

Should Past Experience be Ignored? An Insight from the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior

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Abstract

Purpose: The contribution of the Past behaviour construct to the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior has been controversial. The aim of this paper is to review the Past behaviour construct to identify how an individual's past experience may influence their intentions to behave in a certain manner as predicted by the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Design/methodology/approach: This study will comprehensively review important articles on DTPB literature, with a particular focus on past experience and the contribution of past experience in the accuracy of predicting intention and behaviour.

Findings: The conclusions from other researchers have tended to be divided into two camps, with one side claiming that past experience is an inherent component of the theory, and claiming that there is a problem with the research constructs if the past behaviour construct is needed, while the other camp stated that the past behaviour construct is required if the theory's predictive power is to be increased.

Research limitations/implications: This is a review of literature involved with this theory and as such a purpose built research to test the conclusions of this paper is advised.

Practical implications: The significance of this paper is that it covers the literature that is controversial in nature and catalogues what research previous authors have employed the past experience construct in DTPB.

Originality/value: This paper is of interest to scholars reviewing the various behavioural intention theories in general and contributes to clarifying the contribution of the Past behaviour construct to researchers doing research using the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behaviour in particular.

Keywords: Theory of Planned Behavior, Attitude, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavior Control, Past Behavior, Prior Experience, Intention

Introduction

Ajzen's 1991 Theory of Planned behaviour (TPB) does not typically make obvious that the past behaviour construct is present and taken into account in its framework. Indeed, previous works on the subject by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) had noted that direct experience will result in stronger, more stable behavioral intention to behavior relationship. In addition, according to Bandura (1986), past experience with a behaviour is the most important source of information about behaviour control. Past experience may make low probability events more salient, ensuring that they are accounted for in the formation of intentions (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

Literature Review

Ajzen (1996) had classified past experience as direct and indirect experience. The advantages of direct experience in comparison to indirect experience, is that it provides more realistic information about the behavior's likely consequences, about the expectations of important others, and about the difficulties of performing the behaviour (Ajzen, 1996). Although direct experience may produce a more stable beliefs and attitudes (thus better predictive ability) compared to indirect (or second-hand) experience, prediction of behaviour should relatively be poor following either type of experience (Ajzen, 1996).

According to Ajzen (1996), direct past experience will produce strong attitudes and the relevant attitude will become automatically activated due to the direct experience. As a result, Ajzen (1996) argues that the effect of direct experience on the attitude-behavior relationship is less pronounced in the spontaneous mode of processing because the attitude will be retrieved directly from memory without considering past experience. Individuals in spontaneous mode uses a minimum of systematic information processing in their minds, so there is little advantage to using direct experience in the spontaneous mode. This means that the advantage of direct experience would be in situations that promoted reasoned action (Ajzen, 1996). Further, when people are not sufficiently motivated to engage in careful deliberations, or are incapable of doing so, then the salient beliefs at the time will dictate behaviour. Therefore, this means that in general, attitudes should predict behaviour better in reasoned than in spontaneous mode of action (Ajzen, 1996).

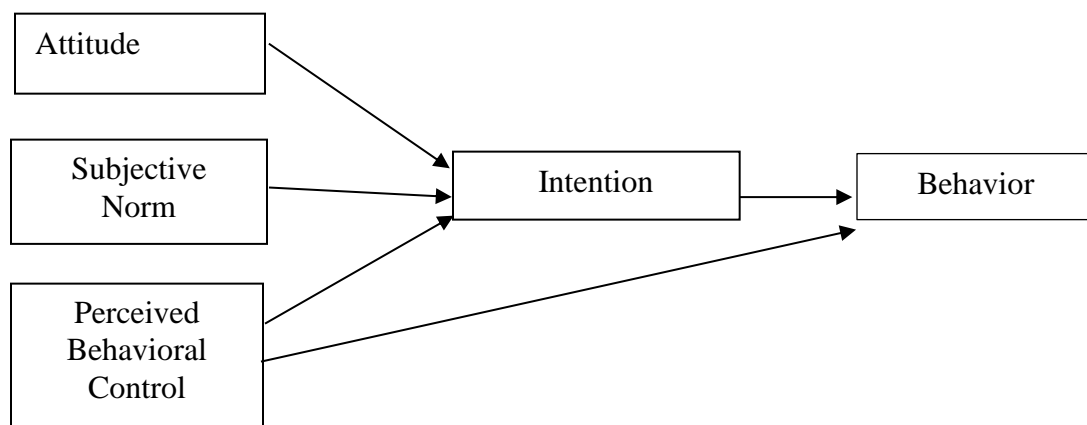


Figure 1: Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior

Taylor and Todd (1995) also considered prior experience in their research on IT usage, but made no distinction between the term "prior experience" and "past behaviour". They noted that prior

research had suggested knowledge gained from past behaviour will help shape intention, indicating that experience can fill an individual’s expectation gap. Taylor and Todd (1995) had used the past behaviour construct in their study by applying their research model separately on experienced IT users and inexperienced IT users. They had found that there was a stronger link between behavioural intention and behaviour for the experienced users, perhaps due to an increased familiarity of the activity.

It was also found that experienced users placed less weightage on perceived usefulness and emphasised perceived behavioural control instead, where behavioural intention fully mediated the relationship between perceived behavioural control and behaviour. This is contrasted to the inexperienced users where perceived usefulness (a predictor variable of Attitude) was the strongest predictor of intention. They also found that the relationship between subjective norms to behavioural intention was not significantly different between the two groups. Bearing this in mind, it has also been found that younger people (as contrasted to experienced or older people) would rely on their attitude and self-efficacy to form intentions because they do not have as extensive and organised past behavioural patterns as adults, or when the frequency of that particular past behaviour is low (Hagger, Chatzisarantis and Biddle, 2001; Norman, Connor and Bell, 2000).

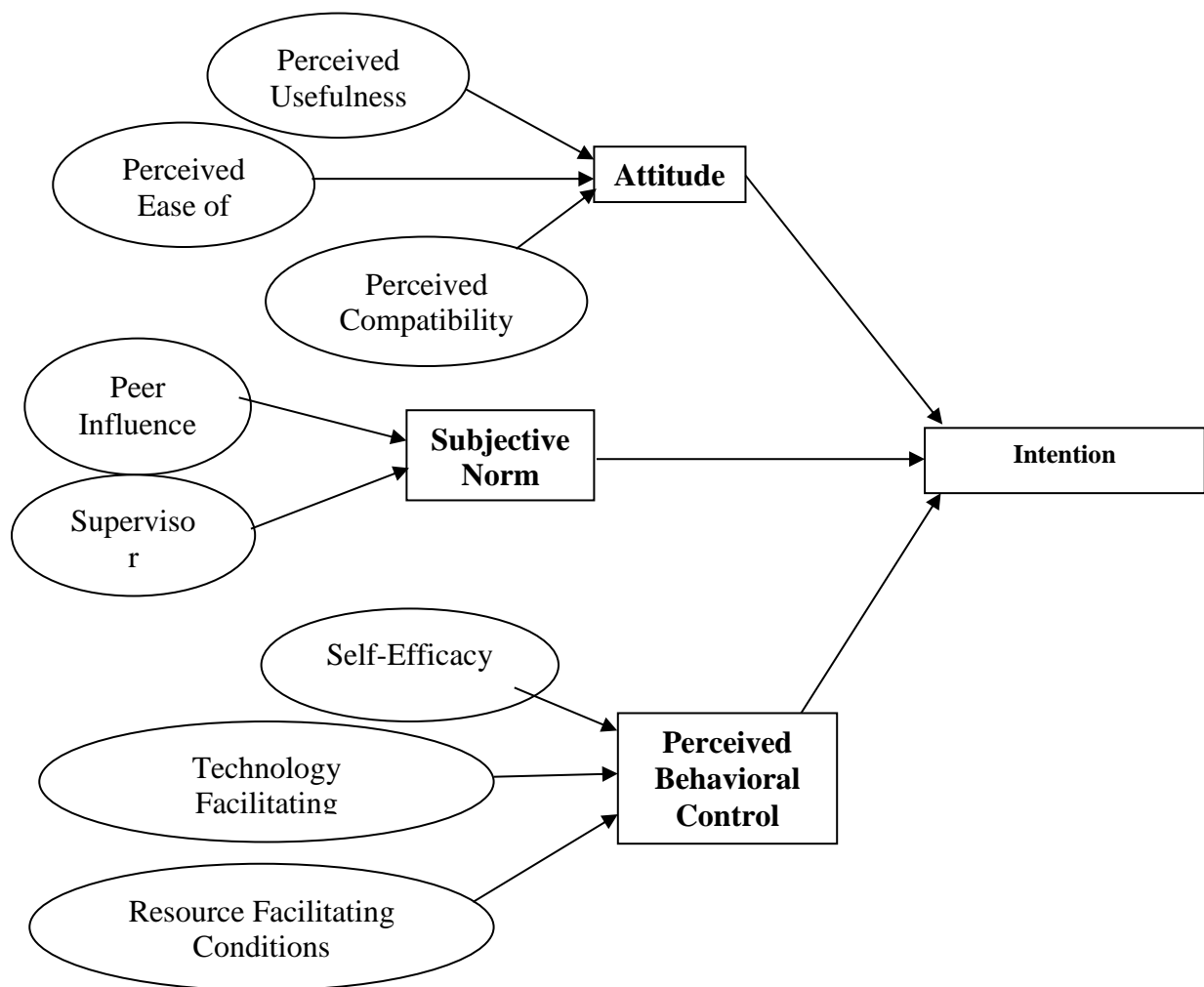


Figure 2: Taylor & Todd’s Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior

In addition, when individuals have had past experience of a behaviour, their perceptions of control are more likely to be realistic and perceived behaviour control is better able to provide an accurate prediction of behaviour (Norman et al, 2000). Further, past behaviour has been shown to be the strongest predictor of intentions for a variety of different behaviours, being able to explain 6% to 12% of the variance in intentions over and above the standard TPB variables (Norman and Conner, 2006; Norman, 2011; Read, Brown, Thorsteinsson, Morgan and Price, 2013) and up to 13% in variance in behaviour (Conner and Armitage, 1998). Past behavior was also found to have a direct effect on future exercise behaviour, binge drinking and predicting opposition towards wind farm developments over and above the influence of the TPB. The results highlight the need to consider the moderating effect of past behavior on TPB-behavior relations (Norman et al, 2000). It is at present missing from the decomposed TPB framework as a separate additional construct (Taylor and Todd, 1995). As TPB can be applied to many situations, this places a greater importance for the researcher to include the correct variables that relates to past behaviour in order to accurately predict intentions.

This is noted by Ajzen (1991), who said that if all factors that determine a given behaviour is known, whether internal to the individual or external, then that behaviour can be predicted to the limit of measurement error. Further, as long as this set of factors stay unchanged, the behaviour also remains stable over time. Therefore, assuming that the determinants are stable, a measure of past behaviour can be used to test the sufficiency of any model designed to predict future behaviour. Accordingly, it stands to reason that perceived behaviour control plays an important role in mediating the effect of past behaviour on later behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

However, following Ajzen (1991), the addition of the past behaviour construct should not significantly improve the prediction of later behaviour, and if past behaviour is found to have a significant residual effect beyond the predictor variables contained in the model, this will suggest a presence of other factors that have not been accounted for, as attitudes, subjective norms and perceived self-efficacy are all residues of past experience. In contrast, Celuch, Goodwin and Taylor (2007) noted that the inclusion of past behaviour did substantially enhance their TPB model related to internet purchase intentions. Similar findings by other scholars like Norman and Conner (2006), Norman (2011) and Read et al (2013) also lend credibility to the effects of past experience and its relationship with intentions.

Discussion and Conclusion

The conclusions from researchers have tended to be divided into two camps, with one side (in particular Ajzen, 1991) stating that past experience is an inherent component of the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Ajzen (1991) had also claimed that there is a problem with the research constructs in a research framework if the past behaviour construct is needed by researchers, while researchers in the other camp like Norman (2011) and Read et al (2013) had stated that the past behaviour construct is required if the theory's predictive power is to be increased. This is why the inclusion of the Past behaviour construct into the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behaviour has been controversial.

It would seem that past behaviour affects an individual's intention and behaviour differently, as predicted by DTPB, depending on whether that individual has had experience with a particular behaviour or not. People with prior experience with a particular behaviour would tend to rely on perceived behavioural control prior to expressing the relevant behaviour. In contrast, the perceived usefulness construct was the most useful predictor for individuals without prior experience of a

particular behaviour. The Self-efficacy construct has also been found to have been relied on by younger, less experienced individuals to form intentions. Therefore, the issue whether the past behaviour construct should be ignored or not in DTPB appears less of an issue of practicality as it is of philosophy.

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