



Consumers un-tethered: A three-market empirical study of consumers' mobile marketing acceptance[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This study examines factors influencing consumers' acceptance of mobile marketing across three influential markets, namely U.S., China, and Europe. The authors develop an integrative conceptual model on consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward mobile marketing. The authors incorporate three individual-level characteristics, namely personal attachment, innovativeness, and risk avoidance and investigate how permission-based acceptance influences the relationship between consumers' attitude and mobile marketing activity. Focusing on Generation Y consumers, the model is empirically tested with data from U.S., China, and Europe. The findings illustrate several cross-market differences and similarities regarding the relationships between individual-level characteristics, attitude, and mobile marketing activity. Research and managerial implications of these findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

New developments in mobile technologies (such as latest generation smartphones and tablets) have begun to turn the mobile device into an innovative, powerful platform with which to engage consumers (Shankar & Malthouse, 2007; Shankar, Venkatesh, Hofacker, & Naik, 2010). Indeed, the significant growth in the worldwide penetration of mobile phones has fueled the growth of mobile marketing spending and focused marketers' attention toward building and promoting brand presence on mobile devices, creating a marketing platform referred to as "brand in the hand" (Sultan & Rohm, 2005). In this study, we define mobile marketing as a set of programs and practices that firms employ to communicate and engage, in an interactive manner, with consumers and enable them to access information, download content, or purchase products on mobile devices (MMA, 2008). This definition underscores the potential for companies to conduct branding,

marketing communications, and other mobile activities specific to the consumer's current context, time, and location.

Scholars have examined the uniqueness of the mobile marketing platform with respect to traditional, and even fixed-Internet, media along two dimensions: (1) that it involves a high degree of interactivity, and (2) that its marketing content and messages can be based on one's location (e.g., Bauer, Barnes, Reichardt, & Neumann, 2005; Rohm and Sultan 2005; Shankar et al., 2010). Past research also suggests firms can deliver advertising and other location-based promotions to consumers, in effect rendering the marketing content contextually valuable to consumers (Pura, 2005). A case in point is Adidas' use of quick-response codes in its innovative mobile "window shopping" platform (Gigaom, 2012).

While a growing body of research has examined factors influencing mobile marketing acceptance among consumers, relatively fewer studies examine and compare consumer acceptance across both developed and emerging markets (Peng & Spencer, 2006; Shankar et al., 2010; Xu, Oh, & Teo, 2009). Therefore, our key research question is what factors influence youth consumers' acceptance of mobile marketing practices across three influential global markets. We have purposely chosen youth consumers as our research focus since, to these "digital natives" (Prensky, 2005), the mobile platform has overtaken the fixed Internet as the primary form of communication and access to content. Simply put, these individuals represent the future for firms seeking to engage with consumers in the mobile space.

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This study contributes to the marketing literature in four ways. First, although there is a growing body of research examining consumer acceptance of mobile marketing (e.g., Bauer et al., 2005), these studies do not specifically explain drivers of mobile marketing attitude, nor do they incorporate mobile marketing activity as an ultimate dependent variable. We extend past research by developing and empirically testing an integrative conceptual framework on the formation of consumers' attitude toward mobile marketing, by studying the impact of attitude on behavior, and by examining the conditions shaping the strength of the attitude–behavior relationship in the mobile marketing domain.

Second, our approach goes beyond current conceptualizations of acceptance models (primarily the TAM and innovation diffusion models) to unite technology-based factors with consumer characteristics central to mobile marketing in explaining consumer attitudes, as well as consumers' subsequent acceptance of and participation in mobile marketing activities. More importantly, we examine the moderating roles of consumer characteristics such as personal attachment (to the mobile device), innovativeness, and risk avoidance on the effects of technology factors (e.g., usefulness perceptions) on attitude toward mobile marketing.

Mobile carriers, marketers, and policy makers are confronted with numerous obstacles, including the perception of mobile marketing communications as intrusive, annoying, and posing a threat to personal privacy. Therefore, while many academic studies have noted the challenges facing mobile, location-based marketing practices, including feelings of intrusiveness as well as trust and privacy concerns among consumers (e.g., Grant & O'Donohoe, 2007), the global youth generation has readily embraced mobile devices and is more demanding than previous generations in terms of their expectations for interactions with brands involving the mobile experience (cf. Meyer, Michael, & Nettesheim, 2008). Our expanded conceptual model, moving beyond the TAM theory, seeks to address these unique consumer issues surrounding mobile marketing.

Third, we investigate the role of permission as it relates to consumers' acceptance of firms' mobile marketing efforts and extend the literature by examining the role of permission-based acceptance on mobile marketing activities among the youth segment. Whereas Jayawardhena, Kuckertz, Karjaluoto, and Kautonen (2009) examined antecedents to consumers' willingness to participate in permission-based mobile marketing, their model did not include mobile marketing activities as an ultimate dependent variable.

Fourth, much of the prior work on consumer acceptance of mobile marketing practices has focused on single markets (e.g., Barwise & Strong, 2002; Tsang, Ho, & Liang, 2004; Zhang & Mao, 2008), and few studies have compared cross-market differences related to consumers' acceptance of mobile marketing acceptance (Ngai & Gunasekaran,

2007; Sultan, Rohm, & Gao, 2009). Accordingly, our study of mobile, location-based marketing is focused on the following three markets: U.S., China, and Western Europe, across which markets technology adoption seems to be converging. The number of smartphone users in China, concurrent with the launch of 3G mobile data services, reached almost 200 million by the end of 2011 (Ablott, 2011). And the potential for continued growth in highly populated yet still developing markets such as China (Ericsson.com, 2010) is significant. In Europe, mobile phone penetration now exceeds 100% (averaging more than one mobile phone per person) in several countries including Germany and Italy. In turn, mobile device penetration in the U.S. has surpassed 90%, smartphone penetration is approaching 50%, and stiff competition in industries ranging from consumer products to financial services is leading domestic brands to embrace new and innovative forms of digital marketing communications in order to reach consumers (Nielsen Research, 2010). Yet, with respect to areas such as online privacy, there are apparent cultural differences (Daley, 2011). For instance, European laws and public policy toward protection of personal information online are significantly stricter than it is in markets such as the U.S.

By nature of our proposed conceptual model and in light of the trend toward globalization of consumer cultures and influences (Khanh and Hau 2007), we examine cross-market differences and similarities in consumer acceptance with respect to mobile marketing practices. The objective of our study, however, is not to focus on cultural characteristics, but rather to examine antecedents to acceptance and marketing-related activity related to mobile marketing and how the relationships among these antecedents differ across three global markets.

In the next section, we review the extant literature and present our conceptual model of mobile marketing acceptance. We then detail our research methodology and model analysis. Finally, we discuss the study results, implications for theory and practice, study limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Conceptual framework

Our study lies at the intersection of two issues: (1) the influence of technology adoption factors as well as individual characteristics on consumers' attitudes toward mobile marketing and subsequent mobile marketing activity, and (2) the analysis of cross-market differences related to mobile marketing acceptance among youth consumers across the U.S., China, and Western Europe. The conceptual framework shown in Fig. 1 highlights the proposed relationships and hypotheses, the rationales for which are presented below.

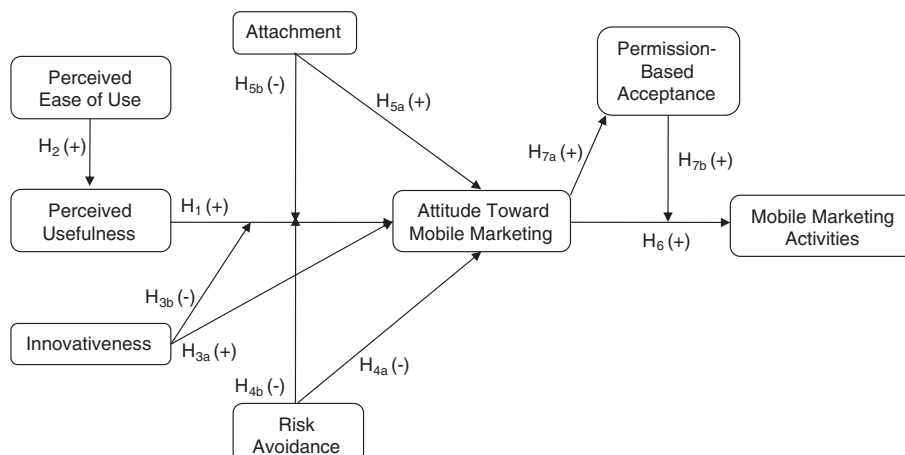


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

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