

EXPLAINING INTENTION-BEHAVIOR DISCREPANCY--A PARADIGM

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Abstract

Theoretical researchers have been arguing that intention should predict behavior. Empirical researchers who have been following the theoretical development of the two constructs found mixed results. This paper reviews the intention-behavior discrepancy issues and proposes a paradigm that focuses on the explanation of intention-behavior discrepancy.

Theoretical researchers have been arguing that behavioral intentions should predict subsequent behaviors (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, McGuire 1969, Oskamp 1977). One of the popular models is the Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasons action, which uses the behavior intention as the intervening construct between attitude and behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Their theory views a person's intention to perform or not to perform a behavior as the immediate determinant of the action. Thus, in order to predict whether an individual will act in a certain way, the simplest and probably most efficient approach is to ask that person whether he/she intends to do so.

On the other hand, researchers have found mixed results in empirical studies (Bonfield 1974, Ryan and Bonfield 1975, Katona 1960, Juster 1964, Pratt 1966, Sheth 1974, Howard and Sheth 1966, Sheth, Raju, Bhagat 1979, Fishbein and Ajzen 1977). They have found that behavioral intention may not necessarily be an accurate and consistent measure of behavior.

The purposes of this paper are:

1. to review relevant literature in various disciplines on the intention-behavior discrepancy issue and highlight some of the current developments in this stream of research.
2. to propose a paradigm that focuses on the explanation of intention-behavior discrepancy.
3. to explore further research implications based on this paradigm.

Research in Intention-Behavior Consistency

Most of the studies in the 1960s and 1970s that attempted to predict behavior from behavioral intention measures have been reviewed by Wicker (1969) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1977). Most of these studies have revealed rather low and nonsignificant intention-behavior relationship.

Another major review of literature on intention-behavior relationship is from Cialdini et al. (1981). They have suggested that the recent research in the consistency issue has turned to the task of identifying additional variables that moderate the intention-behavior relationship.

The third significant pursuit for exploring the intention-behavior relationship has been the organization of the Ontario Symposium on Personality and Social Psychology (1979) that focused on the theoretical and empirical works on variability and consistency in social behavior (Zanna, Higgins and Herman 1982).

In summary, the past two decades of research in intention-behavior consistency has been focused on the introduction of additional moderating variables between intention and behavior. This research can be grouped under the headings of intention-behavior discrepancy

due to specificity or the correspondence principle, to individual differences, and to situational factors (Figure 1).

Specificity of Measurement

The specificity of measurement, or the correspondence principle, has been argued by Fishbein and Ajzen (1977). From their extensive review of literature (Fishbein and Ajzen 1977), they concluded that intention should be a good predictor of behavior only when the intention and behavior measures show a high degree of correspondence. Intention and behavior measures are said to correspond when they match on the action involved, the target at which the action is directed, the context in which it occurs, and the time of its occurrence. Therefore, global behavior intentions involve no specific action, context or time elements. They may represent responses to the target irrespective of particular contexts or time elements.

Fishbein and Ajzen attribute the failure of some studies to find significant intention-behavior relationships to the lack of corresponding levels of specificity in the measures.

However, a lack of correspondence does not guarantee that intentions will be unrelated to behaviors (McGuinness, Jones and Cole 1977, Schriesheim 1978, Hammer and Smith 1978, Mirvis and Lawler 1977, Seligman et al. 1979, Smith 1977). It seems that general behavioral intentions may relate to specific behaviors in some instances which cannot be explained with the correspondence principle or specificity of measurement.

Individual Differences

The failure of general behavioral intention to predict specific or single acts has led researchers to introduce various personality or individual difference factors as moderating variables to explain the intention-behavior discrepancy issue.

Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975, 1980) theory of reasoned action used the normative concept. The subjective norm is the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behavior. It is the extent to which the person feels significant others want that he/she should perform the behavior.

Past behavior or habit has also been used as a moderating variable to explain the discrepancy issue (Howard and Sheth 1969, Bentler and Speckart 1979, Bearden and Woodside 1977, Triandis 1977, 1980). According to those findings, the more a person has engaged in a behavior previously, the less important is intention in predicting future behavior, and the more important is habit in accounting for a significant degree of variability in present behavior.

Direct experience with the behavioral object is a better predictor than are intentions formed without such experience (Regan and Fazio 1978a, Songer-Nocks 1976, Fazio, Zanna and Cooper 1978, Fazio and Zanna 1978a, 1978b, 1982). Researchers have found that behavioral intention formed by direct experience with the behavioral object can increase the intention-behavior relationship more than for people who have no direct experience. This is due to the fact that direct

experience or contact with the behavioral object may generate confidence, certainty and clarity with the already formed behavioral intention. Also direct experience or contact with behavioral object is more salient in memory.

Zuckerman, Siegelbaum and Williams (1977) found that people with high ascription of responsibility would be more likely to act on their behavioral intentions than those who were low in the ascription of responsibility. The ascription of responsibility concept was suggested by Schwartz (1973) to measure the degree of an individual's tendency to assign responsibility to him- or herself.

Snyder (1972, 1974, 1979a, 1979b) has proposed the self-monitoring concept which could moderate behavioral intention and behavior. According to the self-monitoring formulation an individual can actively use situational cues or information about inner states to construct a pattern of behavior appropriate to that particular context. Therefore, high self-monitoring individuals can monitor or guide their behavioral choices on the situational information. These individuals demonstrate considerable situation-to-situation specificity in their behavior. Moreover, for these high self-monitoring individuals, correspondence between their intention and behavior is minimal.

By contrast, for persons who monitor or guide their behavior on the basis of information from relevant inner states, personal dispositions ought to be less responsive to situational specifications of behavioral appropriateness. These low self-monitoring individuals' behavior manifests substantial cross-situational consistency and temporal stability. Furthermore, the covariation between behavioral intention and behavior ought to be quite substantial for the low self-monitoring individuals.

Empirical evidence has provided support for Snyder's theoretical propositions (Snyder 1979a, 1979b, Snyder and Swann 1976, Ajzen, Timko and White 1982, Becherer and Richard, 1978; Lurksky, Woodworth and Clayton, 1980; Zanna; Olsen, and Fazio, 1980; Zuckerman and Reis 1978). It has been empirically demonstrated that the self-monitoring concept is an important moderating variable between intention and behavior.

Wicklund (1982) reviews research indicating that individuals high in private self-consciousness tend to display greater intention-behavior consistency than individuals low in self-consciousness.

Fazio and Zanna (1981) have demonstrated that a person's prior intention-behavior link moderates the present intention-behavior relation.

Abelson (1982) proposes that the presence of individuating conditions, i.e., which increase one's awareness of one's essential self-orientations, is necessary to increase the correlation between intention and behavior. People scoring high on the private self-consciousness scale have shown higher intention-behavior relationships than people scoring low on the scale (Buss 1980).

Abelson (1981) has also suggested a script theory that could moderate measured intention and behavior. Scripts are cognitive schema with certain kinds of knowledge structure which govern perceptual and cognitive processes. An individual's commitment to a particular scripted behavior is contingent upon an action rule which the individual has developed and attached to a particular script representation. An action rule consists of a set of criteria which, if

affirmed, will lead the person to enter the script, but if negated will lead the person not to enter the script. A scripted person will behave in socially determined, stereotyped behavioral structures and expectations, even though he may not have positive behavioral intentions otherwise.

Sivacek and Coano (1982) have suggested that a person's vested interests may be a moderating variable for intention-behavior consistency. The vested interest hypothesis suggests that intention-behavior consistency will be maximized when the behavior suggested by specific behavioral intentions has clear and hedonic relevance for the individual. That is, if the logical consequence of an individual's behavioral intention actually affects that person's life, then consistency between intention and behavior should be maximized.

Situational factors

In consumer research, Howard and Sheth (1969) suggested the inhibitor concept that could intervene between behavioral intention and behavior. These noninternalized constraints emanated from the buyer's environment or carried over from past environments and are contained in his exogenous variables, such as importance of purchase, time pressure and financial status. Some of the common inhibitors are price levels and availability of brand.

Sheth (1974) has hypothesized that behavioral intention is a function of (1) one's evaluative beliefs, (2) the social environment, and (3) the anticipated situation. Furthermore, he suggested that behavior is a function of one's affection toward the behavioral object, the individual's behavioral intention and the unexpected events experienced by the individual at the time of behavior. This conceptual theory has formulated the function of situational factors. The anticipated situations or events may enhance or inhibit the behavioral intention as determined by affect or social environment, or both. The unexpected events are the antecedent and contiguous stimuli that impinge on the individual at the time of the behavior.

Bhagat, Raju and Sheth (1979) compared this behavioral model with the Fishbein model and found that Sheth's model has higher predictive validity in explaining intention-behavior consistency. Bearden and Woodside (1977) have included unexpected events as a source of explanation in their discussion on the situational influences on consumer purchase intentions.

Belk (1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1979) has demonstrated the notion that consumer behavior depends upon the situation and the person, and that situational variables should account for most of the behavioral variance in consumer research. However, Belk's conceptual development and empirical studies have utilized the anticipated situational variables. The individual changes certain behavior patterns according to certain anticipated circumstances. For example, purchasing an expensive and prestigious brand of beer to entertain a guest instead of serving the regular ones normally consumed at home.

One of the most comprehensive literature reviews on situational studies in the consumer research area is by Leigh and Martin (1981).

Triandis (1977, 1980), in his model of interpersonal behavior, suggested that for any level of habit or intention, the absence or presence of "facilitating conditions" will affect the likelihood of a behavior. Some of these facilitating conditions could be a person's ability to perform, and the total situation in which an individual meets with others.

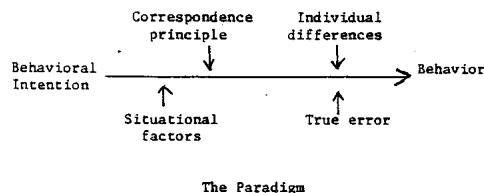
Wicker (1969, 1971) concluded that intention may not be a stable reflection for behavior. He used three verbal measures, namely, perceived consequence of behavior, evaluation of behavior and judged influence of extraneous events in measuring behavior. He found that the best single predictor of the behavior was judged influence of extraneous events with mean $r=0.36$.

Katona (1960, 1963), Juster (1964) and Van Raaij (1981) have also hypothesized the inconsistency between intention and behavior. A person's perceptions and evaluations of the economic reality and the optimistic or pessimistic expectations regarding personal finances and economic developments determine spending and saving of a household. Consumers may learn and adjust their behavior to changing circumstances. Unexpected events (potential surprises) do influence rational behavior. Thus, one can easily observe that many people who have said that they do not expect to buy a car during the next twelve months actually purchase a car during that period. The change in behavioral intentions of the individuals can be explained by the occurrence of certain events after the formation of intentions. These events can readily change the expectations of the individual and help the individual to form new intentions.

Van Raaij (1981), in particular, included the "situational factor" in his model of consumer behavior. These factors are the conditions and circumstances that normally constrain economic decisions within certain boundaries. They act as stimulators or inhibitors for economic decisions. For example, disposable income, family size, and certain anticipated or unanticipated situations may change one's intentions.

The review of the issue of intention-behavior discrepancy has demonstrated that this discrepancy is not a random error. It is clearly a systematic intervention of different forces that takes place between intention and behavior. Furthermore, this discrepancy of intention-behavior cannot be solved by the rule of correspondence suggested by Fishbein and Ajzen; or by relying on the explanations of individual differences; or even be claimed as a measurement error alone.

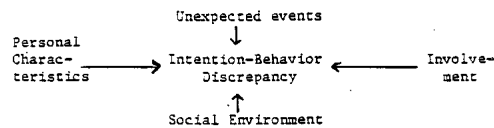
Figure 1. Systematic forces which intervene between behavioral intention and behavior



In order to improve the prediction of behavior from behavior intention measures, it is important to take a look at factors which might influence and explain the intention-behavior discrepancy. The following paradigm focuses on the explanation of intention-behavior discrepancy (Figure 2). It is not another behavioral prediction model. It gathers some of the important systematic forces that affect overt behavior.

These factors are explained as follows:

Figure 2. Factors that explain the intention-behavior discrepancy



(1) Unexpected events

According to Sheth (1974), the unexpected events factor refers to the antecedent and contiguous stimuli that impinge on the individual at the time of the behavior under investigation. It represents the situational environment surrounding the specific act of behavior. In buyer behavior, the unexpected events factor can be exemplified by the blue-light special feature in a K-mart store. Buyers may be attracted to the special purchase offers while in the store. The shoppers do not form prior buying intentions for the product. Their behavior is explained by the occurrence of unexpected events. This type of behavior cannot be explained by measurement of attitude or a behavior intention instrument.

Other examples of unexpected events that interrupt intentions are price fluctuation of displayed brands, availability of brands or products, crowding factors in the store, weather conditions, layoffs from work and time pressures, etc.

(2) Personal characteristics

Personal differences also contribute to the explanation of intention-behavior discrepancy. Snyder (1974) suggests that the degree of self-monitoring within the individual will affect his/her effort of carrying out certain behavioral intentions. According to Snyder, a low self-monitoring person has less ability to use situational cues to guide his/her behavior, and will correlate highly with the measured behavioral intention.

On the other hand, a high self-monitoring person has greater ability to manage the situational cues. He/she will be able to behave according to the demand of the situation. Therefore, his/her behavioral intention, or even attitude may not be a stable one; or at least, not even necessarily a reflection of his/her attitude or behavioral intention. One of the reasons for the popularity of Snyder's proposal is the availability of operation of the self-monitoring concept through a 25-item scale. Various empirical studies have demonstrated the validity of the scale.

(3) Social environment

The social environment factor includes the normative beliefs and the anticipated situations as perceived by the individual when expressing his/her intention to behave. Normative beliefs refer to the person's subjective norm. It is the person's perception that important others desire the performance or nonperformance of the specific behavior. The person's demographic background, socioeconomic status and past experience contribute to the formation of these normative beliefs.

Anticipated situations are those activities or situations which the individual is likely to engage in the future as he/she perceives them now when expressing his/her intention to behave. Berk (1974, 1975) and others (Woodside, Lutz and Kakkar 1975) have explored the anticipated situational effect on consumer behavior. They have constructed various typologies to classify the influence of these anticipated situations on buyer behavior. For example, if you anticipate a guest for dinner, you purchase a special brand of wine that is

socially acceptable to treat your guest. Most probably, this may not be the brand you normally consume yourself. Another example of social influence is that the intention of purchasing a gift (compared with an intent for personal use) may affect the brand choice behavior. The reflection on behavior is that a private behavioral intention may not be manifested due to the influence of normative beliefs or anticipated situation. Thus, this kind of pseudo-behavior or pseudo-behavioral intention may explain a large amount of the variation in behavior.

(4) Involvement

Involvement factor in this paradigm refers to the consumer's involvement with the brand or product. A high-value or high-involvement brand or product is created by the consumer as more important. It involves some form of financial, social or psychological risk associated with the purchase. In such a case, it is worth the consumer's time and energy to consider brand or product alternatives more carefully. Therefore, a more complex process of decision making is likely for the high-value, high-involvement brand or product.

The low-value, low-involvement product represents less importance to the consumer. Financial, social, and psychological risks are not nearly as great. In such cases, it may not be worth the consumer's time and effort to search for information and to consider a wide range of alternatives. Therefore, a limited process of decision making is more likely for the low-value, low-involvement brand or product.

Behavioral intentions formed on high-involvement products are more stable than those formed on low-involvement products. Lastovicka and Gardner (1978) suggested that a low-involvement product class is one in which most consumers perceive little linkage to their important value, and is a product class where there is little consumer commitment to the brands. A low-involvement purchase is one where the consumer does not strongly identify with the product or brand. A high degree of discrepancy will be noticed in a low-involvement purchase.

On the other hand, a high-involvement purchase is one where the consumer strongly identifies himself with the brand or product. Less behavior discrepancy will be explained in a high involvement purchase.

Discussion

Marketing researchers have been studying consumer behavior for a long time and in various ways. The investigation of intention-behavior discrepancy receives the most attention. Various results and hypotheses have been posited for the explanation of the discrepancy. It is important for the understanding of consumer behavior and on how to transform this knowledge for the use of marketing practitioners. Of course, the operation of this knowledge can be observed in strategic formulation of the marketing mix. Looking back on the utilization of this knowledge on buyer behavior, marketing practitioners had been using various techniques to change the attitudes of buyers. Many promotional campaigns were designed to give such a result.

Marketing practitioners have also been using another set of knowledge from buyer behavior research. They have been using various behavioral change techniques in purchase situations to attract brand-switching and impulse purchases. Some of these techniques include couponing, point-of-sale display, price dealing, unit pricing, in-store advertising, in-store layout and design and stocking techniques. These behavioral

change techniques have demonstrated that they may work better than conventional promotional campaigns for changing attitudes.

On the other hand, the results of this behavior change strategy should demonstrate the point that intention and behavior discrepancy is not a random error. Also, the discrepancy cannot just be explained by stochastic models alone. It is a systematic intervention of forces that take place between intention and behavior. The proposed paradigm in this paper should be considered as a foundation or springboard into the next generation of research in this area. It combines the research focus on how and when intention-behavior discrepancy can occur.

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