from each of the two antecedents to represent the effect that they have on influencing consumer attitudes toward SMS advertising as shown in figure 1 below.

### *Informativeness*

Informativeness can be defined as “the ability of advertising to inform consumers of product alternatives so that purchases yielding the greatest possible satisfaction can be made” (Ducoffe, 1996). The model of consumers’ attitudes toward SMS advertisements illustrates that there is a relationship between consumers’ perceptions of the informativeness of internet advertising and consumers’ attitudes toward internet advertising (Brackett & Carr 2001). Based on the relationship between the Informativeness of SMS advertisements and consumers’ attitudes toward the SMS advertisement, the following relationship can be hypothesized; *Ha1: Informativeness of SMS positively influences attitudes towards SMS advertising*

### *Entertainment*

Ducoffe (1996), defines entertainment as “the ability to fulfill an audience’s needs for escapism, diversion, aesthetic enjoyment, or emotional enjoyment.” Entertainment Services can increase customer loyalty and add value for the customer. The perceived entertainment utility of mobile marketing has a positive influence on consumers’ perceptions of mobile marketing (Bauer, 2005). Based on the model, the following hypothesis was stated: *Ha2: Entertainment of SMSs positively influence attitudes toward SMS advertising*



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the hypothesized relationship between informativeness and entertainment on consumers’ attitudes towards SMS advertising**

### 3. Methodology

A cross-sectional design for the study was selected. Levin (2006), Wang and Cheng (2020), Zangirolami-Raimundo, Echeimberg, and Leone (2018) ascribe that cross-sectional research design collects data at one point in time as they do not follow up on respondents, instead, they enhance data documentation of informed evidence-based findings to enhance the establishment of preliminary evidence for future studies. To understand the nature of the problem the population of the study consisted of Facebook social media users in Eswatini. 500 Facebook users were targeted. According to Chuah and Cham (2020) in the absence of a sampling frame when administering online surveys, deciding factors get blurred since respondents interested in a particular topic most often give their time answering the questionnaire instrument. On the other hand, Hair, Anderson, Babin, and Black (2010) suggested that in a non-probability sampling technique, a sample size between 160 and 300 has been found well suited for multivariate statistical analysis techniques when the target population is too large and lacks a sampling frame.

To collect data, a research instrument (questionnaire) was administered using a digital survey, whereby a digital link

was sent to Facebook users. Social media survey has proved to be cost-effective and timely when the population is heterozygous and hard to reach (Xu, 2016). The validity of the questionnaire was measured to ensure that it captures what it is supposed to measure. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to measure the internal consistency of the Likert scale form of questions. Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is a widely-used measure of reliability used to quantify the amount of random measurement error that exists in a sum score or average generated by a multi-item measurement scale (Hayes & Coutts 2020). To test for reliability, the study constructed a reliability analysis test to ascertain the presence of internal consistency which indicates the degree of homogeneity among the ordinal Likert scale statements as illustrated in Table 1 below. According to Schuberth (2021), good reliability estimates with an alpha value between 0.6 (60%) may be acceptable. Table 1 presents results of the reliability analysis for each construct. From the table, informativeness, and entertainment reliability coefficients are higher than 0.7 which indicates the existence of high internal consistency, and the overall reliability coefficient indicates an acceptable (0.834) internal consistency across all the variables when combined.

**Table 1: Reliability statistics**

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Informativeness	3	0.742
Entertainment	3	0.842
Overall	6	0.834

Source: Primary Data (2022)

The data collected through a structured Likert-scaled questionnaire was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) since it is an appropriate package for analysing social science research data (Sekaran, 2003). The independent variable was operationalized into two dimensions: informativeness and entertainment while, the dependent variable was conceptualised as negative or positive consumers' attitudes toward SMS advertising. Inferential statistics focused on measuring the direction, form, and degree of the relationship (regression and correlation) between antecedents (informativeness, and entertainment) of attitudes towards SMS advertising among mobile phones users.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Analysis of variation

The Analysis of variation was used to ascertain whether informativeness and entertainment were significant predictors of the outcome variable (attitudes towards SMS advertising). The results from the ANOVA output revealed that informativeness and entertainment have a significant influence on mobile phone users' attitudes towards SMS advertising ( $F(2, 154)=12.602, p=.000$ ). Therefore, the research accepts the proposition that antecedents of attitude predict consumers' attitudes towards SMS advertising.

**Table 2: ANOVA**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.327	2	2.163	12.602	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	26.437	154	.172		
	Total	30.764	156			

a. Dependent Variable: 19. Attitude

b. Predictors: (Constant), ENTERTAINMENT, INFORMATIVENESS

Source: Primary Data (2022)

## 4.2 Model summary

To determine the effect of the antecedent variables on attitudes, the model summary was generated. Table 3 below shows that the coefficient of determination statistics of  $R^2=0.141$  which indicates that there is 14.1% variance in mobile phone users' attitudes that can be explained by

informativeness and entertainment. Aware that there are several uncontrollable factors that influence consumer attitudes, it is sensible for the predictor variables to collectively contribute a 14.1% change in consumer attitudes. Lee, Bardi, and Sneddon. (2021) opines that human behavior studies are subject to low  $R^2$  values due to the difficulties in predicting people than physical processes.

**Table 3: Model summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.375 <sup>a</sup>	.141	.129	.4143

a. Predictors: (Constant), ENTERTAINMENT, INFORMATIVENESS

Source: Primary Data (2022)

## 4.3 Coefficients of regression

To understand the effect of each antecedent of attitude, coefficients of regression were determined as presented in table 4 below. The study further determine if each factor

significantly influences consumers' attitudes (Sig. column). The results show entertainment ( $\beta=0.46$ ,  $t=3.283$ ,  $\rho=.001$ ), significantly influences mobile phone users' attitudes towards SMS advertising. As much as informativeness positively influences mobilephone users' attitudes towards SMS advertising, it was not significant.

**Table 4: Coefficients of regression**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.252	.126		-1.995	.048
	INFORMATIVENESS	.021	.016	.118	1.307	.193
	ENTERTAINMENT	.046	.014	.296	3.283	.001

a. Dependent Variable: 19. Attitude

Source: Primary Data (2022)

Results of the test of hypotheses indicated that the model was a significant predictor of the outcome variable at ( $F(2, 154)=12.602, p=.000$ ). The coefficient of determination was  $R^2=0.141$ . This indicates that 14.1% change in mobile phone users' attitudes can be explained by informativeness and entertainment. Lee, Bardi, and Sneddon (2021) ascribe that human behavior studies are subject to low  $R^2$  values due to the difficulties in predicting people than physical processes.

The study tested if consumers' perceptions of the entertainment nature of SMS advertising positively influence consumer attitudes towards SMS advertising. The resulting p-value (.001) indicates that the study of the alternative hypothesis was accepted at a 5% level of significance which means that, there is sufficient evidence to support the claim that the entertainment nature of SMS adverts significantly influences mobile phone users' attitudes towards SMS advertising. The results also established that a unit change in the entertainment nature of SMS adverts increases consumers' positive intention towards advertisement content by  $\beta=.046$ . The findings of the study concur with Bauer (2005) whose study findings revealed that entertainment services can increase customer loyalty and add value for the customer. On the other hand, the informative nature of SMS messages does not have a significant effect on consumer attitude towards SME advertising. This view is supported by Abdelrahim and Wady (2018) on factors affecting consumers attitudes towards SMS advertising in Palestinian consumers towards SMS advertising. Abdelrahim and Wady's study revealed that, whereas credibility had the strongest influence, informativeness did not significantly influence consumers attitudes towards SMS advertising.

## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that SMS advertising is a credible route to convey entertainment news via mobile phone devices. In essence, mobile phone consumers' attitudes towards SMS advertising are mainly dependent on entertainment nature of SMS adverts contained in a message, which further implies that mobile phone consumers are enticed by entertainment SMS advertisements.

### 5.2 Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, it is recommended that mobile network operators should carefully design attractive messages with attractive features that have the ability to entertain consumers while enticing them towards specific products and services. The use of attractive

features of the entertainment nature of the message creates a positive attitude towards SMS advertising. From the study, it seems, consumers do not bother about the informative nature of SMS. Since customers can also be segmented differently, giving mobile phone users opt-in/opt-out on the type of entertainment SMS that they would like to receive needs to be considered as well.

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