Intention-Behavior Consistency: the Effect of Time Perspective

Muge Capar, Georgia Tech, USA
Koert van Ittersum, Georgia Tech, USA

Intentions are often measured to predict future behavior. Although intentions help predict behavior, there is often a substantial gap between people’s intentions and their subsequent behavior – an intention-behavior inconsistency. To improve our understanding of the origin of this intention-behavior inconsistency, this research focuses on one of the key differences between intention and behavior: time. More specifically, we examine the effect of people’s time perspective on the intention-behavior relationship. We find that more future-oriented individuals display a higher intention-behavior consistency, whereas more present-oriented individuals tend to display a lower intention-behavior consistency.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14686/volumes/v36/NA-36

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Muge Capar, Georgia Tech, USA
Koert van Ittersum, Georgia Tech, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Predicting future behavior is one of the central research topics in marketing and consumer research. Most of the theories developed to predict behavior, such as the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1985, 1991), the model of interpersonal behavior (Triandis 1980), the theory of goal setting (Locke and Latham 1990), and the social cognitive theory (Bandura 1977, 1998) propose that intention is the key predictor of behavior. Although intentions help predict behavior, there is often a substantial gap between people’s intentions and their subsequent behavior—an intention-behavior inconsistency, meaning that people behave inconsistently with their intentions. To improve our understanding of the origin of this intention-behavior inconsistency, this research focuses on one of the key differences between intention and behavior: time. There is always a time interval between the formation or measurement of intentions and the performance of behavior. Despite the central role of time in the intention-behavior relationship, research that focuses on time-related aspects is scarce. Research has studied the effects of temporal distance and the characteristics of behavior (or the object of behavior) on people’s decisions regarding future behaviors. In terms of intention-behavior relationship, in addition to the importance of temporal distance between intention and behavior, it is also important how the person approaches time. In order to fill this gap, we examine the effect of people’s time perspective—a personality construct that reflects people’s approach to past, present, and future—on the intention-behavior consistency. It is important to understand how this personality characteristic affects self-prediction of behavior in order to control for and correct errors in self-prediction so that more accurate and confident results can be obtained. Based on Zimbardo and Boyd’s (1999) time perspective factors, we examine the effect of future, present-fatalistic, and present-hedonistic time perspectives on intention-behavior relationship in the concept of new product adoption. We hypothesize on the effect of these factors both on stated intentions, and intention-behavior consistency. We also hypothesize on the moderating role of attitude on these effects.

In order to test our hypotheses, we conducted an experiment with student subjects, in which we asked them their intention to pick up a stainless steel mug in a given time period in the near future, as well as measured their time perspective using Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory. In the second part of the experiment we kept track of the participants that picked up or did not pick up the mug. To test the effects of these variables on stated intentions, we used logistic regression analysis with self reported behavioral intention as the dependent variable. Participants’ attitudes towards the mug, the three time perspectives—present-fatalistic, future, and present-hedonistic, and the interactions between their attitude and the three time perspectives, were included as independent variables. To test the effects of the same variables on intention-behavior consistency, we again used logistic regression analysis with the intention-behavior consistency (0= inconsistent, 1= consistent) as the dependent variable. Those who followed through on their intentions (self-reported intention=yes; behavior is performed; self-reported intention=no; behavior is not performed) were classified as consistent, while those who did not follow through on their intentions (self-report intention=yes; behavior is not performed; self reported intention=no; behavior is performed) were classified as inconsistent. Participants’ attitudes, their time perspectives, and the interaction terms were included as independent variables.

We find that present-hedonism positively influences self-reported intentions, and this positive effect is strengthened by consumers’ attitudes towards the mug. While we do not find a main effect for present-fatalism, we do find that the effect of present-fatalism on self-reported intentions is moderated by consumers’ attitudes towards the mug. More specifically, consumers’ attitudes towards the mug strengthen the negative influence of present-fatalism on self-reported intentions. We also find that people with high future time perspective are more conservative in stating their intentions and have a tendency to state lower intentions than individuals with a low future time perspective.

In line with their desire to achieve future goals, we find that more future-oriented individuals display a higher intention-behavior consistency. On the other hand, more present-oriented individuals tend to display a lower intention-behavior consistency. A strong orientation toward present pleasure, with little concern for future consequences, causes more present-hedonistic people to overstate their intentions, as a result of which they display a lower intention-behavior consistency. More present-fatalistic people display a lower intention-behavior consistency because of their hopeless attitude towards the future, which causes them to either overstate or understate their intentions. Furthermore, consumers’ attitudes towards the mug moderate the effect of present-fatalism on the intention-behavior consistency—the more favorable consumers’ attitudes, the weaker the relationship between present-fatalism and the intention-behavioral relationship.