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EFFECTIVENESS OF SMS ADVERTISING A STUDY OF YOUNG CUSTOMERS IN BAHRAIN

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# Effectiveness of SMS Advertising (A Study of Young Customers in Bahrain)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The dramatic revolution in mobile technology has provided companies with new promotional opportunities for reaching their consumer groups (Radder, et al., 2010; Carter, 2008; Xu et al., 2008; International Advertising Bureau, 2008). The worldwide increase in the ownership of mobile phones has made marketers consider such devices as promising potential media for mobile marketing use, through which they can effectively reach their customers (Bauer et al., 2005; Chowdhury, 2006; Muk, 2007; Tsang et al., 2004; Barwise and Strong, 2002). One component of mobile marketing is short-message-service (SMS) advertising (Waldt et al., 2009; Ramanarain, 2012). For the purpose of this study, SMS advertising will be defined 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|| (Kavassalis et al., 2003).

Many marketers find SMS advertising to be more effective than traditional advertising (Roozan et al., 2008; Mirbagheri, 2010) in terms of reach, cost and retention (Bamariya and Singh, 2012). The literature reveals that SMS advertising has managed to attract the attention and trust of marketers as a promotional tool due to its unique characteristics, including: interactive

qualities, the ability to easily target specific groups of customers (Bauer, 2005; Stewart and Pavlou, 2002; Barnes, 2003), the capacity to reach customers anytime, anywhere (Aamir et al., 2013; Luxton, 2009; Dickinger et al., 2005), the generation of highly-personalized messages to individual consumers (Bauer et al., 2005; Aalto et al., 2004; Kavassalis et al., 2003; Leppaniemi and Karjaluo, 2005; Siau et al., 2001), the potential to take advantage of mobile users' habit of reading all SMS messages (Leppaniemi, 2005; Mirbagheri, 2010), suitability for both —pull|| and —push|| promotional strategies (Katzstone, 2001), ability to reach a larger, more diverse pool of people (Yamir, 2008; Bauer et al., 2005), and lower costs than traditional advertising (Frolick, 2004). According to Ramnarain (2012), —the most important reason to advertise via SMS is the high reading-ratio, about 99% of the text messages are read by the recipient and 90% of the text messages sent, are read within three minutes after delivery.|| Kondo et al. (2008) summarized the benefits of SMS advertising as being immediate, personal, customized, direct, reliable, and automated. Some claim that SMS advertising would be more effective if it targeted young customers because this segment of the market is believed to comprise the majority of those who use mobile phones and mobile phone applications (Scharl et al., 2005; International Advertising Bureau, 2008; Bigelow, 2002; Rohm and Sultan, 2005).

The prevailing literature on mobile advertising has shown that people's perception of SMS advertising is determined by a number of factors, including the entertainment value, informativeness, credibility, personalization, and irritation level present in the advertising message (Bauer et al., 2005; Tsang et al., 2004; Xu, 2007; Radder et al., 2010; Zabadi et al. 2012).

The objective of this study is to examine how young customers in Bahrain interact with SMS advertising. What are their attitudes, and how do these attitudes affect their behavior? Specifically, this study intends to find answers to the following questions: (1) How do young consumers perceive SMS advertising in terms of its entertainment value, informativeness, credibility, personalization, and irritation level? (2) How do such perceptions influence their attitude towards SMS advertising? (3) What is the relationship between consumers' attitudes towards SMS advertising and their intention to use SMS advertising? (4) Do those consumers who perceive SMS advertising positively

forward them to others? Or do they talk positively about them with others? (5) Is there any relationship between consumers' positive perceptions of SMS advertising and their buying behavior in regards to the products advertised through SMS?

Finding answers to such questions is essential to marketers. It would help them to properly design their SMS advertisements in order to positively influence consumer attention, attitude, intention, and behavior. In other words, effective SMS advertising would improve consumer response rates and how frequently they exhibit positive responses to the advertising they receive (Liu et al., 2012).

Arab countries lack research related to the response of consumers to SMS advertising. The majority of such studies have been conducted in the Western countries (Waldt et al., 2009), but the findings may not apply to the Arab countries due to cultural differences. Even within countries of the same region, one may find significant differences in the response of consumers to advertising (Marieke, 1994; Verchpoulos et al., 2003). Therefore, conducting a study of this nature in Bahrain

would add significant insight to the current body of literature.

## II. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE STUDY

On the basis of a related literature review, a model was specified (Figure 1), showing that attitudes towards SMS advertising is a function of five SMS-related attributes, named: entertainment value, informativeness, credibility, personalization, and irritation level. Furthermore, the model depicts how attitude affects consumer intention to use SMS advertising as well their WOM. Finally, the model indicates that intention to use SMS advertising and consumers' WOM would likely result in buying products advertised through SMS. The model shown in Figure 1 has been partially adapted from a number of related studies (Ranjbarian et al., 2012; Cowdhury et al., 2006; Xu, 2007; Zabadi et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2011; Haghirian et al., 2008; Ahmadi et al., 2013; Waldt et al., 2009; Leppaniemi and Kajaluoto, 2005; Scharl et al., 2005; Bamoriya and Singh, 2012; Leung and Cheung, 2004).

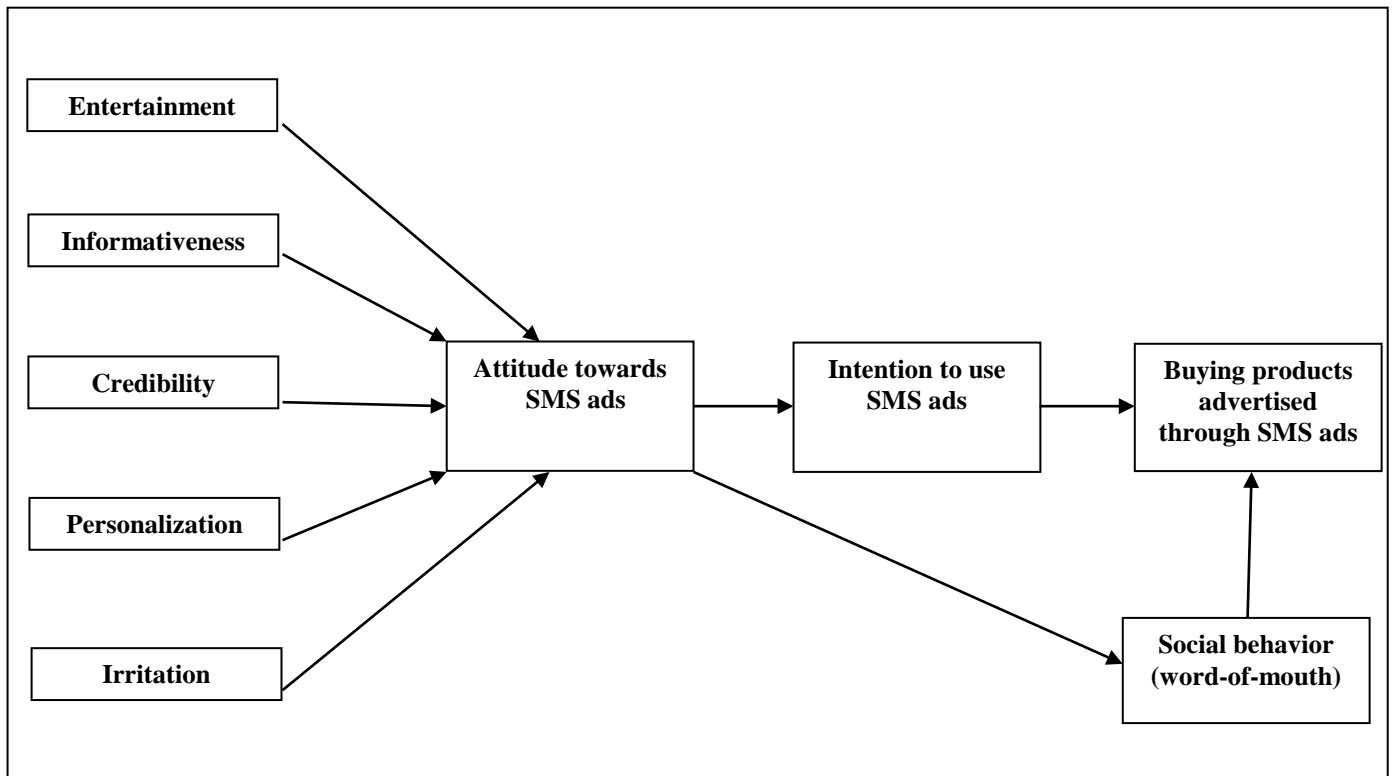


Figure 1 : Consumers' response to SMS advertising

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

### a) Entertainment Value

Entertainment is defined by Ducoffe (1996) as —the ability to fulfill an audience's needs for escapism, diversion, aesthetic, enjoyment, or emotional enjoyment.

|| In this respect, Mitchell and Olson (1981) found that

entertaining advertising will put the audience in a good mood, and thus, have a positive impact on consumers' attitudes toward advertising and even toward the advertised brands (also supported by Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Mobile advertising, if delivered in an enjoyable format, will immediately capture consumers' attention and make them feel positive about the

advertisement (Leung and Cheung, 2004; Katterbach, 2002). In order to attract customers and keep them, some companies deliver games, ring tones, and prizes to customers' cell phones through SMS messages (Zabadi et al., 2012; Highirian and Dickinger, 2004). Some studies found that sending interactive games through SMS will engage customers more fully with the message (Lehmkuhl, 2003; Ahmadi et al., 2013). Bauer et al. (2013) found that advertising that meets consumers' standards for aesthetics and pleasure will be positively perceived, and will have a positive influence on consumers' attitudes towards SMS advertising (Bauer, 2005). In Japan, entertainment plays a significant role in people's acceptance of SMS advertising because for Japanese consumers, a mobile phone is not just a communication tool, but an entertainment device (Haghirian et al., 2004). The use of entertainment in advertising has a positive influence on consumers' attitudes and inspires customer loyalty (Liu et al., 2011).

From all the above, it seems that almost all related studies agree that a high degree of entertainment value has positive effects on consumer attitude (Shavitt et al., 1998; Hung et al., 2009).

Based on the literature highlighted above, hypothesis 1 was developed.

*H1:* There is a positive relationship between the entertainment value inherent in SMS advertising and customer attitude towards SMS advertising.

#### *b) Informativeness*

The informativeness of an SMS advertisement is defined as the amount of useful and helpful information provided by the advertising medium (Ducoffe, 1996). Given the important role information plays in the effectiveness of advertising, marketers tend to design their advertising messages in a way to provide sufficient, useful, and interesting information (Gordon and De Lima-Timer, 1997). When the recipients perceive that an advertisement contains useful and valuable information, they will react positively to it (Aitken et al., 2008). In order to be perceived by customers as worthy of both attention and time, information delivered via SMS messages needs to include qualitative features such as accuracy, relevance, timeliness, and usefulness for consumers (Siau and Shen, 2003; Nasco and Bruner, 2008; Ahmadi et al., 2013; Milne and Gordon, 1993). In their study, Nagash et al. (2003) suggested that in order for e-commerce advertising to be perceived positively, the advertisements should include accurate, relevant, convenient, and timely information that provides a complete picture. In this respect, Chowdhury et al. (2006) found that recipients of SMS advertisements do not feel annoyed if they receive them with appropriate information that they find interesting and relevant. Some researchers went even further and claimed that

informative advertisements are likely to positively influence customers' brand attitude and purchase behavior (Leung and Cheung, 2004; Scharl et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2011).

From the above discussion one can understand that informativeness has a positive effect on the consumers' attitude towards SMS advertising (Chowdhury et al., 2006; Ahmadi et al., 2013). This positive relationship has been substantiated by a significant number of studies (Brackett and Carr, 2001; Tsang et al., 2004; Haghirian et al., 2005; Weldt et al., 2009; Haghirian et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2011; Leung and Cheung, 2004; Zabadi et al., 2012; Xu, 2007; Ranjbarian et al., 2012; Ahmadi et al., 2013). Based upon the reported relationship between SMS informativeness and consumer attitude towards SMS advertising, hypothesis 2 was developed.

*H2:* There is a positive relationship between the informativeness of SMS advertising and consumer attitude towards SMS advertising.

#### *c) Credibility*

Mac-Kenzie and Lutz (1989) define advertising credibility as —consumers' perception of the truthfulness and believability of advertising in general. According to Mac-Kenzie and Lutz (1989), audiences judge the credibility of an advertisement through two perspectives: advertiser credibility and advertising credibility. The former refers to the company as a source of information and the bearer of the message (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lafferty et al., 2002) while the latter refers to the content of advertisement. Credibility is crucial for mobile advertising and may determine customer response to the message (Balasubramanian et al., 2002; Okazaki et al., 2007); therefore, credibility factors should be incorporated into studies related to technology adoption (Xu, 2007). Brackett and Carr (2001) found that credibility has a significant influence on customers' perceptions of advertisements, and customers may determine the credibility of a message according to the advertising medium. In this respect, Yang (2007) found that people perceive internet messages as less credible than printed messages. Credibility can be a powerful tool for marketers to gain customers' trust, which is crucial for the success of mobile commerce (Siau and Shen, 2003). Thus, it seems that advertising messages that satisfy consumer need for credibility will be positively perceived (Waldt et al., 2009).

From all the above, it can be deduced that advertising credibility has a positive influence on consumer attitude towards advertisements (Brackett and Carr, 2009; Tsang et al., 2004; Waldt et al., 2009; Zabadi et al., 2012; Ahmadi et al., 2013; Chowdhury et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2011). Based on this, the third hypothesis of the study was developed.



H3: There is a positive relationship between the credibility of SMS advertising and consumer attitude towards SMS advertising.

d) *Personalization*

Personalized messages are usually perceived more positively than mass-market messages by consumers (Xu et al., 2008), which means that mobile advertising can attract significant attention if personalized (Kalakota and Robinson, 2001). Personalization means —building customer loyalty by building a meaningful one-to-one relationship, by understanding the needs of each individual and helping to satisfy a goal that efficiently and knowledgeably addresses each individual's need in a given context|| (Ricken, 2000). Due to a significant amount of SMS advertising received by consumers, such advertisements can be perceived as intrusive and annoying (Zhang, 2000), which, in turn, may result in a negative attitude towards the messages (Zanot, 1981). To overcome these problems, message personalization is a possible solution (Xu, 2007) because customers are likely to be more receptive to messages that are customized to their needs and preferences (Dezoysa, 2002; Milne and Gorden, 1993; Robins, 2003). A study conducted by Yan et al. (2004) revealed that, by personalizing their mobile advertising, marketers would have an opportunity to accurately target certain groups of customers by speaking directly to their preferences (Varshney and Vetter, 2002; Fan et al., 2005; Leppaniemi and Karjaluto, 2005; Zhang, 2003). In other words, through personalized messages, marketers can reach their potential customers in a very individual way and enhance their relationship with them (Xu, 2007). This finding is also supported by Varshney and Vetter (2002) who stated that, in order to increase the effectiveness of mobile advertising, marketers need to send precise messages focusing on specific target groups. To achieve this, they need to have databases containing customer demographics, locations, and preferences. This is also supported by Rao and Minakakis (2003), who stated the importance of having marketing strategies based on knowledge of customer profiles, histories, interests, and needs. Some studies argued that marketers can personalize their text messages based on the consumer local time and location (Watson, 2000; Balasubramanian et al., 2002). With regard to time, SMS messages will get more attention if marketers consider the best time of day to send messages, and how frequently to send to each target group (Scharl et al., 2005). In this respect, Easton (2002) and Jukic (2003) emphasized the importance of time in attracting customers via wireless channels. It can also be noted from the literature that consumers respond more positively to location-specific messages (Watson et al., 2000; Leppaniemi and Karjaluto, 2005;

Xu, 2007). Therefore, for effective reach of different target groups, time and location are advantageous tools unique to mobile marketing, which most other marketing channels lack (Jukic et al., 2003). Based on the above discussion related to message personalization, hypothesis 4 was developed.

H4: There is a positive relationship between the personalization of SMS advertising and consumer attitude towards SMS advertising.

e) *Irritation Level*

When advertising employs techniques that annoy, offend, insult, or are overly manipulative, consumers are likely to perceive it as unwanted and irritating influence|| (Ducoffe, 1996). Irritation has always been one of the major critiques of advertising (Bauer and Greyser, 1968). Due to the irritation it causes its audience, an advertisement may lose its effectiveness (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985; Luo, 2002). Mobile users may perceive irrelevant and distracting information as an intrusion into their privacy, which may make them feel confused and annoyed about the message and, as a result, they will react negatively to it (Stewart and Pavlou, 2002). This finding is also supported by Ahmadi et al. (2013) who stated that —cell phone ads can provide the consumer with information which makes them indecisive and upset. The consumers may have an indecisive feeling about the advertisement and show negative responses to them. || another annoying type of message might be the unwanted one, known as spam (Dickenger, 2005). Through reviewing the relevant literature, one notices that the level of irritation induced by SMS advertisements is negatively correlated to consumer attitudes towards SMS advertisements (for example: Brackett and Carr, 2001; Tsang et al., 2004; Brehm, 1972; Zabadi et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2011; Chowdhury et al., 2006). Based on the literature review related to irritation levels caused by mobile advertising, hypothesis 5 was developed.

H5: There is a negative relationship between the irritation caused by SMS advertising and consumer attitude towards SMS advertising.

f) *Attitude, intention, and buying behavior*

Attitude is defined as a —learned predisposition to respond to an object in a consistently favorable or unfavorable way|| (Wilkie, 1994). Intention is defined as —the strength of a person's conscious plan to perform the target behavior|| (Fishein, 1975). Attitudes cannot be observed directly because they are psychological and mental states, therefore researchers attempt to identify them through other factors (Aaker et al., 1995; Huang, 2004). Most previous studies related to SMS advertising found that people generally have negative attitudes towards SMS advertising (Ranjbarian et al., 2012; Carroll et al., 2007; Lenng, 2007, Muk, 2007). Attitudes towards

advertisement play a significant role in determining consumer response to advertisements (Mackenzie & Lutz, 1989). The major aim of any advertiser is to positively influence consumers' attitudes and buying behavior (Ducoffe, 1996). Consumer attitude and intention are the focus of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis et al., 1989). These two theories state that consumer intention to behave in a specific manner is determined by their general attitude. In other words, attitude shapes intention, and intention shapes buying behavior. In this respect, Kinnear and Taylor (1996) stated that attitude is an important criteria used by consumers to make their buying decisions. This finding is also supported by Korzaa (2003). Lee et al. (2006) found a strong and positive correlation between the intention of consumers to receive mobile advertising messages and their attitude towards them. Related to the same issue, Anderson (200) discussed the Fishbein Attitude Theory and stated that when consumers receive SMS advertisements, such ads will affect their belief systems, which in turn shapes their attitudes towards the advertised brand; such attitudes will influence their intention to buy the advertised brand. Ajzan (1985) reported that attitude is used by consumers in making buying decisions (Okakazi et al., 2007). Positive attitudes will likely lead to purchase. Such a positive relationship between attitudes and behavior will become stronger when consumers are dealing with a product with which they are highly involved (Tenbult et al., 2008). The positive relationship between attitude-intention and intention-behavior was also reported by Venkatesh et al., 2003; Tsung et al., 2004). The relationship between these variables is also explained in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which states that attitude influences behavior through intention (Zabadi et al., 2012).

From the above discussion, it is predicted that the relationship between attitude and intention as well as between intention and buying behavior can be positive. Based on this, hypotheses 6 and 7 were developed.

*H6: There is a positive relationship between consumer attitude towards SMS advertising and intention to use SMS advertising.*

*H7: There is a positive relationship between consumer intention to use SMS advertising and buying behavior.*

#### *g) Attitude and word of mouth (WOM)*

In regards to SMS advertising, word of mouth refers to consumers spreading the message, independently of the advertiser. Methods of WOM for SMS advertising might include forwarding the message to others or talking positively about it with others. Weinberger and Lepkowska (2000) reported that consumers tend to pass SMS advertising to others if they experienced a positive response or interaction with

the advertisement. Ping et al. (2003) investigated consumer product formation process in online WOM, and found that positive WOM has a larger impact on proliferating positive product attitudes than negative ones. Albarq (2014) studied the relationship between electronic WOM and tourism in Jordan and found it positive. In fact, it works both ways. Positive WOM will have a positive impact on consumer attitudes, and those who have positive attitudes towards a product will likely pass positive information about it to others (Tucker, 2011; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). Park et al. (2011) stated that WOM has a greater impact on the formation of consumer attitudes towards SMS advertising than towards conventional advertisements. Therefore, companies must consider customer satisfaction when developing advertising, as satisfied customers are likely to pass positive WOM to friends and relatives while dissatisfied ones may pass negative WOM (Tucker, 2001). WOM is a result of people's natural tendency to share their thoughts regarding the products they use and the advertisements they encounter (Bone, 1992; Jalilvand et al., 2012), and these shared thoughts (i.e. WOM) can be positive, neutral, or negative (Anderson, 1998). The impact of attitude on people's electronic WOM is significant because nowadays, after experiencing products, people report their reviews (opinions) online for others to see. Such online reviews have become an increasingly important reference in customers' decision-making processes (Goldenberg et al., 2001; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Morgan et al., 2003). A similar result was reported by Jalilvand et al. (2013), who studied the impact of WOM on tourists' attitudes toward Islamic destinations. Literature also reveals that the relationship between attitude and WOM plays a significant role in trusting online retailers. Those with a positive past experience (i.e. positive attitude) with an e-retailer will communicate positively about it with others (i.e. positive WOM) and vice versa (Dennis et al., 2009; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009; Ajzen, 1991). A similar scenario was reported by Murtiash et al. (2013) in a study related to dealing with car agents in Indonesia. Companies spend a lot of money and effort to avoid negative publicity (i.e. negative WOM) about their products, which is usually disseminated by those who formed negative attitudes towards the company or its products (Ahluwalia et al., 2002; Hernard, 2002; Greyser, 1995). According to Pulling et al. (2003), there are two types of negative publicity: performance-related (due to perceived product bad quality) and value-related (due to unethical or social issues related to the company or its products).

From the WOM studies discussed above, it can be noted that customer satisfaction (i.e. positive attitudes) leads to positive WOM and customer dissatisfaction (i.e. negative attitudes) leads to negative WOM (for example: Wangenheim and Bayon, 2007;

Anderson and Mittal, 2000; Bolton et al., 2004; Rust et al., 1995; Anderson, 1998; Swan and Oliver, 1989; Westbrook, 1987; Sudaraman et al., 1998). A similar linkage between satisfaction and WOM was also found by Palmer et al. (2011), who examined the relationship between student satisfaction with their university experience and their WOM about the university. Their findings revealed that student dissatisfaction was associated with negative WOM, while student satisfaction was associated with positive WOM expressed to people outside the institution.

The issue of WOM is essential for companies because messages forwarded/recommended by friends gain more credibility than those coming directly from advertisers, and friends do not forward messages unless they themselves have read and enjoyed the message, thus determining that it has value worthy enough to be forwarded to others.

Based on the above, this study proposes the following two hypotheses:

*H8:* There is a positive relationship between customer attitude towards SMS advertising and their WOM about SMS advertising.

*H9:* There is a positive relationship between customer WOM about SMS advertising and their buying behavior.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

##### a) The sample

To test the nine hypotheses of the study, 247 undergraduate students were recruited. The students were between the ages of 20 and 24 years; 35% of them were male and 65% were female. The sample was chosen from the 20,000 students registered at the University of Bahrain, using a convenience sampling technique. Recruiting college students as a sample for investigating mobile advertising has been widely-used, as can be witnessed in the literature, because this group of mobile phone users has been depicted as a concrete representative of the digital world (Katz, 1996). Many marketers look at young customers as an attractive target for mobile-related goods and services. Youth's heavy usage of mobile phones makes them important targets to researchers attempting to investigate the effectiveness of mobile advertising (Grant and O'Donohoe, 2007; Standing et al., 2005; Chowdhury et al., 2006; Hanley et al., 2006; Peng, 2006; Rohm and Sultan, 2006; Jun and Lee, 2007; Newell and Meier, 2007; Hanley and Becker, 2008; Wais and Clemons, 2008; Radder et al., 2010). The importance of the youth in mobile marketing was substantiated in a study conducted by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (2008), which reported that in the USA, 96% of 18-29 year olds with mobile phones have used one or more mobile data services.

##### b) Data collection procedure

The primary data was collected by administering a self-completion questionnaire to participants that covered data related to the variables of the study. The study questionnaire had 30 questions aimed at obtaining the required data for the study. Four of the questions were personal questions asking for SMS usage, gender, age, and education. The other 26 questions aimed to determine sample responses to the study variables as follows: three questions assessing SMS entertainment value (adapted from Xu, 2007; Chowdhury et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2012), three questions assessing SMS informativeness (adapted from Xu, 2007; Zabadi et al., 2012; Bamoriya and Singh, 2012; Chowdhury et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2012), three questions assessing SMS credibility (adapted from Xu, 2007; Liu, 2012), three questions assessing SMS personalization (adapted from Xu, 2007; Ramanarain, 2012), three questions assessing SMS irritation levels (adapted from Xu, 2007; Chowdhury et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2012), five questions assessing attitude towards SMS advertising (adapted from Xu, 2007; Zabadi et al., 2012; Bamoriya and Singh, 2012; Xu et al., 2008; Chowdhury et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2012; Ramanarain, 2012; Kumar, 2013), three question assessing intention to use SMS advertising (adapted from Xu, 2007; Bamoriya and Singh, 2012; Ramanarain, 2012; Radder et al., 2010), two questions assessing word-of-mouth effects (suggested by the study), and one question assessing purchase behavior (adapted from Aamir et al., 2013).

##### c) Variable specifications and statistical techniques

To test the nine hypotheses, the study used multiple regression analysis and correlation analysis techniques. Seven of the variables—entertainment value, informativeness, credibility, personalization, irritation level, attitude, and intention—were measured on a five-point likert scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree. The other two variables, word of mouth and buying behavior, were measured using a five-point scale: always, mostly, sometimes, seldom, and never.

#### V. FINDINGS

To test the reliability of the internal consistency of the scales used, Cronbach Alpha was calculated, and revealed that all the scales were reliable with alpha values of 0.863 for entertainment value, 0.731 for informativeness, 0.617 for credibility, 0.643 for personalization, 0.751 for irritation level, 0.816 for attitudes, 0.788 for intention, 0.704 for word of mouth, and 0.788 for purchase behavior.

A multiple regression analysis was run to examine the relationships between the variables as

proposed in hypotheses 1-9, as reported below. For all hypotheses, we also analyzed the effect of gender on the responses of the respondents and found that it has no significant impact. This was confirmed by the results of Chi-square, which indicated that there is no significant difference between perceptions of male and female with regards to SMS advertising attributes. Therefore, the findings reported in this section show the overall results for the respondents without differentiating gender.

Hypotheses 1-4 investigated whether there is a positive relationship between SMS advertising attributes (entertainment value, informativeness, credibility, and personalization) and consumer attitude towards SMS advertising. Hypothesis 5 investigated whether there is a negative relationship between irritation induced by SMS advertising and consumer attitude towards SMS advertising. Tables 1 and 2 indicate the results obtained for testing hypotheses 1-5.

*Table 1 :* Correlation coefficient values of the constructs (N = 247)

Details	Entertainment	Informativeness	Credibility	Personalization	Irritation
Attitude towards SMS ads (control factor)					
Pearson correlation (r)	0.674	0.504	0.521	0.225	-0.407
Significance (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

*Table 2 :* Results of multiple regression analysis (dependent variable: attitude towards SMS ads)

Factors	Standardized coefficient (Beta)	t-value	Sig.
Constant		4.289	0.000
Entertainment	0.434	8.393	0.000
Informativeness	0.164	3.367	0.001
Credibility	0.261	5.465	0.000
Personalization	0.047	3.613	0.000
Irritation	-0.141	-3.054	0.003
Adjusted R square = 0.571 F-value = 66.375 Significance = 0.000			

The correlation results in Table 1 indicate that all the examined five attributes of the SMS advertising have significant influence on consumer attitude towards SMS advertising at  $< .01$ . Entertainment value, informativeness, credibility, and personalization were found to positively correlate to attitude towards SMS advertising, whereas irritation was found to correlate negatively to attitude. From Table 1, it can also be inferred that although personalization is positively associated with attitude, the correlation between the two is weak ( $r = 0.225$ ). This means that for the young customers in Bahrain, although receiving personalized messages is preferable to receiving blind, mass-marketed messages, personalization is not a major

determinant in their attitude towards SMS advertising. The personalization results reported in this study do not fully correspond with the results found in many of the studies that are analyzed in existing literature, studies which reveal a strong correlation between personalization and consumer attitude and suggest that mobile advertising has gained significant attention because of SMS personalization. Table 2 indicates that the overall result of the regression model is statistically significant at  $< 1\%$  with the F-value of 66.375, and that variations in all independent variables together explain 57.1% of the variations in the dependent variable (adjusted R square = 0.571). Table 2 also indicates that, when assessed individually, all five SMS attributes



play significant roles in determining consumer attitude towards SMS advertising (sig.  $t < .01$ ), with entertainment value playing the most important role (beta = 0.434), followed by credibility (beta = 0.261), then informativeness (beta = 0.164), then irritation level (beta = 0.141) and finally personalization (beta = 0.047).

The above results provide full support for hypotheses 15.

Hypothesis 6 investigated whether there is a positive relationship between consumer attitude towards SMS advertising and intention to use SMS advertising. Correlation analysis indicates that the two variables are strongly and positively correlated ( $r = 0.659$ , sig. = 0.000). Regression analysis shows that consumer attitude towards SMS advertising has a significant role in determining intention to use SMS advertising (beta = 0.659,  $t = 13.708$ , sig. = 0.000). The importance of attitude in forming intention can also be observed in the results of adjusted R square, which indicate that variation in attitude explains 43.2% of the variation in intention (adjusted R square = 0.432, F-value = 187.913, sig. = 0.000). These results support hypothesis 6.

Hypothesis 7 examined whether there is a positive relationship between consumers' intention to use SMS advertising and their buying behavior (i.e., actually buying the products advertised through SMS messages). Correlation analysis results indicate that the two variables are positively and strongly associated ( $r = 0.426$ , sig. = 0.000). Regression results show that consumer intention to use SMS advertising is a significant determinant of buying behavior (beta = 0.420,  $t = 7.299$ , sig. = 0.000), and that intention explains 17.8% of the buying behavior (adjusted R square = 0.178, F-value = 53.281, sig. = 0.000). These findings support hypothesis 7.

Hypothesis 8 tested whether there is a positive relationship between consumer attitude towards SMS advertising and WOM (i.e., forwarding the message to others or talking positively about it with others). Correlation results indicated that there is a positive and strong relationship between the two variables ( $r = 0.450$ , sig. = 0.000). Regression results show that when consumers have positive attitudes towards SMS advertising, they tend to spread positive WOM about it (beta = 0.450,  $t = 7.879$ , sig. = 0.000). It was found that variation in attitude explains 19.9% of the variation in WOM (adjusted R square = 0.199, F-value = 62.075, sig. = 0.000). These findings verify hypothesis 8.

Hypothesis 9 proposed a positive relationship between consumers' WOM about SMS advertising and their buying behavior for the products advertised through SMS advertising. The findings show that the two variables are strongly and positively correlated ( $r = 0.483$ , sig. = 0.000). On the other hand, regression

analysis revealed that those who spread positive WOM about SMS advertisements are likely to exhibit positive behavioral reactions and buy the products promoted through SMS advertising (beta = 0.483,  $t = 8.543$ , sig. = 0.000). Results also show that the variation in consumers' reported WOM explains 23% of the variation in their reported buying behavior (adjusted R square = 0.230, F-value = 72.980, sig. = 0.000). Based on these findings, hypothesis 9 is deemed valid and true.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Based on previous related research, this study proposed a conceptual model for SMS advertising effectiveness. The core of the model is consumer attitude towards SMS advertising. According to the model, the attitude construct is determined by five SMS attributes: entertainment value, informativeness, credibility, personalization, and irritation level. The model also suggests that once attitude towards SMS advertising is formed, such attitude will determine two important behavioral constructs: psychological (intention to use SMS advertising) and social (WOM). This study tested such relationships and found that attitude is positively associated with intention and WOM. The last part of the model is related to the relationship between consumers' intention to use SMS advertising, their WOM, and their buying behavior (that is, their proclivity to buy products advertised through the received SMS advertisements). It sought to answer the question of whether consumers' intention to use SMS advertising and positive WOM would encourage them to buy the advertised products. The findings indicated that intention and WOM do determine consumers' buying decisions and have the potential to positively influence these decisions.

Due to the high volume of SMS advertising by numerous companies that send them out without the consent of the mobile users, many people tend to avoid and delete SMS advertisements before reading their content. Entertainment value is an essential element that should be considered and integrated into an SMS advertising campaign to better attract the youth. There are several ways that an SMS message can be more entertaining and better engage the youth, allowing them to interact with the content of the ad. One of the ways is to involve a game or challenge in the SMS, to include appealing graphics and/or sound effects, or to use animation to catch the attention of the consumer while simultaneously delivering the core message of the ad. Another example is to make the ad's message less conventional and more creative, by using an informal tone, or incorporating humor or a joke that people would want to share with their friends into the ad's message. Creating ads that relate to people's day-to-day life and culture is crucial, as it will strengthen people's

connections to the ad and easily capture their interest. The ad will create a feeling of being understood in the consumer, and they will be more likely to feel that the advertised product is —right|| for them.

An SMS message should remain short and light, containing the most important points that you would like to be delivered. Long, verbose messages with excess information could lead to having people, especially young people, dismiss the ad as boring or irrelevant, and result in instant deletion. Young people have little interest in reading a long message from an unknown person that doesn't relate to them, so much so that it could result in an opposite reaction and cause disinterest in the company or brand being advertised. An SMS message should be developed as if it were newspaper headline or the title of the book. It should be bold, interesting, fun and unique, something that will grab and sustain the attention of the reader, feeding them the necessary information while entertaining them. These ads should feel like fun diversions, not burdensome advertisements, thus inspiring the youth to eagerly read them.

The credibility of an ad is very important to the person reading it. Sometimes, advertisements exaggerate when delivering their message, or promote their brand or company in a way which is inauthentic, or downright false. The ad might work the first time, but it would ultimately result in fostering a bad reputation for the company and leave a negative impression in people's minds. Once the public sees that a product does not correspond to the advertisement promoting it, they will no longer trust any ads from that company. A customer always expects to get what has been advertised, no strings attached. Anything less sits like a lie in the customer's consciousness.

An advertisement is best when it communicates with the consumer on a personal level. When a company is aware of who they are sending their ads to, they can better assess what tone is most appropriate, what imagery is most appealing, what humor will be most effective, and what time of day to send it. For example, choosing to send an ad at noon time in many Arab countries is not a good idea, as that is usually a time when people rest, eat, and take a nap, while night time is more social. Incorporating customers' names in ads, sending ads that speak directly to their interests and tailoring ads so they are timely—such as incorporating football celebrities in ads promoted during World Cup season—will incite more interest in the ads and increase their popularity. A good approach is to first understand who the consumers are as a whole, then to split them into different target groups based on age, location, interests, etc., and based on that, tailor the ads to work best for each target group. Irritating consumers with excessive and irrelevant advertising will incite negative attitudes towards your company brand and

image. One of the things that could potentially irritate the consumer is sending multiple ads that feel like spam, which will cause the customer to feel both harassed and negligible in the advertising process. Many companies send multiple messages throughout the day, and send out ads on a near-daily basis, which not only results in the ad being deleted straight away, but also increases the level of complaints and intolerance every time an SMS ad is received. If an ad is mildly irritating the first time, it is infuriating by the fifth time. Another factor that results in irritation is receiving ads from companies that consumers have no association with, meaning that they have somehow acquired the consumer's phone number without permission, and have chosen to invade the privacy of the consumer's personal phone and forced their ads upon the consumer. Additionally, messages that are very long and take time to read exhibit a lack of respect for the consumer's time, prevent the customer from engaging with the ad, and exhibit a lack of professionalism in the company, as it implies an inability to be concise. This creates the feeling that a company is advertising only for their own benefit rather than truly trying to connect with consumers and understand their needs. Taking the time to understand consumers grants a company better leverage in that they can give consumers what they need. Failure to do so creates negative attitudes in consumers.

These five key factors (entertainment value, informativeness, credibility, personalization, and irritation level) play a big role in shaping the ultimate attitude of consumers towards SMS ads, in either a positive or negative manner, and have a tremendous impact on their decision of how to behave in relation to the product and the brand. If a consumer exhibits interest in an ad and receives it positively, then this will lead to either of two things. The first is that they will look into acquiring what is being promoted in the ad for their own use. The second is they will engage in WOM, and share the ad with someone they know who they feel could benefit from it. In both these cases, the final outcome will be that someone purchases the product advertised through the SMS ad, which is ultimately what every company and ad campaign seeks to achieve.

The findings of this study have resulted in the acceptance of all nine hypotheses, and its results are, for the most part, in line with the existing literature. In examining the relationships between the variables shown in the conceptual model (see Figure 1), this study and many others have reached similar outcomes, despite being conducted on groups from different cultural, social, demographic, and economic environments (for example: Xu, 2007; Zabadi et al, 2012; Katterbach, 2002; Lehmkuhl, 2003; Bauer et al., 2005; Brackett and Carr, 2001; Bauer et al, 2005; Haghirian et al, 2005; Waldt et al, 2009; Tsang et al, 2004; Funk, 2004; Haghirian et al, 2008; Ranjbarian et

al, 2012; Ahmadi et al, 2013; Heng et al, 2009; Liu et al, 2012; Krishnamorthy, 2000; Kassinen, 2003; Siau and Shen, 2003; Varshney, 2003; Chowdhury et al, 2006; Luo, 2002; Okazaki, 2004; Aitken et al, 2008; Pagani, 2004; Nasco and Gordon, 2008; Robins, 2003; Bahmanzaiari et al, 2003; Pavlou and Stewart, 2000; Stewart, 2002; Waldt et al, 2009; Goldsmith et al, 2000; Lafferty et al, 2002; Riecken, 2000; Easton, 2002; Kalakota and Robinson, 2001; Dezoysa, 2002; Yan, 2004; Varshney and Vetter, 2002; Robins, 2003; Fan and Gordon, 2005; Rao and Minakakis, 2003; Zhang, 2003; Stewart, 2002; Dickinger, 2005; Luo, 2002; Siau and Shen, 2003; Rust et al, 2002).

## VII. IMPLICATIONS

Despite these findings, SMS advertising has yet to hit its stride. Most consumers still do not have a very positive attitude towards SMS ads, and for this reason these ads remain largely ineffective. This can be seen in the results of this study that tested consumer attitudes toward SMS advertising; the average attitude towards SMS advertising was 2.973 out of a maximum positive of 5. This low score reflects the belief among the majority of consumers that SMS advertising is not entertaining (mean = 2.77), uninformative (mean = 3.33), not credible (mean = 2.46), not personalized (mean = 3.17), and irritating (mean = 3.44).

To improve the effectiveness of SMS advertising, marketers face the challenge of making SMS advertisements more palatable and likable to the majority of consumers. To be perceived positively, marketers need to ensure that their SMS advertisements possess the following characteristics:

- Management has to seriously consider the entertainment aspect of SMS advertisements by adding games, jokes, graphics, or catchy and memorable jingles to their ads. This will make the consumer feel they are interacting with a fun diversion, not reading an ad. And the consumer will be more likely to forward the message to friends, to save it on their phone and show friends, or to pass along the joke. All of this positive WOM can have a potent positive effect on consumer behavior, brand image, and general attitude to SMS marketing.
- Incorporating elements from pop culture, such as musicians, actors and athletes, as well as references to popular literature, music, and film will enhance the ads' attention-grabbing capacity. This, too, has the potential to make an SMS ad a talking-point among friends, especially young people, who all want to use the products their favorite celebrities and athletes use.
- To be informative, SMS ads should be designed in a way that conveys their promotional messages concisely. Using few words, mixing words with

images, and using sound will succeed in expressing the core message while sustaining consumer attention. People don't have the time to read long messages unless they include obvious attractive incentives.

- To be credible, SMS ads should be reasonable. They should promote products honestly, without resorting to exaggeration, in order to foster trust among consumers. This will have positive implications not only for the particular ad and product, but for overall receptivity of consumers to the brand, and to SMS advertising in general. It is the first and perhaps most essential step in developing a positive relationship with the consumer.
- Personalized messages are crucial in forming and strengthening the bonds of loyalty between consumers and brands. Companies need to possess comprehensive databases that contain relevant information about their target customers. When consumers receive only relevant SMS advertisements that speak to their interests, they will be more likely to read future ads from the same source. In addition, receiving ads at a convenient time increases the likelihood of the ad being read.
- Irritating a consumer can destroy the potential for SMS advertising to positively impact consumer attitudes and buying patterns. In a society where we are inundated with SPAM by way of emails, telemarketing phone calls, and even promotional paper mail, excessive SMS ads can be infuriating. Customers will feel harassed, will delete messages indiscriminately, without reading them, and will spread negative WOM about how annoying SMS ads are. Furthermore, sending ads en masse, without regards to the interests, demographics, or age group of the target audience, will result in spreading irritation, distrust, and frustration toward the product, the company, and the SMS advertising campaign at large.

In sum, placing the consumer needs and preferences at the foreground of any SMS advertising campaign is the most surefire way of achieving success.

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