

# Contribution of Mobile media communications to consumer attitude/consumer behavior in the clothing retail industry in Zimbabwe

Ngwenya.T<sup>1\*</sup> Fainos Chokera<sup>1,2</sup>

1. Department of Marketing, Midlands State University, PO box 9055, Gweru, Zimbabwe
2. Department of Marketing, Midlands State University, PO box 9055, Gweru, Zimbabwe

\*[ngwenyat@msu.ac.zw](mailto:ngwenyat@msu.ac.zw)

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## ABSTRACT

This paper sought to explore the current state, dynamics and opportunities of SMS mobile advertising in Zimbabwe. In doing so, the paper takes keen interest into (1) the content of SMS mobile advertising being used (2) willingness to receive SMS adverts by consumers (3) the frequency to which consumers have received these SMS in the past two years (4) as well as attitudes formed towards receiving messages and the impact these have on inducing consumer action. Using Zimbabwe's top four retail players in the clothing industry a sample of 322 consumers were used and an instrument for measuring attitudes towards SMS based Advertising was also used. It was interesting to note that given the varied forms of SMS ads the sector only use sales promotion, stock alerts and competition. Attitudes that consumers formed towards SMS advertising were directly linked to the acceptance to receive SMS, were most of the consumers highlighted that they would want clothing retail companies to ask them permission to send their messages as these messages sometimes come unexpectedly. The paper concludes and recommends that SMS advertising is the future of most clothing retailers as it affords a two way communication enabling high interactivity, specific based advertising, and location based communication.

**Keywords:** SMS advertising, mobile marketing, permission based

## 1.1 Introduction

Marketers who are failing to acknowledge mobile technology are in effect ignoring one of the most powerful means of actively engaging and reaching customers (Haig, 2002). Whilst Zimbabwe is still recovering from its collapse, it is with great pleasure that the telecomms industry is also recovering from this critical setback in the country which happened between 2000 to 2008. The introduction of the multicurrency economy in 2009 has assisted players in the telecoms industry to plan ahead and source for funds to extend their facilities and provide wider network coverage in both rural and urban areas.

The expansion of network coverage by NetOne, TelOne and Econet resulted in the mobile penetration rate increasing fivefold within three years to reach around 75% in early 2012 (TelecomsMarketResearch.com 2011). Grant et al (2010) write; "by 2012, over 50% of all Africans or more than 500 million people will own mobile phones, by 2014 this portion is expected to increase to 56%, giving Africa one of the world's highest mobile usage rates." Similarly, in Zimbabwe mobile advertising remains the most efficient method of consumer interaction, and one with the most potential for growth. This is particularly so when one considers the limitations of transmission accessibility, affordability as well as the limitation on audiences imposed by political/ideological preferences that characterizes Zimbabwe's media such as T.V (both local and satellite), newspapers and radio. According to [www.bulawayo24.com](http://www.bulawayo24.com) 20 July 2012, mobile usage in Zimbabwe rose to 75% in 2011 from 67.5% the previous year. Currently it is estimated that mobile communication has reached saturation with an estimated 114% by end of 2013 (Source: BuddeComm based on various sources). As Reshma Bharmal-Shariff posits Mobile communication has made it possible, both in affordability and accessibility, for people who are in the most remote areas to communicate not only with family, friends and colleagues, but also to be a 'voice' in current events by interacting in polling and comment activities via SMS," (Broeckelmann, 2010). Taking from this cue, mobile advertising currently enjoys immense opportunities for business growth and profitability both in Zimbabwe and Africa in general.

### 1.1.1 SMS based Advertising

Numerous scholarly researches on mobile marketing have been done since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Examples are; (Hung et al., 2002,) mobile payment service (Know and Chidambaram, 2000) wireless application

protocol (WAP)(Lee et al., 2002; Fogelgren-Pedersen et al., 2003), cellular telephones and (Dahlberg et al., 2003; Nysveen et al., 2005) focused on mobile text messaging, mobile gaming services, and mobile contact services. This paper, however, mainly focuses on SMS-based advertising. Based on its real-time and on-hand advantages, several studies have shown why SMS marketing remains the best form of mobile marketing. Schierholz et al., (2007), Ha and James, (1998) ; Ahonen (2008) note that SMS advertising engages the consumer, it is always near, interactive and is available at the point of creative inspection and is more believable than television adverts that are seen as misleading .

Yet still, several scholarly works also note that mobile marketing comes with challenges (Grant and O'Donohoe, 2007). For instance, Salo et al ; 2008 demonstrate how SMS adverts are difficult to design and limited in their expressiveness as a result of their limited alphanumeric characteristics. Shu-Chu Ho and Liang (2004) also point out that consumers often ignore messages when interrupted by an advertisement. This therefore calls for greater creativity on the part of mobile advertisers, so as to capture the attention of consumers within the limited parameter and at the same time interest; desire to read the message.

Numerous studies also demonstrate how, in the face of uncertain reception of SMS adverts by customers, incentive based adverts provide specific financial rewards to individuals who agree to receive promotions and campaign, Shu-Chu Ho and Liang (2004), Poustchi and Wiedemann, (2006) also show how the inclusion of sweepstakes, competitions, coupons and rebates in the design of a mobile advert is meant to increase the attention given to mobile adverts by consumers. Barwise and Strong (2002) identify six ways of using SMS for advertising: brand building, special offers, timely media "teasers" competitions, polls/voting, products, services and information requests.

The authors contributions make advertising the preferred mode of reaching customers and is more cost effective and target specific. As such, these researches have proved to be quite beneficial in that they offer basis from which further studies on how mobile marketing can assist business to enhance their customer base and increase brand awareness can be done. Building on these contributions, this paper seeks to specifically offer solutions on the challenges and opportunities that SMS based advertising can have on the clothing retail sector in Zimbabwe considering the nascence of the business practice and the shortcomings associated with such early growth stages. This notwithstanding, SMS remains the most efficient mode of mobile advertising despite the advent of the widely popular internet-based mobile and PC applications such Whatsapp and Facebook used by consumers. Basically all phones have SMS applications, while some mobile phones do not have internet or chat application which lives SMS the most attractive application.

This research follows on the one done by Muruko et al (2013) on the various forms of ICT used by clothing sector in Zimbabwe. However the findings from the study demonstrate gaps which this paper is hopes to fill; that is, consumers willingness to receive mobile adverts and to understand consumers attitudes towards SMS based advertising and consumer action/reaction to the said SMS adverts. Understanding these dynamics, as this paper will hopefully demonstrate, is crucial in exploring the existing practice in SMS-based advertising and the marketing opportunities it affords in Zimbabwe. .

## **2. Methodology**

This study used qualitative and quantitative study through questionnaire and interviews to achieve relevant results. Krejcie and Morgan (1960), model was used to come up with a sample size of 322 consumers. The research constituted both genders which were above 18 years of age. Gender distribution of the overall sample shows 40 % male and 60% women between the ages of 18-45 years of age. These categories were chosen because according to Karjaluoto et al., 2006; Pedersen, 2005 females are using more of SMS services like texting more than males and also the fact that in Zimbabwe most of the ladies do the shopping of clothes for their families therefore hold accounts in these various clothing retail shops.

Table 1: Sample Size

Clothing Retail shop	Branches	Customers
Case Study A	21	50
Case Study B	1	22
Case Study C	65	150
Case Study D	59	100
Total sample size		322

*Questions:* The objective intended to establish factors that are associated with the consumer's willingness to receive mobile advertising messages. It also sought to investigate attitudes of targeted recipients and their action/reaction to SMS adverts, that is, does receipt result in consumer's interest in merchandise and/or eventual purchase? In this light, the following questions were asked;

*Have you ever received an advert from your clothing retail shop via SMS?*

*If yes, had you agreed to receiving sms adverts from your clothing retail shop?*

*How many times do consumers remember receiving adverts in the past 2 years?*

*How relevant are the message that you receive, what is the content of ads?*

*What is your attitude towards SMS ads that are sent to you?*

*At the end, the consumers were asked about the level to which they think mobile advertising is being utilised in general.*

In order to ensure *validity and reliability* to research the questionnaires constituted language that the respondent understood; the questions were kept as simple as possible, sensitive to the fact that some of the respondents were not highly educated. Pre-test was done to identify any mistakes that needed correction. A small number of respondents (representative of the type of respondent to be interviewed in the main survey) were selected for the pre-test. This was to determine whether questions were formulated well to achieve the desired results.

### 3 Findings

The research revealed that the clothing retail sector is using SMS advertising as shall be revealed by the findings below;

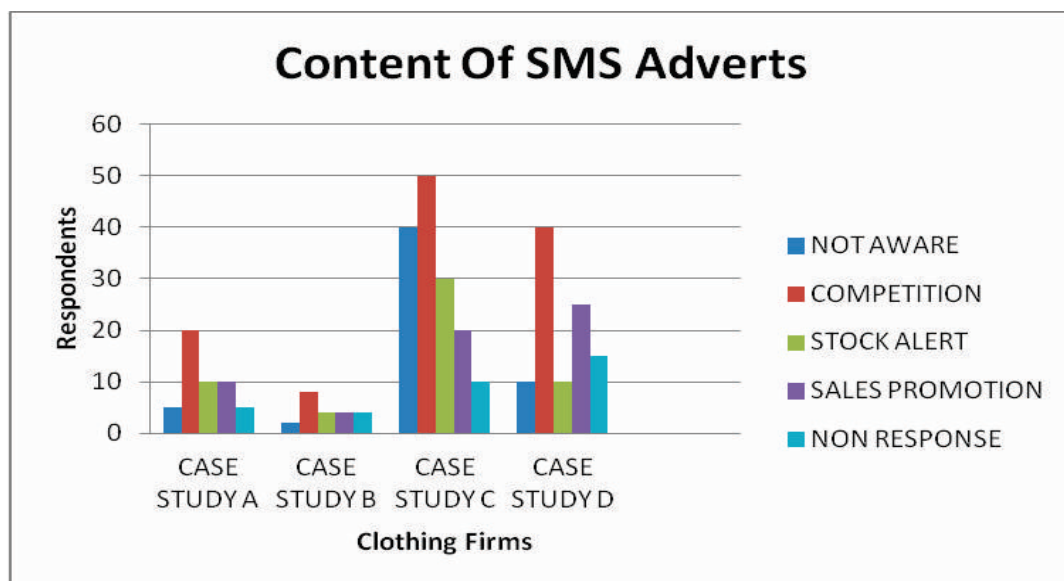


Figure 1: Content of SMS Advertising

Case study A showed that 20, 10, 10 consumers cited competition, stock alerts, sales promotion as the content of SMS ads respectively. In Case study B consumers identified both competition (10) and stock alerts(10) as the main content of SMS ads whilst 5 of the consumers highlighted sales promotion. 50 consumers in Case study C cited that competition is the most SMS ads used, followed by 40 consumers who are not aware of the SMS ads, 30 sales promotions and finally stock alerts with 20 respondents. 35 consumers in case study D cited stock alerts as the most dominant SMS ads, with 10 identifying competition and 5 sales promotion.

From this consumer survey it was noted that competition is the most dominant type of SMS ads that consumers receive, followed by stock alerts and sales promotion. However a significant no of consumers showed that they did not recognise any adverts made by the company which really is a cause for concern if the organisation goal is to communicate with its target audience. Competition adverts were designed with a promise to the consumer that if they come and buy clothes in their shops they will stand a chance of entering into a competition that would make them win items like cars, household equipment and money among others.

The content of stock alerts in the clothing retail shops comprise of new arrivals and in most cases they is no emphasis on the price of the merchandise as well as the specific target audience. However from research stock alerts seemed to be particularly of interest to ladies within the ages of 18-35 the reason being they always want to make sure they keep up with trend of fashion. Sales promotion are mostly designed with a percentage knocked down on some item on, e.g ‘winter clearance sale now on, prices from \$2.00, starts 17 July 2013, more style, less price’ Or ‘further 15% of winter sale merchandise, starts 09-13 July 2013’.

The reason consumers do not remember these SMS adverts or do not take them seriously is because they are not target specific (gender, lifestyle, age). Adverts seen by respondents state, for instance, a 15% price reduction but do not state initial pricing, the net effect being failure to convincingly woo customers to eventual purchase. Consider 15% of merchandise that is costing more than \$100 it will still be a lot of money. These factors therefore need to be taken into consideration by clothing retail companies when designing the content of SMS ads.

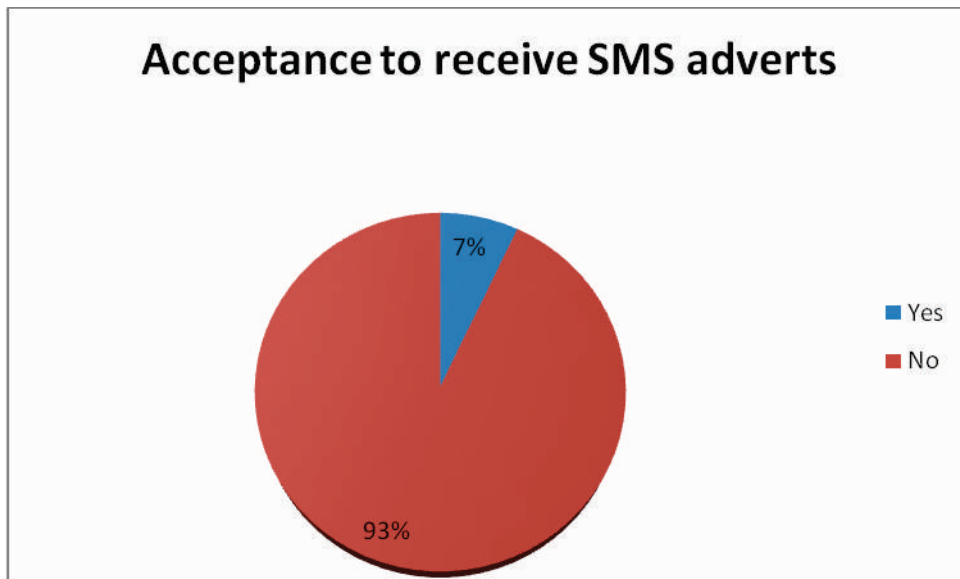


Figure 2: Acceptance to receive SMS advertising

When asked 93% of the consumers highlighted that they were not consulted by the retailer on whether they were willing to receive SMS adverts. One of the respondents cited, “I didn’t sign anything with that company that gives them permission to send me SMS ads, I just opened an account with them and gave them my mobile number such that they can send me account updates, somehow this is abuse of my privacy.”(responded 20) Only a minority, 7% agreed to receiving text SMS. 7% of the consumers constituted those from Case Study C which had upgraded their systems to include permission marketing and only applied to recently opened accounts since the other accounts were already in the system .

Table 2: Frequency of SMS received over the past two years

Once or twice	3 to 5 times	5times or more
17	150	122

150 consumers remember receiving at least 3 to 5 SMS adverts in the last two years. Of these adverts they remembered that they were for competitions conducted bi-annually as well as well as for new stock. The majority of the consumers admitted that they had opened their accounts within the last two years.

122 consumers highlighted that they had received more than 5 SMS adverts whose content included sales promotion, stock alerts and competitions. The same consumers also indicated that they actively used their accounts to acquire stocks as seasons changed. Of the total respondents only 17 recalled receiving an SMS advert maybe once or twice in the last two years. The majority of these respondents were male as it was noted that they don’t really pay attention to such kinds of messages, as they are not usually involved in the buying process and they also cited the cluster of unsolicited SMS alerts that come through their service providers. From this 17 some indicated that they changed their mobile numbers. The same group also represents consumers with the most inactive accounts. As such the combination of inactive accounts and attitude towards unsolicited SMS alerts may explain their ignorance to a true reflection of SMS alerts they may have actually received over the past two years.

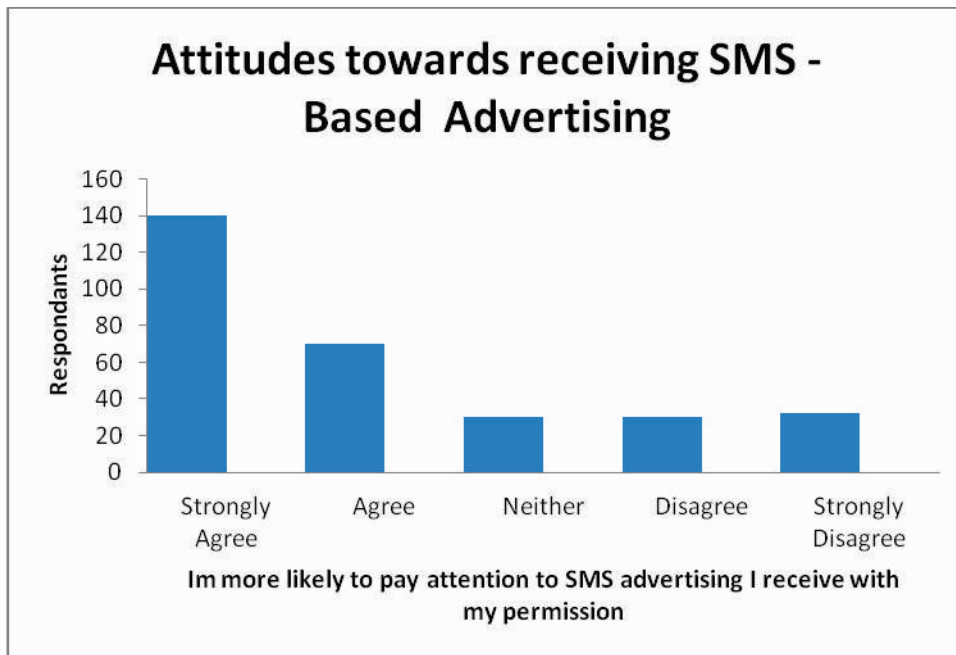


Figure 3: attitudes towards SMS advertising

210 consumers expressed that they are more likely to pay attention to SMS ads received with their permission. The respondents showed their dislike towards unsolicited SMS adverts arguing that they irritate them. Some of the respondent views were, “Some of the text messages are irrelevant as they can be for a promotion that appeals for consumers in a particular city or age category which will waste my time at the end of the day to pay attention to such text.” (responded 200), while others “For me mobile is intimate. I only give my number to friends, relatives, colleagues, and receiving an SMS from various companies irritates me as I will be expecting messages from those I keep in my inner circle” (responded 150). The majority rather preferred email adverts which also carried both text and images for a reliable evaluation.

62 consumers however argued that they can pay attention to SMS ads even if they do not grant permission to clothing retail shops. They highlighted that there is no need to have separate request to inform the client on any promotions, sales and stock alerts that they have. One of the respondent said “I like them (SMS adverts), they should keep on sending them. I use them as a guide to purchase several items” (responded 59). Noteworthy is the fact that the majority of those who are likely to pay attention to SMS ads regardless of prior permission are women, constituting 72 percent.

This syncs with Jayawardhena et al.; 2008 findings that women are more likely to pay attention to SMS ads than male even if they don’t give permission to receive SMS. The reason being that they are the ones involved in buying process, would want to capitalize on an opportunity, monetary benefit and reduce time risk among other benefits. 30 of the respondents are indifferent and these constituted most of the male respondents and those with inactive accounts and they also lacked knowledge of SMS services.

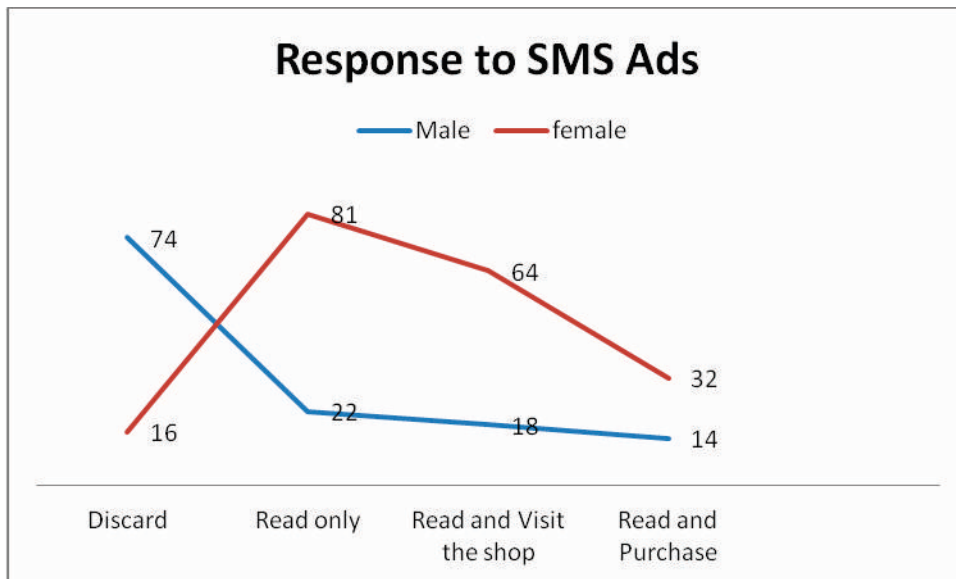


Figure 4: consumer behaviour towards SMS ads

The results show male and female variations on behavior taken after receiving the SMS ads. 74 out of 128 male respondents highlighted that they will discard the SMS without reading it so does 16 out of 194 female respondents. This shows that women are more responsive to SMS ads because the majority of women (178), would rather keep it in their phone memory until they can read its contents rather than discard it. Results show that male respondents are less responsive to SMS ads as the majority (74), see these adverts as irritating and irrelevant to them as in most cases they are not involved in the buying process.

Of the remaining 54 male respondents who do not discard the message, 22 cited they will only read the SMS but do not take action, and 18 will read and visit the shop, whilst only 14 will read and purchase the merchandise. As for female respondents, of the 178 who do not discard the message 81 will read only, 64 will read and visit the shop and 32 will read and purchase the merchandise advertised. It can be noted from the results that female respondents are most receptive to SMS ads than male consumers. They can respond more positively to SMS ads in a way that yields favourable outcome to the communication's objective of inducing an action. These statistics also show the importance of knowing how a particular media can influence different genders and can also assist business to measure the influence their SMS ads have on the sales made.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Despite the existence of various forms of SMS ads the sectors only use sales promotion, stock alerts and competition. Out of 100 respondents only 7% remembered giving clothing retail companies permission to send them SMS ads. Most of the respondents indicated that they remembered seeing at least 3 to 5 adverts in the past two years. Attitudes that consumers formed towards SMS advertising were directly linked to the acceptance to receive SMS, were most of the consumers highlighted that they would want clothing retail companies to ask them permission to send their messages as these messages sometimes come unexpectedly.

Research showed that competition is the most popular form of mobile advertising. This result could be attributed to the fact that competition is more interactive because the consumer has to participate to stand a chance of winning. Consumers also pay attention to these SMS because they benefit from the interaction. Most consumers were unhappy with the abundance of SMS adverts they receive as they believe they did not give consent to the shops. Mobile devices come in as a unique advertising channel. When one compares mobile devices with traditional media like TV, radio, print for mobile media has a wider coverage and according to Leppaniemi et al., (2005), it is the most inexpensive way to advertise and within a few seconds companies can undertake marketing campaigns targeting tens of thousands of people with a proportion of the costs compared to other direct medium such as telephone and direct mail.

It is recommended that clothing retail companies use permission based marketing so that consumers can use opt-in or opt-out option. Reyck and Degraeve (2003), are of the opinion that mobile ads work best if it is permission based. After obtaining permission, companies need to design of SMS adverts that are unique and creative, such that they quickly capture the target audience. The ads should carry the basis of a good advert which are relevance, originality and impact. There is no originality with 15% discount it's something that people see every-day. The SMS ads should be relevant to the target consumer who is receiving it that is tailor make ads to suit the consumer age, preference, gender, lifestyle in terms of products or services. At the end of the day would expect SMS ads to have impact that is reading the SMS, visiting the shop, trying on clothes and purchasing. The timing of the ads should also be such that the consumer is thinking of shopping, a case in Zimbabwe is usually towards month-end or national holidays.

Incentive-based advertising provides specific financial rewards to individuals who agree to receive promotions and campaigns. *Shu-Chun Ho, and Liang* (2004). Since, Mobile phones are individual objects and retailers should design ads that are target specific, as well as recognise the difference in social context, individual preferences, time, and location. Context-sensitive systems such as Ad-me can also be used by retailers to avoid customers from being irritated. (Barwise and Farley, 2005 Hristova and O'Hare, 2004) also support that SMS advertising equip consumers with tailored, relevant information which is beneficial to the consumer. SMS location-based services are likely to become increasingly valued as a marketing tool (Ververidis and Polyzos, 2002).

Via the mobile channel, the response can be nearly immediate, interactive and the consumer can be reached everywhere at anytime because the service is typically ubiquitous (Jelassi and Enders, 2004). Text message ads have been found to boost consumers' inclination to purchase by 36 per cent, which partly explains its growing popularity among marketers (Enpocket, 2005c). According to Enpocket (2005a), text message campaigns also deliver a 15 per cent response rate, which they estimate is twice as much as direct mail or e-mail campaigns; apparently, text messages are 50 percent more successful at building brand awareness than TV and 130 per cent more than radio (Enpocket, 2005c). Therefore customers who come to buy in these clothing retail shops should be identified and given an incentive for making up a follow up. Organisations can use these statistics as a measurement to evaluate how effective their SMS ads were.

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