Theory of Planned Behavior as a Theoretical Framework

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Theory of planned behavior (TPB), which was developed by (Ajzen, 1991), provides a useful theoretical framework for researching human social behavior in various fields. TPB, an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA), proposes that attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control can predict intention, which, combined with perceived behavioral control, can predict behavior (Figure 1).

FIG. 1. Theory of planned behavior

Concepts employed in the model allow for the prediction of human intention and behavior in specific contexts. Attitude toward the behavior is defined as the extent to which the behavior is evaluated positively or negatively. Subjective norms refer to perceived social pressure on behavioral achievement. Perceived behavioral control reflects the ease or difficulty with which the behavior can take place. Generally, a more positive attitude, more favorable subjective norms, and higher perceived control are associated with stronger intention to perform the behavior.

In return, intention and perceived behavioral control can help predict the performance of the behavior. The stronger intention, i.e., stronger willingness to carry out the behavior, can lead to a higher probability of behavioral achievement. As in TRA, intention alone can predict behavior with high accuracy where people can behave at free will. Nevertheless, in most cases, faced with obstacles, people are more likely to conduct behavior when having a greater level of confidence (perceived behavioral control).

By adding perceived behavioral control in the prediction of behavior, TPB represents an improvement over its predecessor, TRA (Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010; Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992; Marcoux & Shope, 1997; Taylor & Todd, 1995). This theory has been empirically proved in a wide range of fields such as healthcare, finance, marketing, commerce, transportation, leisure, sustainability, moral behavior ... (Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Bamberg, Ajzen, & Schmidt, 2003; Beck & Ajzen, 1991; Cordano & Frieze, 2000; Godin & Kok, 1996; Han et al., 2010; Marcoux & Shope, 1997; Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006; Shih & Fang, 2004; Taylor & Todd, 1995; Yadav & Pathak, 2016).

However, there are certain limitations to this theory. Firstly, the predictability of behavior depends on the measurement accuracy of the investigated variables. Secondly, variables like attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control were developed based on specific beliefs, yet this relationship remains uncertain and varies case by case. Even the same moral beliefs can differ across cultures (Vuong et al., 2020). Other concerns include the correlation and sufficiency of independent variables (Shah Alam & Mohamed Sayuti, 2011). These need to be acknowledged in the limitation section of research papers for further development of the theory (Vuong, 2020).

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