



The effects of product involvement and impulse buying on purchase intentions in mobile text advertising



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ABSTRACT

While research in mobile advertising is abundant, limited attention has been paid to date to how consumers respond to mobile advertisements for different product categories and in which way impulsivity affects intentions to purchase. In this paper, we study the dimensionality of the product involvement construct and its effects on consumers' purchase intentions via a simulated field experiment ($N = 736$). We show that the cognitive dimension of product involvement and impulsiveness significantly affect purchase intentions. We also present that the relationship between product involvement and purchase intention is moderated by the consumers' impulse buying personality traits. These findings progress the current state-of-the-art in mobile advertising research, while also having significant practical consequences for the design of effective mobile SMS advertising campaigns.

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1. Introduction

Despite the considerable attention paid to mobile text advertising, research on the identification of critical factors that determine its success has been limited (Vatanparast and Butt 2010). This study examines the role of *product involvement*, a construct that has received extensive research attention in the study of traditional marketing media, in the context of SMS advertising. In addition, the study examines the role of *impulse buying tendency* as a potential moderator of the effects of involvement.

Product involvement refers to the perceived personal relevance and importance consumers attach to different product categories (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984, Krugman 1965, Mitchell 1979, Petty and Cacioppo 1981). Mitchell (1979, p. 194) defines product involvement as “an individual level, internal state variable whose motivational properties are evoked by a particular stimulus or situation”. As a motivational factor, high involvement enhances information search and processing and promotes elaborate decision-making (e.g. Fazio 1990, Petty and Cacioppo 1986, Zaichkowsky 1985). The effects of involvement have been extensively studied in the context of advertising and consumer research. Several studies demonstrate that involvement significantly affects

consumers' responses to advertisements and the formation of their subsequent product attitudes and purchase intentions (e.g. Petty et al. 1983). High levels of involvement lead to deeper and more extensive processing of advertising message content and render a message effective when the arguments contained in it are strong. In the context of e-commerce and internet advertising, findings indicate that highly involved consumers tend to have stronger interaction intentions with websites (Yoo and Stout 2001) and are more likely to click on banner ads (Cho 2003).

Product involvement has also been associated with the cognitive vs. affective properties of the decision making process. The well-established Foote, Cone and Belding (FCB) Grid (Vaughn 1986, Ratchford 1987), describes how consumers approach the buying process for different product categories and distinguishes among four main product groups along two dimensions: involvement (high vs. low) and decision process (cognitive vs. affective). According to this framework, consumers discern products on the basis of their involvement with them and on whether rational or emotional factors play the most prominent role in choice processes and the formation of purchase intentions (for a similar conceptualization, see Rossiter and Percy (1987)).

A number of researchers take this idea a step further and draw a distinction between cognitive and affective involvement. Kim and Lord (1991) have shown that the FCB Grid's think, feel and involvement measures load on two factors, namely the “think” factor (high or low cognitive involvement) and the “feel” factor (high or

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low affective involvement). Park and Young (1986) distinguish between cognitive involvement (induced by utilitarian or cognitive motives) and affective involvement (derived from value-expressive or affective motives). Similarly, Zaichkowsky (1994) defines cognitive involvement as personal relevance based on the functional, utilitarian performance of the products and affective involvement as personal relevance based on feelings, emotions and moods evoked. Thus, cognitive involvement encompasses reasoning and factual information, whereas, affective involvement is associated with emotion and mood. This conceptualization is adopted in the present research.

Buck et al. (2004, p. 647) have put forward the ARI solid, a model depicting the relationship between affect, reason and involvement. This model aims to conceptualize and measure how attitude objects (e.g. products and brands) and messages (advertisements) are cognitively and affectively processed and provide a three-dimensional representation of the depth of consumers' thoughts and feelings. Following Zaichkowsky's (1985) distinction between product, purchase and advertising involvement, this model also refers to either a temporary state affected by the situation (e.g. purchase involvement), an enduring tendency of a person to respond carried across situations (e.g. enduring product involvement) or the tendency of an object or message to generate rational and emotional responses (e.g. advertising message involvement). These authors further argue that "emotional involvement is based upon holistic syncretic cognition, while rational involvement is based upon linear and sequential analytic cognition" (p. 647).

A number of studies have examined the effects of cognitive and affective product involvement in consumer behavior and advertising. For instance, Putrevu and Lord (1994) compare the effectiveness of comparative and noncomparative advertising for products characterized by different levels of cognitive and affective involvement. They have found that comparative advertisements induce more positive brand attitudes for products which elicit cognitive and affective motivations simultaneously. In the context of online shopping, Smith et al. (2013) demonstrate a direct relationship between cognitive involvement and perceived ease of use and usefulness of online shopping.

Although the cognitive – affective involvement dichotomy is established in traditional advertising, it has never been tested and validated in the context of mobile advertising and, especially, in the case of mobile text (SMS) advertisements, where the inherent limitations and unique characteristics of the advertising channel may render traditional advertising knowledge less relevant or valid. The majority of mobile advertising (m-advertising) studies focus on users' perceptions toward permission-based marketing, content, wireless service provider (WSP) control, trust, ad usefulness and delivery of the message (Carroll et al. 2007, Merisavo et al. 2007, Muk 2007).

In terms of product related effects on consumers' mindsets, Kannan et al. (2001) proposed that mobile advertising is likely to significantly increase the frequency of impulse purchases, especially in low-value or low-involvement product categories, due to the instant gratification and immediate need fulfillment enabled by the medium. Varnali et al. (2012) recently demonstrated that message relevance improves mobile response rates and facilitates the viral impact. However, subsequent research has failed to provide empirical evidence on how product involvement and impulse buying tendency interact to affect purchase intentions in response to mobile advertising.

In this study, we seek to examine the effects of cognitive and affective product involvement on purchase intentions. Our focus here is especially on SMS advertising, excluding other forms and types of mobile advertising, like mobile media services (MMS) or mobile QR codes. Based on Richards and Curran (2002, p. 74), we

define mobile text advertising as "a paid form of location-sensitive personal Short Message Service (SMS) communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, either in real time or in the future." In the next section, we review the literature and arrive at a number of hypotheses. We then present the method for testing our theoretical propositions, before proceeding to the presentation of the results of a large-scale randomized field experiment. The contribution of our work to m-advertising theory and practice are presented next, before concluding with a discussion of future research opportunities.

2. Literature review and research hypotheses

Mobile text advertising has a number of distinctive properties that differentiate its reach and richness from other advertising media. Although it is generally agreed that mobile advertising provides consumers with personalized information based on their location, interests and time of day (Scharl et al. 2005), at the same time there is an inherent limitation of short text messages to convey sufficient amounts of information for advertised products; it might be argued that this limitation might have an adverse impact on purchase intentions, especially for high cognitive involvement products. In a recent study, Bart et al. (2012) found that mobile display advertising campaigns are effective for higher (vs. lower) involvement products, and for products that are seen as more utilitarian (vs. more hedonic). However, their study focused on display advertising which is highly different from text advertising in terms of content, interaction and visual attention. In contrast to display advertising, text advertising has limited capacity to deliver impactful meanings. In support of this argument, Xu et al. (2009) showed that multimedia location-based advertising (LBA) messages lead to more favorable attitudes, increase the intention to use the LBA application, and have more impact on purchase intention than text-based messages. A large body of empirical evidence indicates that message content is crucial in the context of persuasion under high and low involvement conditions.

The elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo 1981, 1986) and the conceptually similar heuristic-systematic model (Chaiken 1980) provide the prominent theoretical framework in the study of persuasion and attitude change. In these dual-process models, involvement is assigned a critical role as a factor determining message recipients' processing motivation. The models predict that when the recipients of a persuasive message are motivated (and able) to process its content, they engage in analytical processing and scrutinize its content (central route to persuasion, systematic processing). Under such conditions, post-message attitudes (and subsequent behavioral intentions) depend on the quality of message arguments: messages containing strong arguments induce more attitude change and are more effective compared to messages containing weak arguments. In contrast, when processing motivation (and/or ability) is low, persuasion occurs only through the peripheral route (or through heuristic processing). In such conditions, peripheral message cues (such as the expertise or the status of message source) or heuristics (such as message length) determine attitude change. In an early test of the elaboration likelihood model, Petty et al. (1983) assessed participants' product attitudes after they had them look at a magazine advertisement under conditions of either high or low product involvement. The advertisement contained either strong or weak arguments for the product (argument strength) and featured either prominent sports celebrities or average citizens as endorsers (source status, peripheral cue). The manipulation of argument quality had a greater impact on attitudes under high than low involvement, but the manipulation of product endorser had a greater impact under low than high involvement. Several studies

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