THEORY OF REASONED ACTION/THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR

Originators of Model:
Icek Ajzen, Ph.D. is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts. He received his Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of Illinois and has, in past years, been a Visiting Professor at Tel-Aviv University in Israel. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles and, with Dr. Martin Fishbein, has co-authored many scholarly papers, journals and books on the "Theory of Reasoned Action" and "Theory of Planned Behavior." Drs. Ajzen and Fishbein co-authored Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior, a book that has been used in many academic settings and in the field of social psychology. Dr. Ajzen's homepage URL is: http://www-nix.oit.umass.edu/~aizen/homepage/

Martin Fishbein, Ph.D. is a Professor in the Department of Psychology and the Institute of Communications Research at the University of Illinois at Urbana, IL. He is a consultant for the International Atomic Energy Agency, The Federal Trade Commission and Warner Communications, Inc. He co-authored with Dr. Ajzen Belief, Attitude, Intention and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research. He has written many scholarly books, book chapters and articles. He first started thinking about the role of attitudes influencing behaviors in the early 1960s and in the early 1970s Ajzen joined him and they collaborated and developed the Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behavior. Also conducts research at the CDC in the behavioral intervention branch in the area of prevention.

Approximate year of origin: The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) was developed in 1967. During the early 1970s the theory was revised and expanded by Ajzen and Fishbein. By 1980 the theory was used to study human behavior and develop appropriate interventions. In 1988, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was added to the existing model of reasoned action to address the inadequacies that Ajzen and Fishbein had identified through their research using the TRA.

Circumstances that led to the model development: The development of the TBP/TPA originated in the field of social psychology. As early as 1862 psychologists began developing theories showing how attitude impacted behavior. Social psychologists continued to study attitudes and behaviors between the year 1818 and 1925 saw many new theories emerging. Having their emphasis on attitude and behavior, it can be postulated that this theory grew out of the 19th century when the field of psychology began to look at the term "attitude". Those theories suggested that "attitudes could explain human actions" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 13). Thomas and Znaniecki were the first psychologists to view attitude as individual mental processes that determine a person’s actual and potential responses. This was when social scientists began to see attitude as a predictor for behavior. These ideas remained relatively intact until the early 1960s when many social scientists began to review attitudes and behavior predictors.

The following were influential in the understanding of the relationship between attitudes and behaviors:
• In 1929 L.L. Thurston developed methods for measuring attitudes using interval scales. Following Thurston’s scale came the famous, more specific and easier to use Likert-scale. This scale is widely used today.
• In 1935, Gordon W. Allport theorized that the attitude-behavior relationship was not unidimensional as previously thought, but multi-dimensional. Attitudes were viewed as complex systems made up of the person’s beliefs about the object, his feelings toward the object, and his action tendencies with respect to the object.

• In 1944, Louis Guttman developed the scalogram analysis to measure beliefs about the object.

• Doob in 1947 adopted the idea of Thurstone that attitude is not directly related to behavior but it can tell us something about the overall pattern of behavior.

• In the 1950’s, this point of view that attitude is multi-dimensional became universal.

• Rosenberg and Hovland in 1960 theorized that a person’s attitude toward an object is filtered by their affect, cognition and behavior.

   • In 1969, Wicker conducted an extensive survey and literature review on the subject and he determined "it is considerably more likely that attitudes will be unrelated or only slightly related to overt behaviors than that attitudes will be closely related to actions" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 25).

As a result of these developments, Fishbein and Ajzen joined forces to explore ways to predict behaviors and outcomes. They assumed that individuals are usually quite rational and make systematic use of information available to them. People consider the implications of their actions before they decide to engage or not engage in a given behavior" (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 5). After reviewing all the studies they developed a theory that could predict and understand behavior and attitudes. Their framework, which has become known as the Theory of Reasoned Action, looks at behavioral intentions rather than attitudes as the main predictors of behaviors. As the Theory of Reasoned Action began to take hold in social science, Ajzen and other researcher realized that this theory was not adequate and had several limitations (Godin & Kok, 1996). One of the greatest limitations was with people who have little or feel they have little power over their behaviors and attitudes. Ajzen described the aspects of behavior and attitudes as being on a continuum .. from one of little control to one of great control. To balance these observations, Ajzen added a third element to the original theory. This element is the concept of perceived behavioral control. The addition of this element has resulted in the newer theory known as the Theory of Planned Behavior.

**Purpose of Theory:**

• To predict and understand motivational influences on behavior that is not under the individual's volitional control.

• To identify how and where to target strategies for changing behavior.

• To explain virtually any human behavior such as why a person buys a new car, votes against a certain candidate, is absent from work or engages in premarital sexual intercourse.
Characteristics and key terms for Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behavior.

This theory provides a framework to study attitudes toward behaviors. According to the theory, the most important determinant of a person's behavior is **behavior intent**. The individual's **intent** to perform a behavior is a combination of **attitude** toward performing the behavior and **subjective norm**. The individual's **attitude** toward the behavior includes: Behavioral belief, evaluations of behavioral outcome, subjective norm, normative beliefs, and the motivation to comply.

If a person perceives that the outcome from performing a behavior is positive, she/he will have a positive attitude toward performing that behavior. The opposite can also be stated if the behavior is thought to be negative. If relevant others see performing the behavior as positive and the individual is motivated to meet the expectations of relevant others, then a positive **subjective norm** is expected. If relevant others see the behavior as negative, and the individual wants to meet the expectations of these "others", then the experience is likely to be a negative subjective norm for the individual. **Attitudes** and **subjective norm** are measured on scales (as an example the Likert Scale) using phrases or terms such as like/unlike, good/bad, and agree/disagree. The intent to perform a behavior depends upon the product of the measures of attitude and subjective norm. A positive product indicates behavioral intent (Glanz, Lewis, & Rimer, Eds, 1997).

**TRA** works most successfully when applied to behaviors that are under a person's volitional control. If behaviors are not fully under **volitional control**, even though a person may be highly motivated by her own attitudes and subjective norm, she may not actually perform the behavior due to intervening environmental conditions. The **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** was developed to predict behaviors in which individuals have incomplete volitional control.

The major difference between **TRA** and **TPB** is the addition of a third determinant of behavioral intention, **perceived behavioral control**. **Perceived Behavioral control** is determined by two factors; Control Beliefs and Perceived Power. Perceived behavioral control indicates that a person's motivation is influenced by how difficult the behaviors are perceived to be, as well as the perception of how successfully the individual can, or can not, perform the activity. If a person holds strong control beliefs about the existence of factors that will facilitate a behavior, then the individual will have high perceived control over a behavior. Conversely, the person will have a low perception of control if she holds strong control beliefs that impede the behavior. This perception can reflect past experiences, anticipation of upcoming circumstances, and the attitudes of the influential norms that surround the individual (Mackenzie & Jurs, 1993).

**Brief description of the theory:**

**Assumptions**
1. Human beings are rational and make systematic use of information available to them.
2. People consider the implications of their actions before they decide to engage or not engage in certain behaviors.

**Development**
1. The TRA/TPB began with looking at Behavioral Intentions as being the immediate antecedents to behavior. It is believed that the stronger a person’s intention to perform a particular behavior, the more successful they are expected to be. Intentions are a function of salient beliefs and/or information about the likelihood that performing a particular
behavior will lead to a specific outcome. Intentions can also change over time. The longer the time period between intention and behavior, the greater the likelihood that unforeseen events will produce changes in intentions. Because Ajzen and Fishbein were not only interested in predicting behavior but understanding it, they began trying to identify the determinants of behavioral intentions. They theorized that intentions are a function of two basic determinants: a) attitude toward behavior and b) subjective norms of behavior.

2. Attitude is populated to be the first antecedent of behavioral intention. It is an individual’s positive or negative belief about performing a specific behavior. These beliefs are called behavioral beliefs. An individual will intend to perform a certain behavior when he or she evaluates it positively. Attitudes are determined by the individual’s beliefs about the consequences of performing the behavior (behavioral beliefs), weighted by his or her evaluation of those consequences (outcome evaluations). Those attitudes are believed to have a direct effect on behavioral intention and are linked with subjective norm and perceived behavioral control.

1. Subjective norms are also assumed to be a function of beliefs that specific individuals approve or disapprove of performing the behavior. Beliefs that underlie subjective norms are termed normative beliefs. An individual will intend to perform a certain behavior when he/she perceives that important others think he/she should. Important others might be a person’s, spouse, close friends, physician, etc. This is assessed by asking respondents to judge how likely it is that most people who are important to them would approve or disapprove of their performing a given behavior.

Problems arise with the TRA when the theory is applied to behavior’s that are not fully under volitional control. The TPB took into account that all behavior is not under volitional control and that behaviors are located at some point along a continuum that extends from total control to a complete lack of control.

The individual may have total control when there are no constraints of any type to adopting a reticular behavior. At the opposite extreme, there may be a total lack of control if adoption of a given behavior requires opportunities such as resources or skills which may be lacking. Control factors include both internal and external factors. Internal factors are such things as skills, abilities, information, emotions such as stress, etc. External factors include such things as situation or environmental factors.

To overcome this limitation, Ajzen modified the Theory of Reasoned Action by adding a third antecedent of intention called perceived behavioral control. With the addition of this third antecedent, he re-named this the Theory of Planned Behavior.

2. Perceived behavioral control refers to the degree to which an individual feels that performance or nonperformance of the behavior in question is under his or her volitional control. People are not likely to form a strong intention to perform a behavior if they believe that they do not have any resources or opportunities to do so even if they hold positive attitudes toward the behavior and believe that important others would approve of the behavior (subjective norm). Perceived behavioral control can influence behavior directly or indirectly through behavioral intentions. A direct path from perceived behavioral control to behavior is expected to emerge when there is some agreement between perceptions of control and the person’s actual control over the behavior.
Key terms:
Main Constructs

**Behavior:** It is the transmission of intention or perceived behavioral control into action.

**Behavioral Intention:** It is an indication of how hard people are willing to try and of how much an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behavior. Influenced by three components: person’s attitude toward performing the behavior, the perceived social pressure, called subjective norm and perceived behavioral control.

**Attitude:** It is the first determinant of behavioral intention. It is the degree to which the person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior in question.

**Subjective Norm:** It is considered the second predictor of behavioral intention. This is the influence of social pressure that is perceived by the individual (normative beliefs) to perform or not perform a certain behavior. This weighted by the individual’s motivation to comply with those perceived expectations (motivation to comply).

**Perceived Behavioral Control:** Is the third antecedent of behavioral intention. This construct is defined as the individual’s belief concerning how easy or difficult performing the behavior will be. It often reflects actual behavioral control.

Other Key Terms:

- Behavioral Beliefs: Beliefs about the behavior.
- Normative Beliefs: Beliefs about what others think about behavior.
- Control Beliefs: Beliefs about the level of control over behavior.
- Self-Efficacy: The individual’s perception that he/she will be able to perform a certain behavior successfully.
- Volitional Control: The actual willful control over behavior.
- Actual Control: An individual’s control over behavioral factors such as readily available resources such as money, time, skills, cooperation of others, etc.

Application to Health Education:
- TPB is used in order to predict and understand healthy and unhealthy behavior and the outcomes of behavior.
- It has important implications for health education in examining health related behaviors and implementing and developing health prevention programs.
- It is used to predict and understand intentions, behaviors and outcomes of health related behaviors including weight loss, alcohol abuse, smoking behavior, physical activity and more.

Example: Behavior/Cessation

**Attitude toward the Behavior:** "You know what? I think, smoking is dangerous for my health."

**Subjective Norms:** "I wonder if my wife would like me to quit smoking."

**Perceived Behavioral Control:** "I can quit smoking, even if I’m hooked on cigarettes!"

**Intention:** I want to quit smoking right now!

**Behavior:** "As you can see, I am not smoking anymore. Instead of taking a cigarette, when I get the cravings, I crumble paper now."

Limitations:

1. Factors such as personality and demographic variables are not taken into consideration.
2. There is much ambiguity regarding how to define perceived behavioral control and this creates measurement problems.
3. Assumption is made that perceived behavioral control predicts actual behavioral control. This may not always be the case.
4. TPB only works when some aspect of the behavior is not under volitional control.
5. The longer the time interval between behavioral intent and behavior, the less likely the behavior will occur.
6. The theory is based on the assumption that human beings are rational and make systematic decisions based on available information. Unconscious motives are not considered.

References

Related References

Annotated Bibliography
The Theory of Planned Behavior evolved from the Theory of Reasoned Action. In this article the Theory of Reasoned Action is applied to the study of how attitude and behavior change are affected by a certain issue. In this case, the issue is the National Park Service's controlled burn policy. The Theory of Planned Behavior studies how attitudes affect behavior change and this is done in this article. The article presents how the theories can be applied towards an issue of public interest.


Once more, on this article the reader can observe the effects of attitudes towards behavioral intentions. The article further explores the relationships and differences between attitudes and subjective norms. Then, an analysis is presented of how these attitudes and subjective norms affect behavioral intentions differently or similarly. The article is an interesting source on the theory of the model.


The article utilizes the study of attitudes and behavioral intentions from the Theory of Planned Behavior. This theory is then applied to the assessment of how this affects the attitudes and behaviors of persons with regards to grassroots organizations. Biases and conflicts of individuals with respect to this type of organizations. This article provides information that can be applied to similar organizations of Public Health.


This article presents an interesting case. The Theory of Planned Behavior is applied to the study of how financial contribution or commission to sales agents affect their attitudes towards a certain behavior. In this case, the behavior is typically deemed unethical. Industries that typically present this type of behavior include insurance and brokerage. A comparison is made between sales agents acting on towards a commission or towards a salary. Different theories and hypothesis trying to answer this issue are presented in this article as well.


This article presents a direct application of the Theory of Planned Behavior to a health issue. The health issue is heart health interventions. The study analyzes regular exercise in 30-to-60-year-old men. The Stages-of-Change process is also utilized in this research. The article presents both the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Stages-of-Change Model to study the health issue separately. Then, the two constructs are applied together to the analysis and discussion.