



Consumer adoption of No Junk Mail stickers: An extended planned behavior model assessing the respective role of store flyer attachment and perceived intrusiveness

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ABSTRACT

Although store flyers play a crucial role in retailer communication, their environmental burden has raised a public debate, fostering No Junk Mail sticker adoption by a growing number of households. This study proposes and tests a planned behavior model of consumer intentions towards adopting a sticker that extends to the sticker adoption alternative (i.e., receiving store flyers) by introducing store flyer attachment and perceived intrusiveness as two potential intent determinants. While confirming the relevance of the extended model, the findings support a typology of store flyer consumers that enlighten retailers on possible shifts in their audience.

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1. Introduction

Despite the movement of many firms to electronic media as their mode of direct marketing, store flyers remain a ubiquitous and important communication channel for many retailers to promote new products, communicate price specials and announce new stores. While providing a quicker response than traditional advertising media and allowing retailers to emphasize their own brands, store flyers also constitute a specific source of revenue because of the fees that manufacturers are charged for featuring their products (Miranda and Konya, 2007). Consistently, recent industry reports show a rise in store flyer expenditures (e.g., Jensen et al., 2014; Gázquez-Abad et al., 2014), suggesting that there is value for retailers in using this form of communication.

In parallel, the increasing environmental burden of store flyers has raised a public debate in numerous countries, with store flyers being blamed for making up large proportions of household paper waste. This led public authorities to promote the adoption by households of No Junk Mail (NJM hereafter) stickers that prevent

them from receiving any form of unaddressed print advertising in their mailbox (Jensen et al., 2014; Puig-Ventosa et al., 2014). Even if the detention rate for these stickers is still moderate, ranging from approximately 9% in France (TNS SOFRES, 2011) to approximately 25% in Germany and Denmark (Liebig and Rommel, 2014; Jensen et al., 2014), the growing number of households having attached this sticker to their mailbox may be considered a potential threat to the status of store flyer advertising.

As outlined by Gázquez-Abad et al. (2014), research on the determinants of consumer attitudes towards store flyers is still limited despite the magnitude of store flyer spending. Moreover, less is known about the factors that explain why consumers become active decliners of store flyers by adopting the NJM sticker even if, at first instance, such a behavior can be considered pro-environmentally motivated. Notwithstanding these current research gaps, empirical evidence exhibits a consistent pattern in receiver behaviors in which the majority of them, on a regular basis, read store flyers and use them to plan their shopping (Miranda and Konya, 2007; Jensen et al., 2014). Additionally, a large segment of receivers report reading store flyers for entertainment (Jensen et al., 2014). By highlighting the occurrence of frequent and favorable interactions with store flyers, these findings indicate that some consumers are likely to become emotionally attached to this media. Alternatively, perceived

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intrusiveness has been noted as a major detrimental determinant of direct mail attitude (Morimoto and Chang, 2006; Luna Cortés and Royo Vela, 2013). Taken together, these studies suggest that beyond strictly environmental drivers, store flyer consumption may intrinsically exert specific and paradoxical influences on consumer intention to switch from continuously receiving store flyers to complete rejection by means of a NJM sticker.

Considering both the critical role of store flyers in retailer communication and the rise of consumers' pro-environmental behaviors, the objective of this research is to propose and test a comprehensive model of the adoption of the NJM sticker that integrates theoretical perspectives on both socially responsible consumer behaviors and media consumption. Because the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) has been employed successfully in relating pro-environmental attitudes and behavioral intention (Rivera-Camino, 2012), it provides the conceptual ground for explaining why consumers become active decliners of store flyers. Overall, this study advances existing literature on direct mail by addressing deliberate consumer resistance to postal advertising. It also offers fresh perspectives on how consumers may become committed to a particular media. Finally, by developing a typology of store flyer consumers from the tested model, this study helps retailers to better understand possible shifts in their audience's behavior, thereby providing guidance for their communication strategy.

2. Conceptual background and research hypotheses

2.1. Extended planned behavior model

Widely used in consumer behavior research as an approach to predicting intentions and behavior, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) postulates three conceptually independent determinants of intention: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, with the relative importance of each determinant varying across behaviors and situations. This model also suggests that intentions are the immediate antecedent of behavior (Ajzen, 2002). In particular, the theory was employed successfully to explain human behavior in relation to various environmental issues (e.g., Kaiser and Gutsche, 2003; Rivera-Camino, 2012).

However, adopting a NJM sticker can also be seen as a substitution involving tradeoffs between two alternatives (Hamilton et al., 2014), that is, receiving store flyers as the current status and no longer receiving them as the potential alternative. Taking into account this theoretical perspective, additional factors relating to how consumers consider the current alternative can be incorporated into the planned behavior model. Literature on choice predicts that commitment to the current alternative affects the choice process outcome by significantly favoring the alternative (Bansal et al., 2004; Botti et al., 2008). In particular, attachment as a form of affective commitment is expected to create a strong attraction towards the current alternative, thereby reducing switches in intentions (Bansal et al., 2004; Evanschitzky et al., 2006). Consumer research has shown that an object attachment results from multiple positively valenced interactions between an individual and an object, which in turn triggers the creation of idiosyncratic consumption values (e.g., Kleine et al., 1995; Holbrook, 1999; Thomson, 2006). In the media literature, the concept of attachment has recently been employed to describe an emotion-laden bond between a person and a particular media that may emerge from repeated use (VanMeter and Grisaffe, 2013; Kim et al., 2013; Choi, 2013). As expected, these studies underline that media attachment significantly stimulates media acceptance and continuance intentions. In accordance, because consumers receive

store flyers with some regularity and possibly derive gratification from their consumption, they are likely to become attached to this media. Therefore, it is expected that store flyer attachment is negatively related to NJM sticker adoption.

Conversely, advertising literature has evidenced the centrality of ad perceived intrusiveness in eliciting feelings of irritation and ad avoidance (Edwards et al., 2002; McCoy et al., 2008). In the context of direct mail, three dimensions of perceived intrusiveness have been distinguished (Morimoto and Chang, 2006): threats to one's privacy, disturbance of one's thought process, and ad clutter. Regarding postal mail specifically, its perceived intrusiveness was found to reduce media acceptance (Chang and Morimoto, 2011). Therefore, it is expected that the perceived intrusiveness of store flyers favors NJM sticker adoption. In addition, the perceived intrusiveness of store flyers may directly impede the elaboration of store flyer attachment by inducing negative emotions that translate into an unfavorable halo involving consumer interactions with the media. In other words, store flyer attachment is assumed to mediate the negative effects of the perceived intrusiveness of store flyers on intention to adopt a NJM sticker.

Overall, the intention to adopt a NJM sticker is hypothesized to be directly explained by five antecedents, two of which are causally linked and relate to store flyers as the current alternative. These structural relationships constitute an extended planned behavior model, leading to the following hypotheses:

H1. : (a) Attitude towards adopting a NJM sticker, (b) subjective norms, (c) perceived behavioral control and (d) perceived intrusiveness of store flyers positively influence NJM sticker adoption intention, whereas (e) store flyer attachment negatively influences it.

H2. : Perceived intrusiveness of store flyers negatively influences store flyer attachment.

2.2. Determinants of attitude towards adopting a NJM sticker

When examining the formation of an individual's attitude towards pro-environmental behaviors, previous research on environmental psychology and green consumption has found empirical evidence supporting the respective role of environmental concern and environmental beliefs associated with the behavior under scope (e.g., Fransson and Garling, 1999; Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012). Although there is no definitive consensus regarding the formal definition of environmental concern, this concept can be conceptualized as a general attitude towards the environment that reflects the extent to which individuals are worried about environmental threats (e.g., Lee et al., 2014). Insofar as it transcends consumption situations, environmental concern tends to be fundamentally attitudinal and is considered an indirect determinant of pro-environmental behaviors while directly affecting environmental variables (e.g., Leary et al., 2014). Furthermore, individuals were found to perceive that consuming products with environmentally sound attributes delivers additional value compared to conventional alternatives, suggesting that perceived environmental benefits effectively improve the attitude towards a given alternative (Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H3. : (a) Environmental concern and (b) perceived environmental benefits positively influence attitude towards adopting a NJM sticker.

2.3. Contribution of perceived values to store flyer attachment

A number of consumption values have been associated with direct mail and may subsequently explain store flyer attachment.

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