Curb Your “Wastism”: Interplay Between the Abundance Mindset and Non-Abundance Cues on Waste

Meng Zhu, Carnegie Mellon University, USA
Ajay Kalra, Rice University, USA

We theorize that people are in a default abundance mindset, which accentuates the need for convenience in consumption and consequently increases waste. We demonstrate that non-abundance cues can trigger a conservation goal and decrease waste in unrelated domains. Interestingly, this decrease vanishes when participants first get a chance to conserve.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

“To Have and To Hold? Marketing Implications of Consumers’ Product Retention Tendency”
Kelly L. Haws, Texas A&M, USA
Rebecca Walker Naylor, Ohio State, USA
Robin A. Coulter, University of Connecticut, USA
William O. Bearden, University of South Carolina, USA

In this research, we introduce the concept of product retention tendency, defined as an individual’s propensity to retain physical possessions. Per our conceptualization, consumers can fall anywhere on a continuum ranging from those who have no desire to “hang on to” their possessions and who therefore frequently dispose of things, to those who keep nearly all of their possessions and who do not like to discard anything. We argue that an individual’s general tendency to retain physical possessions impacts not only their retention/disposal decisions, but also their acquisition- and consumption-related behaviors. We propose that consumers with a stronger product retention tendency are driven by the desire to avoid waste (reflected in their greater frugality, interest in creative reuse, and concern for the environment) and by their attachment to physical goods (including possession attachment and materialism). These characteristics influence how individuals with a strong (vs. weak) product retention tendency differentially respond to various marketing tactics (e.g., product/packaging design decisions and specific promotional strategies).

We draw upon relevant literature in marketing, consumer behavior, and psychology (e.g., Coulter and Ligas 2003; Frost et al. 2004; Lastovicka et al. 1999) to provide theoretical grounding for a nomological network for product retention tendency and related constructs, including compulsive hoarding. We then detail six studies (studies 1a-f) conducted to (1) develop a valid and reliable measure of product retention tendency (PRT), (2) establish discriminant validity between our construct of interest and clinical compulsive hoarding, and (3) assess the proposed relationships between the constructs in the nomological network. In accordance with our conceptualization, these studies also demonstrate that product retention tendency is associated with avoiding waste due to frugality, an interest in creative reuse, and concern for the environment, as well as with feeling connected to one’s possessions because of possession attachment and materialism.

We then build upon insights from the nomological network of product retention tendency to discuss and hypothesize the influence of product retention tendency on consumers’ acquisition- and consumption-related behaviors. We focus on waste avoidance motivations and reuse of product packaging in study 2 and on attachment motivations and the response to promotional offers in study 3.

In study 2 we expect that individuals who have a stronger (vs. weaker) product retention tendency will consider more alternative uses for product packaging because of their desire to avoid being wasteful. More specifically, we expect that the waste avoidance motivations of frugality, creative reuse, and environmental concern are the drivers of this behavior. As expected, a regression model with PRT as a continuous predictor variable revealed that participants with a stronger product retention tendency reported significantly more ways to reuse a glass mayonnaise jar (F(1, 398)=6.80, p<.01). Creative reuse fully mediates the relationship between PRT and the number of uses generated. Frugality and concern for the environment both partially mediates the relationship, as confirmed by significant Sobel tests. Study 2 therefore demonstrates that the waste avoidance motivations in the nomological network help explain why consumers with a stronger (vs. weaker) product retention tendency respond differently to an opportunity to reuse product packaging. The results of study 2 suggest that managers can successfully target consumers with a stronger product retention tendency by using product packaging that is specifically designed to be reused by the consumer, perhaps even touting the potential for reuse as an added benefit of their offering.

In study 3, we draw on Okada’s (2001) work on trade-ins to examine how differences in product retention tendency can impact response to two equally-valued promotional offers (i.e., a trade-in offer, in which a used good is “traded in” for a discount on a new good, vs. an equally-valued sale price offer on a new good). We predict that product retention tendency will moderate Okada’s (2001) findings, which show an overall preference for the trade-in offer. Consistent with our expectations, we found a significant interaction between product retention tendency and camera offer condition (F(1, 201)=3.93, p<.05). Follow-up analyses revealed that participants with a weaker product retention tendency reported a greater likelihood of buying the camera because of the deal in the trade-in offer condition compared to the sale price offer condition (F(1, 201)=10.10, p<.01). In contrast, participants with a stronger product retention tendency, regardless of whether they were in the trade-in or the sale price condition, were equally likely to report that they would buy the camera because of the deal (F(1, 201)=.26, p>.10). We also found that the difference in response to trade-in versus sale price offers for consumers with a stronger versus weaker product retention tendency is mediated by consumers’ emotional attachment to their possessions and their materialism. Our results suggest that Okada’s (2001) findings may have been driven by consumers with moderate or weak levels of product retention tendency. For those with a stronger product retention tendency, both types of offer are attractive because of the motivating factors we identify, attachment to possessions and materialism.

Overall, our research seeks to draw attention to the area of product disposal and how such tendencies impact consumer responses to marketing tactics. Our studies provide examples of the many ways in which a consumer’s attitude toward retention can affect their decision making behaviors through the waste avoidance and product attachment motivations.

REFERENCES


“When Low Bids Win: Non-Price Competition among Buyers in Secondary Markets”

Aaron R. Brough, Northwestern University, USA
Mathew S. Isaac, Northwestern University, USA

A central aspect of marketing is how sellers compete for customers. Although price competition among sellers is prevalent, marketers recognized many years ago that customers also care about non-monetary factors. As a result, marketing literature has focused extensively on how sellers may successfully compete without lowering prices by differentiating themselves on dimensions such as location, brand, service, context, etc.

An area that has received less attention in the literature is how buyers compete for scarce goods. This neglect may be due to the assumption that sellers’ pricing decisions are based on an aim to maximize profit (Monroe and Della Bitta 1978), and that therefore buyers compete exclusively on the basis of price (i.e., the highest bidder wins). Such an assumption may be particularly prevalent in the context of secondary markets, where sellers reveal a profit-motive by deciding to sell rather than keep, discard, or donate a used product. Furthermore, many second-hand exchanges are one-time transactions among relatively anonymous buyers, which incentivizes sellers to focus on profit-maximization.

In this research, we challenge the assumption that sellers of used goods are concerned exclusively with profit and argue that they may also care about non-monetary factors. We therefore predict that buyers of used goods may successfully compete with higher bidders by differentiating themselves on non-monetary dimensions. In particular, we focus on one non-monetary factor—buyer usage intent—and investigate how sellers’ pricing decisions are influenced when prospective buyers communicate how they intend to use a product following a transaction. Building on diverse literatures which suggest a connection between a product and its owner (Argo, Dahl, and Morales 2008; Belk 1988; Thaler 1980), we attribute sellers’ preferences regarding post-transactional product usage to a sense of product attachment that sellers feel towards their used goods.

We test these predictions across three empirical studies.

In Study 1, 100 online participants indicated the maximum WTA of participants who felt weakly attached to the ring indicated a lower WTA from the buyer who planned to use the ring for a marriage proposal and a higher WTA from the buyer who planned to wear the ring to a costume party. These results are consistent with the notion that attachment influences the impact of buyer usage intent on seller pricing decisions. The next study examines the extent to which sellers regret a transaction after learning that actual product usage violated the seller’s post-transactional preferences.

The objective of Study 3 was to provide additional evidence for the role of attachment by manipulating rather than measuring it. This was done by using hedonic versus utilitarian products, with the idea that participants would feel greater attachment to hedonic products than to utilitarian products. 142 undergraduates imagined that after selling a VHS tape which was originally purchased either for pleasure (hedonic) or for use in writing a term paper (utilitarian), they learned that the buyer had either watched the tape multiple times (proper usage intent) or recorded over its original content (improper usage intent). Participants were also informed that subsequent bidders had offered more money for the tape than the buyer to whom they sold it. Participants then indicated the extent to which they regretted selling to this buyer. Results showed that participants experienced greater regret after learning that a buyer had recorded over the VHS tape rather than watching it, but only when the tape was perceived to be a hedonic product.

Overall, this research contributes to the marketing literature by examining buyer-side competition. In particular, we suggest that like sellers, buyers may successfully engage in non-price competition. This insight has important implications for the pricing literature, which has focused primarily on how firms set prices and how consumers perceive and respond to those prices. In contrast, our work focuses on how consumers generate prices when selling used goods, and we identify product attachment as an important factor that influences seller pricing decisions in secondary markets.

REFERENCES

“Curb Your “Wastism”: Interplay between the Abundance Mindset and Non-abundance Cues on Waste”

Meng Zhu, Carnegie Mellon University, USA
Ajay Kalra, Rice University, USA

Managing how much consumers waste has become an essential issue in maintaining sustainability of our society. Existing literature on waste holds the viewpoint that consumers are averse to waste due to their motivation to fully exhaust a product’s residual value (e.g., Arkes 1996). We propose an additional “Wastism” perspective to examine consumer waste behavior at a non-conscious level. Specifically, we theorize that as mass production has become increasingly mastered by society (Riesman, 1950; Côté, 1993, 1996) people are in a default “abundance” mindset that emphasizes the need to seek convenience rather than conservation in consumption, which consequently leads to increased waste.
Building on the passive goal activation literature (e.g., Bargh et al. 2001; Laran and Janiszewski, 2008), we posit that subtle cues that highlight the non-abundance of resources (e.g., half-length pencil in a writing task) can trigger the goal to conserve. These cues can cause a shift away from the default abundance mindset and the tendency to seek convenience, therefore leading people to waste less in subsequent consumption, even when the consumption takes place in unrelated domains and utilizes different types of resources. Consistent with the passive goal-activation account, we find that this decrease in waste induced by non-abundance cues is attenuated when participants get a chance to conserve before the resource is provided (e.g., giving them a chance to help with an environmental-based charity as compared to an education charity). We also find that people with a chronic conservation goal are less susceptible to the influences of non-abundance vs. abundance cues.

Study 1 tests for the presence of a default abundance mindset and whether non-abundance cues can lead people to waste less resources in unrelated domains. Participants completed two purportedly unrelated tasks. In the first soft-drink sampling task, the experimenter poured the same quantity of drink into a sampling cup, but either took the bottle away after pouring the drink (non-abundance condition) or left the bottle on the desk (abundance condition). In the second task, participants were given a roll of wrapping paper and asked to gift wrap a box. In a third, control condition, participants proceeded to the second task directly. The length of wrapping paper utilized served as the dependent measure for the relative waste amount. Consistently with our prediction, the non-abundance cue lead subjects to waste relatively less resource (i.e., wrapping paper) in a subsequent unrelated task. Importantly, the length of wrapping paper utilized in the control condition was similar to that in the abundance condition, suggesting that people are naturally in an abundance mindset. Additionally, in support of our theorization, we found (with another group of participants) that participants in the control condition reacted to abundance words as quickly as those in the abundance condition, whereas participants in the non-abundance condition reacted more slowly.

Study 2 disentangles the effect of non-abundance cues on consumption quantity and waste quantity. In the first task, participants completed a figure drawing task, which randomly assigned them to either a non-abundance condition in which they were provided only a half-length pencil, or an abundance condition in which they were given a penholder holding a stack of regular pencils. In the second task, participants sampled three snacks and were told to rinse their mouth with water before each tasting. They were instructed to go to another desk in the room to get the water and then come back to their seat to finish the sampling task. The amount of water poured (i.e., the total amount of resource taken), the amount of water left in the cup (i.e., the waste amount) and the difference of the two (i.e., the consumption amount) were measured. The amount of water consumed was the same in both conditions, but as compared to the abundance condition, participants in the non-abundance condition took less water and wasted less. These results provide support for the proposed convenience-based explanation by demonstrating that non-abundance cues decreased waste because they reduced the amount of resource taken, rather than increasing the amount of resource consumed.

The last two studies seek support for the proposed goal-activation account. In both studies, we asked participants to evaluate the smell and color of a new detergent and provided them with a crystal cup. The amount of detergent subjects poured into the cup served as our waste measure as only a minimal amount is needed for evaluation. Specifically, Study 3 investigates whether people with a chronic conservation goal (high on the frugality scale) are insensitive to the influence of non-abundance vs. abundance cues. As predicted, we found that a non-abundance cue as compared to an abundance cue (manipulated by offering participants a small or large quantity of ketchup in a prior sampling task) lead low frugality participants to pour less detergent; whereas high frugality participants poured very low amounts in both the abundance and non-abundance conditions. Finally, Study 4 tests whether giving people a chance to satisfy the activated conservation goal (manipulated by giving them a chance to help with an environmental charity vs. an education charity) influences the relationship between non-abundance vs. abundance cues (manipulated as in Study 1 by leaving or not leaving the bottle of a sample drink) and waste. Consistent with the goal-activation account, we found that the decrease in waste induced by the non-abundance cue disappeared only when participants got the chance to conserve in the environmental charity.

In contrast to the prevailing literature that people are averse to waste, we propose an additional “wastism” perspective to study consumer waste behavior at a non-conscious level. Our findings indicate the presence of a default abundance mindset. This default abundant mindset accentuates the need for convenience, which in turn increases waste of resources. Non-abundance cues in the environment can passively activate a conservation goal thereby decreasing waste even in unrelated domains. In support of this theorization, we find that giving participants a chance to conserve before the resource is provided can diminish the beneficial impact of non-abundance cues on conservation.

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Naja Williams Boyd, Anka Behavioral Health, Inc., USA
Tonya Williams Bradford, Notre Dame, USA

The gift of an organ represents a sacrifice (Mauss 1967) and typically is requested, highly specified, extensively investigated, and tightly managed by several members of the healthcare system. Kidney transplantation is the only solid organ transplant performed in which an individual is able to gift an organ to another human being and continue to live a healthy and substantially normal life. Kidney donation is a gift exchange that is extensively controlled, monitored, and managed by the market. A gift of a kidney may be desired by the donor, the recipient, and the recipient’s loved ones, yet there are required intermediaries who make the final determina-
tion for the gifting process—a departure from our understanding of gifting in consumer research.

Through five extended case studies, we explore the experience of living African American kidney donors who have successfully donated a kidney to a loved one. Through the experiences of these donors, we seek to understand consumer gifting behavior in complex market-necessitated circumstances. We purposively study experiences of African American kidney donors because they are in high demand for African Americans End Stage Renal Disease patients who are less likely to be referred, placed on the national waiting list, or receive a transplant (Gadegbeku 2002).

As symbols, gifts represent relational ties and communicate expectations from the giver to the recipient (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989; Caplow 1984). Gifts establish and maintain roles in social relationships (Ottes, Lowrey, and Kim 1993), fortify social bonds (Mauss 1967), alter relationships (Cheat 1988), and serve higher-order needs of love, self-esteem or self-actualization (Belk 1996; Offer 1997). For our organ donor informants, the desire to enable the health of their loved ones is a tangible—life-giving—symbol which is mediated and managed through the healthcare market. The trinity of giving, receiving, and reciprocating constitutes an exchange cycle that attracts others into an intimate, involved relationship with one another. Receiving an organ from a relative places the recipient in a state of owing a gift of comparable magnitude. In general, the recipient will never be able to repay the debt, a circumstance described as the "the tyranny of the gift (Fox and Swazy 2002)," though it may be the role of the market that obviates the very need for reciprocity in this form of gifting (Marcoux 2009). We find organ donation to loved ones may not always result in a process devoid of reciprocity, as the organ donor may be engaged in self-gifting.

In the complex gifting circumstance of kidney organ donation within African American families, we find six themes that reflect significant decision drivers for our informants: loss and abandonment; recipient's health; recipient resistance and reluctance; family support; healthcare provider optimism; and organ donation education. Themes of abandonment and loss resulted from experiences of previous losses in their respective families. One participant said she was aware of her own "selfishness" and another did not want to lose another parent if she could make the difference. Was the gift of the kidney an actual gift to the recipient or was it a self-gift to the donor? The two may actually be one and the same.

Each informant stated that the health of the recipient was of paramount concern in their decision to donate: “It was devastating for me to see him on dialysis.” Recipient reluctance was prevalent as donors sought to give their organ. Not all recipients are interested in receiving kidneys from loved ones, because they “didn’t want to put them [the donors] through that...” One informant stated that he felt “it may be difficult for a sibling to ask another to donate because it’s a sacrifice” and that his brother would feel responsible if something were to happen to him. Family support plays a significant role in the gifting decision process. One donor shares responses to her decision to donate: “Oh girl, are you out of your mind!!” “Do you realize that you are going under the knife?” Her perspective was that “most Black people do not give up their organs.”

The role of the market is crucial to the successful culmination of organ donation. Once one donor made the decision to donate and the recipient’s approval, they made a conscious choice to wait until a new transplant team was in place. The donor had not been impressed with the transplant surgeon on staff because of the way he handled the recipient’s first transplant surgery. The gift-giver and recipient decided to wait until the existing team retired and the new team was in place. It was her belief that “you have to have a connection with whoever is going to be working with you.” The market also is involved in the education process. Donors became educated about the process from their work environments, medical providers, and websites. All gift-givers were willing to donate because they had knowledge and had become educated about living kidney donation.

A kidney is an extraordinary gift. People who give gifts want to know whether their gifts are appreciated and used for their intended purpose (Sherry 1983). Such expectations have a quality of self-interest and may develop into enmeshed relationships created by the donor toward the recipient. This leads to complications in the relationship for both parties, particularly for the recipient. Post-donation behavior will depend on the expectations of the donor when they made the decision to gift the kidney. Recipients may anticipate these feelings of obligation from the beginning; that may be the reason they prefer not to ask a living relative to be a donor. Thus, relationships may be altered as a result of kidney donation (Ruth, Ottes, and Brunel 1999).

From the experiences of our informants, we find kidney organ donors may experience the gift of their kidney to a relative as a puritanic self-gift (Mick 1996) with the hopes of continuing a cherished relationship. As such, the gift of the kidney is both a gift and a self-gift which is reciprocated by the recipient through a continued affective relationship, and embraced by the donor as either reward or stress relief through the same which truly encapsulates the notion of the extended self (Belk 1988). We expand the notion of puritanic self gifts to encompass those where the task completion is the reinstatement of the desired status. In the case of kidney transplantation, task completion is that the kidney recipient engages in life fully without the constraints and limitations of end stage renal disease and the donor goes along, with one less kidney, for the ride!

REFERENCES

