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MARKETING HONORS PROGRAM

HOW CATEGORIZATION AND DELIBERATIVE PROCESSING EXPLAIN CONSUMER RESPONSE TO DIRECT MAIL ADVERTISING

by
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FACULTY SPONSOR: ROBERT H. DUCOFFE

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HOW CATEGORIZATION AND DELIBERATIVE PROCESSING EXPLAIN CONSUMER RESPONSE TO DIRECT MAIL ADVERTISING

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the volume of direct mail sent to consumers has increased tremendously. "... the average number of pieces received by consumers over the past 50 years has risen from about 145 per year to more than 700 pieces per year"(17). The direct mail method of marketing is being used by many marketers today as a means to "grab the attention of and stimulate response by various target audiences"(17). "Direct mail solicitations are particularly effective in achieving these[marketing] goals: they communicate effectively, inexpensively and efficiently to carefully selected target markets"(14). The different kinds of products and services promoted in direct mail include: clothing, magazines, books, housewares, fitness and sports equipment, cosmetics, food-- cheese and fruit, donations, financial services--credit cards, cultural event subscription and others(15). Presently, even colleges, hospitals, physicians and other professional services are relying on direct marketing to effectively target their markets.

Because an average consumer receives such a large amount of direct mail, they screen out much of it, paying attention only to a certain few. The majority of direct mail is read quickly and then thrown away. Of all the direct mail sent to a consumer, only about 48 percent is read immediately and only about 8 percent of it will produce a response(17,15). "With the increasing volume and clutter of direct mail, it becomes essential for marketers to create mailings which will be read and acted upon rather than thrown away, perhaps unopened"(15). By understanding the evaluation process behind how recipients decide whether or not to process direct mail, marketers can make their mailings more attuned to or attractive to their targets, thereby capturing attention as well as interest. Such understanding may even permit expenditures to be lowered by avoiding unnecessary spending on mailings that will be ignored.

Since the evaluation process is based on the cognitive processing of consumers, it is essential to examine the findings from this area of research. Direct mailers will be concerned about what consumers do at the moment they receive their mail and what influences them to read or act upon certain offers. This thesis will investigate how consumers' attitudes are formed and the cognition processes that influence their behavioral responses towards direct mail. The individual attributes of direct mail envelopes will be examined to understand what attributes induce favorable responses as well as those that tend to lead consumers to immediately discard the envelopes they receive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evidently, there are two distinct cognitive evaluation processes that explain how attitudes are formed: through (1)piecemeal (attribute) evaluation and through (2)the activation of categories in the mind upon encountering a person, situation or an object. In piecemeal processing, "consumers can be characterized as reviewing the information available from an advertisement, package, or some other source [a piece of mail], evaluating each piece of information separately, and through some kind of attribute integration process, arriving at a final judgement"(23). In category processing, individuals organize objects into categories that already exist in memory(23). Based on this model, an individual will

immediately categorize an object if it closely matches an existing schema stored in memory (21). A schema is a previously defined category (23,18,4,20).

Since consumers receive a large amount of mail, it is suggested that in the majority of cases, they initially sort their mail based on inspection of the envelopes before determining which items they will evaluate in a piecemeal fashion. Given this, it would be helpful for marketers to understand what cues lead individuals to categorize offers as "JUNKMAIL." It should also be possible to discover other categories that consumers use to classify direct mail. A study by the Newspaper Advertising Bureau showed that many consumers perceive direct mail to be junk mail and were annoyed that marketers found their names (10). Junk mail here is defined as "a direct mail offering unwanted by the recipient(15)" Second, mailers would be able to find out what characteristics of a mail piece would create favorable or unfavorable responses. Consequently, marketers can avoid using negative tactics in their direct marketing efforts, taking into account that each consumer has different characteristics and experiences that likely lead them to evaluate the mail in their own unique ways.

Research in the area of direct mail has not benefited from an understanding of research in psychology and in cognitive processing. However, the findings from cognitive psychology (the evaluation process) and consumer behavior (consumers' attitudes towards the direct mail industry) can provide us with useful information.

Studies of attitude formation via these two modes of evaluation were done by Pavelchak(21) and; Fiske and Neuberg(13). Pavelchak's "Piecemeal and Category-based Evaluation: An Idiographic Analysis" provides evidence that the two-mode model exists where categorization would occur first, followed by piecemeal processing (when the former is unsuccessful). Individuals were found to form associations in memory between objects and prior existing attitudes toward these objects. Upon encountering the object, automatic retrieval of the attitude towards the object occurs. Other attribute information present may be ignored if it is inconsistent with the category activated by the stimuli. Pavelchak's experiment suggests that the stimuli used can influence the mode of evaluative processing.

Fiske and Neuberg's "A Continuum of Impression Formation from Category-Based to Individuating Processes: Influences of Information and Motivation on Attention and Interpretation," examines the stages of impression formation. They too explain that, an individual would initially categorize. Confirmatory categorization would occur if the stimulus is relevant to the individual. If irrelevant, processing would halt. Recategorization occurs when confirmation is unsuccessful. Once a stimulus is categorized, activation of memory will be biased towards the category-consistent attributes. Similar to Pavelchak, this study found that category-based processing can be encouraged by marketers by suggesting categories that fit for a stimulus and the same with piecemeal processing. For example, if an envelope have a bulk rate stamp and is addressed to the "resident," it encourages the recipient to categorize it as "junk mail" offers. If the envelope is designed to appear like a personal letter with a handwritten address and first class stamp, it encourages the recipient to perceive it as "personal"

correspondence. Both articles (21,13) provide conclusive evidence that recipients of direct mail would initially attempt to categorize the mail they receive. It suggests that by designing mail envelopes in certain ways, marketers can lessen the chance that any previous negative experiences that a recipient has had which can surface as a result of categorization will occur. Piecemeal processing can be encouraged by having "category inconsistent" characteristics on a mail envelope. Direct mail offerings are often designed to create uncertainty in the recipient by having personal mail attributes on the envelope. This makes it more likely that individuals will fail to categorize the item as junk mail, and possibly also more likely that they will individually analyze each attribute to confirm whether it is an important mail or not.

In-depth analysis of category processing as done by Higgins, Jones and Rholes(16); Beattie, Fiske, Milberg and Neuberger(3) ;and Mervis and Rosch(19). Jones and Rholes' study entitled, "Category Accessibility and Impression Formation," concluded that prior exposure to a stimuli can affect subsequent evaluation of a similar stimulus independent of the evaluation process used. Therefore, a recipient who had a negative experience with a certain kind of direct mail item will most probably perceive any future direct mailings of that kind unfavorably. Even when a marketer is able to capture a recipient's interest by employing attention-getting attributes, the recipient may still have a negative impression and discard the mail as a result of pre-existing attitudes.

Beattie, Fiske, Milberg, and Neuberger's "Category-Based and Attribute-Based Reactions To Others: Some Informational Conditions of Stereotyping and Individuating Processes" found that the more preferred mode of evaluation 'is categorizing --doing it whenever possible because it is much easier to categorize than evaluating piecemeal. The authors also suggest that subcategorizing occurs within a category. The study- by Mervis and Rosch, entitled "Categorization of Natural Objects" probes deeper into the matter.

They showed in their analysis that "any object may be categorized at each of several different hierarchical levels." For example, they examined the sentence "A penguin is technically a bird." This sentence implies that the basic category used for forming the impression here would be "BIRD" and the sub-category would be "PENGUINS." They also used instances in color-naming (such as, turquoise is a shade of green) and botanical label (such as, a rose is a type of flower and a flower is a type of plant) in their research. It includes the discussion that an individual is actually not conscious of the evaluation process and which mode of processing one is employing. These three studies (16,3,19) imply that much direct mail recipient processing is largely automatic (impressions are formed automatically) and that sub-categories may exist within a recipient's general "direct mail" category. There may be an hierarchy of category levels where the important mails(bills, business, official letters, etc.) are at the highest levels, and junk mails ranked as lower in priority. The important ones will be read first and the junk mail items may be looked at in a cursory manner or discarded. The ones that individuals are unable to categorize may be further evaluated in a piecemeal or more deliberate fashion (or recategorized).

Two research studies on how attitudes can guide an individual's behavior by Fazio, Kardes, Powell and Subonmatsu(12) and Fazio(11), are of relevance to direct marketing. Fazio, Kardes, Powell and Sanbonmatsu's „Attitudes And Social Cognition" proposes that an attitude which is well-learned will be highly accessible from memory. Also, an attitude which can be automatically retrieved upon contact with an object will most likely guide an individual's behavior. Otherwise the behavior will be based on judgments of individual features of the object. Fazio's "Multiple Processes by which Attitudes Guide Behavior: The Mode Model as an Integrative Framework" recognizes that our behavior is often consistent with our attitudes. He also proposes that there are two attitude-behavior process --a spontaneous (activation of attitude from memory) and deliberative attitude (where attitude formation is a result of effort and consideration of attributes). This is very similar to the two-mode evaluation process discussed previously.

From the two studies (12,11) above, we can then assume that if an average consumer had some experience with direct mail, he/she would have a "well-formulated" set of attitudes that would be automatically retrieved upon receiving direct mail items. Furthermore, consumers' behaviors would also likely be consistent with their retrieved attitudes towards direct mail advertising. If the individual had previously been dealt with unfavorably, he/she will most likely respond negatively to future direct mailings received. Any mail with the slightest implication of a direct mail offer is then likely to induce the reaction activated towards that type of mail. This implies .that it may often be difficult for marketers not to be perceived as "junk" mailers. However, when a recipient is unsure whether a letter is actually a direct marketing effort (by having direct mail category inconsistent attributes on the envelope), it will most likely result in interest and the opening of the mail. The recipient may just want to make sure that an important mail will not be discarded as a junk mail.

Four articles on direct mail have examined the features of a direct mail envelope that are believed to induce response and/or the opening of a direct mail. The first study, "Why Do Consumers Open Direct Mail" by Lincoln and Li(17) found direct mail envelope characteristics which both direct mailers and consumers perceive as effective through focus group studies and personal interviews. In their analysis, factors which would influence consumers to open a direct mail envelope include the appearance of the envelope (graphic and verbal characteristics), whether it is official looking (like a bill, government or business document), whether it is oversized (stands out), personalized (handwritten, personally addressed, direct addressing, stamped, etc), whether there is indication that it contains a sweepstakes or contest (this appeals to "consumer greed") and other teaser features (windows, "leading questions," "intriguing phrases, etc). The research shows, however, that marketers and consumers disagree on what factors increase the likelihood a direct mail envelope will be opened. Direct mailers perceive that the amount of mail a consumer receives a day will have a large influence on whether or not each item is opened. But, recipients do not consider this a crucial factor. This is the main variable that discriminates among the two parties. Both however, agree on the personalization aspect --that bill-like and handwritten envelopes increase the chance of a letter being opened.

In Gould's (15) exploratory study "Why Recipients of Direct Mail Do and Don't Respond," consumers' perceptions of direct mail are examined and how they differentiate their mails into three categories --those they discard, those that are read, and those they respond to. In this study, it was found that consumers use either ranking or the nonconjunctive rule in evaluating mail promotion offers. In using the nonconjunctive rule, the consumer would have a minimal level of acceptance for each characteristics belonging to a piece of mail. Only those mails whose attributes rank above the minimum level would be accepted for further consideration. For example, a mail envelope which looks like junk mail may be further evaluated anyway if it is handwritten and addressed personally to the individual. The minimum level here is whether the envelope has any attribute of a personal correspondence. According to this research, much junk mail is rejected by this process.

At this point, based on the assumption that a consumer initially categorizes their mail, the nonconjunctive rule would operate as soon as the consumer is done categorizing. All the mails which are grouped under the direct mail group will be separated into those which will be thrown away, those that will be read and others that will be responded to using the nonconjunctive rule evaluation process. It was found that direct mail which is not read or opened tends to have the following characteristics: (1)addressed to 'resident' or occupant, (2)looked similar to previous undesirable direct mail received, (3)looked like mass mailing, (4)looked unimportant, (5)looked unattractive or that (6)recipients didn't have time. Those pieces that are read mostly have attributes opposite of those which are not; they tend to be (1)personally addressed, (2)different from previous direct mail received, (3)employ first class postage, (4)look important, (5)attractive and (6)recipients had free time. However, direct mail which is acted upon tended to provide (1)assurance (return policy and from reputable organization), (2) good merchandise selection, (3)good merchandise presentation (appearance of envelope), and (4) convenience (easy to respond to). It is interesting to note that mailings from religious, fundraising or charity groups; sweepstakes and contests; and flyers and local advertising are almost immediately considered to be junk mail.

An article by Rossett(22) entitled "Courting Clients By Mail," analyzed how retail brokers can get more clients by using direct mail. According to Rossett, timing is a very important factor. "Teasers" can get consumers to actually open the mail and read what's inside. Other factors include personalization and a simplified mail design --requiring less time to read and respond to. Rosett also suggests targeting certain kinds of clients instead of blind mass mailing to those who will not respond or be interested. Another article, entitled "Smart Mail" by Churbuck(9) suggests that the creation of a more useful, effective and condensed database of consumer information through a filtration process to target those who would more likely to respond. This will help lower mailing and production expenditures. The introduction of computerized direct marketing will create more accurate databases offering greater potential that those most interested in offers receive them. Also, efficient software and hardware permits offers to be personalized which also enhances their effectiveness.

In sum, the research discussed has generally produced very similar findings. Studies show that the most effective way to make consumers respond is by:

- A) Personalizing,
- B) Ensuring that negative attributes do not appear on direct mail envelopes, and
- C) Targeting segments who are likely to be most interested in the offer.

It should also be noted that the negative attributes which direct mailers should avoid are controllable variables.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

One overall objective of this study was to attempt to further understand what the attributes consumers associate with each category of mail. The following research questions will therefore be addressed based:

1. What attributes do consumers most commonly associate with junk mail?
2. What attributes do consumers most commonly associate with personal mail?

Also, based on the previous discussion, the following hypotheses can be postulated: When an individual initially categorizes a mail, instead of evaluating it in a piecemeal fashion:

- a. Categorization will result in a smaller number of total evaluation thoughts.
- b. Categorization will result in less attention to the individual attributes of an envelope.
- c. Categorization will result in fewer category-based thoughts regarding an envelope.
- d. Categorization will result in a more simple evaluation thoughts.

METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

The first portion of this study examined the attributes which influence mail to be perceived as junk mail and those which influence them to be perceived as personal letter. A pre-test was done to identify the attributes which student subjects associate with junk mail and those they associate with personal correspondence. In the pre-test, two different questionnaires were distributed to subjects who were told to list up to five envelope

attributes which they immediately associate with (1)junk mail and (2)personal mail. The questionnaire is included in [Appendix A](#).

The second portion of the study sought to understand consumers' attitude formation when processing direct mail envelopes. Specifically, the intention was to study whether and how subjects employ categorization and deliberative processing strategies as suggested by previous research when evaluating mail envelopes. An experiment was designed in which one group of subjects were exposed to a typical "junk mail" envelope and another group of subjects was exposed to a direct mail envelope disguised to look like personal correspondence. Each subject was shown only one envelope and was given unlimited amount of time to examine and to form an impression of the experimental stimulus. After this, subjects were asked to verbalize aloud all the thoughts that had occurred during the time they were forming impressions of the stimulus. The experimenter tape-recorded all the verbal responses. The transcript of all these interviews is included in [Appendix B](#).

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Two pre-test questionnaires (version 1 and 2; one for "junk mail" and one for "personal mail") were distributed to students in two classes. Each class was asked to complete one version of the questionnaire. The session was administered by an experimenter and the class professor. The whole procedure took approximately 10 minutes in each class.

The experiment was conducted in a room equipped with a desk, two chairs (one for the experimenter and one for the subject), a stop-watch and a tape recorder. Only one subject was tested in the room at a time. Each subject was identified with a respondent number, and they were alternately assigned one of the two experimental stimuli.

The subjects were told in the beginning to inspect the envelope and not to open it. Upon returning the envelope to the experimenter, subjects were told to verbalize aloud all thoughts no matter how irrelevant they thought they were. All verbatim responses were tape-recorded by the experimenter. At the end of each session, the subject was requested to keep the content of the experiment confidential from other subjects to prevent biased results. The experiment was conducted over a 6-7 week period. The experimenter instructions are included in the [Appendix C](#).

STIMULI DESIGN

In an attempt to control extraneous variables from interfering with or influencing the results of the study, no product or company type could be identified on either of the two envelopes. The attributes identified in the pre-test were used to select the two stimuli in the experiment.

The junk mail stimulus was selected to be consistent with the subjects' existing knowledge categories of junk mail as found in the pre-test. The disguised direct mail stimulus (which resembled personal mail envelope) was selected to be inconsistent with the subjects' existing knowledge categories of direct mail. Thus, the personal mail

envelope possessed both the characteristics of direct mail advertising as well as a personal letter. Because junk mail may often be quickly categorized as such and then discarded by the recipient, a direct mail which looks like a personal letter would likely result in more interest and further deliberative evaluation by the recipient. This would mostly likely induce the recipient to open the mail-- influencing the recipient behavior. Both experimental stimuli are shown in Figure 1 in [Appendix D](#).

THE SAMPLE

Undergraduate students from junior and senior level marketing classes participated in the study in exchange for extra-credit from their professors. A total of 81 students participated in the pretest and 106 participated in the experiment.

PRE-TEST RESULTS

In the pre-test, 50 subjects completed the questionnaires (version 1) which requested them to list up to five characteristics that they associate with junk mail envelopes, and 31 completed those (version 2) which requested them to list up to five characteristics that they associate with personal mail envelopes. During coding, the key attributes were identified from both of the conditions. In the junk mail category, the most common five attributes accounted for 39% of all those mentioned. And in the personal mail category, the most common five attributes accounted for 57% of all those that were mentioned (see Table 1a and 1b).

Table 1a

Pre-Test Category Attributes

(Version 1)

-Junk Mail-

| | Junk Mail | |
|------------------------|------------------|-------|
| | (n) | (%) |
| Base: Total Attributes | (169) | (100) |
| Attributes: | | |
| Colored Envelope | 26 | 15% |
| Offers Prizes | 17 | 10 |
| Thick | 9 | 5 |

| | | |
|---------|-----|----|
| Big | 8 | 5 |
| Coupons | 7 | 5 |
| Other | 102 | 61 |

Total Subjects=50

Table 1b

Pre-Test Category Attributes

(Version 2)

-Personal Mail-

| | Personal Mail | |
|------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| | (n) | (%) |
| Base: Total Attributes | (140) | (100) |
| <u>Attributes:</u> | | |
| Stamped | 25 | 18% |
| White Color | 19 | 14 |
| Return Address | 13 | 9 |
| Receiver Address | 11 | 8 |
| Rectangle Shape | 11 | 8 |
| Other | 61 | 43 |
| Total Subjects=31 | | |

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

For the experiment, the recorded verbal responses were coded on the basis of five types of thoughts:

1. Categorization Thoughts
 - statements that noted that the envelope was similar to other direct mail previously received (e.g. looks like junk mail, looks like a personal letter, etc).
2. Simple Evaluative Thoughts
 - simple evaluation statements that are not based on individual attributes of the envelope (e.g. I hate this kind of mail...)

3. Attribute-oriented Evaluation
 - statements referring to specific attributes of the envelope (e.g. size, color type used, etc)
4. Subtyping Thoughts
 - statements relating envelope to more specific type or category of envelopes (e.g. looks like a Publisher's Clearing House mailer, looks like a letter from a lawyer, etc).
5. Intentions or Behavioral Thoughts
 - statements of how the individual might react or typically reacts (e.g. I never read these things; I usually throw them in the garbage, etc).

The first four coding categories accounted for 75% of the total responses from the subjects in the experiment. The remaining 25% were mostly behavioral responses --opening of the envelope, throwing it out, etc. The coding categories and the verbal script are included in [Appendix B](#). The tabulation of the responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Verbalized Thoughts

| | Total Thoughts | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| | (n) | (%) |
| Base: Total Thoughts | (467) | (100) |
| Type of Thoughts: | | |
| Categorization Thoughts* | 134 | 29% |
| "It was junk mail." | | |
| "Looked like a personal letter." | | |
| Simple Evaluative Thoughts | 123 | 26% |
| "Tricky." | | |
| "Personally, I just don't like it." | | |
| Attribute Oriented Thoughts | 118 | 25% |
| "Had bulk rate postage." | | |
| "The color was bright." | | |
| Behavioral Thoughts | 92 | 20% |
| "Wanted to open it immediately." | | |
| "Throw it right in the garbage." | | |
| Total Subjects (n)=106 | | |
| *Also included Subtyping Thoughts | | |

The means were calculated among the total number and types of thoughts generated from the category-consistent (junk mail) stimulus and the category-inconsistent (personal mail- disguised junk mail) stimulus. See Table 3 (p.22) for the calculated means.

The mean were calculated as follows:

$$\text{MEAN} = \frac{\# \text{ of (total, attribute, category-based or simple evaluative thoughts) from the (category consistent / inconsistent stimuli)}}{\# \text{ of subjects in each condition (category consistent / inconsistent stimuli)}}$$

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion in the literature review, we can create a conceptual model of cognitive processing in direct mail response by consumers. Figure 2 in Appendix E presents my overall hypothesized model applied to direct mail response and behavior by consumers. According to the model, categorization begins immediately upon an individual's receipt of a mail. Successful categorization leads to the recall of the mail category plus the attitudes attached to the category. Failure in categorizing would lead to additional attribute evaluation plus recategorization (possibly with a new category) and eventually confirmation of the new category. If that also fails, the individual would attempt deliberative (individual) attribute evaluation. All efforts would eventually produce a behavioral response which is influenced by the evaluation process used by the individual. Categorization occurs at the end no matter which process the individual goes through.

The results from the pre-test help to answer the two research questions addressed in the study. As seen in Table 1, the attributes which consumers most commonly associate with junk mail include: (1) colored envelope, (2) offering of prizes, (3) thickness, (4) size -- big, and (5) coupons. And the attributes which consumers most commonly associate with personal mail include (1) stamped, (2) white color, (3) return address, (4) receiver address, and (5) rectangle shape. These results are similar to previous findings discussed in the literature review.

Based on the data in Table 3, the hypotheses H(a), (b) , (c) and (d) are supported.

Table 3
Cognitive Response
(In Category Consistent vs. Inconsistent Stimuli)

-MEANS-

| Category Consistent Stimuli (Junk Mail) | Category Inconsistent Stimuli (Personal Mail) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|

Types of Thoughts:

(Influenced by Cognitive Process)

| | | |
|----------------------------|------|------|
| Total Thoughts | 3.22 | 4.20 |
| Attribute Thoughts | .34 | 1.98 |
| Categorization Thoughts | 1.14 | 1.51 |
| Simple Evaluative Thoughts | 1.74 | .71 |

As postulated by H(a), subjects who viewed the category-consistent stimulus (junk mail) formed fewer total thoughts than subjects than the category-inconsistent stimulus condition (personal mail- disguised junk mail). This indicates that subjects in the latter condition 'were induced into more deliberative piecemeal processing, because it was not easy to categorize the envelope. When subjects were uncertain about how to categorize the stimulus, they put more effort into the evaluation of the envelope. Support for H(b) is provided through the presence of a larger mean for the category-inconsistent stimulus. Because more processing was needed, subjects employed more thoughts concerning the individual attributes of the envelope as they attempt to determine what sort of mail piece it contained.

H(c) is again supported by a larger mean for the inconsistent stimuli. More category-based thoughts were formed when subjects were presented with a category-inconsistent stimuli. When initially unable to categorize, subjects apparently tried to recategorize. If categorization initially occurred, there would have been fewer necessary attempts to categorize. Finding a larger mean for the category-consistent stimuli with simple evaluative thoughts supports H(d) which indicates that categorization leads to subjects to recall simple evaluative thoughts associated with their junk mail category. Thus, the findings provide evidence that upon the receipt of direct mail, a consumer, if successful in categorizing, experiences fewer total thoughts, fewer attribute-oriented thoughts, fewer category-based thoughts, but more simple evaluative thoughts.

The results from the study and the findings from the literature review indicate to marketers that they have to pay more attention towards consumers' attitudes (prior experiences) toward direct mail and the cognitive process that consumers use if they are to effectively reach out to them. Research suggests that marketers should understand that the design of mail envelopes, influences the processing strategies that consumers employ. The presence of such large number of direct mail marketers makes this a particularly relevant issue.

In summary, this study indicates that by personalizing direct mail envelopes, avoiding unfavorable variables which consumers dislike from appearing on the envelope, and by targeting consumers with interest in the offer, the likelihood of getting more positive responses and behavior (ex. opening of the mail) will be enhanced. Furthermore, by making an envelope hard to categorize immediately, marketers also induce more deliberative evaluation--creating more attention and interest in their efforts.

Note that the study does not imply that all individual consumer would react the same towards all direct mailings. Since a sample of students was used in this study, in order to determine how other individuals behave, it would be advisable to conduct this experiment employing other types of consumers. As been mentioned, the mode of evaluation chosen by the individual consumer is also likely to be influenced by the individual's past experiences with direct mail. However, marketers should note that the study does imply that the negative attributes that marketers should avoid having on their envelopes are controllable variables. Further research is needed to investigate how different types of prior experiences with direct mail will influence consumer perceptions of direct mail advertising.

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APPENDIX A

PRE-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

VERSION 1

Students,

We would like to know your opinions concerning the appearance of junk mail envelopes. Please list up to FIVE characteristics which you associate with junk mail envelopes. In other words, what makes you believe that a mail piece is a junk mail?

The envelope is/has...

Characteristic

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Thank you for your cooperation. Your opinion counts.

VERSION 2

Students,

We would like to know your opinions concerning the appearance of personal mail envelopes. Please list up to FIVE characteristics which you associate with personal mail envelopes. In other words, what makes you believe that a mail piece is a personal mail?

The envelope is/has...

Characteristic

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Thank you for your cooperation. Your opinion counts.

APPENDIX B

Coding Categories

1. Attribute Oriented Thoughts

- evaluations of attributes of envelope (i.e. size, color, type used, etc...)
- evaluations of this kind of mailing tied to an attribute or set of attributes (i.e. could tell it was advertising because of the bulk rate stamp...)
- comparison or contrasting of attributes to a standard (i.e. looked like a personal letter but the name was typed..)

2. Simple Evaluative Thoughts

- statements referring to overall impressions/evaluations of the envelope not supported by attribute information (i.e. I hate this kind of mail..)

3. Categorization Thoughts

- statements noting similarity between the envelope and the overall category (i.e. looks like junk mail; looks like a personal letter, etc..)

4. Subtyping Thoughts

- statements relating envelope to more specific type or category of envelopes (i.e. looks like a Publisher's Clearing House mailer; looks like a letter from a lawyer, etc..)

5. Thoughts Regarding Intentions or Behaviors

-- statements of how the individual might react or typically reacts (i.e. I never read these things; I usually throw them in the garbage, etc...)

Revised Verbals

1.

A lot of things.
Tricky.
I'm not going to take the time to read it.
Throw right in the garbage.
Personally, I just don't like it.
It's a negative feeling.

2.

Thought it was from a friend'
Would open it.
Assume he knows who its from.
Even if he didn't know who it was from, he'd open it anyway.

3.

I received those before.
I'm not interested.
Throw in garbage.

4.

Personal letter
But too heavy.
Some kind of direct mail.
Had address.
Back of envelope looked more like some kind of business or corporation
Simple.
Had street number.
More like a corporation.

5.

I was excited.
Wanted to open it immediately.

6.

Had idea that it was a direct mail survey.
I have lots of negative impressions of direct mail.
Looks like it, but might not be direct mail.
Had bulk rate postage.
Had little computer scanner.
Some kind of giveaway.
If you press down on the envelope you can see the writing about the offer and you can tell it's direct mail. It gives it away. But it does look like a personal letter. So some people might be apt to open it. I might have even opened it. Looks like personal mail.
So some people might be apt to open it.
I might have even opened it.
Looks like personal mail.

7.

It was junk mail.
Probably some kind of gift.
It did say there was a free gift.
If I had the time I'd open it, otherwise I'd throw in garbage. Too much of this mail (stuff like this).

8.

Maybe a newsletter inside, I'm not sure. Wasn't addressed to me personally.

9.

I saw a?
Sometimes they have coupons.
I never throw away. I open anyways.
When they say ?(your), I never take for granted, I never believe it.

10.

I get one of these for graduation.
I get 70 pieces of direct mail a week.
For charities.
Typing in corner.
It was intriguing.
It reminded me of a direct envelope I get.
Looked like insurance offer, investment program.

Limited time offer.
Wasn't a magazine subscription

11.

It's junk mail.
See so many of them.
Looks like something who its written out to. I would get. Who ever gets it will have same reaction.

12.

It's personal.
I should open the envelope.

13.

I give it to my mother and she takes care of it. Sometimes she throws them out.
That's what I do every time (throw it out...).

14.

It's just a letter.
Not a personal letter.
Usually a personal letter has a ? style.
The person who received a personal letter would try to open it.

15.

Junk mail.
Looks insignificant.
Sweepstakes.
Nothing of importance or significance.

16.

Thought it was a personal letter.
Realized stamp was not for a personal letter. White.
Seemed to be personal but the print was wrong. I don't have any guess what this is.

17.

Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes. Obviously they're trying to sell you something. Win something...subscription.

Curious to see what they were offering.
If I was in a hurry, I'd discard.

18.

Looked like a normal letter.
But, flipped to the back and could see limited time offer.
Some kind of direct mail.
Trying to ? something.
Made you curious to open it.
Pretty good ploy.
Had no idea who it was from.
Was personalized.
Must of had some contact.
Could of been some form letter.

19.

Junk mail.
Throw in trash.
Catches your attention.
B.S.

20.

Student mailer with grades.

21.

Trash it.
It was junk.
Was a curiosity.

22.

Might be a personal letter.
Because of the address.
Unsure because of the stamp.
Maybe a --- promotion.
I could see limited time offer so thought it was direct mail.

23.

I get this stuff for magazine subscriptions. Catch is they're trying to
sell more magazines. It's junk mail.

Use windows & cheques to get people to open. Some people open.
If my name was there I might open it.

24.

From a government agency.
Not junk mail.
It's important to me.

25.

Excitement.
Maybe I would send it back.
Publishers Clearing House.

26.

Looks like direct mail.
Bulk rate stamp.
Sender's address.
Receiver's address.
Bar code.

27.

It's a hoax, you're never going to win.
A lot of people would throw it out.
Something behind it, they want to make money.
I don't know what their motives are.
Gets your attention with the window and green color. Would make
people want to open it.
People with experience would see it and throw it out. It was thick--
there was a lot of stuff inside. Advertising.

28.

Junk mail.
Probably open it real quick and throw it away. Definitely not a bill.
Said limited time offer through the envelope. Bulk rate stamp.
The person didn't open it.

29.

Junk mail.
I wouldn't open it.

See too much of it.
Would toss it aside.

30.

Not a regular stamp. Like advertising.

31.

A scam.
I don't read it.
Throw it away.
Not most creative one I saw.
Flags.

32.

A regular envelope.
Person's address.
I'm not sure if I would open or throw in garbage.
Isn't anything to identify, agency unclear.
Maybe I would open.
Since there is a name and address.
It was very simple.
Dots or something.
Doesn't make you open it.

33.

A sweepstakes.
Junk mail.
I never open it.
I throw it away.

34.

Stamp was bulk rate.
Bar code suggests it was direct mail.
Thought it was not important.
I don't know if I would open it.
I might open it, I'm not sure.

35.

I never believe these things. I just throw away. They will tell you you're already a winner a scam... A sweepstakes.

36.

I thought it was junk.
Because it was thick.
It has ?? which made me think it's not really junk mail.
It was neater.
I saw some writing inside.
It was advertising.

37.

Just junk mail.

38.

Looked official.
Stamp was bulk rate.
Was from an organization that sends out alot of letters.
Top left corner, a name and address.
Doesn't seem like junk mail.
It gives an idea of some sort of instructions...
Bar codes give an idea that its...

39.

I thought it was an opportunity to win some tickets.
I checked close and saw there was a reply date and might be ??? I was still concerned about what was inside.
There was one or two red stickers.

40.

It was unprofessional.
A small business trying to promote something.
Obviously a manual typewriter.
The stamp wasn't the usual.
Was probably some kind of form letter.
It did look kind of interesting.
Some kind of company...
I would have opened it just to see what it is.

41.

Another advertisement for magazines.
They make you purchase something in order to win.
It would probably end up in the garbage before you got any money. I probably wouldn't have opened it or opened it just to see what they have to say...to see the contents.

42.

It was written to Chuck.. It had a name.

43.

Bills?
Can't think too much about it 'cause you see it so much.

44.

Junk mail.
Didn't look like a bill.

45.

Here we go again. I hate to get these things. How did they find me.
Why me?
It's junk.

46.

A personal letter.
Because of the way it was written.
Looked like it came from a friend.
The way it was typed.
It was deceiving.
The return address you may not know.
If you turned it over it's marked ??
People that like to save time just throw in the garbage.
Bulk rate postage stamp tells you??

47.

Not true.
Some gimmick.
You have to buy something in order to ??
There so much of that out there.

48.

Looks like any regular envelope.
If I get it, I wouldn't open it.
Bar code.
Junk mail.
I wouldn't rush to open it.
If there was "Baruch College" I would open it...

49.

Sweepstakes.
Junk mail.
I would open it and look at it.
I'm not going to be too excited.
What are they up to now.
I get a million of those in the mail.
I'm not thinking that I'm winning something.
Did it and nothing came through so I'm not very excited.

50. .?

It's junk mail.
I wouldn't trust it very much.
Nothing for you, just trying to sell you something. You open it, but you don't expect any surprises.
You know they're just trying to sell you something. Throw it in the garbage.

51.

I received these kinds of envelopes three or four in a week. I'm not so interested in it.

52.

Thought it was a regular envelope.
Thickness.
Could be something important.
Stamp.

53.

Something that benefits you.
The numbers are very attractive.
The envelope is very unique.
It's a big envelope.
You expect something.

Coupons stand out.
Gets your attention.
Yellow.
Very important.

54.

The envelope is an appropriate statement. It would have a lot of information.
I thought it might be official or important.

55.

It's something I feel disrespected. I would read it.

56.

I see if the envelope is addressed to me, not to the resident. It's kind of plain, nothing on cover.
Intriguing about what was inside.

57.

A simulation.
A test. (subject thinking about purpose of experiment) I see those, a sweepstakes.
I like to open it.

58.

Looked like a personal letter.
Wasn't a label, doesn't go to everybody.

59.

It was seductive.
How old do you need to be to get this envelope. I was curious to see what was inside.
Let's see. Open it & see.

60.

envelope

61.

For sure they're trying to Sell something. For sure I'm not going to win.

62.

Looked like a personal letter.

Didn't look like junk mail.

If it was junk mail they wouldn't give you the return address. If I'd recognize the return address, I'd open it.

63.

Junk mail.

Too good to be true.

Most of the time I open things like that.

Just junk mail.

64.

First I thought it was junk mail.

It looked like a personal letter.

But they...??

65.

Publishers Clearing House.

That's the most common.

I look for the name, the sweepstakes, the words.

66.

Felt like opening it to see what it is.

67.

Strange.

For a moment I thought it was real.

But then I...?

68.

??

Window in the envelope.

Maybe advertising or political.

69.

Silly.
It didn't tell me anything at all.
A sweepstakes.
A lot of people joke.
I wanted to win it.

70.

Like any mail, I would immediately open it.
Addressed to me.
So I would be interested in the contents.
It was thick.
I have a tendency to open letters to see what's inside..

71.

Another sweepstakes.
To be thrown out.
Usually that's what I do, I take one look at it and garbage. Nothing is free.

72.

Pretty plain.
I won't pay much attention.
Normally I will open the letter.
I will read it without paying much attention and throw it away.

73.

I think it's a waste.
Not necessary.
But you want to know their marketing strategy. What's inside excites people, free gift..

74.

Appeared to be some sort of solicitation.
From a non profit, possibly.
From a credit card or magazine.
Either read it or dump it.

75.

More junk mail.
Sure, who doesn't want a million dollars.

If I thought I could really win a million dollars, I'd open the envelope.
I've opened numerous like these before, they just didn't stop. They wouldn't get me off their list.
Hope turned into a nightmare,...,
It wasn't related to anything I was involved with...
Wasn't sponsored by any kind of; not related to anything... Definitely not opening it.

76.

Junk mail.
Offering products that are not of interest.
It's a waste of time.
I would open it. just to see exactly what it is.
Then just toss it.
Saw limited time offer.

77.

An american promotion.
With american flag on it.
Reminded me of wheel of fortune.
It was just another promotion that we come across.
Usually you throw them right away.
If they're quite interesting you open them up.
I used to fill them out in the beginning but not anymore.

78.

Looked like a regular envelope. Computer generated.
Address was same too and from. Bulk mail.
So it wasn't a personal letter. Probably a corporate letter. Advertising.

79.

Annoyed.
Junk mail.
Throw it out.
I get the sweepstakes...etc.
Publishers Clearing House.

80.

Mass production.
Mass mailing.
Waste of paper.

81.

Looked like junk mail.
Usually rip it and throw it out.
If I haven't received anything in the mail that day I would probably look at it.

82.

I thought it was very important information.
It had a lot of paper in it.
The weight.
The way it was addressed.
It was a good quality envelope.
Came from a very important person.

83.

It's just another mail??
I never had anyone win anything from this kind of mail.

84.

Looked like a personal letter.
It wasn't from a PO box.
No company name, just a person.

85.

Publishers Clearing House.
Supposedly awards of 10 million
Seemed like a typical envelope people receive at the end of the year.
To subscribe to magazines, books...I've received a few of them
Myself..
It's a contest...how hard is it to win it..
I filled it out a few times and hoped to get called but never..

86.

Looked like something I would probably throw out after I read it.
Read through the envelope and looked like you had to act now.

Probably be junk mail.
I would open it to see what it was.

87.

Typical junk mail.
Promises that they can't give you.
Just want you to perform something.
It wasn't on the??

88.

It was a good marketing strategy.
Could've used a thicker envelope...a security envelope.
Could see through the envelope that it was a limited time offer. The
person definitely would have opened it.
Looked official.

89.

Saw alot of those envelopes at my house.
Usually I don't look at it.
Usually consider it junk mail.
I wasn't really interested unless it said you won something. Usually
throw it away.

90.

Curious about what's in there.
Looked at the name and address.
The stamp.
The sender.
The size of the envelope.

91.

Junk mail.
You want to get rid of it.
Some kind of scam.
Wonder whether you get a chance of winning.
Seen enough of them so you're not that interested.

92.

It some kind of resume.
Some kind of lawyer..

Because it comes to a specific name.
I wouldn't think its a commercial.
Something specific.
Some new service...collection agencies etc..
Lawyer's name on the top.
Too thick to be something personal.
Maybe a brochure.
Looked like a cheque.
Didn't have any companies on it so not a commercial.
Something I wouldn't throw away.

93.

Another sweepstakes.
I didn't want to bother opening it.
I get something like that it's one of the last ones I'll open up.
I just put it at the bottom of the pile.
There's always a catch to it (saying there's a winner).
Don't think it's such a big deal.

94.

Wondering what it was.
It didn't have a specific company.
So I didn't know where it was coming from.
Looked like a personal letter.
The envelope was see-through.
If I pressed it it looked like some sort of flyer inside.
I wouldn't have opened it.
It didn't look like anything I requested.
The bulk stamp indicates mass mailing.
Wasn't a regular 29 cent stamp.
From an unknown person.
Bulk stamp--many people received it...

95.

Another piece of junk mail.
Somebody's trying to cheat someone.
Throw in garbage.
Lies.
Never open them.

96.

Just looked like regular mail.

97.

Just an ordinary sweepstakes. Nothing appealing.

98.

Not from New York, from Connecticut.
Not usual postal service..bulk.
Stamp is different..did not see 29 cents.
Not delivered by US postal service.
Kind of promotion.
Heavy.
That's why I thought it was promotion.
You receive so many coupons in this envelope.
Marketing strategy comments

I was a victim myself...

99.

Obviously its a sweepstakes.
To win something.
Ed McMan.

100.

What could this possibly be.
Saw on the back that it was some kind of an offer. Could tell who it was coming from, male or female. Kind of heavy.
Would open.

101.

Just another junk mail.
Sweepstakes.
Open it and throw in garbage.

102.

Another ad.
Another junk mail.
I wouldn't open it if nothing important.
Throw it away.

103.

Oh I won. When you read carefully, you realize you may be eligible to win. You have to send the numbers in and then find out if you win.

104.

It was really plain.
It was white.
Seemed kind of thick.
I guess I would open it and look at it.
If it was advertising throw it away.

105.

Some type of sweepstakes.
Clearing House.
Randomly addressed to people trying to get them to participate. Ed
McMan.
One million dollars on one part of the envelope and one million one
hundred thousand on another part...
It was addressed to someone in Brooklyn.
The name was crossed out of course

106.

Business envelope or promotion.
Saw inside the envelope and figured it was a promotion.

APPENDIX C

DIRECT MAIL STUDY EXPERIMENTER INSTRUCTIONS (Please note that there are THREE parts in the experiment)

PART 1 IMPRESSION OF ENVELOPE

1.

- Instructions:
1. Hand subject a folder containing one of two envelopes.
Instruct the subject to follow the directions on the outside of the folder.

2. **COLLECT FOLDER WITH ENVELOPE
FROM SUBJECT**

PART 2

INSTRUCTIONS:

3. Please give the following instructions to each subject:

I would like you to verbalize aloud all the thoughts and ideas that went through your head while you were inspecting the envelope. Please report any thoughts no matter how simple, complex, relevant or irrelevant that may seem to you. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not bother to properly frame your ideas. Just tell me the thoughts that occurred to you during the time you were inspecting the envelope.

4. **PRESS RECORD BUTTON BEFORE SUBJECT BEGINS AND STATE SUBJECT NUMBER**
5. **PRESS STOP BUTTON AFTER SUBJECT FINISHES**

PART 3

INSTRUCTIONS:

6. Please thank subject for participating.
7. Remind subject to:

Please keep the contents of the experiment confidential from other students who may be participating as it is important for the study that each student does not know what the study is about before entering the room to avoid pre-determined attitudes and bias in their responses.

APPENDIX D

**FIGURE 1
JUNK MAIL STIMULUS**



go to [larger image](#)

**PERSONAL MAIL STIMULUS
(DISGUISED JUNK MAIL)**



go to [larger image](#)

APPENDIX E

**FIGURE 2
MODEL OF CONSUMER RESPONSE TOWARDS DIRECT MAIL**



go to [larger image](#)

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