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Attitudes towards brand purchase - 2

By Chuck Chakrapani

Review of the model

In the last article (*Imprints*, October 1999) we discussed the theory of reasoned action of the form:

$$B \sim BI = A_{act}(w1) + SN(w2)$$

To arrive at the attitude toward the behaviour, we combined together the strength of evaluations of a consumer's different salient beliefs about the functional consequences of an action as shown below:

$$A_b = \sum b_{ie}$$

We also noted that attitude toward a brand (A_o) is very different from A_b , or attitudes towards buying. Although both of them are based on salient beliefs, the beliefs are different. A consumer can be positive about a brand but not buy it. Conversely, a consumer may have a negative A_o and yet buy the brand. We discussed the theoretical mechanism that gives rise to such apparently anomalous outcomes.

Level of specificity

Marketers should not only pay attention to what exactly they are measuring, A_b or A_{act} , but they also should be concerned with another problem: the level of specificity of an attitude.

Although it may not be apparent, different levels of specificity are associated with different sets of attitudes. Attitudes that are associated with one level of specificity cannot be generalized to another level of specificity. Here is an example of how this works: A consumer may be an avid buyer of books. But it may not follow that they would buy books on the Internet. He or she may want to browse a book before buying. 'Buying books over the Internet' has a different level of specificity to which attitudes towards 'buying books' in general may not apply.

Subjective or social norms

The next factor to be considered is subjective or social norms. The SN component of the model refers to consumers' perception of what they believe other people want them to do. The model has two components that relate to subjective norms. The first is the consumers' *salient normative beliefs* (NB_j) with regard to what people want them to do. The second is the consumers' *motivation to comply* (MC_j). These are combined to get a total normative belief score weighted by the consumer's motivation to comply:

$$SN = \sum NB_j MC_j$$

Standard marketing research questions can be used to measure NB_j and MC_j (see Exhibit 1 on the following page for sample questions that can be used to measure NB_j and MC_j). As the exhibit shows measuring NB_j and MC_j is no more difficult than measuring BI.

Exhibit 1**Measuring subjective social norm (SN)****Possible questions for Normative Beliefs (NB)**

My friends are in favour of my using designer clothes

Completely agree 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Completely disagree

My family members do not want me to buy an expensive car

Completely agree 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Completely disagree

Possible questions for Motivation to Comply (MC)

In general, how much do you want to do what your friends want you to do?

Not at all -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 Very much

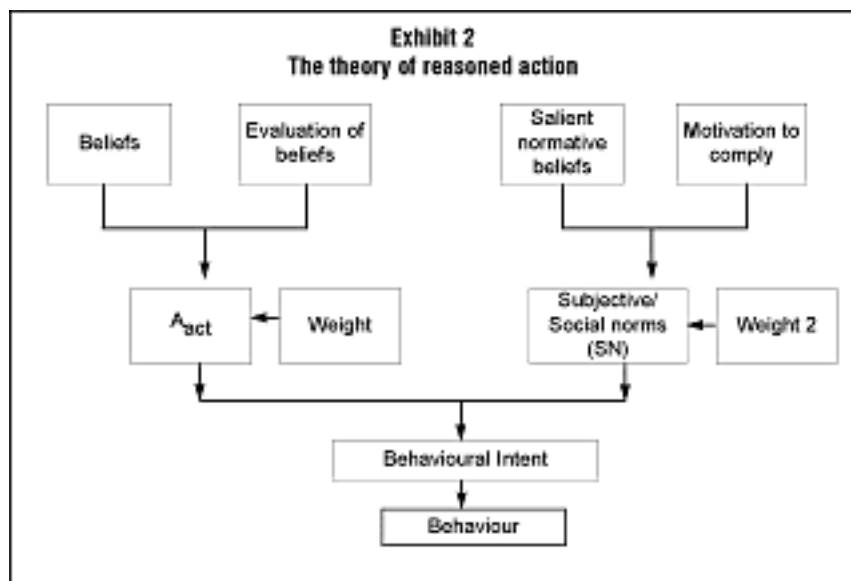
In general, how much do you want to do what your family members want you to do?

Not at all -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 Very much

The relative influence of Aact and SN

The theory of reasoned action states that Aact and SN interact to influence behavioural intention (BI). The relative influence of Aact and SN may depend on the context. During the information integration process Aact and SN may be weighted differently to create a specific BI. For instance, the type of automobile a person in a high profile occupation buys may be strongly influenced by SN and the normative beliefs regarding conformity. Beliefs about the general consequences of owning that automobile (Aact). In another instance it is Aact that exerts a greater influence. An example of this might be the type of cereal one eats. This behaviour may be influenced by Aact and much less by SN.

In fact a number of behaviours can be identified as being primarily influenced by Aact. Similarly a number of other behaviours can be identified as being primarily influenced by SN.

**Relevance to marketing strategies**

In order to identify the most effective marketing strategies, a marketer should identify which one of the determinants - Aact or SN - is the prime mover for a given product in a given context. If, as in our example, the automobile purchase is bought by the target group based on SN, then the marketer may want to emphasize the SN component (the implied approval of friends, family, boss etc.). Endorsement type of advertisements may work well in such contexts.

However if the major determinant of purchase is Aact, then emphasis on SN is likely to be an ineffective marketing strategy. In this case, the marketer might want to create a set of salient beliefs about the positive

consequences of the behaviour. Advertisements that demonstrate salient benefits are likely to work better here.

The theory of reasoned action can be used to identify the type of affective as well as cognitive factors that form the foundation of a consumers' intention to carry out a specific behaviour.

Stated intentions and actual intentions

Most voluntary consumer behaviours are influenced by underlying intentions. Yet marketing researchers know that consumer intentions are not perfect predictors of behaviour. Confusing as this may sound, stated consumer intentions may not be the actual intentions that influence actual consumer behaviour. This can be seen by the problems associated with using intention measures to predict actual consumer behaviours. This aspect of intention vs. behaviour is discussed below.

Intentions vs. behaviours

Ideally, all marketers would like to be in a position to predict consumer behaviour and forecast the effect of their marketing efforts. In practice this ideal is seldom achieved.

From the point of view of the theory of reasoned action, the task of predicting consumers' purchase behaviour can be achieved by measuring their intentions to buy just before they make a purchase. For all practical purposes this is impossible to achieve and, even if it is possible to achieve, it will provide little input to the marketer. After all, a marketer has to plan his or her strategies months in advance not when a consumer is about to buy a product.

Studies show that, in general, the longer the gap between intention and behaviour, the less correlated they are. Even in a category like automobiles (where consumers tend to have a better idea as to what they like compared to many other product categories). A study quoted by Longman (1968) found that 4 out of 10 consumers who intended to buy a car within one year did not buy one. Yet 17% of those who did not intend to buy one, ended up actually buying an automobile.

So, to actually predict behaviour, one should measure a consumer's intention "at the same level of specificity as the action, target, and time components of the behaviour. Situation component also should be specified when it is important." (Peter & Olson 1999).

Intervening variables that diminish the predictive power

What are the factors that intervene between intent and behaviour and reduce the predictive power of intent? Researchers have identified seven factors (Peter & Olson 1999):

Exhibit 3

Seven factors that diminish the predictive power of intentions

1. Time
2. Level of specificity
3. Unforeseen environmental event
4. Unforeseen situational context
5. Degree of voluntary control
6. Stability of intentions
7. New information

1. *Time* . The larger the time gap between an intent and behaviour, the less strong the relationship. Time provides the means for other factors to emerge that change the original intent. The predictive power of a one week time frame is much greater than the predictive power of a one year time frame.

2. *Levels of specificity*. When the intent is not matched for specificity, predictive power is diminished. A consumer's intent to purchase new clothes may be based on an expected promotion or contemplated job change.

3. *Unforeseen environmental event* . Factors such as nonavailability of an intended product or loss of a job can radically change one's intent and, as a result, the behaviour.

4. *Unforeseen situational context* . For instance, a consumer may not have a high opinion of fast food restaurants. Yet, when faced with the prospect of feeding three children, the price of a fast food restaurant may compare favourably with a better quality restaurant.

5. *Degree of voluntary control* . Some behaviours may not be under the voluntary control of the consumer. For instance, a consumer may have intended to drive to the mall on Sunday to buy a particular product. However, because of problems with transportation, he or she ended up buying an alternative product in a nearby store.

6. *Stability of intentions* . Some intentions are stable and others are less so. Salient beliefs about consumer durables are likely to be more stable than beliefs about nondurables. When intentions are not stable, the predictive power of intentions decreases.

7. *New information* . A consumer may have a clear intention of buying a model of Dell computer. Then he or she might hear about another model offered by IBM that would better suit his or her needs. In this case, the original intent can only weakly predict the actual purchase behaviour.

Although the theory of reasoned action provides a model for predicting consumer behaviour, it is still subject to extraneous influences and should be used in its proper context along with proper controls for it to be effective.

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