

# **Mobile Advertising or Mobile Marketing. A Need for a New Concept?**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is about clarifying the meaning of two concepts: mobile advertising and mobile marketing. The aim is to find a term that covers the essential elements of mobile commercial communication, which is sometimes referred to as mobile advertising and at other times as mobile marketing. To clarify the situation, the elements of traditional advertising and marketing are analysed, and compared to the current use of the focal terms. Since neither of the terms seems to cover the phenomenon adequately, two alternative conceptualisations are suggested and discussed. The paper concludes with an evaluation of the study, its limitations and future research paths.

## **Keywords**

Mobile advertising, mobile marketing, conceptual analysis

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## **Introduction**

Mobile advertising has raised considerable interest as mobile technology has advanced and companies world-wide are starting to use not only text messages, but also multimedia messages in their mobile commercial communication. This interest is evident in newspapers (e.g. Manninen 2004; Taulavuori 2005), trade press (e.g. Salmela 2004; Karjaluo & Leppäniemi 2005), and in research (e.g. Barnes 2002; Leppäniemi & Karjaluo 2005; Salo & Tähtinen 2005). Moreover, there's a wide research interest in mobile marketing (e.g. Barnes & Scornavacca 2004; Facchetti et al. 2005) or mobile commerce/business (e.g. Denk & Hackl 2004; Kalakota & Robinson 2002; Varshney 2003; Wang & Wang 2005) that touches upon the issue of mobile marketing communication.

In spite of the rapid increase in studies focusing on mobile commercial communication, the theory development and especially the conceptualisations of mobile means of commercial communication suffer from a lack of attention. Leppäniemi & Karjaluo (2005) have very recently acknowledged a need for more work on the various definitions of mobile advertising. Terms like mobile advertising and mobile marketing are being used despite not having been explicitly defined and different terms seem to refer to the same phenomenon. For example, Kalakota and Robinson (2002) use the term *mobile marketing* when referring to distribution

of messages and promotion, in Stafford and Gillenson (2003) *m-commerce* refers to the same phenomenon, and in Pura (2002) the term is *mobile advertising*.

In addition to the conceptual variety and confusing usages, the relations of the applied terms to other concepts have not been clarified. Firstly, mobile marketing in many studies seems to refer to a more restricted action than the concept marketing does. For example Kalakota and Robinson (2002) define mobile marketing as “the distribution of any kind of message or promotion that adds value to the customer while enhancing revenue for the firm”. From a traditional marketing management perspective, this is a description of only one of the 4P’s in marketing; namely marketing communication and not of all of them. Moreover, the term mobile commerce is sometimes used when referring to message distribution, although commerce generally refers to all the actions of doing business.

Secondly, advertising as one-way communication from the marketer to the customer seems to be much more restricted than what the use of mobile phones enables advertisers to do. The receiver of the message can react by phoning the marketer, sending the company a text message, or connecting her/himself to the company’s web pages (if fitted to the mobile in use). Thus, mobile advertising is much more interactive and personal than traditional advertising. In spite of this, the personal and interactive nature of the phenomenon is not present in the conceptualisations or descriptions of mobile advertising.

What is more, the use of the term ‘advertising’ influences the practitioners’ thinking and actions. This can be seen in the mobile ads that are being designed and delivered when e.g. retailers try new mobile advertising services (e.g. Salo & Tähtinen 2005, Komulainen et al, 2005). The m-ads more closely resemble newspaper advertising to unknown masses than interactive and personal mobile commercial communication with potential and/or loyal customers. This may lead to a vicious circle of advertisers setting goals according to mass media (e.g. reaching a high number of potential customers), and ad agencies or advertisers designing m-ads for mass audiences without personalisation and interactivity, which annoys many customers, leading to a failure of the campaign. Finally, after such a failure, both the marketer and the agency may decide that mobile advertising does not work, although the poor knowledge of the essential features of mobile commercial communication was the real reason for the failure of the campaign.

This paper begins with setting the goal for the paper and describing the research design. Then the recent conceptualisations of traditional advertising and marketing are studied to find a comparison for the current use of the terms mobile advertising and mobile marketing. Following this comparison, the need for a new conceptualisation is discussed and two alternative terms are suggested. The paper concludes with a discussion on its contribution and limitations as well as suggestions for future research.

## **Research problem and design**

The introduction pointed out a lack of conceptual analysis of the terms related to mobile commercial communication, in other words messages that are sent and received through mobile and hand-held devices (mostly mobile phones). This paper aims to fill that research gap by clarifying the meaning of what some researchers now call mobile advertising (e.g.

Salo & Tähtinen 2005) and some mobile marketing (e.g. Kalakota & Robinson 2002) and suggesting two alternative conceptualisations. In order for the paper to reach its aim, the following research question is posed: How can the phenomenon of 'sending and receiving commercial messages to mobile devices' be conceptualised? Thus, this research focuses on the two concepts 'mobile advertising' and 'mobile marketing', since they seem to be the ones that are commonly used and confused with each other. Thus, analysing such terms as mobile commerce and mobile business, in other words the buying and selling of goods and services through wireless handheld devices, lies outside the main focus of this study.

The research question is answered by applying a conceptual analysis. The data are derived from a content analysis of the literature focusing on the phenomenon. To be able to clarify the meanings of mobile advertising and mobile marketing, we must first be clear on what is meant by advertising and marketing. Thus, the existing conceptualisations of traditional marketing and advertising and their elements are studied.

Secondly, we need to know how the phenomenon of 'sending and receiving commercial communication to mobile phones' is currently depicted within scholarly research. The literature under investigation here was gathered through a literature search from Science Direct, ProQuest, EBSCO, and Emerald Fulltext. The following keywords were applied in the search: mobile advertising, wireless advertising, wireless marketing, and mobile marketing. In addition to the reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings that were available are included in the literature. The outcome of the search was 20 full text studies. The definitions and/or descriptions of the keywords in the studies form the data analysed at this stage of the study. Thirdly, the elements of traditional marketing and advertising are compared to the elements of mobile marketing and advertising in order to see whether they help us to understand the phenomenon. Finally, once the main elements of mobile commercial communication are known, two new concepts that include the essential elements are suggested and evaluated.

## **Recent conceptualisations of advertising and marketing**

The aim of this section is to discuss how the existing research on advertising and marketing defines and describes these concepts. Instead of using a content analysis of the huge number of studies on the topics, I searched for articles that would focus on defining the two concepts or describing the essential elements of them. Two recent key articles, namely Richards & Curran (2002) and Nan & Faber (2004) were found that, combined, offer both views on advertising and these are discussed next.

A current definition of advertising is found in Richards & Curran (2002). Two main reasons justify the choice of this particular article here. The first reason relates to the publication outlet; the article was published quite recently in the *Journal of Advertising*, one of the three premier advertising journals (the other two being the *Journal of Advertising Research* and the *International Journal of Advertising*, see Hult et al. 1997, Theoharakis & Hirst 2002). The second reason relates to the content and method of the article. The paper's aim is to discuss the essential elements that determine advertising and constructing an improved definition of advertising. The article applies a Delphi method and uses dialogue with experts (ad agency

executives, presidents of professional organisations, government regulators, and respected academics) in building the definition.

The essential elements that reoccur in the definitions of 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 & Curran 2002). Starting from these elements, the Delphi method applied in the study produced the following definition of advertising "*a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future*" (ibid, 74). In addition to this definition, a clarifying footnote is presented (ibid): "mediated communication is that which is conveyed to an audience through print, electronics or any method other than direct person-to-person communication". The authors also note that this definition broadens the scope of advertising to include new technologies, although mobile advertising is not mentioned. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is no need to define mobile advertising as such.

Nan and Faber (2004) focus on re-conceptualising the essential elements of advertising in order to find out what makes advertising a distinct phenomenon and how its important characteristics can be incorporated in research. They conclude that there are (at least) four advertising building blocks; *consumer scepticism*, *repetition*, *message co-ordination*, and a *cluttered and competing environment*, which separates advertising from other types of communication. Consumer scepticism refers to studies that show consumers seem to learn about advertisers' motives, strategies, and tactics and thus learn not to trust all advertising. Advertising is highly repetitive in nature, since studies have shown that a consumer needs to see the advert more than once before it may influence her/his thinking or behaviour. In using multiple communication options (TV, radio, newspaper, mobile devices etc.) to reach customers, advertisers co-ordinate their messages, often applying Integrated Marketing Communication tools. The advertising environment is becoming more and more cluttered, since the volume of advertising in general has increased and so has the number of competing brands and competitive clutter. This is one of the reasons that advertisers are looking for new media (such as mobile devices) to gain more customer attention by avoiding clutter.

The definition of marketing that this study applies is the one accepted by the American Marketing Association (AMA); "Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders." (AMA 2004). It is clear from this definition that the relationship between the concepts of advertising and marketing are hierarchical. Marketing is the widest concept, communication being the intermediary and advertising the narrow one. Thus, the same hierarchy would be useful also in conceptualising the phenomenon in the mobile word.

The discussion above has set the scene against which the current use of the concepts 'mobile marketing' and 'mobile advertising' will be compared next.

## Conceptualisations of mobile advertising and mobile marketing

### Practitioners' usage of the terms

Before discussing the ways that academic scholars use the terms, let us first take a brief look at how the Mobile Marketing Association uses them. As seen in Table 1 the web-pages of MMA Global use both terms: mobile marketing and wireless (mobile) advertising. In spite of the difference in the terms, their content is very similar as they both refer to sending promotional content to mobile phone owners. However, when looking at the MMA's Code for responsible mobile marketing, the term mobile marketing covers not only the content of mobile communications but also any forms of marketing, advertising and sales promotion. Thus, there is confusion in the practitioner's use of the terms.

Table 1. Practitioners' use of mobile marketing and mobile advertising

| Reference   | Concept              | Description   |
|---|----------------------|---|
| MMA Global (2005a)<br>- industry overview                       | Mobile marketing     | New promotion channel   |
| MMA Global (2005b)<br>- in glossary                             | Wireless advertising | Any content sent by or on behalf of advertisers and marketers to a wireless mobile device                             |
| MMA UK (2003)<br>- in MMA Code for responsible mobile marketing | Mobile marketing     | Any form of marketing, advertising or sales promotion activity aimed at consumers and conducted over a mobile channel |

When comparing the content of the terms to the definitions of advertising and marketing presented above, advertising is the one that they are closest to. Thus, we argue that the companies and individuals that currently use or are interested in using mobile devices in promoting their products view it as advertising. The only difference is that the media that conveys the message is a mobile handheld device. The features of the media and their influence on the message are neither discussed nor taken into consideration.

### Academic usage of the term 'mobile advertising'

The following discussion will focus on the academic use of the terms 'mobile advertising' and 'mobile marketing'. However, if the source of reference has also used other terms (such as mobile communication) they are also included in the analysis.

The scholarly use of mobile or wireless advertising (wireless advertising refers to mobile Internet and thus banner ads that can be viewed by using a mobile device) is rather unified, as Table 2 shows. Most of the definitions or descriptions in the articles refer to traditional advertising, stating that the difference lies in the mobile devices, which the message is being sent and read from (e.g. Bulander et al. 2005a, Salo & Tähtinen 2005).

Table 2. Academics' use of mobile advertising: a new from of advertising

| Reference                        | Concept                                   | Description   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Barnes 2002                      | Wireless digital advertising              | New platform for interactive advertising  |
| Barwise & Strong 2002            | Permission-based mobile advertising       | Flexible, tactical medium suitable for short, time-based communications   |
| Bulander et al. 2005a            | Mobile or wireless advertising            | Advertising that uses mobile terminals.   |
| Bulander et al. 2005b            | Mobile or wireless advertising            | Advertising using mobile terminals as its target platform.  |
| De Reyck & Degraeve 2003         | Mobile advertising as precision marketing | Targeting well-identified potential customers with text messages in advance, thereby increasing the response-to-advertisement ratio.  |
| Faber et al. 2004                | Mobile advertising                        | Wireless communication, reaching consumers via cell phones  |
| Leppäniemi & Karjaluo 2005       | Mobile advertising                        | Wireless Internet-based advertising (in US), SMS- and MMS-based telecommunication (in Europe).  |
| Leppäniemi et al. 2004           | Mobile advertising                        | "The business of encouraging people to buy products and services using the mobile channel as a medium to deliver the advertising message" by IMAP project (2003)              |
| Okazaki 2004 a<br>Okazaki 2004 b | Wireless advertising                      | Text banner ads in wireless advertising platforms, pull advertising (i-mode)  |
| Okazaki 2005                     | Mobile advertising                        | Short message services transmitting business-to-customer messages to wireless devices.  |
| Pura 2002                        | Mobile advertising                        | Push and pull messages, promotional sponsorships, part of a cross media   |
| Salo & Tähtinen 2005             | Mobile advertising                        | Ads sent to and presented on mobile handheld devices  |
| Tähtinen & Salo 2004             | Mobile advertising                        | Ads sent to and presented on mobile handheld devices  |
| Yuan & Tsao 2003                 | Mobile advertising                        | A channel for tailor-made campaigns targeting users according to where they are, their needs at the moment, and the devices they are using (i.e. contextualised advertising). |

However, there are also definitions and descriptions that stress the features that make mobile advertising different from traditional forms of advertising. For example, Barwise & Strong (2002) take up the flexibility, and time-based nature but also the fact that the small screens

restrict the length of the message. Moreover, Barnes (2002) stresses the interactive nature of mobile advertising and Yuan & Tsao (2003) the ability to use contextual information to target the messages to individual receivers, in other words to personalise the message. All these features are enabled by the technology that is being used; in other words the mobile devices and the telecommunication platforms and infrastructures.

This brings us to question whether these features are distinctive to advertising in general and if not, should we use the term mobile advertising at all. If we compare them to the broad definition of Richards & Curran (2002) presented above, we can state that mobile and wireless advertising otherwise fit into the overall definition of advertising, but the non-personal nature does not hold in mobile commercial communication.

If we were to accept the definition of mobile advertising as referring to mobile commercial communication, the essential elements of mobile commercial communication should be part of the definition. If the features were alike in all forms of advertising, there would be no need for different definitions. However, some of the essential features of advertising that Nan & Faber (2004) bring forward (scepticism, repetition, message co-ordination, a cluttered and competing environment) do not describe permission based mobile commercial communication. Mobile advertising cannot rely on repetition (which is reported to be irritating), nor does it happen in a cluttered and competing environment, at least not yet. Moreover, message co-ordination in the mobile environment is no longer the privilege of the advertiser. Firstly, according to the EU legislation, the receiver has to be asked for permission before sending m-adverts, unless there is an existing customer relationship and the message relates to that. In both cases, the customer must receive instructions on how to decline the permission. In addition, the receiver can respond by sending a short message back to the advertiser, send the advert to friends and relatives, or change the advert or add something to it before forwarding it, without the advertisers' knowledge.

To conclude, recent research uses the term mobile advertising in a rather unified way, although no single definition has gained popularity over any other. However, the distinct features of mobile advertising, which several studies agree on, do not correspond with the essential elements of advertising. Therefore, the use of the term mobile advertising when referring to mobile commercial communication is misleading and confusing, since it hides the very elements that make it different from other forms of advertising. Thus, if practitioners and researchers continue to use the term 'm-advertising' it may hinder the application of those interactive and personal elements that could be the very elements that influence the success of mobile commercial communication.

### **Academic usage of the term 'mobile marketing'**

The keyword search produced only five papers that use the term 'mobile marketing' as a main construct. Interestingly, four of them describe the phenomenon as personalised and interactive or dialogue-oriented communication, as Table 3 reveals. In other words, the features that distinguish the mobile commercial communication from its traditional counterpart - advertising - are stressed. The only exception is a definition by Kalakota & Robinson (2002) that was applied by Barnes & Scornavacca (2004), but they do discuss interactivity and personalisation in the main body of the study.

Table 3. Academics' use of mobile marketing: personal and interactive communication

| Reference                 | Concept  | Description   |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Barnes & Scornavacca 2004 | Mobile marketing<br>M-commerce<br>Wireless marketing   | "The distribution of any kind of message or promotion that adds value for the customer while enhancing revenue for the firm" (Kalakota & Robinson 2002)                               |
| Bauer et al. 2005a        | Mobile marketing & Mobile communication                | Innovative form of commercial communication, individualised and dialogue-oriented communication   |
| Bauer et al. 2005b        | Mobile marketing                                       | An innovative form of commercial communication. Personal, ubiquitous, interactive, localised, dialogue-oriented communication.  |
| Karjaluoto et al. 2004    | Mobile marketing<br><br>Mobile marketing communication | Two-way marketing medium, interactive channel to drive sales. A fresh element in companies' promotion mix.  |
| Scharl et al. 2005        | Mobile marketing                                       | Using a wireless medium to provide consumers with time- and location-sensitive, personalised information that promotes goods, services and ideas, thereby benefiting all stakeholders |

However, when comparing the AMA's definition of marketing to the picture of mobile marketing provided through the five studies, there is a clear difference. Mobile marketing seems to be used to describe only one part of the marketing definition, namely the communication of value. This conclusion receives support from two of the studies (Bauer et al. 2005; Karjaluoto et al. 2005) that both use also the term 'mobile marketing communication' when describing the phenomenon.

In conclusion, the use of the term 'mobile marketing' in the analysed studies refers to the same phenomenon as 'mobile advertising' did in the first set of studies. In addition, when comparing the descriptions to the definition of the term 'marketing', their fit is not optimal. Therefore, to use the term 'mobile marketing' to describe personalised, interactive, dialogue-oriented commercial communication via mobile devices does not help researchers and/or practitioners to understand the phenomenon. More likely, it may be easily confused with terms like mobile commerce, referring to electronic commerce transactions carried out via mobile devices (see Dholakia & Dholakia 2002, Kalakota & Winston 1996) or mobile business, referring to an even broader phenomenon also including internal business processes and transactions partially operated in the off-line world (Zobel 2001).



## Suggesting a new conceptualisation

The previous chapter has revealed that currently researchers use two terms to describe mobile commercial communication. On one hand, mobile advertising is widely applied, but its content does not bring forward the distinctive features that the mobile devices bring in. Therefore, the use of mobile advertising does not really cover the whole phenomenon. On the other hand, marketing is a wider concept than advertising, but when it is used to describe the focal phenomenon, it actually covers more than it should. This problem of one term being too small and the other being too large is visualised in Figure 1.

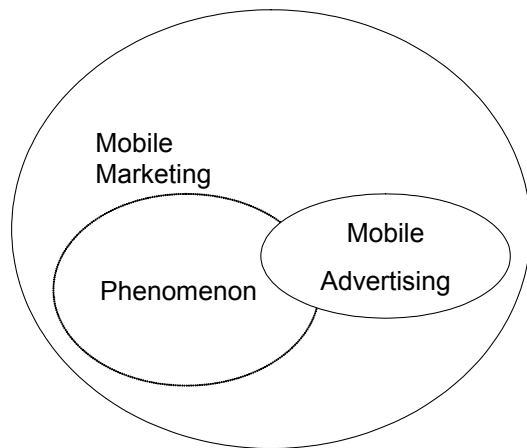


Figure 1. The relations between the terms and the phenomenon

This leads us to consider an alternative term that would cover the whole phenomenon and nothing but the phenomenon in question. First, the essential elements that form the phenomenon at hand need to be distinguished and thereafter, a term that includes these elements needs to be discovered.

We used existing literature sets and analysed those elements that are used most often when describing the essential features of mobile commercial communication. The interactivity (see e.g. Barnes 2002, Barwise & Strong 2002) of the media, the personal nature of the mobile device (see e.g. Barnes & Scornavacca 2004, Bauer et al. 2005), its potential for use in a context-sensitive way, for example when the customer is actually shopping (see e.g. Barnes & Scornavacca 2004, Salo & Tähtinen 2005), and its ubiquity and fastness (see e.g. Pura 2002, Scharl et al. 2005) were the most often mentioned characteristics. A combination of these elements can be classified as personal mass communication (see Ottesen 2001 for the categories) as more than one person is exposed to the same communication symbols, although the communication episode gives room for relatively immediate feedback and dialogue.

Although these elements are distinctive to mobile forms of commercial communication, other forms share some of the elements. Interactivity and the phone's personal nature both bring the term away from one-way advertising towards dialogue and communication and close to personal selling and direct marketing. Context-sensitivity is also an essential feature of point-of-purchase marketing communication; however, it is restricted to certain locations, unlike ubiquitous mobile communication. It seems that no other form of commercial communication

shares the exact same essential elements with the mobile form, making it unique and thus deserving a concept of its own.

This study suggests two options. Firstly, to adopt a single term, we suggest m-adcom / m-adcommunication. It combines several essential elements under a single word. Firstly, the fact that mobile devices are being used to deliver and receive the messages is present in the first letter (m-). Secondly, the messages communicated relate to commercial purposes. This means that the sender of the commercial message aims to persuade the receiver, who has a certain level of scepticism towards the message (e.g. does not consider it to be the whole truth), although he or she may feel that the source is more trusted than traditional advertisers. These features are also the features of advertising, thus providing the second section of the word (ad). Thirdly, the media's interactive and personal nature and it being in a way initiated by the consumer when s/he gives permission are inherent elements in any communication, thus inspiring the three last letters (com). This suggestion highlights the importance of mobile media being 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 value to them, and when dialogue is possible.

Secondly, another solution would be to use "mobile marketing communication", which would distinguish mobile forms from any traditional non-mobile forms of marketing communication. The pro of this alternative is that depending on the aim and use of "mobile marketing communication", it may serve the same purpose as advertising, personal selling, public relations, customer relationship management, and sales promotion. For example, when directed towards unknown masses, the term would be mobile advertising and when applied to loyal customers to enhance their relationship with the marketer, mobile CRM could be the label. This alternative thus suggests that mobile is a media, in other words a channel of sending messages that can always be applied although it might not be the optimal media choice (e.g. for impersonal mass communication).

## **Discussion**

This study is one attempt to fill the gap in current research concerning the conceptualisation of mobile commercial communication. The confusing usage of different terms in current research was demonstrated and the essential elements of traditional advertising and marketing as well as mobile communication were discussed. Based on the discussion, two alternatives for conceptualising the phenomenon at focus were made. Now it is time to discuss the contribution of the study.

To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first time the current conceptualisations of mobile advertising and mobile marketing have been discussed and alternative conceptualisations suggested. Future studies will decide on how useful these conceptualisations are. If researchers come to the assessment that m-adcommunication or mobile marketing communication, as conceptualised in this study, will help them to understand the phenomenon better than other terms, then both or one of them will be taken into use. If they are not found to be useful, on the other hand, the discussion about the usage of the terms 'mobile advertising' and 'mobile marketing' should be taken into consideration and a choice be made on which one of the terms to use when referring to mobile forms of

commercial communication. If mobile advertising is the choice, the research community should discuss the means through which the interactivity and personal nature of mobile advertising is acknowledged, so that practitioners will also see and use the new opportunities they offer.

As always, there are certain limitations that this study suffers from. Firstly, the data sets (the number of articles addressing the phenomenon) were restricted to include only studies that used either one of the two definitions. A broader view would have been reached if such terms as interactive marketing (see e.g. Barwise & Farley 2005), direct marketing (see e.g. Patterson 1998), mobile customer relationship management (see e.g. Sinisalo et al. 2005), and mobile communication in general (see e.g. Oksman & Turtiainen 2004) were also discussed. However, considering the space limitations, this has been left for future studies.

Secondly, the relationships of the discussed concepts to other concepts have not been, to a large extent, discussed in this paper. Including definitions of m-commerce and mobile business and discussing their relationships to all the concepts mentioned above would offer us a wider hierarchy of concepts and a better understanding of the scene. Moreover, since research on mobile forms of commercial communication is still emerging, the studied papers are from a relatively short time period. The search conducted was only able to identify and provide journal articles so a vast majority of conference papers and articles in edited books on the topic could have been left outside the data sets, although some papers were available to the author.

The avenues for future research that this study offers were implicitly discussed in the section on shortcomings. Thus, further elaboration on the concepts that are close to mobile advertising, mobile marketing or m-adcommunication/mobile marketing communication are welcome. Moreover, studies on how advertisers, marketers, advertising agencies, and consumers conceptualise mobile means of commercial communication would be valuable. After all, in the EU area it is the consumer or business customer that initiates the communication, either by buying products or otherwise giving permission to the marketer to send messages to her/his mobile device.

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