



Permission marketing: A theoretical framework

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Abstract

In modern times customers are much concerned about their privacy and privacy of customers is halted by unwanted marketing communications. Organizations now have a variety of alternatives for marketing their brands and products/services in an efficient and cost-effective manner thanks to electronic marketing, but it is important to take great care to protect privacy of customers. The adoption of electronic marketing is directly influenced by consumers' worries about unethical online behaviour. While many people are prepared to exchange goods and services, many are hesitant to make online purchases due to a lack of trust. Due to privacy concerns with e-marketing, consumers continue to favour traditional channels when making purchases. Review of the literature reveals privacy has become a major problem for all online businesses. The permission marketing strategy a novice concept can provide solution to customers from unwanted marketing information and privacy concerns. This research study aims to look into the theoretical framework of permission marketing. The study looked at the various theories explaining the theoretical framework of permission marketing, constructs identified by various theories for customer acceptance for permission marketing and conceptual framework for cost - benefits of permission marketing program to consumers. The study will contribute to the existing dearth literature on permission marketing.

Keywords: Permission marketing, customer acceptance, permission, unwanted marketing information, advertising clutter

Introduction

In modern marketing era, permission marketing technique that relies on customers' consent to receive marketing information has become significantly important for marketers in building positive and strong relationships with customers. Due to their prior consent to get such information, the volunteered customers are more likely to pay attention to marketing materials, and customer attention has emerged as the most crucial tool for success of business. The practice of interruption marketing used by marketers has persuaded customers to accept permission marketing because they desire to shield themselves from an abundance of irrelevant and unwanted marketing information. Prospective customers need to be given personalized and relevant information because customers dislike being disturbed by persistent unwanted marketing messages and feel bothered by them (Bhatia, 2020) ^[5].

Seth Godin an American entrepreneur used the term permission-based marketing in the year 1999 in his book entitled as "Permission Marketing: Turning Strangers into Friends and Friends into Customers". According to Seth Godin, permission marketing is the privilege—not the right—of sending personalized, relevant, and anticipated messages to people who have agreed to receive them. He also claimed that permission marketing is more successful than interruption marketing, which aims to reach a mass audience with a single marketing message. Giving customers the option to decide whether they want to receive marketing messages is the goal of permission marketing, which also offers an entirely different way of looking at consumers and advertising (Godin, 1999) ^[14]. Beginning with customers' express and active desire to receive

marketing information, permission relationships are established. Permission marketing provides people the option to cancel permission granted at any time. Permission marketing is becoming more crucial than ever due to the overabundance of advertising in today's world. Since Godin described how, quickly developing digital technology has boosted the significance of both m-commerce and e-commerce and the ability to engage with customers in new ways, the possibility to connect with customers has greatly increased. The most recent debut of the "the Internet of Things"—the idea of connecting any device, whether a phone, wearable technology, or other—has contributed to this increase as technology has gotten more and more ingrained in people's lives. Customers are now increasingly willing to exchange their personal information for goods and services in their daily lives in exchange of incentives like awards, deals, or schemes (Kulina *et al.*, 2016) ^[26].

Customers are encouraged to opt-in to receive promotional messages through permission marketing, which encourages them to pay more attention to such messages than they would do to unsolicited ones. Permission marketing has emerged as a key strategy for attracting new customers and maintaining relationships with current ones. Because commercial organizations can concentrate on those who are genuinely interested in their marketing initiatives rather than having a target on wide number of people, permission marketing has become a very successful and affordable technique of marketing (Sweeney, 2006) ^[40].

Sending large number of marketing messages to a big audience, even though these messages are irrelevant to them and are not according to their preferences is known as interruption marketing. Marketing that interrupts customers

involves flooding their inboxes with too many promotional messages while disregarding their interests and preferences. Examples of interruption marketing include banner advertising, commercials during TV and sports broadcasts, pop-up ads, telemarketing calls, and pointless SMS messages. With so much marketing information is being sent out at once, people experience information overload, which causes them to become ignorant and disregarding the messages. Customers give marketers permission to send them marketing materials based on their interests. Usually, this is accomplished by having the customer complete a survey showing their interests when signing up for a service. The marketer then connects customer interests with advertising messaging. This is a fresh notion. Despite the fact that targeting the right clients has long been acknowledged as a fundamental marketing strategy the majority of targeting done today is better characterized as "targeting on averages."

Permission marketing literature highlights the importance of the internet for permission marketing and how it has grown significantly with the use of the internet. It can be done in any direct media, but with the use of the internet it has become a real concept as internet encourages advertisers to create campaigns that allow recipients to connect in a variety of ways, resulting in the rise of online advertising as a critical component in increasing the number of people exposed to their messages (Serna, 2022) ^[36]. There are two reasons for this: (1) on the internet, the cost of communication between marketer and customer is minimal (Shiman, 1996; Hoffman and Novak, 1996) ^[18, 37]; and (2) immediate two-way communication on the internet has permitted a rapid feedback mechanism (Hoffman and Novak, 1996) ^[18]. Permission marketing has become popular digital marketing approach from some time (e.g., consumers signing up for newsletters), but with the rise of mobile marketing and social media marketing, customer consent is becoming increasingly vital (Im and Ha, 2013) ^[19]. Permission marketing makes use of "newmedia" channels (e.g., web, e-mail, mobile, social media), which are well suited for interactive marketing and research work performed by (Waring and Martinz, 2002; Marinova *et al.*, 2002; Tanakinjal *et al.*, 2007; Kent and Brandal, 2003; Bamba and Barnes, 2007; Radd *et al.*, 2010; Jayawardhena *et al.*, 2009; Richard and Meuli, 2013; Reimers *et al.*, 2016; Grubor *et al.*, 2018) ^[3, 16, 20, 24, 30, 34, 35, 41, 47] studied permission marketing in context of newmedia (SMS, email, mobile phone etc.). The failure of the direct mail strategy of distributing unsolicited advertising communications is another factor driving the expansion of permission marketing on the web (Krishnamurthy, 2001) ^[25]. Email is a widely utilised medium for formal and business communication because of its open access, speed, and reliability (Yaseen, 2021) ^[49] but unsolicited commercial e-mail, also known as "Spam," is a prime example of this (Cranor and LaMacchia, 1998) ^[8]. Spam would lead to large number of messages for consumers which would results in weakening of brand reputation, weakening of customer trust and a slowing of entire network and in turn influence the

purchase intention and this is the reason permission marketing is being seen as a feasible alternative for internet marketing communication (Krishnamurthy, 2001; Laxmana, 2016) ^[25]. On the Internet it is now large-scale activity (Krishnamurthy, 2001) ^[25] and thus there is need to enquire this concept intensively even though there are large numbers of studies on the concept of permission marketing.

Three aspects of permission marketing, as outlined by Seth Godin, illustrate that:

Permission marketing is anticipated: As customers have consented to receive such marketing messages in advance, permission marketing messages are anticipated by them.

Permission marketing is personal: It sends communications to specific people who have consented to receive them.

Permission marketing is relevant: Permission marketing is important since it tailors marketing messages according to customers' tastes and preferences.

Today's businesses can communicate with their customers in a number of ways. One of the most often used methods of communication in business is email. One of the most important channels for marketing communications is email, but spam annoys customers in a variety of ways. Email marketing with permission (PEM) can aid in reducing spam. Permission email marketing is known as emails forwarded to customers who have granted the sender consent to receive such mails. Customers may receive opt-in emails or unsolicited emails. Customers frequently see unsolicited emails as spam. Email has become most popular medium for both formal and business communication and this is because of its open access, reliability and speed (Yaseen, 2021) ^[49].

Marketers who are smart enough avoid sending spam emails. Building solid customer relationships can help firms and permission-based email marketing is made simple for marketers by the internet. In the current marketing environment, e-permission marketing is quite common. The act of friend requests, like, signing up for email alerts, visiting business websites, and subscribing to other digital networks are all examples of permission marketing. Users can upload their own videos to video-sharing websites like YouTube and many business firms utilize this website to advertise their goods and services. Customers can choose to 'subscribe' these businesses, allowing marketers for sending them updated information about their items. People who subscribe to newsletters from different institutions, such as banks, are engaging in permission-based marketing.

Customer privacy issues generally revolve around security and privacy of sensitive customer information related to online sales and services transactions, the collection and use of customer data and statistics, as well as the protection of a customer's right to privacy. It is also important to note that there is a distinction between private and personal information. Personal information is information containing

personal attributes of a person, such as a phone number or an address that might not always be private information, although this would depend upon the person and the application. The essence is that not all personal information is necessarily private information, but by treating it as such, involuntary privacy violations could be avoided.

Review of literature

With more than a billion active users India has had enormous growth in the telecom sector, making it one of the largest wireless marketplaces in the world. One of the most affordable ways to reach potential consumers and sell services and products through telemarketing is short messaging service (SMS), which has minimal call and SMS prices. SMS and direct calling has become very important ways for the telemarketers to increase sales. Issue of large number of unsolicited telemarketing communications has created problems for the people. The marketers always remain busy in sending unwanted promotional information to customers who always make customers bombarded with lot of advertising clutter and this advertising clutter has no significance for the customer till the time customer is not willing to obtain such promotional information. Permission marketing (Godin, 1999) ^[14] considers that marketers need to seek prior permission of their customers' before sending them any promotional information and can save customers from such clutter. It provides customers the chance to become volunteer for marketing and also provides business organization a completely different viewpoint to think about customers and advertising for the growth of business (Godin, 1999) ^[14]. Permission relationships begin when customer is ready to give an explicit and active desire to obtain promotional information with the chance to customers to stop obtaining messages at their willingness at any time (Tezinde *et al.*, 2002) ^[42]. Permission marketing has two types 1) opt –in marketing and opt – out marketing. Opt-in marketing refers to that strategy in which firm explicitly ask customers for their permission and only after the permission of customer any information is passed on to the customers and in opt out marketing firms send promotional messages to customers on the basis of prior relationships when customer has not explicitly denied to receive any marketing messages but providing customers an option to opt out at any time (Soundararaj, 2012) ^[39]. It is concerned with making target customers to be interested in the process and target customers should consider it valuable what the business firm is going to do for them. If the target customers feel that there is no advantage in participating permission marketing process they will not give permission. Permission marketing is not intrusive and this feature makes it more effective (Sweeney, 2006) ^[40]. It can significantly contribute in getting new customers and stabilizing relations with existing customers (Sweeney, 2006) ^[40]. It is very efficient and cost effective way of marketing because business organizations don't need to focus on such a large population of customers but they focus on the prospective customers who really shows interest in their marketing

activities. To gain intensive insight into the concept it has been researched in many contexts since from the time it was coined by Godin.

Literature on permission marketing revealed several factors that affect customer's wish to give consent to the marketers such as a previous relationship, brand equity, (Tezinde *et al.*, 2002) ^[42], income, gender, advertising message volume, previous experience with mobile ads, trust and brand image (Jayawardhena *et al.*, 2009) ^[20], personal experience, perceived usefulness & perceived behavioral control has positive influence on permission (Kalyoncuoglu & Faiz, 2015) ^[21] and perceived monetary incentives, personal relevant messages and perceived entertainment enhance customers' attitude for permission marketing (Bhatia, 2020) ^[5]. Customers' opt-in decisions are affected by the above mentioned factors, it is also important to identify the factors that drive customers' wish to opt –out so that firms can make deep and intensive efforts to retain their existing subscribers. Previous research on customers' opt-out decisions has revealed that customers' interest in a permission marketing program is positively influenced by message relevance and monetary benefit (Krishnamurthy, 2001) ^[25], that highly personalized messages (e.g., using the customer's name in the e-mail subject line) drive customers opt out (Marinova *et al.*, 2002) ^[30], and that lengthier-mails and those with fewer links lead to higher unsubscribing rates. An extensive review of articles revealed major determining factors for permission marketing in context of emails, mobile and SMS.

Objective of the study

To study the theoretical framework of permission marketing by reviewing literature.

Conceptual framework

Krishnamurthy proposed comprehensive cost-benefit conceptual framework get knowledge about the consumer's experience with a permission-marketing program. The objective was to frame a conceptual framework at a sufficiently high level of generality. This framework can act as a guide for future empirical research in the area. Benefits from a permission marketing program have a positive impact on a person's level of interest, while expenses have a negative impact on interest for permission marketing programme. Relevance of the message and financial gain are two potential benefits. The fundamental reason that encourages individuals to join a permission marketing program is the promise of receiving relevant information. According to studies (Biel & Bridgwater, 1990; Grunert, 1996; Milne & Gordon, 1993; Reynolds, Gengler & Howard, 1995) ^[6, 17, 31, 32], people value the relevance of promotional messages. The consumer makes decisions about the advertising messages' applicability to his or her demands at every stage of programme participation. If this judgment is negative, there will be a loss of interest. Below given figure provides information of Cost-Benefit conceptual framework.

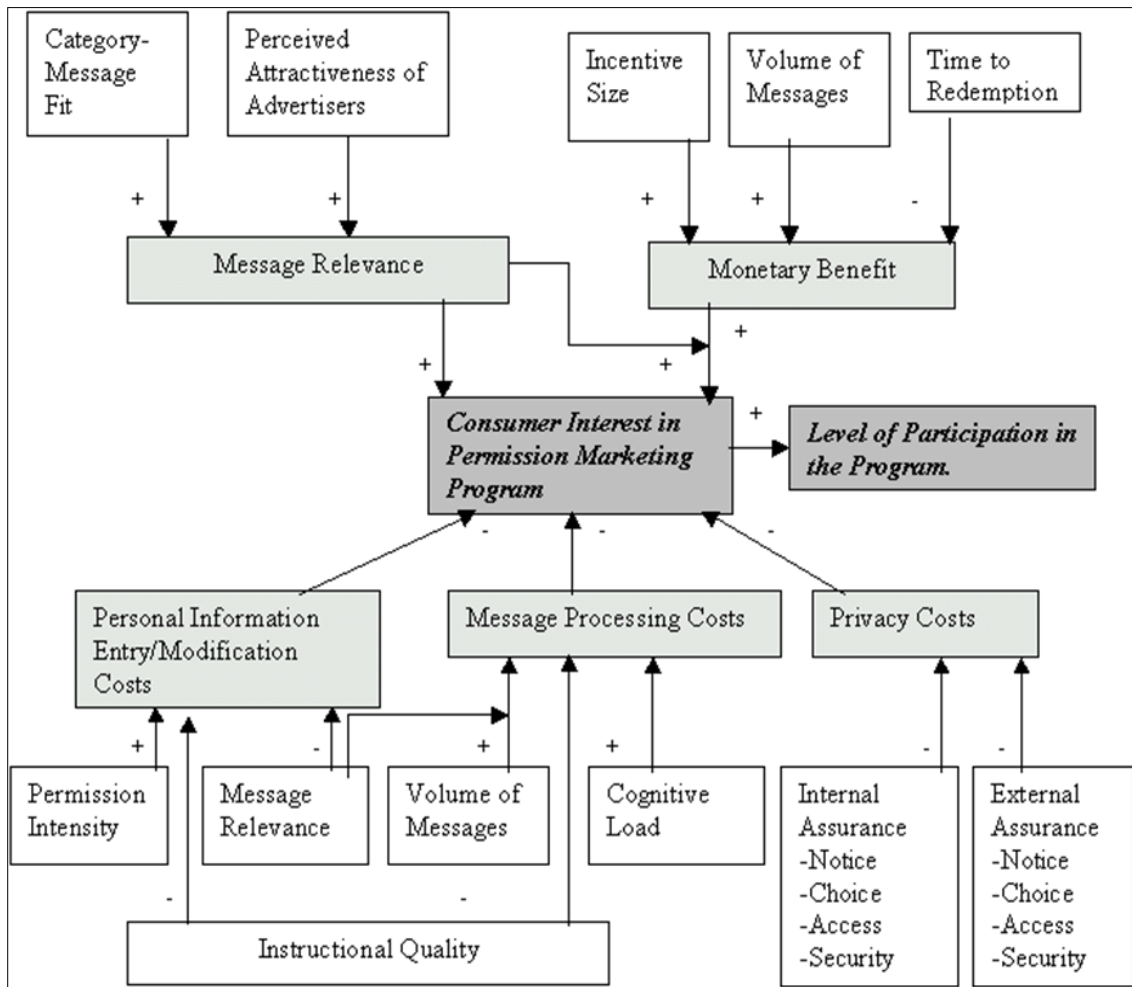


Fig 1: Cost-Benefit conceptual framework Source: Krishnamurthy, 2001 [25]

Cost- benefit conceptual framework revealed that five factors cost and benefit factors such as monetary benefit, message relevance, personal information and modification cost, privacy and message processing cost influence customers’ interest for permission marketing campaign.

Framework for customers’ acceptance for permission marketing

Past research studies report that for the success of advertising and marketing it is important that it should be permission based (Barwise & Strong, 2002; Wei *et al.*, 2010; Unal *et al.*, 2011) [2, 48] and the reason responsible for this is that customers will have explicit control over how their personal information is being used by the marketers and this will lower the possibility of resistance of customers for advertising (Tucker, 2012) [43]. Even if marketing information is permission-based, it is also significant to determine whether customers are accepting it as expected. This is because without acceptance of marketing information it is difficult to make sure that it will be processed (Soroa-Koury & Yang, 2010) [38]. The acceptance behavior of users toward marketing information has previously been examined using three primary behavioral theories: Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Below is a quick rundown of behavioral theories.

▪ **The theory of reasoned action**

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) was first time proposed by Fishbein & Ajzen in the year 1975 [13]. The basic tenet of the theory is that human beings are rational individuals that use information at their disposal for making judgments, framing evaluations and taking decisions. The theory considers that attitude of an individual towards performing behaviour is related with his/her beliefs related with certain consequences and evaluation of those consequences in performing that behaviour and the theory determine that attitude as one of major factor influencing person’s intention to perform certain behaviour. Along with attitude, person’s intention is influenced by normative beliefs as normative beliefs are viewpoints of certain referent people such as family, friends, media etc about performing or not performing certain behaviors. The normative beliefs and motivation leads to normative pressure and the collective impact of normative pressure is known as subjective norms. Thus the attitude towards behaviour and subjective norms are considered as determinants of intention to perform some behavior and intention leads to performing a behavior. As long as the behaviour is voluntarily controlled by the individual, this hypothesis properly describes the antecedents related to adoption of any system or strategy (Beiginia, 2011) [4]. TRA is depicted in figure 1.

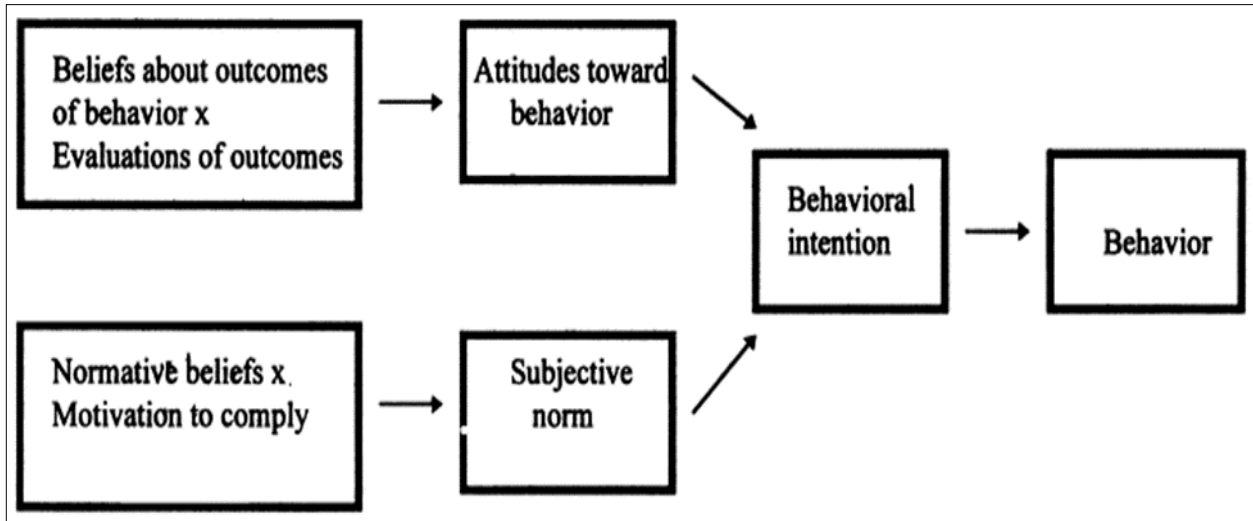


Fig 2: Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) [13]

▪ **Technology Acceptance model**

Davis extended the TRA model to create the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in management information systems research (see Fig. 3). TAM claims that the two beliefs of perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) are the most important for acceptance behaviour of customer. The subjective likelihood that using a certain technique or strategy will improve one's performance is known as Perceived usefulness (PU). Perceived ease of use (PEOU) is a measure of how easy it is to use a strategy or technique. Attitude is predicted by both PU and PEOU. PEOU has a connection to PU. TAM differs from TRA primarily in one aspect: the person's attitude toward using the something and perceived usefulness both are jointly used to determine a person's behavioural

intention. The TAM model has a fundamental flaw in that it ignores subjective norms. As a result, the TAM model falls short of describing the forced use of some system where subjective norms (social pressures) play a significant role. Venkatesh and Davis (2000) [46] followed up with their new adapted TAM model, which is commonly referred to as the Extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM2). In terms of social impact and cognitive instrumental processes, TAM2 describes perceived usefulness and usage intentions. Subjective norm, voluntariness, and image are social influence traits, whereas job relevance, output quality, outcome demonstrability, and perceived ease of use are cognitive instrumental processes. TAM 2 was then expanded to create TAM 3 (Venkatesh & Bala, 2008) [45].

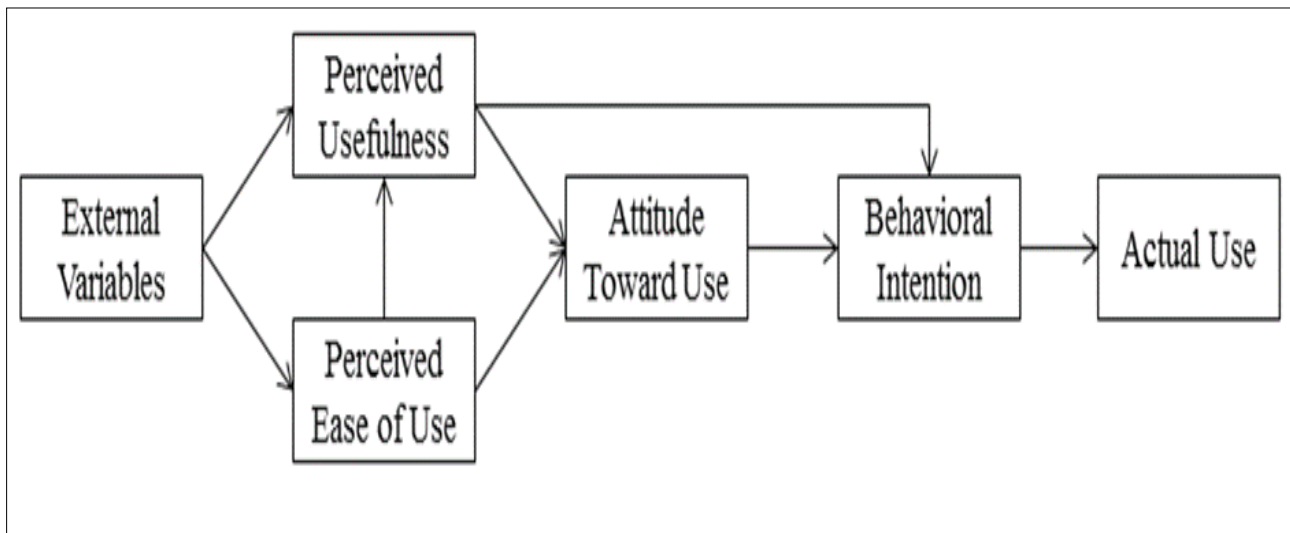


Fig 3: Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1986)

▪ **The Theory of Planned Behaviour**

Another extension of TRA, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) [1], suggested a new construct termed perceived behavioural control as a determinant of behavioral intention. Perceived behaviour control refers to an individual's perceptions of the ease or

difficulty of performing behaviour, as well as the skills, resources, and opportunities required to perform the behaviour. Rather than TRA, the TPB model seeks to anticipate both voluntary and involuntary behaviours when it comes to perceptions of performance control (Beiginia *et al.*, 2011) [4].

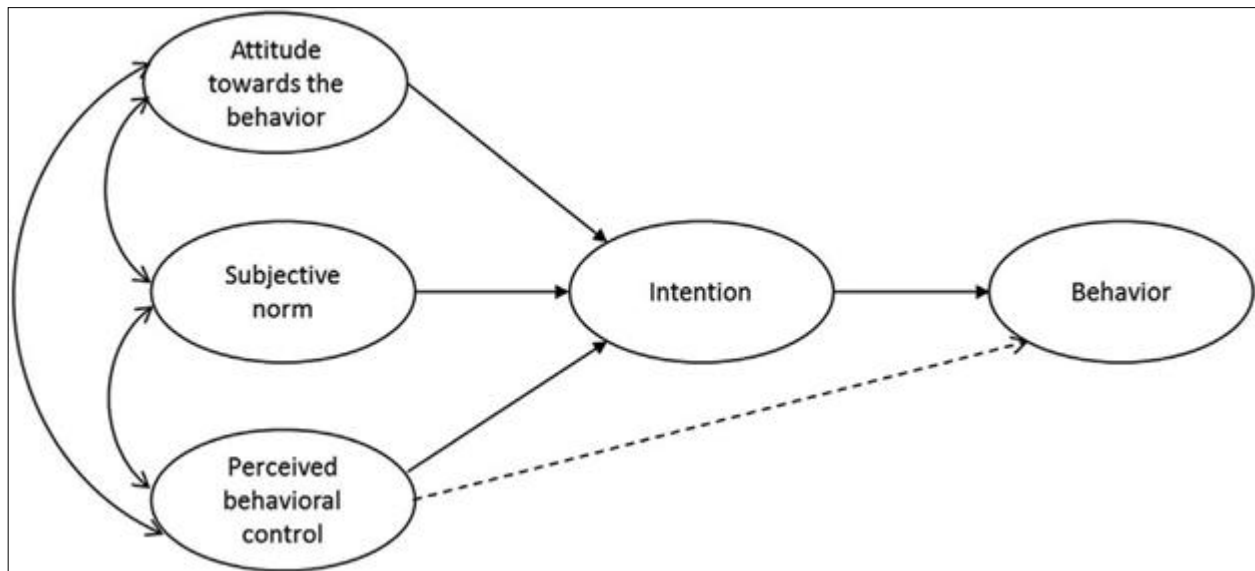


Fig 4: Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) ^[1]

Major constructs identified from theoretical framework

Major factors identified in literature affecting customer acceptance of permission marketing:

- **Subjective norms:** SN are called as influence of family, friends and social pressures in order to perform or not perform a specific behaviour and the beliefs of influential people surrounding an individual influence an individual's behaviour (Ajzen,1991) ^[1]. Subjective norms can influence customers willingness to give consent for specific marketing information under permission marketing campaign of organizations.
- **Perceived Ease of Use:** According to Davis (1989) ^[11, 12] attitude of users towards any technology is influenced by ease of use and perceived usefulness is also affected by perceived ease of use. Therefore, perceived ease of use influence attitude of users both directly and indirectly through perceived utility. According to Karjaluoto *et al.*, (2008) ^[22] perceived ease of use and familiarity plays a significant role in influencing the attitude of users' towards SMS advertising. Carroll *et al.*, 2005 ^[9] reported that customer should be made comfortable with the procedure opt-in and granting permission for marketing/advertising otherwise customers may lead to unfavorable attitude towards marketing which will lead to failure of adoption of marketing/advertising.
- **Perceived Usefulness:** The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), created by Davis in 1989 ^[11, 12], explains the factors that influence user acceptance any system. Here, he defined perceived usefulness as the extent to which an individual thinks that utilizing a specific system/strategy would improve his or her ability to accomplish their purpose. In context of permission marketing it is concerned with ease of use of permission marketing purchasing decisions.
- **Perceived Behavioural Control:** PBC in context of permission marketing can be called as the total control people can have behaviours related to promotional information they receive. It refers to receiving

marketing messages only when consumers have granted permission to companies empower consumers to control frequency, time and content of the messages they receive (Jayawardhena *et al.*, 2009; Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2008) ^[20, 22] and it is seen in studies that consumers are more willful to give their consent to companies if they have authority to control the frequency and content of marketing messages (Jayawardhena *et al.*, 2009, Kautonen *et al.*, 2007) ^[20, 23].

- **Attitude:** According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) ^[13], attitude is "an individual's favourable or negative feelings (evaluative affect) towards completing certain behaviour." If a person has a positive opinion of executing the behaviour, Ajzen (1991) ^[1] asserts, "Intention to conduct the behaviour will take place." A connecting link between belief factors and behavioural intention has also been found to be attitude (Lai and Li, 2005) ^[28].
- **Behavioural intention:** Behavioural intention has been interpreted as a person's level of willingness to try and amount of effort they intend to put forth in order to carry out a behaviour. People are more likely to engage in the behaviour when their intentions are stronger, according to Ajzen (1991) ^[1].

Conclusion

Following a review of the literature, it was determined that models such as the Theory of Reasoned Action, TAM model, Theory of Planned Behavior and a few more theories/models not covered in this study contributed to customer acceptance of permission marketing. The analysis of the three models/theories listed above showed that there are numerous constructs that determine customer acceptance towards permission marketing. The main focus of this study is on three models/theories (TRA, TPA, and TAM) and conceptual cost benefit framework proposed by Krishnamurthy (2001) ^[25]. Conceptual cost –benefit framework for consumer interest for permission marketing program revealed that five factors i.e. message relevance, monetary benefit, personal information and modification cost, privacy and message processing cost largely influence

customer interest. Constructs identified in these three models/theories are focused; however, there are many other factors also contributing to customer acceptance which are left out in this study and future researchers can focus on studying other theories and factors by considering the limitations of this study. Permission marketing is studied in different contexts in the marketing arena, according to this literature evaluation. Researchers have looked into this topic from a variety of angles, including antecedents of permission marketing, consumer attitudes regarding permission marketing, and customer intentions to grant permission. Despite the fact that there have been a number of studies on this topic, research on this concept needs more attention of scholars. After doing this investigation, it was discovered that no review studies have been conducted on this topic since its conception. This study will greatly contribute to the literature of permission marketing. On a theoretical level, this review adds much to the existing literature.

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