
Mobile Marketing Strategies for Permission-based Communication: Insights into the consumer behavior of Romanian users

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ABSTRACT

In an ever evolving technology dominated world, consumers and companies change their communication needs and wants. With a marketing-oriented new generation of customers, marketers must adopt new forms of efficient and targeted delivery of their message. Mobile marketing promises a direct one-to-one approach and a targeted commercial message, but, to be really appreciated by the customers, it needs their permission for a direct communication. The acceptance of customers depends on their level of trust in the company, due to the fact that mobile phones are one of the most personal devices and mobile marketing is using them as their communication channel. The purpose of this article is to synthesize the criteria for permission-based communication between companies and consumers. By establishing a constant bilateral communication flow with its customers, a company can leverage the interaction with its clients to new levels of trust and engagement.

Keywords: *mobile marketing, permission-based communication, client satisfaction, bilateral communication*

1. INTRODUCTION TO MOBILE MARKETING

The mobile phone has become an ubiquitous mobile device that has known a rapid proliferation around the world, having been adopted independently of demographics and geographical location of people, which made it become „the only universal device” (Ahonen, 2008). Due to a growth of the market and the use of new technologies and their convergences, companies have explored new opportunities for marketing their products and services (Bamba, Barnes, 2007). Although a number of scholars have argued that only the acceptance of the mobile phone itself can influence customers’ adoption of mobile marketing (Roach, 2009), advertisers and marketers are eager to expand their advertising campaigns beyond traditional media channels, by exploring the personal, interactive and ubiquitous features that mobile phones provide (Cuneo, 2006). The advertising industry is therefore very interested in using mobile devices such as mobile phones as a medium for communicating their commercial contents (Bauer, Barnes, Reichardt, Neumann, 2005).

The relationships between consumers and marketers are interactions where every part wants to satisfy their own goal, goals that neither part can fulfill individually (Stewards, Pavlou, 2002), meaning that marketers can influence the customer behavior, but the customer can also influence the marketer’s behavior (Pavlou, Stewart, 2000). The mobile marketing channel offers an immediate and interactive response from the customer, by reaching him everywhere and anytime (Jelassi, Enders, 2004) due to the large diffusion of mobile phones.

Today’s consumers want a tailored content of mobile services (Robins, 2003) on their mobile phones, underlining thereby the importance they give to personalization in mobile marketing (Watson *et. all*, 2000). Consequently, customers are very sensitive when receiving messages on their mobile phones from unknown persons or companies (Haghirian, Madlberger, Tanuskova, 2005). By asking customers for their permission to receive mobile marketing commercial messages and offering them an opt-out option, customers may feel very much in control over their mobile device, thus perceiving less risk when providing permission (Jayawardhena, Kuckertz, Karjaluo, Kautonen, 2009). Respecting customers privacy means including four elements in a

mobile marketing campaign: necessity (of the user), finality (added value), transparency (giving them the option to opt-out whenever they need to) and proportionality (of sending commercial messages) (Cleff, 2010).

Advertisers should always try to strike a balance between effective advertising and not invading the privacy of mobile phone users (Kennedy, 2006), because the key to successful mobile advertising is that it should not be intrusive (Andrews, 2006). If the customer is interrupted in her or his daily activities, this can damage the brand image (Hoyer, MacInnis, 2004), because for many users, receiving mobile commercial messages on their mobile phone is not desirable (Soroa-Koury, Yang, 2010). Only when mobile advertising is perceived by the customer as easy and useful, then they will likely adopt it (Verkantesh, David, 2000).

Liking and accepting mobile advertising is not sufficient for a company that provides these services. For effective mobile marketing, consumers must be engaged in the advertising campaign, because „engagement is a stronger state of connectedness” than mere liking (van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nass, Pick, Pimer, Verhoef, 2010). Positive customer engagement has positive consequences for the company, both financial and nonfinancial, as well as short and long term (van Doorn et. all, 2010). In spite of that, academic attention towards customer engagement is limited (van Doorn et. all, 2010).

By summarizing the models and theories related to SMS permission marketing (Bamba, Barnes, 2007), one can conclude that the influential factors are: brand trust, permission, message content (Barnes, Scornavacca, 2003; Carroll, Barnes, Scornavacca, 2005); message content, message personalization, consumers’ control and privacy (Dickinger, Scharl, Murphy, 2005); consumers’ attitude toward advertising, perceived utility, perceived risk, social norms, and consumers existing knowledge (Bauer, Barnes, Neumann, Reichardt, 2005). Taking into account that mobile marketing now provides much more services than the „classic” SMS marketing, do these factors influence mobile application? And are they applicable on the Romanian customers that are involved in mobile marketing campaigns?

2. RESEARCH

The new generation of today’s consumers are very marketing-oriented and very specific about their needs and wants. The older media channels are not appealing to them, forcing marketers to search for newer communication channels to engage consumers in the campaigns of a specific company. Mobile marketing is a new marketing form, using the mobile phone and other mobile devices to interact with the end-user. Given the fact that mobile phones are considered to be one of the most personal devices, mobile marketing is perceived as risky to one’s personal privacy. By building a solid level of trust, companies can ask for the acceptance of customers to be involved in a mobile marketing campaign. To this aim, the purpose of this article is to synthesize the criteria for permission-based communication between companies and consumers.

2.1 Research methodology

In line with the purpose of this article, the main objectives of this study analyse following aspects, by pursuing to:

- (i) establish the specific criteria that make consumers accept SMS marketing from a company;
- (ii) establish the specific criteria that make consumers accept a mobile application on their mobile phone from a company;
- (iii) establish the specific criteria of a mobile marketing communication that will initiate a dialog between the consumer and the company;
- (iv) determine the most important criteria for permission-based communication.

This study has an exploratory nature, due to the fact that mobile marketing is globally a very new marketing form and information about permission-based communication is just in its infancy. The exploratory character of this research was the most adequate choice when observing the lack of studies on mobile marketing end-users, as well as on the behavior of Romanian customers involved in mobile marketing campaigns.

514 respondents (illustrated in Table 7.) took part in this research and have completed the online survey with 26 logically arranged questions. All participants were Romanian aged over 16 years that are Facebook and Internet users. Every respondent was the owner of at least one mobile phone, even if this was not a pre-condition to participate in the study. The online survey was the most adequate choice for a mobile marketing research, taking into account that many participants forwarded the link of the survey-page to their friends and peers: due to the „snow-ball effect” it created, more participants were excited to be part of this research.

All 26 questions of the online survey were mandatory and were about the usage of mobile phones and the behavior of Romanian when involved in a mobile marketing campaign. The survey took up to ten minutes for full completion and was created online with Google Docs, assuring a high number of respondents in a relatively short time period (24.04.2012 – 30.04.2012).

The collected data from the 514 participants in the study was centralized and then grouped in specific themes to be analysed. For a quicker evaluation, the already themed data was coded. The program used for data analysis was SPSS.

2.2 Analysis of the research results

2.2.1 Consumers attitude towards commercial messages received on their mobile phone

A clever message is the main element that draws attention to a specific commercial message, followed by more relevant information contained in the received message. Clever commercial messages are significantly more important for respondents with a monthly income of more than 3500 RON.

The design of a commercial message is significantly higher for younger respondents (16-25 years). The emotional tone of a message is significantly more important for the respondents that are over 35 years old.

Analysing the respondents’ answers one can conclude that there are different needs for specific age groups, younger respondents preferring an interesting design, whereas older respondents prefer firstly ingenuity and then a more emotional tone to the commercial message. Thus, as shown in Table 1, targeting accordingly to specific age groups is very important for a company that aims successful SMS campaigns.

2.2.2 Factors that influence a consumer to reply to an interesting commercial message

Most respondents, regardless of gender, age and income, would reply to a commercial message if they would find it interesting. Thus, the fear of many companies considering that sending SMS is regarded as Spam would be substantially reduced, if, firstly, consumer would be asked for permission to receive commercial messages in form of SMS, and, secondly, if those commercial messages would be targeted by criteria such as age and needs of the consumer. Very fine targeting is one of the greatest advantages of mobile marketing and should be used as such. Figure 1 illustrates the availability of respondents to reply to an interesting message.

2.2.3 Specific elements that define a mobile application as being accepted by the consumer

Romanian respondents download, on average, one mobile application per week. Participants in the research aged 16-25 years and male respondents download, on average, significantly more applications than other respondents (two mobile applications per week). Mobile applications are a very new component of mobile marketing, leaving many Romanian companies without an application for mobile phones designed especially for them. The discharge rate is low at this time, but with the increasing number of smartphones on the market and their easy internet connection, mobile application will rise to new levels of interest – both for consumers and for companies.

Personal utility is the most important criteria when choosing a mobile application, being appreciated to a greater extent from those respondents owning a mobile phone, having an Internet connection and downloading more application on a weekly basis. The implicitly purpose of a mobile application is to facilitate the access to various information for the user, whether this information is related to the weather or recent global stock market

indicators. It is therefore normal that utility is the first criteria when selecting those mobile applications to be downloaded in a mobile phone. Criteria for choosing a mobile application are shown in Table 2.

The next criteria, situated much lower than the first one, is the gratuitousness of a mobile application, meaning that its download is free of charge. This criteria is appreciated to a greater extent by those aged under 35 years. In most cases, mobile application are available free of charge in their simpler version, whilst the more complex version is charged. Even so, in most cases, the actual download of a mobile application is situated between 1 and 15 USD – on the Romanian market there are very few local mobile application to determine a cost range. If one person needs access to many information available in more mobile application, then, implicitly, the cost of download - when not free of charge – can increase exponentially. Therefore, the need of respondents to have access to free of charge mobile application is understandable. However, one must take into account that this criterion is not the first mentioned and that is it far from utility – the most mentioned criterion for downloading a mobile application.

Other criteria for mobile application selection for download, appreciated to a greater extent by those who download between 1 to 5 mobile applications weekly, are cleverness and popularity among peers and friends. Cleverness is definitely appreciated more by younger respondents (16-25 years) and by those with an income lower than 1 500 RON, whereas popularity among peers and friends is appreciated to a greater extent by respondents aged under 35 years and owners of smartphones with Internet access, as illustrated in Table 3.

If a friend or a peer of the respondent is very excited about the advantages he or she has by using their mobile phone as a communication tool with a company, most respondents would agree to participate out of curiosity. The great influence of friends is explained by the trust they provide for that specific company, making newcomers in that particular campaign or data base feel safe in their new stance. More than that, friends and peers have more influence on others because they usually share the same interests and needs as the respondent.

Participants in the research who considered that popularity among peers and friends is an important criterion to choosing a specific mobile application stated to a greater extent that if the company could persuade another friend before them, then they could be persuaded too, or they would get more information on that specific matter.

2.2.4 Most important criterion to accepting bilateral communication with a company through the mobile phone
Three quarters of the respondents in this study would accept a mobile application on their mobile phone from a specific company, if this application would facilitate their access to a personalized treatment (events invitations, precious tips, customizes products). Participants aged less than 35 years are significantly more open to accepting mobile applications than the older age groups. This outcome can be explained by the fact that young people have a greater knowledge of new technologies, being more interested in the benefits this new technologies can provide. The correlation between the excitement of friends and peers about the advantages of using their mobile phone as a communication tool with a company and the decision of the involved person is shown in Tables 4 and 5.

The most important criterion in accepting communication with a company through a mobile device is respecting ones privacy need, as illustrated in Table 6. The mobile phone is a very personal communication tool, meaning every abuse through this channel will cause a blockage of communication from the consumer part. The greater the respect of a company for its customers privacy, the more open the consumer will be to the received messages.

Of those respondents that want a personalized communication, significantly more participants find that exclusive information and message customization are important criteria in accepting to communicate through the mobile phone with a company. Of those respondents that do not want a personalized communication, the most important criteria in accepting the communication through the mobile phone with a specific company are the respect of their privacy and a felt connection with that company (they have to “like” it).

2.3 Limits of the research

The limits of the research, besides the sample size that cannot be representative for the wholeness of the Romanian people owning a mobile phone, is the fact that in an online survey of 26 question, one can never address all the important aspect connected to accepting a bilateral communication from a company through the use of a mobile phone.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Given the fact that more than half of the participants would reply to an interesting commercial message received on their mobile phone, another question was addressed in order to establish the criteria that can transform a simple commercial message to one that generates responses. The main criterion that draws attention to a commercial message is cleverness, followed by more relevant information for the customer. These two criteria are the ones that determine the user to react to a commercial message that they receive on their mobile phone. To a lesser extent, design has an influence on the consumer (significantly higher for those aged 16-25 years), as well as an emotional tone of the message (significantly higher for people over 35 years). Thus, these marginal age categories have very clear preferences about what they expect from a commercial message, this indicating that age is an important element in targeting a commercial message: the “hook” that will make respondents react is not the same for each age group. Customization of the commercial message, cleverness and relevant information for the consumer are those criteria that initiate a dialogue between consumer and company.

On average, the participants in this study download a mobile application weekly, whereas those aged 16-25 and male respondents download, on average, two mobile applications per week. This way of communicating between a company and its customer is still relatively new on the Romanian market, with very few mobile applications that were developed locally. However, the mobile application market for local companies is expected to expand, meaning that the number of such applications will grow.

Elements that determine the download of mobile application from the respondents’ perspective are: personal utility, gratuitousness and access to personalized treatment. Three quarters of the participants in this research have stated that they would accept or download a mobile application from a company if this application would facilitate access to a personalized treatment. The need for customization is very high, acceptance being conditioned by two different types of customization: personalized treatment and personal utility for the consumer.

Due to the fact that mobile applications have emerged with the rise of smartphones, it is not uncommon that they are more appreciated by smartphone owners and by those that have already downloaded mobile applications. The implicitly purpose of a mobile application is keeping the customer informed; therefore the personal utility is an important criterion in the consumers’ choice. Gratuitousness is another criterion that facilitates the download of a mobile application in the user’s mobile phone. Given that the user already pays the mobile phone services and the data transfer, they will appreciate companies that make free of charge mobile application available.

If for SMS receiving cleverness was the first mentioned criterion, when it comes to mobile applications, cleverness is appreciated to a greater extent by those aged 16-25 years. Popularity among peers and friends is not necessary an element that determines bilateral communication between a company and its customers, because it was situated at the end of the criteria list. Users prefer personal advantages, such as utility and gratuitousness, when downloading a mobile application.

Summarizing, one can say that the two most important criteria for involving a consumer in a mobile marketing campaign are the respecting of the consumers privacy and sharing exclusive information. 72.63% of respondents mentioned that the respect of their privacy is the most important criterion for accepting the communication with a company: access to the consumers’ personal data must be treated with great responsibility, because mobile phones and its belonging data are considered very personal information for the consumer.

Due to the fact that the mobile phone has become an ubiquitous communication tool in everyone's life and given the respondents attachment and dependence on this tool, any lack of adequate and responsible treatment from the company will only lead to the disruption of the bilateral communication or even to the consumer developing negative feelings towards the company. Access to exclusive information is the second most important criterion, with 37.63%, whereas 34.74% respondents considered the personalization of the commercial message an important criterion.

Every company must therefore be careful in selecting their own database, as well as having an appropriate use of customers' personal data. Managers should pay close attention to creating the data base of the company's customers and try to target them according to age, income and other important selection criteria. The vast majority of clients will engage in a bilateral communication if they have personal advantages from this association, meaning that they will have access to exclusive information or offers. Customers will also value the personalization of the communication, as well as its gratuitousness. But, the most important implication for a company's manager is that the ability to give customers the guarantee of privacy in a mobile marketing campaign will assure a constant communication flow with them, leveraging the customer relationship management to new levels of trust and fidelity.

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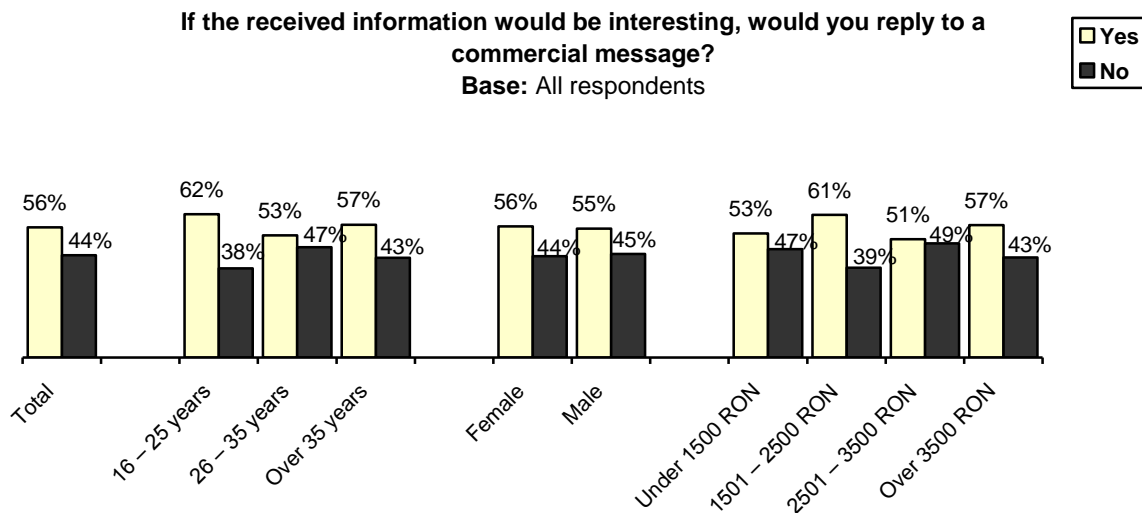
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Figure 1 – Availability of respondents to reply to an interesting message.



List of tables ○ Significantly higher than ○ At a confidence interval of 95%

Table 1: Characteristics of commercial messages that make respondents read them

	Total	A clever message	More relevant information	An interesting design	An emotional message
Total	514	53.11%	40.86%	24.32%	7.20%
16 – 25 years	159	54.72%	39.62%	34.59%	5.03%
26 – 35 years	278	54.68%	39.93%	19.78%	6.83%
Over 35 years	77	44.16%	46.75%	19.48%	12.99%
Female	301	55.81%	42.19%	22.59%	8.31%
Male	213	49.30%	38.97%	26.76%	5.63%
Under 1500 RON	135	53.33%	38.52%	27.41%	5.93%
1501 – 2500 RON	145	51.03%	42.07%	22.76%	8.97%
2501 – 3500 RON	104	47.12%	44.23%	24.04%	4.81%
Over 3500 RON	130	60.00%	39.23%	23.08%	8.46%

Significantly higher than At a confidence interval of 95%

Table: 2. The most important criteria when choosing a mobile application

	Total	Age			Monthly income			
		16 – 25 years	26 – 35 years	Over 35 years	Under 1500 RON	1501 – 2500 RON	2501 – 3500 RON	Over 3500 RON
Total	514	159	278	77	135	145	104	130
Personal utility	81.13%	79.25%	81.29%	84.42%	79.26%	78.62%	84.62%	83.08%
Gratuitousness	41.83%	47.17%	42.45%	28.57%	45.93%	40.69%	44.23%	36.92%
Cleverness	19.46%	29.56%	16.19%	10.39%	28.15%	13.10%	17.31%	19.23%
Popularity among peers and friends	10.12%	10.69%	11.87%	2.60%	8.15%	9.66%	9.62%	13.08%
Interesting design	6.42%	8.18%	6.12%	3.90%	5.19%	4.14%	6.73%	10.00%

 Significantly higher than  At a confidence interval of 95%

Table: 3. The criteria for mobile application download depending on type of mobile phone, Internet connection and number of weekly downloaded applications

	Total	Smartphones owners		Internet access from the mobile phone		How many mobile application do you download weekly?	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	0	between 1 and 5
Total	514	311	203	347	130	304	198
Personal utility	81.13%	90.03%	67.49%	86.74%	66.15%	74.01%	91.41%
Gratuitousness	41.83%	38.59%	46.80%	38.33%	45.38%	44.08%	37.88%
Cleverness	19.46%	20.90%	17.24%	21.61%	15.38%	11.84%	28.79%
Popularity among peers and friends	10.12%	14.47%	3.45%	13.26%	1.54%	5.59%	15.15%
Interesting design	6.42%	8.36%	3.45%	7.20%	5.38%	4.28%	7.58%

 Significantly higher than  At a confidence interval of 95%

Table: 4. Correlation between the excitement of friends and peers about the advantages of using their mobile phone as a communication tool with a company and the decision of the person involved

		What is the most important criteria when choosing to download a mobile application?				
	Total	Cleverness	Personal utility	Popularity among peers and friends	Interesting design	Gratisness
Total	514	100	417	52	33	215
Maybe because of curiosity	54.86%	66.00%	55.88%	57.69%	54.55%	53.02%
Yes, I trust my friends tastes	17.90%	22.00%	18.23%	25.00%	27.27%	15.35%
No, there is too much technology involved	16.73%	5.00%	15.11%	11.54%	9.09%	20.00%
No	5.45%	7.00%	5.04%	5.77%	9.09%	6.98%
If they could persuade another friend before, then I would try	4.09%	3.00%	4.32%	13.46%	6.06%	6.05%
I need more information	1.75%	0.00%	2.16%	3.85%	0.00%	0.47%
Others	1.36%	2.00%	1.68%	1.92%	6.06%	1.40%
Personal decision	1.17%	1.00%	1.44%	0.00%	3.03%	0.93%
If it is to my advantage	1.17%	1.00%	1.44%	1.92%	0.00%	1.86%
Depends on the company and the quality of products	0.78%	1.00%	0.96%	1.92%	0.00%	1.40%

 Significantly higher than  At a confidence interval of 95%

Table: 5. Influence of personalized treatment from a company on the acceptance of mobile phone application from customer

	Total	Age (years)		
		16 – 25	26 – 35	Peste 35
Total	514	159	278	77
Yes	74%	79%	74%	62%
No	26%	21%	26%	38%

 Significantly higher than  At a confidence interval of 95%

Table: 6. The criterion considered most important to accept communication through the mobile phone with a specific company.

		If that mobile application would facilitate a personalized treatment from the company, would you accept it on your mobile phone?	
	Total	Yes (a)	No (b)
Total	514	380	134
Respect of ones privacy	73.74%	72.63%	76.87%
Exclusive information	32.68%	37.63%	18.66%
Message personalization	30.74%	34.74%	19.40%
I just have to like the company	15.95%	15.53%	17.16%

Table: 7. Respondents' profile

<p>Gender (n=514)</p> <p>Male 41,44%</p> <p>Female 58,56%</p> <p>TOTAL 100%</p>	<p>Residence area (n=514)</p> <p>Bucharest 65,76%</p> <p>Transylvania 21,60%</p> <p>Muntenia / Oltenia 8,37%</p> <p>Moldova 2,92%</p> <p>Dobrogea 1,36%</p> <p>TOTAL 100%</p>
<p>Age (n=514, 0 lipsă)</p> <p>16-25 years 30,93%</p> <p>26-35 years 54,09%</p> <p>36-45 years 12,06%</p> <p>Over 45 years 2,92%</p> <p>TOTAL 100%</p>	<p>Venit lunar (n=514, 0 lipsă)</p> <p>Under 1500 RON 26,26%</p> <p>1501 – 2500 RON 28,21%</p> <p>2501 – 3500 RON 20,23%</p> <p>Over 3500 RON 25,29%</p> <p>TOTAL 100%</p>