Brazilian Research in Consumer Behavior Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior: a Brief Analytic Review

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Despite the importance and influence of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), only in this decade research based on this theory has been carried out in Brazil. In its early stages, this paper is an analytic review of these works, regarded with consumer behavior, providing an overview of applications and results. Although more research is needed to assess basic theoretical assumptions such as the model of expectancy-value, an interesting trend in latest Brazilian studies seems to be the carrying out of cross-cultural surveys to fully appreciate the explanatory power of TPB in comparison to other action theories.

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weaknesses of present market research techniques applied, topical areas where neuro-knowledge would be appreciated by the companies, etc. Interviews with medical research institutions will be basically about gaining an overall picture on the requirements to support applied research projects outside health research issues. Neuroimaging techniques such as e.g. fMRI can contribute to fundamental research in terms of a better conceptual understanding of the latent constructs which is necessary to develop sound questionnaires. Following Page (2008), survey-based and qualitative research will always be necessary to fully interpret the findings gained by neuroscientific methods. It is important to address the question, how knowledge about the potential of these alternative approaches in combination with the existing set of qualitative and quantitative research methods, can be diffused from academia to the practical world.

As a second stage of research, another group of stakeholders, namely potential participants in neuroimaging projects, will be addressed. Cooke, Peel, Shaw and Senior (2007) came up with interesting results regarding the perspective of people who took part in an fMRI or MEG experiment (Cooke, Peel, Shaw and Senior 2007; Senior, Smyth, Cooke, Shaw and Peel 2007). Based on their findings, we will ask a broader population about their willingness to take part in a study applying physiological techniques. The average customer as potential participant in such a study is usually quite unfamiliar with these alternative market research techniques. We want to gain information under which conditions people would be willing to participate, whether there is a need for providing (financial) incentives or whether they have any, e.g. health-related, concerns. Getting information on participants’ needs and requirements will help designing future projects and evading any interferences due to non-compliance of the participants during data collection. This will be done by conducting a quantitative acceptance survey. We aim at finding out whether there are special groups of people especially interested in such methods based on demographic, lifestyle and personality trait variables. Furthermore, we want to compare the future relevance of neuroimaging techniques, in particular fMRI, with other possible physiological approaches such as analysing facial-expression to derive e.g. information on emotions. We assume that the latter will be more promising for practical marketing research, especially when it comes up to gather information from children, intercultural settings and within the area of advertising research.

References

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TPB (Ajzen 1985) is one of the three most important action theories (Baggouzi, Güran-Canli, and Priester 2002). It aims to explain behavioral intentions based on a few constructs: belief, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen 1985).

Despite the empirical support for TPB (see, for example, meta-analyses reviewed by Sutton 1998; Armitage and Conner 2001), many authors have suggested refinements in order to increase its explanatory power. For example, the percentage of variance in intention can be increased by the addition of moral norms (Conner and McMillan 1999; Parker et al. 1996), and the inclusion of measures of self-efficacy and anticipated regret (O’Connor e Armitage 2003).

Based on meta-analyses, Rivis and Sheeran (2003) advocate the representation of social norms in behavioral intention models by distinguishing injunctive norms and descriptive norms. Bagozzi and Warshaw (1990) recommended a better specification for attitude dimensions and that the residual effect of past behavior was included in the TPB’s basic constructs net, giving rise to a different model—the Theory of Trying—to research behaviors that can be interpreted as goals.
Although Ajzen (2002a) encourages improvements of TPB, he bases on literature review to argue that the effect of past behavior is attenuated when measures of intention and behavior are compatible and disappears when intentions are strong and well defined, the expectations are realistic and specific plans to implement action are devised. Controversies about the theoretical development of TPB like these should be enlightened through further studies.

In Brazil, the investigation of the validity of TPB is scant. This working paper is based on eight publications, including 17 studies, which investigated TPB. The works were chosen through searching digital databases of master theses and doctoral dissertations defended in Brazilian universities. Basic sources were taken into consideration in order to avoid analyzing similar papers about the same studies. The year-period of the literature search was from 1985 on since the first paper about TPB was published in 1985. Papers about secondary aspects of TPB were discarded, for example, studies that investigated only one of its theoretical constructs.

Based on these publications, the explained variance in behavioral intention ranged from .165 to .90. Both the inferior and superior limit are quite apart from average values in international studies. According meta-analyses, attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control explain from 39 to 42% of variance in intentions (Armitage and Conner 2001; Godin and Kok 1996; Sheeran and Taylor 1999).According to a summary of research results, as the percentage of explained variance in intention increases also does the coefficients of the main predictor, supporting the rule quoted by Ajzen (2002b), which establishes that the more favorable the attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control the stronger should be the person’s intention to perform the behavior in question.

On the other side, there is a negative relationship between betas of attitude and behavioral control, that is, the highest the beta of attitude the lowest is the beta of behavioral control. In accordance with such result, Ajzen (1991) notes that the relative importance of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control in the prediction of intention varies according to behaviors and situations. For example, when attitudes are strong and normative influences are powerful, perceived behavioral control might be less important to predict intentions.

Attitude was the most important predictor of intention in 13 out of the 17 studies analyzed. Although subjective norm is reputed as the weakest predictor of intention (Sheeran, Norman, and Orbell 1999), SN was the most important predecessor of intention in Rodrigues’ (2007) study. The distinction of injunctive and descriptive norms, following recommendation by Armitage and Conner (2001), might help to explain this construct prominence to explain variance in intention to engage in adventure tourism. Other explanations suggest either the influence of Brazilian cultural traits or the type of target behavior.

Three of the analyzed works showed that perceived control was the best predictor of intention. For example, Monteiro and Veiga (2006) reported that perceived behavioral control was more important than the other attitudinal constructs in accounting for variance in intention of quitting smoking (perceived control had a standardized beta of .63 whereas attitude’s beta was .22 and subjective norm’s beta was .36).

Despite the ultimate objective of TPB being to predict overt behavior, out of the 17 studies analyzed only two works also aimed to measure the target behavior after measuring intention and attitudinal constructs—the study by Goecking (2006) about dieting and working out, and the research carried out by Lacerda (2007) concerning renting films through the Internet.

Considering all studies, there was a wide dispersion of accounted for variance in intention ranging from .165 to .90 that can be explained by the diversity of focused behaviors and methodological rigor.

Five out of the seventeen studies analyzed aimed either to investigate either other action theories or to try the addition of antecedents of behavioral intention to improve explanatory power. For example, the study by Goecking (2006) assessed TPB and also compared it to the Model of Goal-Directed Behavior—MGB (Perugini and Bagozzi 2001), which can be considered a combination of anticipated emotions with desires and frequency and recency effects of past behavior, along with the variables of TPB. Results showed that a substantial increase of variance accounted for in volition construct (adopted as equivalent to intention) was gotten in MGB in comparison to TPB (R²=.87 vs. R²=.54), but paradoxically explanation of overt behavior, based on self-report, diminished from R²=.25 to R²=.23.

Although with a wide dispersion, the explanatory power of TPB was supported in Brazilian studies. Only a paper (Veiga and Monteiro 2005) included the assessment of the model of expectancy-value in the combination of beliefs to produce attitudinal constructs. The other works were limited to the examination of the theory based on the relationships among its higher level constructs. More recent research projects (Gonçalves et al. 2006 and Rodrigues 2007) have approached a cross-cultural evaluation of TPB, comparing Brazilian respondents to the ones of Argentina and USA.

References