

## An Exploratory Analysis of Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of SMS Advertising among young Bangladeshi Consumers

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*This paper aims to explore and conceptualize the factors that facilitate the success of SMS advertising campaigns and to understand the perception of the urban youth of Bangladesh regarding SMS advertising. An exploratory research approach is undertaken while embracing a qualitative research strategy. Furthermore, a focused group discussion method was utilized to collect data in order to establish the factors which enhance the effectiveness of SMS advertising. The findings of this research validate relevance, targeted & personalized messages, creative & informative content, monetary benefits, sales promotion, permission marketing, intrusiveness, mobile word of mouth and purchase intention as the factors which enhance SMS advertising effectiveness. Furthermore, this research paper establishes causal relationships between the aforementioned factors and provides new insights that affect SMS advertising effectiveness which were not conceptualized by previous scholars. The outcomes of this research paper provide significant insights to marketing managers to effectively communicate to the consumers by utilizing SMS advertising. This paper addresses a significant gap in the body of existing knowledge in the milieu of marketing communication by effectively establishing the factors which have an impact of SMS advertising effectiveness while also conceptualizing the inter-relationships between the factors.*

**Field of Research:** Mobile Marketing, SMS Advertising, Consumer Behavior.

### 1. Introduction

Marketing communication landscape is changing day by day. The internet and digital technologies have introduced new forms of communication where brands are being able to interact with consumers more and consumers themselves are having more responsibilities for their part in the communication process (Fill, 2009). Due to this, marketing managers are facing various challenges, especially in regards to choosing effective communication vehicles for advertising their products or services. As communication media are becoming more fragmented, at the same time it is providing new opportunities to reach the intended target customers, as well as making it more challenging (Singh, Veron-Jackson, & Cullinane, 2008). Clow and Baack (2011) mentioned several issues such as cost, media clutter, consumers' literacy, reach etc. as important factors that marketing managers should consider before choosing the right media.

Due to this phenomenon, marketing managers are searching opportunities in different new media. One of the media that has become popular in recent years is SMS advertising through mobile phones. SMS advertising is 160-character marketing messages that can

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be sent to target customer's mobile devices. Mobile medium has three special characteristics: location specificity, portability and untethered/wireless capabilities (Shankar & Balasubramanian, 2009). These characteristics are becoming important attributes for businesses to create competitive advantages, as it allows managers to communicate with their target customers at a particular time of an action being performed, in a particular location.

Different businesses in different countries have successfully implemented SMS advertising and have benefitted from its results. Many European countries such as UK, France, Germany, Spain and Italy have reported that SMS ads have reached to almost 40% of the target customers and nearly 25% of the total mobile audiences have been able to recall the ads (comScore, 2010). Businesses in some Asian countries such as China, Malaysia, Singapore etc. have reported that marketing techniques through mobile phones have grown rapidly and also have been quite successful (Rao, 2013).

In Bangladesh SMS advertising is becoming popular as well. Various businesses are sending SMS advertisements by collaborating with the mobile operators (The Financial Express, 2012). However, concern remains that whether the tactics used by the business managers and mobile operators are effective and the potential that SMS advertising have for businesses are being utilized properly or not. SMS advertising can potentially be a unique and successful way to reach its target customers. On the other hand, improper use of SMS advertising can degrade the brand image and also make the consumers dislike the brand (Rettie and Brum (2001). Hence, it is important to find out whether the marketing managers of Bangladesh are using SMS advertising effectively or not.

This research focuses on different factors that influence the effectiveness of mobile marketing messages. After a thorough literature review several factors were identified and through a qualitative analysis in terms of focus group discussion these factors were discussed with the participants. Findings of the focus group discussion provided valuable information regarding the dynamics that influence SMS advertising within the young consumers in Bangladesh, which were not discussed in earlier literatures. In addition, the results also highlight new insights concerning interdependent factors of SMS advertising. The outcomes of the research results will benefit different companies in Bangladesh and all over the world, by providing knowledge about the consumers' motivations and preferences regarding SMS advertising.

The next sections will identify the research objectives and carry out a thorough literature review in the context of SMS advertising. The outcomes of the literature review will then be analyzed through a focus group discussion, findings of which will provide greater insights regarding SMS advertising effectiveness in Bangladesh, which will be highlighted in the recommendation part.

## 2. Research Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore factors that are related to the success of SMS advertising campaigns and to understand the perception of the urban youth of Bangladesh regarding SMS advertising. Thus, the following research objectives are deduced:

RO1: Carry out a thorough literature review, to find out different factors that contribute to the success of SMS advertising.

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RO2: Carry out a qualitative analysis in terms of a focus group discussion to explore the perception of the urban youth of Bangladesh regarding SMS advertising and gain new insights regarding mobile marketing messages.

RO3: To find out whether there remains a gap between the strategies implemented by the businesses in Bangladesh in contrast to the strategies recommended by the authors of different researches.

Afterwards the results will be analyzed and guidelines will be provided for the businesses in Bangladesh to properly implement a robust SMS advertising strategy in their communication process and in turn enhance their promotional effectiveness.

### 3. Literature Review

As cellphone usage has grown significantly and rapid technological developments have taken place, new marketing communication media and tools are being developed and proving to be effective. These new technologies have introduced new opportunities for marketers to reach its customers and also personalize the communication process according to individual customer's preferences (Al-Meshal & Almotairi, 2013). SMS advertising is one of those technologies, which has been very successful. Businesses now can collaborate with the mobile operators and send consumers periodic messages using mobile phone technologies. Mobile marketing messages are interactive, low cost and can be personalized according to target customers' preference (Bob, 1989). Apart from that, SMS advertisements can be sent based on time and location, enabling managers to use this to communicate with the customers at the point of action (Wunker & Hughes, 2001). Due to this, Rask and Universitet (2001) describe SMS marketing as:

*'Your best salesman in the pocket of your best customer'*.

However, the success or effectiveness of an SMS advertising campaign depends on various factors. Different researchers have pointed out different factors that influence SMS advertising acceptance among consumers. A summary of different factors, which influence the success or effectiveness of SMS advertising are discussed below:

#### 3.1 Relevant, Targeted & Personalized Messages

For SMS advertising to be effective, several studies have stressed the importance of sending relevant messages to properly targeted audiences. Rettie, Grandcolas, and Deakins (2005) analyzed 26 different SMS campaigns and have found out several factors that make SMS advertising successful. One of those factors is relevance. Rettie et al. (2005) mentioned that to create interest among target customers the message needs to be relevant to their interest.

Scharl, Dickinger, and Murphy (2005) argued that targeted messages based on the consumers' profiles create more impact of SMS advertising. To create a personalized message as such requires a well-maintained database, in which customers' habits, interests and preferences will be stored. Sending messages according to customers' different likings such as their favorite music, hobbies, TV shows etc. will increase the effectiveness of the SMS advertising campaign. However, it is always difficult to obtain

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customer information, as they are sometimes unwilling to provide personal details due to privacy reasons (Barwise & Strong, 2002).

### **3.2 Using Creative & Informative Content**

Creative and informative content are more desired by the consumers, hence making this an important factor to be incorporated in SMS advertising. Doherty (2007) argued that consumers would accept mobile-based messages if they are relevant and have creative content. Haghirian and Madlberger (2005) also emphasized on advertising value and content of the message to be the success factors for SMS advertising. Especially when the target customers are the youth, messages should follow a conversational style such as used in instant messaging and also should be entertaining (Lee, 2002). Chowdhury, Parvin, Weitenberner, and Becker (2010) argued that creative and pleasing messages might entertain the consumers and consumers will not get annoyed with the messages. As mentioned earlier, out of the several factors that were deemed as important for SMS advertising found by Rettie et al. (2005) one was short and straight to the point and the other was funny and entertaining messages.

### **3.3 Monetary Benefits & Sales promotion Tactics to Increase Purchase Intention**

SMS advertising is usually used for making the consumers act upon something (Dickinger, Haghirian, Murphy, & Scharl, 2004). In most cases, it would be to induce the customers to buy the products. Andersson and Nilsson (2000) showed that, SMS advertising creates purchase intention among consumers. It can be argued that most recipients of SMS advertising will be reading the SMS. As the effect of the SMS advertising does not last long, it is imperative to induce the customers in some sort of action through the message as soon as possible, or else consumers might forget about the SMS contents (Dickinger et al., 2004).

(Rettie et al., 2005) have identified monetary incentives or different sorts of sales promotion tactics can be used to make SMS campaigns successful. Offers and benefits can be used to induce consumers to purchase products as well. Monetary benefits included in SMS messages ensure consumer acceptance further. A UK based survey of over thousand respondents found that, prizes and promotions, special offers and other monetary benefits make SMS campaigns more successful (Barwise & Strong, 2002). Dickinger et al. (2004) mentioned that, to keep the target market interested towards SMS advertising, it is important to send them periodic prizes, games and other interactive materials.

### **3.4 Permission Based SMS Advertising & Intrusiveness**

Permission based marketing is becoming more important nowadays. Consumers, who feel interested about different products and services and want to receive information and offers from those companies, will be opting in for their SMS advertising (Godin, 1999). Thus, consumers will be paying more attention to those SMS messages making the campaign more effective. Carroll, Barnes, Scornavacca, and Fletcher (2006) have stressed the importance of permission based SMS advertising as well. Their research concluded that, the main determinants of SMS advertising acceptance are permission, control and content. Peppers, Rogers, and Dorf (1999) argued that, permission based marketing is

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good for both customer and the company as marketers get more attentive audience and customers receive less irrelevant messages.

Different studies have focused on the negative aspects of SMS advertising. Out of those, most of the studies concluded that SMS advertising without obtaining permission is the root cause of creating negative perception in the consumers mind. Tsang, Ho, and Liang (2004) mentioned that, consumers had negative attitude regarding SMS messages and found the messages irritating and intrusive, as those were sent without permission. However, positive attitudes regarding SMS advertising were observed among consumers if the messages were sent after obtaining permission. While researching the role of SMS advertising in M-Commerce, Rettie and Brum (2001) found that, almost 90% of the respondent had negative attitude towards mobile messages that were sent without permission. Dickinger et al. (2004) defined unwanted messages as spam and have argued that spams are annoying to consumers irrespective of what media that they receive it from. Furthermore, consumers feel that spam messages are intrusive.

### 3.5 Mobile WOM

Another important aspect of SMS advertising is its viral effect of appealing text messages. Dickinger et al. (2004) mentioned that, recipients of mobile marketing messages might share it with their friends and family members if they find the message appealing. Godin (2001) argued that, this viral effect would amplify the possibility of making SMS campaign successful.

Mobile word of mouth encourages consumers to pass mobile messages from customer to customer. Pousttchi and Wiedemann (2006) argued that messages, which are passed along by the consumers due to having entertaining and informational value, are deemed as more credible than those, which comes directly from the self-interest advertiser.

Based on the above extant literatures it is evident that none of them focuses on Bangladesh market. In addition, little focus on specific target market such as the youth has been covered. This research will try to fill that gap by providing valuable information regarding mobile marketing messages in the Bangladesh market from the youth's perspective.

## 4. Methodology

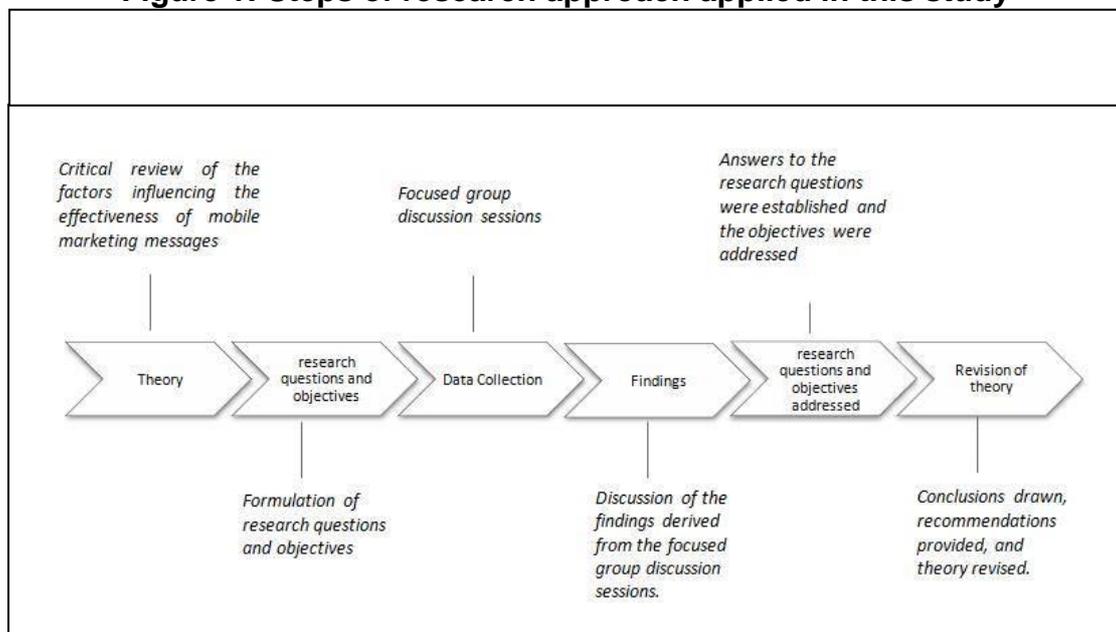
To analyse the effectiveness of mobile marketing messages in Bangladesh and to develop new insights in the existing knowledge of mobile marketing, a qualitative research method in terms of focus group discussion was chosen. The authors of this paper employed a qualitative research approach due to the following significant reasons: i) Research related to mobile marketing especially in the Bangladesh market is very limited, hence deeper understanding of the research context to uncover new insights and to understand consumer motivation and feelings is of paramount importance.(McDaniel & Gates, 1998)ii) Findings from the qualitative analysis will provide the foundation for a future quantitative analysis to generalize the research results (Saunders, Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2011). iii) To test the causal relationship between the factors relevance, creative and informative content, monetary benefits and purchase intention, permission based messages and intrusiveness and mobile WOM of mobile marketing communication and communication effectiveness.

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In consequence, this research reflects a mixed ontological, philosophical view of objectivism and subjectivism as the authors of this paper will work with an observable theoretical reality within the milieu of integrated marketing communications (Burke, 2007) while also striving to create and re-create theory to further facilitate the understanding of effective mobile marketing communication (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Furthermore, a combination of research approaches encapsulating both deductive and inductive research development are applied in this study as the authors of this paper critically reviewed the literature encompassing mobile marketing communication which led to the formulation of the theoretical framework (Hart, 1998) while also building new theory which is derived during the data collection phase (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Consequently, in relation to the particular domain of theoretical considerations (Gill & Johnson, 2002), the research questions and objectives were deduced.

Figure 1 illustrates the steps taken in this process.

**Figure 1: Steps of research approach applied in this study**



Additionally, the purpose of this paper signifies exploratory research as it seeks not only to validate existing theory but also investigate new insights and evaluate the theory of mobile marketing communication in a new light in the context of the Bangladeshi market (Robson, 2002). In consequence, this research embraces a qualitative research strategy due to the nature of the research purpose, research approach and the research questions and objectives.

In accordance with McDaniel and Gates (1998) a sample size of 10 university level students was selected for the focus group discussion. Students were carefully selected prior to the focus group discussion. Those who are already receiving SMS advertising from various businesses and have good knowledge about the corporate world of Bangladesh were chosen, as they would provide better insights of mobile marketing related activities for the research. Also the factor of open mindedness, honesty and story telling ability was kept into consideration, as these traits according to Creswell (2012), were important for qualitative analysis.

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Standardized open-ended questions were developed for the focus group discussion. Standardized open-ended questions are structured questions prepared before the interview/focus group is conducted (Turner, 2010). The questions were derived from thorough literature review conducted prior to the focus group discussion. Researchers in different articles have argued different factors that need to be incorporated in SMS advertising to make it successful. Also they have indicated different factors that may degrade the brand image and cause irritation among the consumers. Questions derived from these researches were provided to the participants, and these acted as the main questions. As respondents answered each main question, different probing questions were asked to the participants regarding their answers. Probing questions are important to stimulate the respondents to produce more information (Bernard, 2011). Hence, it proved to be valuable to enable the researchers to explore the factors involved with SMS advertising in-depth.

A classroom in the university was chosen as the venue for the focus group discussion. In addition, proper measurement was taken to make the respondents comfortable, which is important to conduct a focus group discussion (Delgado, 2006). According to McDaniel and Gates (1998), trained moderators should lead the focus group discussion. Two interviewers conducted the focus group discussion, one leading the questions while the other taking notes. Both interviewers later transcribed the findings, coded, categorized and summarized the data for analysis purpose. The analysis combined with the literature review has been presented later in this paper.

It is important to carry out a qualitative analysis for this research as in Bangladesh SMS advertising is quite new. Consumers are unaware about its potential, and marketing managers are using it without following effective strategies. A focus group discussion will allow people to share what they think about the SMS advertising, conducted by the businesses in Bangladesh, also why they think in that way. According to (Delgado, 2006) the focus groups, conducted with the youth, can generate new aspects of the topic in question, which can often be missed by other research methods.

## 5. Main Findings

The focus group analysis has provided some valuable insights regarding the factors involved with the success of SMS advertising campaigns. In addition, the analysis uncovered new insights perceived by the urban youth of Bangladesh regarding SMS advertising.

### 5.1 Individual Factors and Related Factors

#### 5.1.1 Relevance and Targeted Messages

Throughout the discussion, it was obvious that relevance and targeted messages are the most important factors perceived by the participants. The discussion concluded that if the mobile marketing messages are not relevant to the target audience then it is perceived as uninteresting, intrusive and sometimes annoying. Relevance has been pointed out to be a crucial factor for SMS advertising by Grandcolas, and Deakins (2005) and Doherty (2007) as well. However, not all of the mobile marketing messages sent by Bangladeshi companies were relevant to the target audience. The focus group discussion revealed that, a lot of the messages were irrelevant to the participants. For example messages sent

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by particular banks, real estate companies and government were deemed as irrelevant and the target market were somebody else rather than the urban youth. On the other hand, some messages were relevant and the target audience found it important.

### 5.1.2 Personalized message

Personalized message, as pointed out by Scharl et al. (2005), were highly aspired by the target audience. However, almost none of the participants have received messages that are personalized. Only one Tobacco Company sends relevant personalized message to one of the participants, which made the participant highly impressed, also attached to the company.

### 5.1.3 Information, Creativity and Benefits

Most of the SMS sent by Bangladeshi companies were informative, but lacked in creativity. However, creative SMS which were pointed out by Doherty (2007) were not perceived as very important to the participants.

Participants observed most of the messages were providing monetary benefits and different sales promotion tactics hence increasing the intention to purchase the product. This phenomenon has been mentioned by different literatures as well (Andersson & Nilsson, 2000; Dickinger & Kleijnen, 2008; Rettie et al., 2005). However, relevance played a big factor in terms of how these monetary benefits were perceived as useful. Participants mentioned that, if the message or product category is not relevant then the monetary benefits played no role in terms of purchase intention. So a relation between monetary benefits, relevance and purchase intention were observed. Also the size of the monetary benefits was mentioned in the discussion. Participants argued that most offers are not lucrative enough to induce them to purchase the product. However, some offers such as rewards at the end of the month were perceived as useful. This is because; students' budget runs short at the end of the month thus, different offers seem more lucrative at that time.

### 5.1.4 Permission

Permission, as mentioned by Carroll et al. (2006), Peppers et al. (1999) etc., plays a vital role in the success of SMS advertising. Participants argued that, none of the mobile advertisers in Bangladesh have asked their permission to send them SMS messages. Even, participants were interested to know, from where the mobile marketers got their mobile numbers. Significant discontent was observed among some of the participants regarding SMS sent to their mobile phones without permission. As Tsang et al. (2004) & Rettie and Brum (2001) mentioned, sending SMS without permission created severe negative perception regarding some companies among the participants. However, some of the SMS campaigns did not create negative perception even though permission was not sought. Participants felt that as those offers or products were relevant to them, they were not unhappy to receive those SMS; some of the SMS were helpful even.

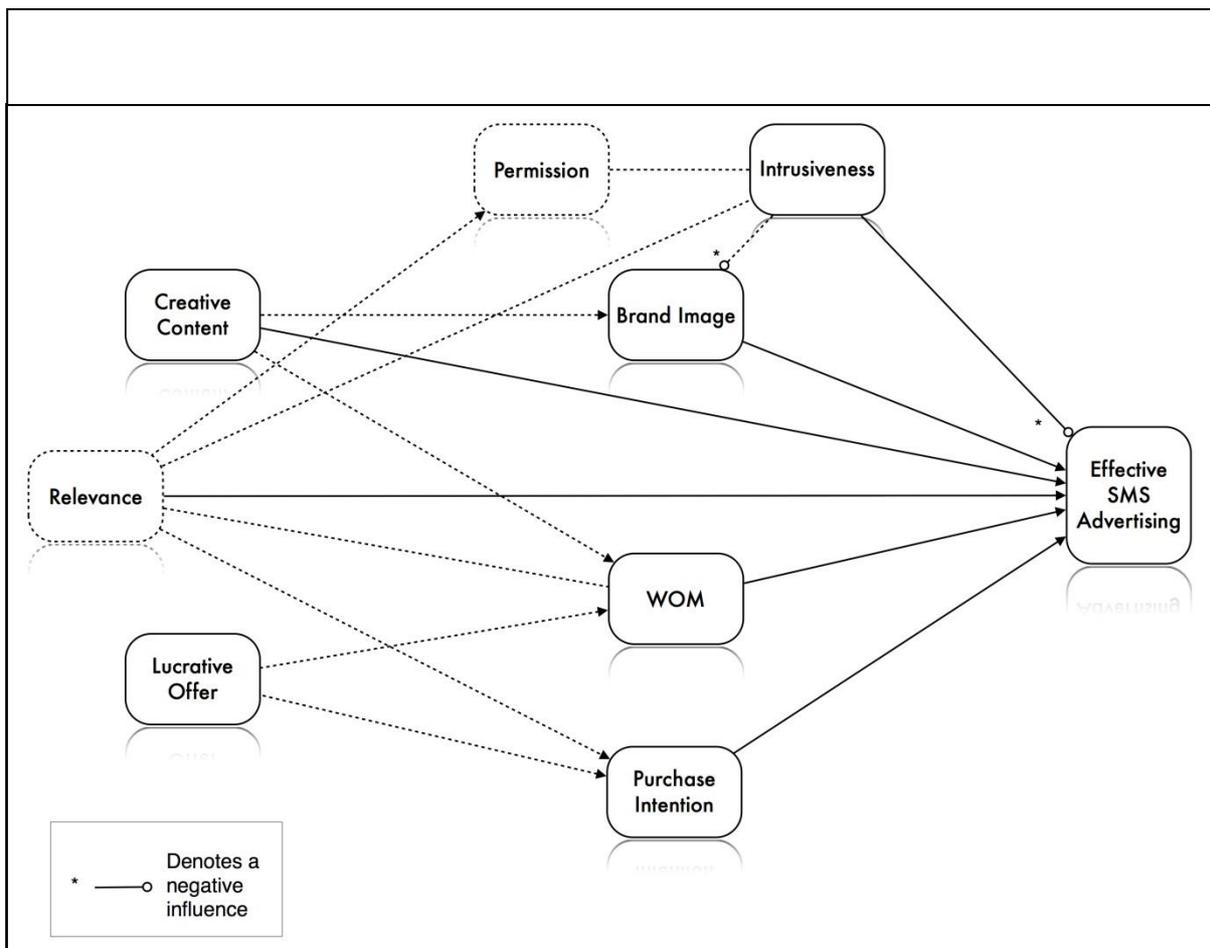
In this issue a relation between permission, relevance and brand image was observed. Even though none of the companies sought permission, messages that were relevant to the participants were not perceived as negative. Where as messages that were not relevant were perceived as annoying and intrusive. It also degraded the companies' brand image.

5.1.5 Sharing

In terms of sharing SMS messages, some of the participants mentioned that, they have shared some of the messages with their family members. However, sharing was done only by face-to-face conversation and not by forwarding the original message. Messages which were highly relevant or creative or had lucrative offers were shared with friends and families. So a relation between relevance, creative content, lucrative offer and WOM were derived from the focus group discussion.

So the focus group discussion revealed different relations with the factors,

Figure 2: Factors affecting SMS advertising effectiveness.



Also the importance of these factors was observed in terms of making SMS advertising successful. Figure 1 illustrates the relation between the factors and the success of mobile marketing campaigns.

5.2 New Insights

Apart from the insights gained by using the factors discussed in the literature review, some new insights were also gained from the focus group discussion. These insights provided valuable information about the perception of the youth in Bangladesh regarding SMS advertising, which literatures didn't cover. These insights are discussed below.

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A factor regarding timing has been discussed by one of the participants. In the weekends, some SMS advertisers, especially those who are related to grocery shopping, send mobile messages early in the morning. As the younger generation is not the target market for grocery shopping and might be sleeping at that time, these messages cause great annoyance within this group and also degrade their brand image. Hence, mobile advertisers should be cautious about the time when they are sending the messages.

Another finding was regarding the way of asking permission. Participants argued that, mobile marketer can send them initial sample SMS to make them understand whether they feel the importance of that kind of SMS or not. Later, companies can ask for permission by simply asking customers to opt in. Participants further argued that a way of opting out should be introduced as well.

Another interesting finding from the focus group discussion was the issue of deleting messages. Most of the participants agreed that they have a habit of deleting mobile marketing messages, even sometimes without reading the messages. Some companies send messages very frequently. The participants mentioned that this is very annoying and most of them delete these messages even without reading the content. However, if messages are sent from those companies whom the participants are not annoyed with, and find the messages important and relevant, then they will be willing to read the whole message.

Overall the focus group discussion resulted in different findings. Findings related to the young consumers of Bangladesh have been discussed above. The focus group was successful in terms of providing data which can later be used in different quantitative analysis.

## 6. Recommendations

The literature review and the focus group discussion have provided valuable insights regarding the SMS culture of Bangladeshi companies, perception of the urban youth regarding SMS advertising and what companies should do to make SMS advertising more successful. From the analysis, it is obvious that there remains a gap between theory and practice of SMS advertising and the mobile marketers should address these gaps to make their SMS campaigns more effective. Some of the recommendations regarding reducing this gap is mentioned below:

- It is of paramount importance to send SMS advertisements to targeted group of people. Mobile marketers should collaborate with mobile operators or update their own customer database to send messages to relevant target market rather than random people who are not their potential customers.
- Messages should be informative and if possible creative. Messages should provide such information which increases purchase intention. Offers and monetary benefits will help to achieve this, however the size of the benefit should be lucrative enough to gain the attention of the customers.
- SMS advertisers should seek permission before sending messages. An innovative tactic will be to send the customers a few sample SMS and then ask permission. Also an-opt out system should be provided. Absence of these techniques will cause annoyance within the customers and degradation of brand image.
- SMS advertisers should prevent themselves from sending too many messages. Frequent messages annoy the recipients and also degrade the brand image.

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- Companies should always seek ways to improve their customer database. Customer data, their likings and preferences will help SMS advertisers to send personalized messages which will make the customers satisfied and also loyal to the company. However, annoyance and intrusiveness might make the customers dislike the brand and turn away from any future purchases.

### 7. Future Research Avenue

The sample taken in this research paper encompasses only on the urban youth of Bangladesh. Hence, an area of future research is to take a broader heterogeneous sample in order to generalize the findings throughout the Bangladeshi market. Furthermore, this research paper utilizes focus group techniques in order to explore and establish the factors which enhance the effectiveness of SMS advertising in Bangladesh. In consequence, an agenda for future research is to utilize a quantitative research strategy and further examine the factors conceptualized in this research paper in order to facilitate generalizability, causality, measurement, and replication (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

### 8. Conclusion

To the best knowledge of the authors of this paper, there has been no research conducted on the effectiveness of SMS advertising in Bangladesh. Hence, this research addresses a gap in the literature by examining the factors which influence the effectiveness of SMS advertising in Bangladesh. Furthermore, this research also reveals new insights that influence SMS advertising effectiveness which were previously not conceptualized in the existing literature which further augments the originality and value of this research paper. In consequence, the authors of this paper provide valuable recommendations to organizations that utilize SMS advertising to communicate with their consumers. Additionally, this research paper reveals inter-relationships between the factors which affect SMS advertising effectiveness which were crystallized during the data collection phase. The causal relationships originated from this research paper further address a gap in the existing literature and provide significant insights to marketing managers on how to effectively utilize SMS as a medium of communication.

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