Spam, Spim, and User Perceptions of E-Mail and Instant Messaging Usefulness

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the effect of unsolicited electronic messages, also known as spam and spim, on perceptions of e-mail and instant messaging usefulness. It is hypothesized that spam and spim should have a negative effect on electronic communication system usefulness, but the survey findings do not support this. Users seem to have coped with spam and spim through a combination of technical and non-technical solutions. The implications of these findings are discussed from the perspective of researchers, marketers, electronic communication service providers, and public policy.

Keywords: electronic mail; end user perceptions; gender differences; instant messaging; spam; spim; technology acceptance

INTRODUCTION

The number of spam and spim messages individuals receive continues to grow, but does this affect their perceptions of the usefulness of electronic mail and instant messaging? For well over a decade, individuals and organizations have benefited from the ease and low cost of sending electronic mail (e-mail) messages. But this ease and low marginal cost also comes with a price. It is cheap and easy for organizations and individuals to send huge numbers of unsolicited, mostly unwanted, e-mail messages — commonly referred to as spam. In 2003, approximately two billion spams were sent every day (Swartz, 2004). It is such a pervasive
problem that an industry has evolved to fight the problem through development of anti-spam software.

One possible user response to the increase in spam has been increased use of a relatively new electronic communication technology — instant messaging (IM). But the ease and low-cost nature of sending IM messages also enable the sending of large amounts of unsolicited IM messages, also known as spim. While the amount of spim in 2004 was far less than the amount of spam, it was still a significant phenomenon. More than one billion spims were sent in 2003, and it was estimated to grow to four billion during 2004 (Swartz, 2004). By the end of 2004, spim was expected to be approximately 5% of all public IM traffic (Bird, 2004). Another troubling reality is the content of spim messages. According to a report from early 2004 by the Radicati Group, a technology market research firm in Palo Alto, California, in 2004 70% of spim was porn-related (Biever, 2004). The number of spim messages is expected to continue to grow at a rate at or above that of spam, because laws and anti-spam technology are primarily focused on spam, and IM use continues to grow and has much more room for growth. In 2003, about 70% of organizations used IM, and IM is expected to surpass e-mail use by the end of 2005 (Schultz, 2004).

The interesting phenomenon surrounding e-mail and IM is that, despite increasing amounts of spam and spim, the number of organizations and individuals using e-mail and IM continues to grow, and the number of messages sent is rising. This leads to an interesting question: what effect do spam and spim have on an individual’s use of e-mail and IM? Intuition would lead us to believe that growth in unsolicited messages would, to some extent, affect the use of these systems. But that does not seem to be true.

The purpose of our study is to address this issue. Three important questions are examined in the present study with regard to individuals’ electronic communication technology perceptions. First, what impact do perceptions of spam have on the perceived usefulness of electronic mail? Spam typically is considered to be an annoyance — an unsolicited, usually unwanted, e-mail message. But is the problem bad enough to alter individuals’ use of e-mail? Or are users used to spam and have learned to cope with it? Second, what impact do perceptions of spim have on the perceived usefulness of instant messaging? Similar to spam, spim typically is viewed as an annoying, unsolicited, instant message. But is the problem significant enough to alter use of IM? Since IM is a much newer technology than e-mail, have users not had as much time to learn to cope with spim? Third, given that the majority of spim content is pornography related, are there gender differences that affect perceptions of spim and instant messaging usefulness? Do men and women have different perceptions of the level of annoyance related to spim?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

One of the primary models for predicting information technology (IT) use is the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). The TAM model identifies the relationships between several factors...
How Consumer Perceptions of Network Size and Social Interactions Influence the Intention to adopt Peer-to-Peer Technologies
www.igi-global.com/article/consumer-perceptions-network-size-social/1892?camid=4v1a

Evolving E-Health Systems: Symbiotic Constructs Between Corporate and E-Healthcare Worlds in International Space
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