

Irritation SMS advertising in Nigeria and consumer reaction

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ABSTRACT: The study sought to investigate the elements or values of SMS advertising that Nigerian target consumers perceive to be irritating and, how they react to such ads. Descriptive survey was adopted in the enquiry. Only Students of state owned universities in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states of South-East geopolitical Zone of Nigeria consisted the study population because of their perceived attraction to GSM phones and, by extension, SMS applications. A sample of 427 students was drawn from the population and selected through stratified convenience sampling. The measuring instrument was the questionnaire. Frequency distribution tables, pie chart, the mode and percentages were used for analyses of data. Results indicated that the respondents strongly agree that SMS ad message that is deceptive and lacks permission control is irritating. They merely agree that so frequent messages, difficult to comprehend, unsolicited/disturbance to one's activity SMS ads can be irritating. Their somewhat agreement was recorded for intrusive into privacy and, confusing SMS. Further, the respondents are quite undecided in agreement or otherwise about irritation in biased, improperly timed, overly manipulative, unpleasant and insulting SMS advertising messages. There is general disagreement that SMS that has no opt-in/out control can make the message to be irritating. About their reaction to perceived irritating SMS advertising messages, greater percentage of the respondents indicated their unfavourable disposition to such SMS. The study therefore concluded that intrusive into privacy, unsolicited/disturbance to one's activity, deceptive, confusing, so frequent/high volume of messages, absence of permission before sending the ad messages are the SMS advertising values that irritate Nigerian audiences. It was recommended among others that Nigerian network carriers and advertisers should stick to modern advertising norms whereby the values of the target consumers are respected and, be mindful of these irritating message values.

KEYWORDS: *SMS, irritation, advertising, consumer, reactions, Nigeria*

I. INTRODUCTION

The ubiquity of mobile phones popularly called GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) has ushered in an unprecedented modification of people's communication pattern all over the world. The technology has become the most popular information communication media (Onwumele, 2011). Bauer, Barnes, Reichardt and Neumann (2005) pointed that this is because its adoption and penetration in the world economies has been explosive; just as the device and other personal digital assistants increase the availability, frequency and speed of communication (Scharl, Dickinger & Murphy, 2005).

Al-alak and ALnawas (2010), Suher and Ispir (2009) and Tsang et al. (2004) observe that mobile phones allow diffusion of marketing activities across to consumers, and targeting customers effectively through a one-to-one communication. Notably, the Short Messaging Service (SMS) which is a default application function of the GSM enables easy adaptation of the mode to various kinds of commercial and non-commercial purposes. SMS is a 160 alpha-numeric and symbol/sign limited text-based message delivered and received through the GSM phone device (Suher & Ispir, 2009). GSM owners usually have the device on standby mode with them always for a daily average of 14 hours (Bauer et al., 2005). The SMS message is usually delivered as long as the device is in on mode, has sufficient airtime credit balance, network service coverage and carrying capacity.

The usefulness of the SMS as found by scholars (e.g. Drossos, Giaglis, & Vlachos, 2009; Suher & Ispir, 2009; Trappey & Woodside, 2005) underscores its attractiveness for both non-commercial and commercial purposes by consumers and advertisers; for the latter whether as a standalone or a complement of traditional ad media. The result has been unprecedented turnover in message exchanges. The Mobile Marketing Association (2014) reported over 14.7 trillion messages sent and received worldwide by 2012 and, projected some 28.2 trillion by 2017.

Marketers in countries of the world including Nigeria exploited this SMS popularity and turned it into a veritable advertising medium. The idea is to reach consumers who are inaccessible with the traditional advertising channels. Heinonen and Strandvik (2002) identified consumers with active lifestyle and who are always on the move as the target segment. This change in trend, especially with the advent of bulk-SMS, and the resultant rapid spread of the application earned the SMS the status of great market driver for mobile advertising (Xu, Oh and Teo, 2009).

Greater portion of existing research studies on SMS advertising have focused on the characteristics of SMS advertising and relationships between those factors and success of such SMS as well as consumers' attitude towards the SMS ads. Most of these studies have found informativeness, entertainment, credibility, and irritation as the major characteristics of SMS messages that impact on its adoption, attitudes, usage and/or success. It is obvious from the foregoing that there is little extant research effort in Nigeria at determining the key elements of irritation in SMS ads as well as the extent target audience perceive these elements to be comparatively annoying. Against this backdrop and, appreciating the increased volume of these ad messages that arrive Nigerian consumers' phones daily, the study therefore seeks to examine what elements or values of SMS advertising the Nigerian target consumers actually perceive to be irritating and, how they react to such advertising.

SMS advertising is considered to be irritating when, in the consumer's judgment, it is annoying, unpleasant, insulting, or overly manipulative (Ducoffe, 1996). The timing and frequency of the message as well as when it is unsolicited could also be very annoying. Irritating SMS ad can have dire consequences. Consumers could generally shun SMSs emanating from organizations linked with such messages. For example, preference of apps to SMS ads among UK consumers have been found linked to perceived irritatingly intrusiveness of SMS ads in their private lives (Gupta, 2013). Negative reaction among consumers towards irritating SMS advertising experiences is global. It is not exclusive to the audience of UK, or a particular country or continent alone. Nigerian consumers seem to be the worse off similar SMS ads, especially with the heightened spammy messages occasioned, to a large extent, by the advent of bulk SMS messaging system.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Advertising Goal

One major goal of every advertising campaign is to persuade the target audience and effect a positive change in their attitude towards the advertising and consequently, the advertised product. The bottom line has always been to make sales, retain their customers and remain profitable. This calls for strategic decision by advertisers with regard to choosing effective advertising modal mix that would avoid perceived direct negative effect on the consumer's attitude, but rather induce the desired positive action in the target consumer. Haghirian, Madlberger and Tanuskova (2005) concur, pointing that advertisers select the appropriate advertising medium that will bring the needed consumer response to the advertising message and consequently, positive action. The attitude of the consumer towards an advert is a manifestation of the appropriateness or otherwise of the medium and message content. Thus, the attention the consumer pays to an advertisement, his estimation of value package of the advert and consequent action sums his general attitude to it (Chowdhury, Parvin, Weitenberner & Becker, 2006).

SMS Advertising

SMS (Short Messaging Service) advertising is the application of SMS to commercially relevant messages. Literature sums up SMS as 160-character alphanumeric based GSM phone enabled text communication between two or more parties. Kavassalis et al. (2003) defines SMS advertising as "using short message service (SMS), sent to consumers' cell phones, to provide consumers with time and location sensitive information that promotes goods, services and ideas, thereby generating value for all stakeholders". Previous researches have shown that consumers are favourably disposed to SMS advertising because of intrinsic personal values and extrinsic environmental considerations. Muk (2007) identifies social influence and intention to opt in as accounting for positive attitudes towards SMS advertising. Perceived ease of use and convenience of message exchanges equally drive the near religious addiction to the usage of GSM phone and its SMS services.

Irritation in SMS Advertising

The perceived feeling of insult on one's intelligence (Bracket & Carr, 2001), annoying, unpleasant, insulting, or overly manipulative, deceptive, confusing or biased (Ducoffe, 1996) are the elements in SMS advertising which consumers consider to be irritating. Timing, frequency or volume of the messages, unsolicited/spam messages, no opt-in/opt-out control, absence of permission before receiving ad messages, and disturbance of a consumer's private activity are other perceived forms of irritation characterizing SMS advertising. Dickinger, Scarl, and Murphy (2005) points that unwanted messages possibly cause annoyance in the consumer because of the perceived intrusion into his/her privacy and thus inhibit their acceptance of the advert message.

The type of attitude any communication is likely to elicit is what is important to any serious advertiser. Communication, formal or otherwise, social or commercial, is expected to be anything but irritating. Generally, a negative attitude usually results from perceived irritation in any advertising. Therefore, irritating advertising, whether through traditional or SMS mode could be so counterproductive. The consumer is most likely unwilling to read the message, and subsequently ignore future messages irrespective of the relevance of the advertisement or the message source. Chowdhury et al. (2006) had earlier hypothesized that mobile advertising that is perceived to be irritating will directly impact the attitude of consumers towards it negatively. It also affects how the consumer views the ad product object. Hoyer and MacInnis (2004) have remarked that interruption of a consumer's daily activity by an ad message can cause severe damage on the image of a product brand.

Existing researched literature has identified informativeness, entertainment, credibility among few other factors that positively influence consumers' attitude towards SMS advertising. The same literature indicates that SMS ad which consumers perceive to be annoying has negative effect on their attitude toward the ad and advertised product or service. Bamba and Barnes (2006) study found negative perception of unsolicited SMS ads among young consumer sample of their study. In their study, Haghirian, Madlberger and Tanuskova (2005) found that mobile ad message that is difficult to comprehend can easily irritate the consumer thereby reducing the message value. Similarly, Mohammad and Ahmed (2013) believes that spammy or difficult-to-understand mobile ad message irritates the consumers and rubs off negatively on the marketing intent of such message. These findings found corroboration in Ahmadi, Masrour and Khaksar (2013) whose study point that such irritation ad makes the consumer indecisive and therefore upset.

Mohammad and Ahmed (2013) study in Jordan found that perceived control over SMS advertising by the consumer negatively influences their attitude towards the message. Control tends to check spam or unsolicited message that prior permission of the consumer must be obtained before the advertiser can dispatch any advert message to him/her. In Finland, Merisavo, Kajalo, Karjaluoto and Virtanen (2007) found the contrary as control of SMS advertising was not found to affect the acceptability of SMS advertising by the target.

A perceived manipulative SMS advertising could be irritating. An SMS is manipulative when the sender, through the message content, structure, media and/or illustration, etc., seeks to exert control over the recipient, usually against his/her will or best interests. In such case, the advertiser unscrupulously makes the audience to believe and do things which otherwise he/she would not have done. Van Dijk (2006) posited that manipulation involves control of the mind order leading to consequent recipient's action. The strategy of manipulation is most commonly used in Nigeria by advertisers and GSM carriers. Ayoola (2014) in his study that tried to identify as well as describe how manipulative SMS messages are used by telecom companies in Nigeria, established that the companies encode the SMS messages to optimize their perceived relevance by manipulatively giving out false messages such as sales promotion and promotion lotteries with the aim to earn indirect incomes. The findings of Ayoola (2014) is a tip of the iceberg compared to what obtains in the present circumstance. GSM networks appear to be the knob hob of fraudulent SMS advertising messages and activities. Phone users are constantly harassed with contrived forms of irritation messages: if you mistakenly opt-in, you cannot opt-out; very deceptive subscription that will get you unintentionally opt-in with a touch of any button and no option of opting out etc.

III. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Based on the foregoing therefore, the study proposes that consumer perceives SMS advertising values as irritating when it is: difficult to comprehend; annoying/upsetting; unsolicited; intrusive into privacy; disturbance to his/her private activity; annoying; unpleasant; insulting; overly manipulative; deceptive; confusing; biased; improper time; so frequent/ high volume of messages; has no opt-in/out control and; unwanted. So also when there is absence of permission before receiving the ad messages. The figure below models the proposition:

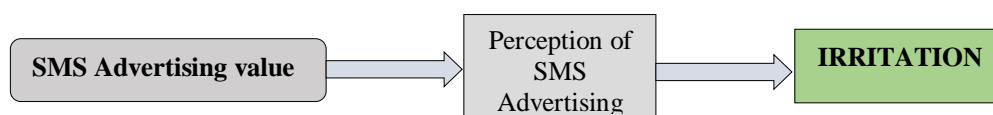


Figure 1: Conceptual model of consumer perception of irritation SMS advertising

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study was a descriptive survey as it sought not to explain the situation but to observe, describe and document it as it naturally occurred. The study site was the South-East geopolitical Zone of Nigeria consisting of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. Only Students of state owned universities in these states make the study population. The choice of students is predicated on their perceived attraction to GSM phones and, by extension, SMS applications (Bose et al., 2010, cited in Anyasor, 2016). Therefore, for predictive validity, use of students sample in this regard vis-s-vis sample of the global population of the study area is adjudged appropriate and a fair representative of the target population. (Danaher & Mullarkey, 2003, cited in Anyasor, 2016).

Study Sample and Sampling

The sample size used for the study was 427 students, using Sholeye, Abosede and Jeminusi (2013) formulae for descriptive studies: $n = p(1-p)(Z\alpha/d)^2 = p(1-p)Z\alpha^2/d^2$

where:

n = sample size

p = estimate of the target population (which is assumed 50% in the absence of pre-existing estimate).

n = 1 - p

d = desired degree of accuracy taken as 0.05

Z = standard normal deviate, set at 1.96 (for 95% confidence interval).

Thus substituting in the formulae: $n = p(1-p)(Z\alpha/d)^2$

$$n = 50/100(1-50/100)(1.96/0.05)^2 = 0.50(1-0.50)(39.2)^2 = 0.50(0.50)(1536.64)$$

$$= 0.25 \times 1536.64 = 384.16$$

Adjustment for a 10% non-response rate: $384.16/90\%$

$$= 384.16/0.9 = 426.84 \approx 427 \text{ (approx. minimum sample size).}$$

This sample of four hundred (427) male and female students was distributed among the five (5) States of the Zones thus: Abia (85); Anambra (86); Ebonyi (85); Enugu (86) and; Imo (85). Allocation of the questionnaire between the genders was on the ratio shown below:

No.	State	Female	Male	Total
1.	Abia	43	42	85
2.	Anambra	43	43	86
3.	Ebonyi	43	42	85
4.	Enugu	43	43	86
5.	Imo	43	42	85
	Total	215	212	427

The stratified and convenience sampling were employed in this study. Every state owned university in each State of the zone was considered a stratum from which the student sample was judgmentally drawn on the basis of sample allocation. The students found on campus, particularly those observed to be operating a phone, were approached and those that voluntarily agreed to complete the questionnaire were selected and administered the questionnaire in a face-to-face contact.

Measuring Instrument

The questionnaire was the measuring instrument used to collect the primary data for the study. The tool consisted of five main question items aimed to address the research objectives. Following the model used by earlier studies (e.g. Tsang et al., 2004; Anyasor, 2016; Saadeghvaziri and Seyedjavadain, 2011 etc.), the study construct was measured on 7-point Likert rating scale: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Somewhat Disagree; 4=Neither Agree/Disagree; 5=Somewhat Agree; 6=Agree and; 7=Strongly Agree.

Tool and Method of Analysis

Frequency tables, pie chart, the mode and percentages were used in the analyses of data. The modal score of responses was used to analyse the extent to which phone users among student perceive SMS advertising irritating. The modal score is intended to bring out clearly between the male group and female group, which more than the other perceives certain forms of SMS values to be irritating.

V. RESULTS

Extent SMS Advertising Value is perceived to be Irritating

	Advertising value	Modal Score				
		Male		Female		Total
1.	Difficult to comprehend	Somewhat Agree	5	Agree	6	
2.	Intrusive into privacy	Agree	6	Somewhat Agree	5	6
3.	Unsolicited/disturbance to your activity	Agree	6	Agree	6	6
4.	Unpleasant	Somewhat Disagree	3	Neither Agree/Disagree	4	4
5.	Insulting	Somewhat Agree	5	Neither Agree/Disagree	4	4
6.	Annoying	Somewhat Agree	5	Somewhat Disagree	3	5
7.	Overly manipulative	Agree	6	Neither Agree/Disagree	4	6
8.	Deceptive	Strongly Agree	7	Strongly Agree	6	7
9.	Confusing	Neither Agree/Disagree	4	Somewhat Agree	5	5
10.	Biased	Somewhat Disagree	3	Neither Agree/Disagree	4	4
11.	Improper time	Neither Agree/Disagree	4	Neither Agree/Disagree	4	4
12.	So frequent/high volume of messages	Agree	6	Agree	6	6
13.	Has no opt-in/out control	Disagree	2	Disagree	2	2
14.	Absence of permission before receiving the ad messages.	Strongly Agree	7	Strongly Agree	7	7

Based on 7-point Likert scale ranking, the perception of irritation of SMS adverts for male and female student respondents was compared using modal score. The results shown on the above table is a distribution of extent of agreement or otherwise between the two groups pertaining to the extent they perceive the SMS to be irritating. Overall, the respondents strongly agree that SMS ad message that is deceptive and does not seek permission before exposing it to consumer are irritating. They generally disagree that having no opt-in/out control can make SMS message to be irritating.

Further, the respondents are majorly quite undecided in agreement or otherwise about irritation in biased, improperly timed, overly manipulative, unpleasant and insulting SMS advertising messages. They perceive that so frequent/high volume of messages, difficult to comprehend, annoying/upsetting, unsolicited/disturbance to your activity SMS ads can be irritating. Their somewhat agreement was observed in SMS that are intrusive into people's privacy, and also confusing. Finally, while the male respondents somewhat agree that SMS that appears annoying could be irritating, the opposite happen to be the position of their female counterparts. How an overtly annoying SMS message could not be irritating to the female folk is an issue for another discourse.

Following from above, the respondents were requested to indicate how they react to SMS advertising that they found to possess any of the above irritating values. Below is the result.

Reaction to Perceived Irritation SMS	Score
i. I prefer to respond favourably to the message	12 (2.81%)
ii. I prefer to read and allow the message	45 (10.54%)
iii. I prefer to ignore the message	213 (49.88%)
iv. I prefer to delete the message	114 (26.70%)
v. I prefer to stop the message update	43 (10.07%)
Total	427 (100%)

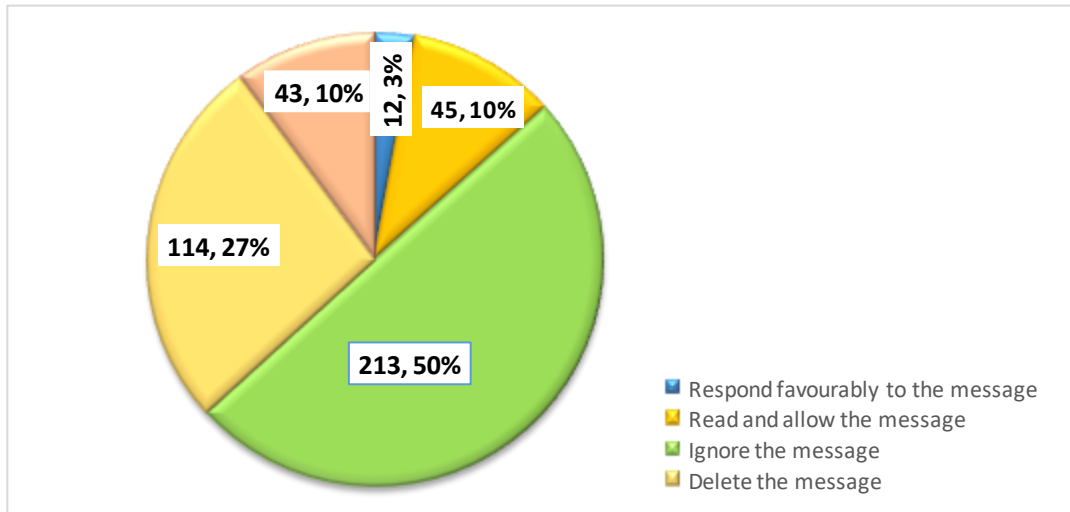


Figure 2: Reaction to perceived irritating SMS in chart

The above figure charted the attitude of the respondents towards perceived irritating SMS adverts on the preceding table. Two hundred and thirteen (213) students representing 50% of the students indicated that they would ignore SMS adverts that are irritating while, 114 being 27% of the students would choose to delete irritating SMS adverts. However, 10% of the students numbering 43 persons would choose to stop the message updates. On the other hand, more favorable response can be given by 45 (10%) of the student who would choose to read and allow the message and the other group being 12 persons representing 3% of the respondents who preferred to respond favorably to the message. This results indicate that majority of the respondents are not favourably disposed to entertaining a perceived irritating SMS advertising messages.

VI. DISCUSSIONS

SMS advertising messages are perceived in different lights by different individuals as shown by the results of this study. As such, while some may perceive a particular message value as irritating, others may view same set of values otherwise. This may explain the reason why the female respondents particularly are not categorically clear about their perception of irritation in some of the obvious irritating SMS values. This could raise a researchable question of the rationality of females with issues of consumption decisions. However, the disagreement on no opt-in/out control of SMS as found in this study is consistent with Merisavo, Kajalo, Karjaluoto and Virtanen (2007) that found that control of SMS advertising was not found to affect the acceptability of SMS advertising by the Finland target population. Same as Bamba and Barnes (2006) study, unsolicited SMS advertising found negative perception among the Nigerian respondents. Similar to findings of Haghirian, Madlberger and Tanuskova (2005) and Mohammad and Ahmed (2013), difficult to comprehend/understand or spammy SMS advertising easily irritate the consumer as established by the present study in Nigeria. Not only does such message irritates the consumers but it in consequence, impacts negatively on the marketing intent of the advertiser. Overall, this is consistent with the position of Masrouf and Khaksar (2013) that irritation SMS advertising is upsetting and makes the consumer indecisive.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of this study, intrusive into privacy, unsolicited/disturbance to one's activity, deceptive, confusing, so frequent/high volume of messages, absence of permission before sending the ad messages are the SMS advertising values that are affirmed to be irritating in Nigeria. In other words, consumers in Nigeria are majorly and continually offended in varying ways by SMS advertisers. But, they are seemingly not bothered by SMS adverts that has no opt-in/out control. The respondents were undecided whether SMS values that is perceived unpleasant, insulting, annoying, overly manipulative, biased or sent at improper time is irritating or not. The study therefore recommended that Nigerian network carriers and advertisers should upgrade to modern advertising norms whereby the positive attitudes of the target consumers are seriously considered and eschew the exploitation of the intelligence level of the consumers who are people influence majorly by their economic status. They should avoid practices that will evoke negative reaction of the consumers that will tell on their business in the long run. The Nigerian Communication Commission, Advertising Practitioners Council as well as Consumer Protection Council should put in strong control mechanisms to monitor the type of advertisements to which consumers are exposed by firms and ensure that defaulters commensurately answer to any irregularity and the consumer publics given adequate protection.

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