

The Role of Mobile Adcommunication in Business to Business Marketing

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Abstract

Purpose of the paper and literature addressed: Mobile adcommunication allows companies to communicate with their customers directly – anytime and anywhere – via mobile devices. So far, mobile adcommunication has mainly been connected with consumer products. This study broadens the scope of mobile adcommunication research by studying how m-adcommunication can be applied as a part of business-to-business marketing communications.

Research method: With the help of a literature review and a qualitative case study, this paper takes a novel approach to mobile adcommunication as part of business-to-business marketing communications.

Research findings: We argue that context-sensitivity, interactivity, exact targetability, and fastness make mobile adcommunication a suitable tool for industrial marketers, for specific purposes. However, the companies need to learn how mobile adcommunication differs from mass advertising and to use the knowledge when designing the communication mix.

Main contribution: The paper suggests ways to apply mobile adcommunication that fit the products being marketed and the state of the relationship, as well as allow to maximize the potential of this way of communicating with customers.

Keywords: industrial advertising, mobile advertising, integrated marketing communications, business marketing

Introduction

Mobile adcommunication (m-adcommunication) or mobile advertising (m-advertising) is a rather recent addition to the marketing communications mix. It offers a context-sensitive, personal, interactive, and quick way to communicate with customers (Salo and Tähtinen, 2005). M-adcommunication helps in reaching customers faster, getting feedback more efficiently and offering new kinds of value to customers by delivering the right information at the most effective time, place, and in the right context.

So far, the utilization of mobile adcommunication has largely been limited to the marketing of low-ticket consumer items (Barwise and Strong, 2002; Kavassalis et al., 2003), in spite of some success stories in b-to-b settings (Kavassalis et al., 2003; IMAP, 2002). The most prominent applications may well be in consumer marketing, but by exploring m-adcommunication more widely other suitable application areas might also be found. Without broadminded research, possibilities to use mobile adcommunication in different kinds of situations could remain untapped.

This study attempts to broaden the scope of mobile adcommunication research by studying how it can be applied as a part of business-to-business marketing communications. Although research on mobile advertising has recently started to proliferate, to the best knowledge of the authors this particular view of mobile adcommunication has not yet been addressed. Moreover, business advertising has remained a field where research efforts have not been extensive (see Johnston, 1994; Gilliland and Johnston, 1997). However, this paper focuses on permission based mobile adcommunication via text and mobile multimedia messages, since that is, for any company, an accessible way to start mobile communication. Other means, e.g. using RFID technology to change customers' mobile phones into connected tracking devices, need more investments and thus were excluded from this study.

The question of business m-adcommunication is tackled from three different perspectives. Firstly, in order to gain an understanding of the possible benefits that m-adcommunication offers, we will discuss the features of mobile adcommunication from a business-to-business marketing perspective. Secondly, we will study how mobile adcommunication is positioned in the overall business marketing communications mix. Finally, we will explore the possible uses of mobile adcommunication as part of business-to-business marketing communications.

To accomplish the aim of the study, in addition to theoretical analysis, a qualitative case study method is applied. With the help of the case study, we will substantiate the theoretical discussion and explore other outcomes. The empirical data is gathered from both providers of professional services that have used m-adcommunication and advertising agencies who are experts in the field. In addition, the mobile adverts of interviewed m-advertisers are analysed. A discussion on the theoretical contribution and managerial implications of the study conclude the paper.

Features of Mobile Adcommunication

Before discussing the features of mobile adcommunication, it is useful to examine what is meant by the two terms of mobile advertising and mobile adcommunication. According to IMAP (2003, 12) mobile advertising is "the business of encouraging people to buy products and services using the mobile channel as a medium to deliver the advertisement's message". This definition places more focus on the process of buying than is the case in advertising definitions in general. Salo and Tähtinen (2005, 140) define m-advertising very briefly as "ads sent to and presented on mobile handheld devices". A definition provided by Leppäniemi, Karjaluoto and Salo (2004, 93) highlights the m-advertisers' intentions when stating that m-advertising refers to "any paid message communicated by mobile media with the intent to influence the attitudes, intentions and behaviour of those addressed by the commercial messages".

In these definitions, the role of the advertiser as the sender of the messages is not emphasized, although the sender also pays for private mobile messages. Definitions of advertising often include an "identified sponsor" as the sender. For example, Wells, Burnett, and Moriarty (1998, 13) define advertising as "paid non-personal communication from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence an audience". However, since m-advertising is neither non-personal nor mediated through a mass media to a large audience, this paper applies the second term, namely mobile adcommunication.

Mobile adcommunication is a term suggested by Tähtinen (2006) after reviewing m-advertising and m-marketing literature. The review also shows that the distinct elements of advertising and marketing do not fit to the focal phenomenon since it is more than advertising but less than marketing. Tähtinen concludes that no other form of commercial communication shares the exact same essential elements with the mobile form, making it unique. Therefore, a new term that combines several essential elements under a single word is suggested; mobile adcommunication. The first word acknowledges the fact that mobile devices are being used to deliver and receive the messages. The messages relate to commercial purposes, which means that the sender of the commercial message aims to persuade the receiver, which has a certain level of scepticism towards the message (i.e. does not consider it as the whole truth), although may feel that the source is more trusted than in traditional advertising. These features are also the features of advertising. Finally, the interactive and personal nature and being in a way initiated by the consumer when s/he gives the permission are inherent elements in any communication, thus inspiring the last part of the term. This suggestion holds important that mobile media is used only when it suits well to the purpose, when the receivers are known to the extent that the messages can be personalised to provide them value and dialogue is possible. This study applies the new term.

The benefits that mobile adcommunication can offer to the b-to-b-marketer stem from the features that distinguish it from traditional advertising. The essential elements that reoccur in the definitions of traditional advertising are that it is (1) paid, (2) non-personal, (3) has an identified sponsor, and uses (4) mass media, and (5) aims to persuade or influence (Richards and Curran, 2002). Contrary to non-personal mass media advertising, m-adcommunication offers context-sensitive, ubiquitous, quick, interactive, and personal marketing communications. One of the most unique features of mobile adcommunication is its context-sensitivity. It enables advertisers to send mobile ads that reach the receiver at the right place, and at the right time with the help of information concerning location of the target persons, weather, time etc. (Salo and Tähtinen, 2005).

Another benefit of using m-adcommunication is that customers can be reached fast and effectively. Mobile messages are often read almost as soon as they arrive irrespective of the time or location of the receiver (Barwise and Strong, 2002). Mobile adverts also catch the receiver's attention quite easily because mobile devices are still rarely used as an advertising medium and so stand out from advertising clutter without a problem. Enpocket's survey (2005) reports that in the USA, only 16 % of young adults have ever received m-adcommunication. Earlier reports from Great-Britain show that 94 % of receivers read the mobile advertisements (Enpocket, 2003), 81 % read each and every m-ad before deleting them, and 77 % read the m-adverts right after receiving them (Barwise and Strong, 2002).

Mobile adcommunication also enables interactivity between the parties, as the receiver can reply to the advertisement by phoning, sending an SMS, MMS or an e-mail, or browsing the advertiser's webpage using the mobile device. (Salo and Tähtinen, 2005). In Great Britain, 15 % of the receivers reacted to mobile adcommunication campaigns (Enpocket, 2003). Moreover, as each mobile device is typically used by a sole individual, mobile adcommunication provides a platform for sending precisely targeted and personalized advertisements (Barnes and Scornavacca, 2004; Salo and Tähtinen, 2005).

In comparison to other advertising media, the most unique features of mobile adcommunication are context-sensitivity and ubiquity. However, from the point of view of b-to-b marketing, determining the context of receiving the ads is not always that important. Business marketers seldom try to persuade passers-by to come to their premises to make impulse purchases, as is the case in consumer marketing. Often, it is enough for a business marketer to reach the prospect from his/her office. In these situations, e-mail is just as handy: it, too, offers a personal, fast and interactive way to reach the prospect, although it is negatively associated with spam. However, in some circumstances, such as trade fairs, the context-awareness of mobile adcommunication can also benefit business marketers. More so, since trade shows are places where firms buying centres may be present and contacted at the same time (Hutt and Speh, 2004).

Mobile adcommunication also poses legal and other challenges to its users. In order to send mobile adverts within the EU, the advertiser or the provider of the contacts needs to obtain the receivers' permission in advance. In addition, mobile devices are highly personal instruments that users take with them almost everywhere at all times. Therefore, mobile adcommunication should not be mass communication but targeted to individuals and personalized to the receiver's needs (Salo and

Tähtinen, 2005; Barwise and Strong, 2002). If the messages are not accepted in advance, relevant to the receiver, arrive at an inconvenient time, or are too numerous, the receivers can easily regard mobile ads as illegal, intrusive and/or irritating (Barnes and Scornavacca, 2004; Barwise and Strong, 2002).

On the other hand, a physical limitation of mobile adcommunication is the small screen size of mobile devices: the advertiser cannot provide detailed information about the product or service without worsening the reading experience (Haghirian, Madlberger and Tanuskova, 2005). This can be a serious limitation in the industrial setting, where research suggests that ads need longer copy to be able to communicate sufficient information to the reader (Belizzi and Lehrer, 1983; Soley, 1986). The variety of pocket-sized mobile devices and their software also pose challenges to m-advertisers wishing to use photos, animation or videos in their mobile adcommunication.

It is uncertain whether people are willing to receive work-related m-adverts on their mobile phones, because of the personal nature of the device. However, this fear may be unfounded as mobile phones are important tools in conducting business, and the phones and subscriber connections are often paid for by the employer. In Karjaluoto, Leppäniemi and Salo (2004) the respondents indicated an interest in mobile adverts that would be related to their work. However, in b-to-b mobile adcommunication a useful precaution might be to restrict the ads to working hours, so that the receiver's free time would not be interrupted with work-related issues. It would be advisable that the mobile adcommunication service would allow the receiver to choose the time (days, hours) that s/he is willing to receive m-ads.

Mobile Adcommunication as a Part of Marketing Communications

Marketing communications, or the promotion mix, consists of elements such as personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, PR, and direct marketing (Fill, 1999, 6–7). However, mobile adcommunication cannot unequivocally be classified under any single element of the promotion mix but rather its position in the marketing communications mix depends on the way it is applied. Because of its distinctive features, mobile adcommunication is not a pure form of “traditional” advertising. It is not mass communication to a large audience but rather delivering personalized messages to targeted individuals (Saló and Tähtinen, 2005). The role of traditional advertising has often been to reach those prospective buyers that are unknown to the marketer. However, the reach of mobile adcommunication is significantly narrower because the marketer needs, in advance, a contact information database and, in the EU, the receiver's permission to send mobile adcommunication. In traditional advertising, the receiver's role has been quite passive but mobile adcommunication enables interactivity between the marketer and the consumer. Because of these features, mobile adcommunication resembles direct marketing. Mobile adcommunication can also be used as a sales promotion tool for delivering exclusive offers or contests. In some instances, mobile adcommunication can even resemble personal selling as it can be used as a personal channel to promote information services or products, such as music or images, that the receiver can order directly from his/her mobile device.

An Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) (see e.g. Gould, 2004; Kitchen et al. , 2004) approach offers a more complete picture of the marketing communications field. The integrated marketing communications mindscape developed by Hartley and Pickton (1999) places marketing communications tools on a continuum from non-personal to personal communications (see Figure 1). On the non-personal end of the continuum, there is one-way communication from an active sender to a passive receiver that is targeted at the public or market segments. The main aims are image management and brand building. Personal communication, on the other hand, is direct two-way communication between individuals aiming at sales, service, and customer contact management. Along the continuum, there are three communications categories, namely ‘corporate communications management’, ‘marketing communications management’ and ‘customer contact management’.

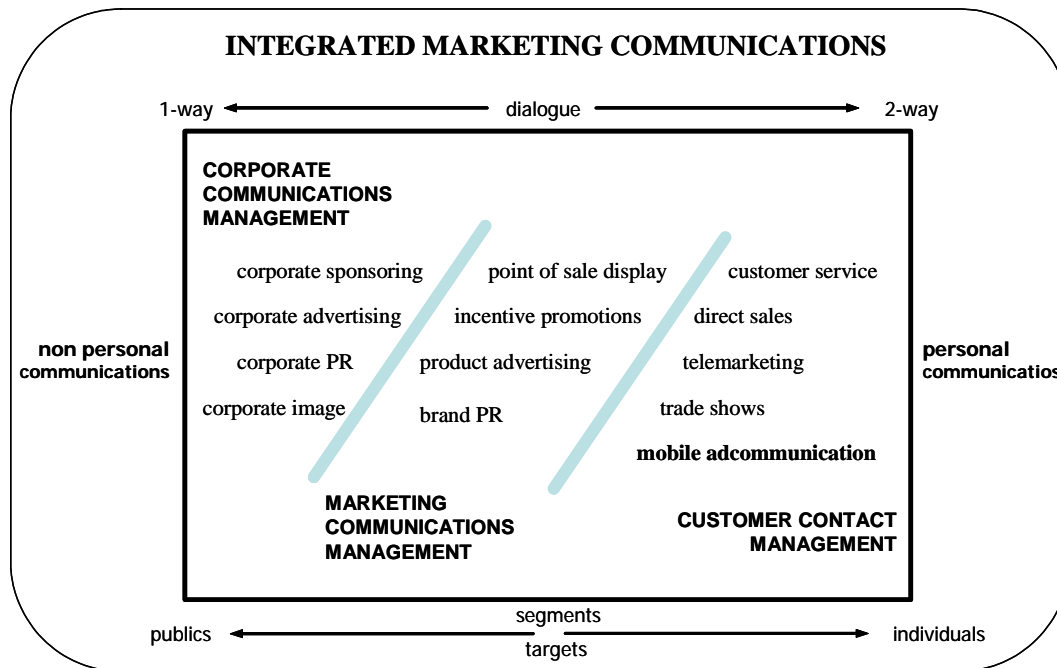


Figure 1. Integrated Marketing Communications Mindscape (adapted from Hartley and Pickton, 1999).

As mobile adcommunication offers a channel for very personal, direct, interactive, and even individually targeted communications, it can be placed along with other personal communications at the 'customer contact management' category. This suggests that mobile adcommunication should be used to communicate information that is personalized and directly relevant to the customer, whereas non-personal issues such as product or corporate image advertising can better be communicated in mass media.

The Possible Uses of Mobile Adcommunication

In the following sections, the possible uses of m-adcommunication are discussed with the help of two different approaches to marketing communications. The reason for choosing two approaches lies in the nature of the product being offered, because it influences the marketers' use of b-to-b marketing communications tools. In the marketing communications mix of relatively low value and risk industrial convenience products (for the categorization, see Pickton and Broderick 2001, 434-35), advertising and sales promotion often have the leading role. On the other hand, industrial durable products carry higher value and risk, and therefore the customer is likely to need more information so personal selling becomes the key marketing communication tool (see Moriarty and Spekman, 1984). Thus, there is a rationale to study how the type of product influences the most suitable communication tools.

For industrial convenience products, a Marketing Management-originated promotion portfolio matrix will be applied, whereas for industrial durable products, a Relationship Marketing approach to marketing communications will be used. The difference in these approaches is clear. Within a Marketing Management approach, marketing communications are mainly seen as one-way persuasive communication from an active marketer to a passive receiver. However, in Relationship Marketing, communication also serves in roles other than persuasion, such as informing, listening, and answering, which require interaction and two-way communication (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998).

The promotion portfolio matrix (Raulas and Vepsäläinen, 1992) revises the Marketing Management approach to marketing communications. With the aid of two dimensions; the communication channel type, and the status of the target group the matrix helps managers to choose an effective communication tool in each situation (see Figure 2). To convince the negatively attuned target group to change their attitudes to become positive, communication appealing to emotions and attitudes is needed. Personal interaction in the form of social networking, referral communications, and persuasion by company representatives are suggested as effective tools here. The neutrally attuned

group, on the other hand, has not formed an opinion about the company or its products and so they need to be offered more information via mass media. The positively attuned target group already has a positive opinion about the company's offering and so the aim is to help their buying behaviour. Thus, the customer is willing to use such communication channels as direct mail, e-mail and other types of information networks.

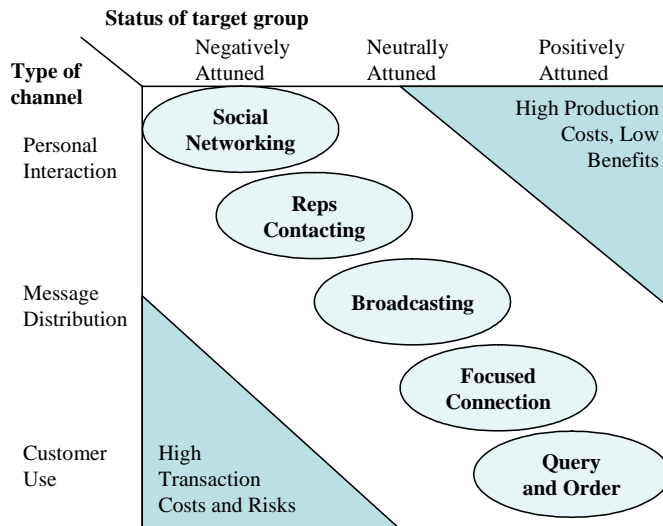


Figure 2. Promotion portfolio matrix (Raulas and Vepsäläinen, 1992).

Mobile adcommunication, in this matrix, could be classified in the 'focused connection' and/or 'query and order' categories because it, too, is targeted to specific customers and delivered to them directly. By following the recommendations of Raulas and Vepsäläinen (1992), m-adcommunication should, then, be targeted to positively or neutrally attuned individuals. This is a very reasonable conclusion, since, firstly, negatively attuned persons would hardly even grant their permission for sending mobile adcommunication and, secondly, because of the intrusive nature of m-adcommunication, targeting it to negatively attuned individuals may easily lead to irritation and reinforcement of negative attitudes. This conclusion is supported by Leppäniemi, Karjaluoto and Salo (2004) and Karjaluoto, Leppäniemi and Salo (2004) who state that mobile adcommunication can be used as a call-to-action tool with the aim of pushing the prospect to the point of sale.

However, the promotion portfolio matrix is better suited to marketing communications that aim at single transactions rather than to b-to-b marketing that focuses on building long-term relationships. For example, the view of Raulas and Vepsäläinen (1992) that personal interaction targeted at a positively attuned target group is waste of resources is controversial. Many b-to-b marketers strive to maintain relationships with their customers between transactions also. In addition, the premise of the matrix that personal interaction should rather be used for changing attitudes than encouraging purchasing behaviour is contrary to the traditional b-to-b marketing communications view, where personal selling is the key tool to achieve deals whereas other marketing communications tools are used to create awareness and provide information (Garber and Dotson 2002). The recommendations of Raulas and Vepsäläinen (1992) of the right marketing communications to use according to the promotion portfolio matrix are thus better suited to b-to-b marketing where the product being offered is a simple, frequently purchased item of low value, e.g. an industrial convenience product. Marketing communications of industrial durable products, on the other hand, can better be understood with the help of the Relationship Marketing approach.

Relationship Marketing views communication as an interaction of two active parties, the seller and the buyer (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). Andersen (2001) integrates Relationship Marketing with marketing communications practice by suggesting that different communication types and tactics should be applied during different relationship stages. In a pre-relationship phase, the communication is planned and unidirectional. The aim is to create awareness through one-way oriented communication, such as advertising, branding and other traditional tools. The focus is on making promises of what the brand or company will do (Lindberg-Repo and Grönroos, 2004). At this stage, mobile adcommunication can be used primarily only as pull-based where the buyer opts in for mobile

adcommunication after having seen an invitation to it, for example, in a print advertisement. Push adcommunication at this stage would require a co-operating partner who would have the contact and permission data, and m-adcommunication from an unknown sender, that the user hasn't directly granted permission to, might be experienced as intrusive.

In the negotiation stage, the communication is dialogue-oriented and aims at persuading the buyer of the attractiveness of what the supplier has to offer (Andersen, 2001). In the case of a complex product or service the parties exchange information widely on various issues. The very limited content of a mobile adcom could, at this stage, be an insufficient tool. However, in the case of a simpler product or service, m-adcommunication could be used as sales promotion to persuade the buyer into making the first purchase.

In the relationship development phase, the aim of communication is to create commitment (Andersen 2001), for example, through inviting the customer to events organized by the company, sending newsletters, greeting cards, information about loyalty programmes etc. (Kotler, 2003, 620; Pickton and Broderick, 2001, 588). Research also suggests that buyers appreciate Internet as a communication tool in ongoing relationship rather than at the supplier selection phase (Deeter-Schmelz and Norman Kennedy, 2004), so this could also apply to m-adcommunication. M-adcommunication is well suited here as the parties know each other; the advertiser has had a chance to ask for sending permission and has enough information to personalize the m-adcoms. Mobile adcommunication offers a quick and interactive way to inform or remind the customer about current events, invite them to special occasions, send them greetings, or to remind them of special offers or updates.

In conclusion, mobile adcommunication provides a platform for context-sensitive, personalized, precisely targeted and interactive communication with customers. However, because of the highly personal and ubiquitous nature of the medium, m-adcommunication in a b-to-b marketing context has to be carefully executed, taking into account the content, context, and permission, so that the m-advert really provides value for the customer. M-adcommunication can be used in various ways, for example as direct marketing, sales promotion, or a customer relationship management tool, depending on the nature of the offered b-to-b product and the stage of the business relationship. In the following section we shall present findings of an empirical study in order to gain practical insight on b-to-b mobile adcommunication campaigns as well as an expert opinion on the applicability of mobile adcommunication to b-to-b communications.

A Case Study of Business-to-Business Mobile Adcommunication

Data gathering and analysis methods

The empirical study was conducted using a qualitative case study method. A case study is an appropriate research strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the researcher has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin, 2003, 1). Case study research is essentially inductive, theory building research (Perry, 1998) that is suitable for studying unexplored, little-known topics (Easton, 1995, 475) as is the case here.

Following the suggestions of Perry (1998) we selected the cases purposefully to get rich information on the little-known phenomenon. The number of cases was decided via theoretical saturation (Perry, 1998), i.e. cases were added until no new issues emerged from the data. Two sets of empirical data were used. Firstly, we interviewed three professional service companies who had used b-to-b mobile adcommunication as a part of their marketing communications. In other words, these companies were pioneers in the b-to-b mobile adcommunication field. The mobile advertisers were all small local professional service companies. Common to each company's marketing communications mix was that personal selling was by far the most important tool to acquire and keep customers. Other marketing communications elements, like advertising, direct marketing, internet pages, and PR, were used on a smaller scale to create awareness. Secondly, to gain an advertising design expert opinion, three ad agency representatives with experience of designing mobile adcommunication campaigns were interviewed (see Table 1). These six interviews form the first data set.

Table 1. Interview data

Company	Interviewee	Duration of the interview
M-advertiser 1	Entrepreneur	60 min
M-advertiser 2	Entrepreneur	50 min
M-advertiser 3	Entrepreneur	30 min
Advertising agency 1	AD	60 min
Advertising agency 2	CEO	30 min
Advertising agency 3	Copywriter	65 min

All interviews consisted of open-ended questions, were conducted in each company's premises and tape-recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The interviews lasted from 30 to 65 minutes. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed into written text as exactly as possible. In the data analysis, the transcriptions were carefully read through several times and grouped into different theme areas with the help of code symbols.

Secondly, as multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003, 97), the interview data was complemented with data from the seven m-adcoms that the interviewed companies had used in their mobile adcommunication campaigns. The second data set speaks for the benefits experienced in b-to-b-mobile adcommunication and mobile adcommunication's role in the case companies' overall marketing communications mix. The m-adcoms were analyzed using content analysis (e.g. Kassarian, 1997; Kolbe and Burnett, 1991) to find out how the companies applied the nature of m-adcommunication. From each m-ad, both the text and the figures and graphics were analyzed for the specific features of mobile adcommunication, i.e. personalization (e.g. name of the receiver), interactivity (e.g. questions presented for the receiver, attempts to invite the receiver to visit web pages or to call the company etc.), and context-sensitivity. The results of the data analysis are discussed below.

How the features of mobile adcommunication were utilized?

All the mobile adcoms analysed aimed at creating awareness, i.e. they included a greeting with the receiver's name, the company name and/or logo, some slogan or indication of what the company offered, contact information in various forms, and graphics. Apart from the greetings, the adcoms were not personalized, and some of them had not even been sent to a specific target group. Nor was the potential for interactivity utilized. Overall, the m-adcoms resembled trade magazine adverts because the special features of mobile adcommunication were not, to a great extent, made use of. The adcoms resembled mostly corporate image adverts, even though m-adcommunication is better suited to more interactive and focused communication.

In spite of the design of the m-adcoms, the interviewed companies' representatives and experts both considered the best features of b-to-b mobile adcommunication to be its precise targetability and fastness. The context-sensitivity was seen as handy only on special occasions, such as trade fairs, since normally it is sufficient to reach the target person from her/his work place. The ubiquity of the mobile medium was considered valuable especially in such businesses where the customers would be working in the field and thus not reachable at the office, for example through e-mail. In such situations, mobile adcommunication would be an effective and quick way to grab the receiver's attention.

The biggest difference of mobile adcommunication to traditional advertising was considered to be its intimacy: the fact that it comes straight to the person's own mobile phone. Because of this, m-adcommunication was also regarded as potentially more irritating and intrusive than traditional advertising. The interviewees stressed that getting the receiver's permission and delivering value to the receiver must be taken into account more carefully than they had done. In addition, the small size of m-adverts (because of the small screens on mobile phones) was identified as a problem. However, the interviewees did not consider the interactivity, in other words one of the specific features of m-adcommunication important, since they did not spontaneously discuss it.

How mobile adcommunication was used?

The case companies' m-adcommunication can best be described as traditional image advertising. Even though they contained some slight features that refer to direct marketing, for example greeting the receiver with his/her name and targeting some of the m-ads according to the receivers' interests, the content was not personalized and interaction with the receiver was not sought for. Applying the integrated marketing communications mindscape developed by Hartley and Pickton (1999), mobile adcommunication was used as unidirectional, non-personal 'corporate communication'. Even though the medium itself offered possibilities for personal and interactive communication, it was not utilized.

The advertisers did not feel that their first trial of mobile adcommunication brought them any commercial value. In spite of this, they acknowledged the learning and becoming acquainted with a new medium as a benefit. Thus, mobile adcommunication did not become a useful part of their marketing communications mix. However, they did not totally reject the use of m-adcommunication in the future, but they recognised that the way of using it would have to be different, to better make use of the special characteristics that m-adcommunication offers.

When looking from the Marketing Management view, the case companies applied m-adcommunication to corporate image campaigns, although they did not find it very useful. Moreover, the experts agreed with this opinion and considered the corporate image advertising even irritating. Suitability of m-adcommunication to promoting products was also considered weak in the case of expensive, industrial durable products whereas, for industrial convenience products, mobile adcommunication could be used, for example, in promoting special offers.

However, when considering Relationship Marketing, the interviewees saw that mobile adcommunication could be useful in informing existing customers about current topics with their permission. The content of the mobile adcom could then be, for example, an invitation to an event, a greeting card, a special offer, a reminder of sent direct mail or an informative adcom about novelties. For very simple low-ticket items it might even be possible to send mobile adcommunication prior to the forming of a customer relationship, for example, as mobile special offer, but as for more complex products, mobile adcommunication was not deemed to be efficient in the pre-relationship stage. Rather, mobile adcommunication was seen to be best suited as a customer relationship management tool in the framework of an established customer relationship.

Overall, the interviewees stressed the importance of asking permission for mobile adcommunication prior to sending any adcoms as well as delivering value to the receiver through mobile adcommunication. Without these two elements, there would be a very real danger of the mobile adcom evoking negative feelings. The value or benefit produced for the receiver could be useful information, entertaining content, or a monetary benefit in the form of an exclusive discount. Also, in the case of b-to-b mobile adcommunication the adcoms should be carefully targeted to the right situation, such as to business hours only, so that the receiver would not be disturbed in his/her free time.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to examine how mobile adcommunication could be applied to b-to-b marketing communications. The paper was built on theoretical discussion, as well as a small-scale case study. Three perspectives of mobile adcommunication in the context of b-to-b marketing communications were presented: features of mobile adcommunication, mobile adcommunication's position in the overall marketing communications mix, and possible uses of mobile adcommunication.

The empirical results concerning the features and benefits that mobile adcommunication could offer to the b-to-b marketer were congruent with the views presented in the theoretical discussion. The unique aspect of mobile adcommunication, context-sensitivity, i.e. the possibility to reach the right person at the right place, at the right time appears to be less valued in b-to-b marketing communications. The right timing and location are often not as critical as in consumer marketing, as it is enough for the b-to-b marketer to reach the desired person at his/her office. However, on special locations, such as at trade shows, location-based mobile adcommunication can offer a convenient way to reach target persons inside the trade show area. For example, an exhibitor could automatically send an m-adcom

to their existing customers, when they enter the trade area. The m-adcom would invite them directly to their stand, and show the route in a map or even guide their way while walking.

The best features of mobile adcommunication from a of b-to-b marketing standpoint seem to be fastness, exact targetability, high attention value, and interactivity. However, these features - perhaps except for attention value - are characteristics that can be achieved with other marketing communications tools as well. For example, e-mail marketing is also a fast, exactly targetable and interactive tool although huge amounts of spam decrease its usability considerably. Thus, at least in EU, where the legislation has kept spam out of mobile phones, mobile adcommunication has a potential to become an interaction channel that both communicating parties find useful and applicable. Especially, when used with key accounts and integrated with the key account management IT systems and data, mobile adcommunication can be more efficient and cost effective that direct mail or phone calls.

The benefits of mobile adcommunication are weakened not only by the limited size of the adcom but also by the possibility that the receiver might easily regard it negatively. The mobile phone is a very personal instrument and adcommunication that comes to it can feel intrusive. Because mobile adcommunication may reach the receiver in a noisy manner with the message tone regardless of the time or place, this can be experienced as an interruption. Thus, it is important that mobile adcommunication is used only in situations where the receiver has stated his/her willingness to receive mobile adcommunication, i.e. has a positive attitude towards it, and the mobile adcom brings value to him/her (see Figure 4).

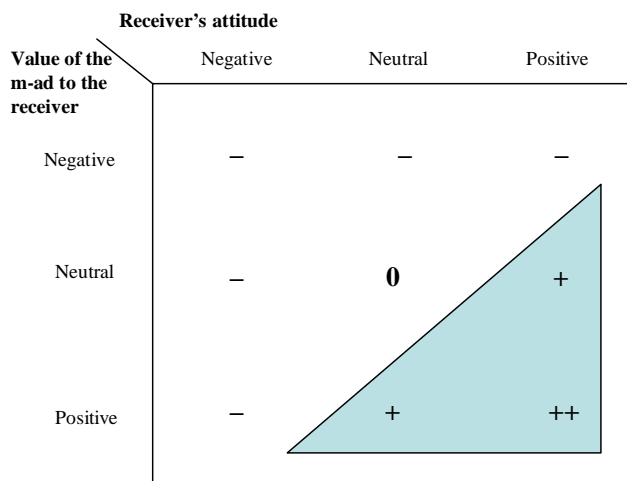


Figure 3. Applicability of b-to-b mobile adcommunication

Empirical results concerning the positioning of mobile adcommunication in the b-to-b marketing communications mix showed that the case companies used mobile adcommunication like traditional advertising. Based on existing research, we suggested that mobile adcommunication should be used in customer relationship management along with other personal and interactive marketing communications elements. However, this was not realized in practice. Even though the medium itself enables personal and interactive communication, this opportunity was not utilized in the case companies' mobile adcommunication. It seems as though the practitioners did not change their way of communicating to better fit the new medium. Thus, it may be more difficult than previously thought to think about advertising in a new, non-mass media way, and to act upon the new ideas. Learning is needed and it may take some time. Although the m-advertisers briefed or designed their own campaigns, they were not satisfied with them. They acknowledged that the image campaigns were not the best possible solutions. This change in thinking could indicate that in the course of time, after the first experiments and learning from them, m-adcommunication in the b-to-b sector will evolve towards the direction suggested here.

The results concerning the use of mobile adcommunication in business-to-business communication were partly coherent with the theoretical discussion concerning consumer communication. The results

indicated that because m-adcommunication enables very personal communication, it should be used to deliver information that is relevant and interesting for the business receiver, whereas non-personal communication targeted to larger groups, such as corporate image advertising, can be better communicated in mass media. This conclusion supports the view that mobile adcommunication should not be mass communication but targeted to individuals (for example Salo and Tähtinen, 2005; Barnes and Scornavacca, 2004; Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2004), be they consumers or members of a firm's buying centre.

Leppäniemi, Karjaluoto and Salo (2004) and Karjaluoto, Leppäniemi and Salo (2004) suggest that mobile adcommunication targeted to consumers might best be used as a call-to-action tool, in other words pushing the prospect to the point of sale. This view only gains support in a b-to-b marketing framework when the product or service offered would be a simple, low-ticket item, i.e. an industrial convenience product. In Figure 5, this study suggests that, for these kinds of products, mobile adcommunication could be used both in the pre-relationship stage as well as within an established customer relationship as a sales promotion tool. However, for more complex b-to-b products, mobile adcommunication is an insufficient medium. For industrial durable products, the potential applications of mobile adcommunication lie especially in the area of customer relationship management. Invitations, greetings, compliments, and reminders aim at deepening the customer relationship and increasing customer commitment. This lends support to, for example, Pura (2003, 304), suggesting that mobile adcommunication can play an important role in customer relationship management.

B-to-B Product or Service	Relationship Stage	
	Pre-relationship	Established relationship
Industrial convenience product	Special offer advertising etc. sales promotion	Special offer advertising etc. sales promotion Loyalty discount advertising
Industrial durable product	—	Customer relationship communication Announcements of current issues Reminders

Figure 4. B-to-b mobile adcommunication applications.

However, when evaluating the role of mobile adcommunication in business to business marketing communications, we have to stress that it should not be evaluated as an isolated media. M-adcommunication is only one tool that firms can use to influence and communicate with their customers. Only when combined with advertising, PR, sales promotion etc. its usage can be fully utilized and evaluated. Moreover, the communication sent from the supplier firms is not the only information channel the members of a buying centre use. Personal sources such as other members of the centre, experts, and superiors have an important influence on the decisions (Moriarty and Spekman, 1984). Although personal sources are considered most influential, the marketer is not advised to rely solely on the sales person (*ibid.*), but to use a variety of communication tools, including web, e-mail (Lichtenthal and Eliaz, 2003), and mobile adcommunication creatively. The importance of the various information sources seem to vary depending on the involvement level and the complexity of the purchase situation (Bunn and Clopton, 1993). Thus, for a marketer, it is of utmost important to try to assess the purchase situations of its customer base, and thereafter to compile a communication mix that suits the different situations.

However, the experiment showed that it is difficult to unlearn 'the advertising for masses' thinking and learn to think in a non-mass media way, and moreover, to act upon the new ideas. Learning certainly

takes time. To aid learning, such experiments as in this study would be valuable, since they offer the companies decision makers a safe and low-cost way to try out new ideas and to pre-test campaigns.

The findings of this study should be considered in light of certain limitations. Firstly, the reliability of the empirical results is weakened by the fact that both the advertisers' and experts' experiences on mobile adcommunication were based on a trial of relatively short duration. Secondly, the number of interviewees in this study was quite small. However, the validity and insights generated from qualitative research have more to do with the information-richness of the cases and the capabilities of the researchers than with the sample size (Patton, 1990, 185). The size of the empirical material in this study was supported by the fact that in the interviews the same things started to recur, i.e. the point of saturation was reached. However, given the scarcity of theoretical source material on b-to-b mobile adcommunication, and the lack of large-scale empirical research, the conclusions presented in this paper should be considered as preliminary and suggestive.

The next step in studying b-to-b mobile adcommunication would be to study experiences of b-to-b mobile adcommunication campaigns over a wider range of adcoms, so that applicability of mobile adcommunication to b-to-b marketing communications could be evaluated more extensively. In addition, an important area of research is also the receivers' attitudes towards b-to-b mobile adcommunication because, in the end, the customers will determine the future of b-to-b mobile adcommunication. Mobile adcommunication is still an unknown and somewhat risky means of marketing communication that should not be used unless customers welcome it.

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