Four types of fare evasion: A qualitative study from Melbourne, Australia

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A B S T R A C T

Fare evasion on public transport can reduce revenue by millions of dollars, undermining the financial viability of transit. However little research examines how public transport users think about fare evasion or attempts to understand *why* people fare evade. This paper presents the results of a program of qualitative research conducted in Melbourne, Australia to understand the attitudes toward and motivations behind fare evasion. A total of 67 people participated in face-to-face or online focus groups.

Results established a spectrum of perceived circumstances where someone might travel without a valid ticket. 'Fare evasion' was considered to be at only one end of that spectrum. The degree of intent to evade was a critical factor explaining the severity of fare evasion from user perspectives. People's attitudes toward fare evasion differed significantly; four key attitude segments were uncovered based on the attitudes and behaviours that group members tended to share. These included 1. 'Fare evasion is wrong – the accidental evader' who held strong views against fare evasion, 2. The 'it's not my fault' evader who meant to pay but sometimes find themselves fare evading due to barriers to payment, 3. The 'calculated risk-taker' evader who deliberately fare evade if they think the reward outweighs risk and 4. 'Career evaders' who always fare evade. Attitudes, feelings and motivations for these segments are described and implications for revenue protection policy are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Fare evasion on public transport can reduce revenue by millions of dollars, undermining the financial viability of transit systems and increase passenger perceptions that the transit system is insecure (Reddy, Kuhls, & Lu, 2011). Research has examined how design solutions, such as ticket barriers and ticket inspections, can reduce fare evasion. However little research examines how public transport users think about fare evasion or attempts to understand *why* people fare evade. Understanding the psychology of fare evasion can potentially inform both infrastructure interventions and 'soft' interventions such as marketing campaigns.

This paper presents the results of a program of qualitative research conducted in Melbourne, Australia to understand the attitudes toward and motivations behind fare evasion. The paper is structured as follows. A literature review follows identifying limitations about existing fare evasion research. Research literature on the psychology of 'consumer misbehaviour' is then briefly reviewed. The research context and methodology is then outlined. The results of the qualitative discussions are then presented and implications discussed.

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2. Literature review

Collecting fare revenue is an essential component of maintaining a cost-effective public transport system. Fare evasion is a threat to productivity, costing systems millions of dollars in lost revenue (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007; Reddy et al., 2011; Victorian Auditor-General, 2012). Furthermore, high fare evasion rates can increase perceptions that the public transit system is an unsafe environment (Reddy et al., 2011).

Most of the literature on fare evasion focusses almost exclusively on either methods that people use to protect revenue from fare evasion (e.g. Lee, 2011; Reddy et al., 2011) or the impact of ticketing system design on fare evasion rates. More open, honour-based or proof of payment ticketing systems (such as adopted on many light rail systems) are known to have higher fare evasion rates compared to controlled or fully staffed systems (such as metros with turnstiles) and higher inspection rates tend to reduce fare evasion (Dauby & Kovacs, 2006; Kooreman, 1993; Lee, 2011).

Previous research tends to make two basic assumptions about fare evasion: one, that fare evasion includes any circumstance where someone should have paid but didn't, and two, that fare evaders do this deliberately. However, almost no published research explores these assumptions from the perspective of public transport users. What behaviours do public transport users consider to be fare evasion? Is all fare evasion deliberate, and what motivates some people to fare evade?

One of the few published journal papers on fare evasion attitudes is a French ethnographic study of ticket inspectors; Suquet (2010) found that ticket inspectors classified fare evaders into six categories:

- People who cannot afford the fare
- Gamblers who know they're unlikely to get caught
- Ideological opponents who challenge the legitimacy of inspectors
- Dissatisfied clients who use fare evasion as a protest against poor service
- Cheats who pretend to pay the fine but never do
- People who don't understand the ticketing system.

Although these six categories highlight that fare evasion is likely to be motivated by a variety of factors, they were created from ticket inspectors who have a very specific perspective. It is quite likely that public transport users would have a very different perspective on fare evasion. However this paper was also notable in openly acknowledging that 'offenders' do not necessarily consider themselves fare evaders.

2.1. Fare evasion as consumer misbehaviour

Because so little research has been conducted on attitudes toward fare evasion, a wider search was conducted on the 'consumer misbehaviour' literature. Fare evasion, like minor theft, is a form of consumer misbehaviour, or 'behavioural acts by consumers which violate the generally accepted norms of conduct in consumption situations' (Fullerton & Punj, 1997, p. 336). The literature on consumer misbehaviour may provide a framework for studying fare evasion attitudes and behaviours.

Surveys suggest that consumer misbehaviour is quite common; for example a survey in the UK found that 30% of respondents admitted to consumer misbehaviour in a hospitality setting, such as complaining without genuine cause, knowingly stealing or vandalising property or using facilities without intending to pay (Reynolds & Harris, 2009). Consumer misbehaviour can be classified into three types (Daunt & Harris, 2011b):

1. *Petty norm infringement:* failing to inform of a mistake in their favour; making complaints without genuine cause
2. *Felonious norm infringement:* non-violent criminal acts such as theft, failure to pay for services or rudeness to employees
3. *Belligerent norm infringement:* intentional damage and aggression toward employees

Fare evasion would be considered a form of felonious norm infringement. Felonious infringements are more likely to occur where customer satisfaction is somewhat low and vulnerability (i.e., the opportunity to infringe) is moderate (Daunt & Harris, 2011b).

Many other factors have been found to influence whether or not someone will commit a form of consumer misbehaviour. The Theory of Planned Behaviour has shown that intention to shoplift can be predicted by attitudes, subjective norms (perception of social pressures) and perceived control (how easy or difficult performing the behaviour is seen to be) (Tonglet, 2006). Personality factors such as honesty, sensation-seeking and aggression can also predict some aspects of consumer misbehaviour (Daunt & Harris, 2011a). And finally, aspects of the 'servicescape' can also impact consumer misbehaviour; the servicescape refers to both the physical design of infrastructure used by consumers as well as the customer-staff interactions. Past research has identified strong links between negative perceptions of servicescape, customer dissatisfaction and consumer misbehaviour (Daunt & Harris, 2011b).