
IS THE CONGRUENCE BETWEEN BEHAVIORAL INTENTION, ATTITUDE, NORM AND BEHAVIORAL CONTROL NORMATIVE?

Laurent AUZOULT

Laboratoire de psychologie, Université de Franche-Comté
32 rue Mégevand, F-25030 Besançon cedex, France
E-mail: laurent.auzoult@univ-fcomte.fr

Abstract: The Theory of Planned Behavior has been criticized for the fact that it reflects an instinctive and naïve psychology leading to a bias of congruence between intention and its determinants. We proceed from this hypothesis to evaluate the normativity of this type of judgment. 72 subjects had to evaluate the normativity of judgments congruent or not between intention, attitude, the subjective norm and behavioral control. The results revealed that congruent judgments were judged to be more normative when attitude and the subjective norm were involved. It is also the expression of a strong intention, which is perceived as normative when the item in the questionnaire refers to behavioral control. Normativity of congruence may explain why it is possible to observe a consistency between responses to this type of questionnaire. Our study suggests, furthermore, that this bias is the product of social influences particular to the context of the study.

Key words: theory of planned behavior, normativity, congruence

Introduction

In the fields of philosophy and psychology, the concept of intention has for a long time attracted particular attention, due to the fact that it is said to express the impact of human will on human behavior. McClure (1991) defines intention as planning for action, the reasons for which are said to be motives or goals. Malle, Moses and Baldwin (2001) also consider intention to be a mental state, which represents the action and appears to be the result of reasoning and a commitment to the action. Fishbein and Ajzen's (2010) conception agrees with the first two, in describing intention as the desire to engage in behavior, which involves the expression of will, expectations and effort. There-

fore, taking account of intention and its determinants (attitude, norm and behavioral control) may allow us to predict the activation of controllable and conscious behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, p. 304). However, this point of view has been subject to criticism. One of these points of criticism concerns the link between intention and its determinants (attitude, norm and behavioral control), this link being characterized by a congruence bias (Budd & Spencer, 1986). In this case, the researchers consider that the elements of knowledge, which support the intention, are spontaneously matched with the intention. This hypothesis is supported by divergent results (Budd, 1987; Budd & Spencer, 1986). The aim of the study we are presenting is to explain this congruence through the existence of a social norm which,

when the context makes it salient, would seek to express a consistent point of view with regard to intention and the knowledge associated with it. Our study is based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, which uses behavioral intention and its determinants (attitude, norm and behavioral control) to explain behaviors.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) postulates that behavior can be predicted from behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). According to this point of view, behaviors are the result of an act of reasoning based on behavioral intention, a motivational factor resulting from 1) the overall evaluation of the perceived consequences of the behavior (attitude), 2) the perception of the behavior from the point of view of the social environment (subjective norm) and the perceived possibility of achieving it (perceived behavioral control). More precisely, the variation of intention can be explained by attitude (i.e., level at which the behavior is evaluated, more or less favorably both on the basis of associated affects and its perceived consequences) and the subjective norm (i.e., level at which the individual thinks that the behavior is more or less (dis)approved of socially and socially widespread amongst important people in their close circle). The TPB also considers that variations of intention and/or behavior can be explained by perceived behavioral control (i.e., level at which the individual thinks that the behavior is more or less influenced by uncontrollable external elements and how easy/difficult it would be for them to be accomplished).

These models prove to be strong and effective in predicting very diverse behaviors

(Kraus, 1995; Armitage & Conner, 2001; McEachan, Conner, Taylor, & Lawton, 2011) even if the contribution of each determinant (attitude, norm and behavioral control) is considered as a variable. It is also considered that the latter depends on the context and individual differences (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Two perspectives have been adopted to improve the predictive capacity of these models. The first consists in adding variables, as for example emotions, identity, temporal distance from the behavior, habit and norms in their different aspects. The additive or moderating impact of norms helps to underline the importance of expectations and internalized behavioral standards (Godin, Conner, & Sheeran, 2005). The second concerns the structure, which unites intention and its determinants through the strength of attitude (Petty & Krosnick, 1995). The centrality, the certitude and the extremity of attitude with regard to the object plays a moderating role between intention and its determinants (Budd & Spencer, 1984) as does importance, intensity and ambivalence (Cooke & Sheeran, 2004).

The Congruence Bias between Intention and Its Determinants

Studies on adding variables and structure which unites intention and its determinants (attitude, norm and behavioral control) reply indirectly to the most frequent criticisms with regard to intention models (Manstead, 2011), namely that the TPB a) takes insufficient account of social influences, b) underestimates the influence of habit and emotions and c) has a linear structure that does not take account of interactions between variables.

The most important criticism, and perhaps the most constructive, has dealt with the fact

that the constitutive elements of these models form an intuitively coherent ensemble *a priori*, guided by an intuitive, naïve and instinctive psychology of intention (Smith, 1982; Budd & Spencer, 1986). Expressing a high level of intention to perform behavior is said to be intuitively congruent with the fact of expressing a favorable attitude and an expectation of the social environment. This hypothesis has already been confirmed empirically. For an external observer, the fact of expressing an attitude and a subjective norm congruent with behavioral intention may be seen as more intelligible, rational and honest than the fact of replying in a non-congruent manner (Budd & Spencer, 1986). Studies using a 'talk aloud' protocol (French, Cooke, Mclean, Williams, & Sutton, 2007; Darker & French, 2009) reveal that most of the items measuring the constructs of the TPB are difficult to interpret. In this case, participants may consistently opt for mid-points of response scales. Another more common strategy is to ensure consistency between the responses by inferring an opinion from the initial responses (Feldman & Lynch, 1988). According to Budd and Spencer (1986), this expectation of congruence is attributable to the motivation to express a positive self-presentation. In this regard, Budd (1987) refers to a congruence bias, which affects responses to questionnaires measuring these constructs and more generally questionnaires on attitude (Sheeran & Orbell, 1996). This congruence bias may be likely to appear if the respondents are aware *a priori* of the relationship existing between the different elements of the model, that is to say, for example, if they establish an *a priori* connection between the fact of having a favorable attitude and a strong intention.

Other studies (Armitage & Conner, 1999; Ellen & Madden, 1990) than those by Budd have given rise to different results, which leaves the question of the existence of a congruence bias open. As Fishbein and Ajzen (2010, p. 313) write : “*Clearly, more research is needed to determine how much, if any, of the observed correlations among the components of our reasoned action approach is due to the actual associations among the constructs and how much may be due to participants' attempts to appear internally consistent*”.

Overview of Present Research and Hypotheses

Our study aims to confirm the existence of a preference for consistency between intention and the determinants envisaged by the TPB. We think, moreover, that this preference may be explained by the normativity associated with the consistency between mental states. Several elements lead us to believe that the congruence between intention and its determinants (attitude, norm and behavioral control) is normative. A certain degree of congruence between attitude and behavior would be useful socially, by permitting everyone to take part in social life by anticipating and relying on the words and the acts of others (Dollard, 1949). Generally speaking, this is expressed by a preference for consistency both for oneself and for others (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995). The studies of Budd tend to show that congruence corresponds to an expectation and that it is a judgment presented as being rational. In this instance, the fact of being perceived as rational is associated with social valorization (Auzoult & Abdellaoui, 2009).

In addition, one knows that the perceived probability of the occurrence of a behavior and its desirability are linked functionally, a behavior perceived as having to be performed tending to become desirable and *vice versa* (McGuire, 1990; 1999; McGuire & McGuire, 1991; 1992). This relationship between probability and desirability expresses all the dimensions of normativity. A distinction (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Bicchieri, 2006) is made between subjective norms (what the social environment and/or important persons with regard to the behavior expect), injunctive norms (what others approve or disapprove of), descriptive and/or group norms (what others, friends and family, members of groups to which one belongs or persons referring to it, normally do) and moral norms (what one personally considers is good or bad to do). These different normative dimensions describe a social influence associated with control and pressure from others but refer (the descriptive norm) to the regularity/probability of behaviors or judgments within the group, or (subjective, injunctive and moral norms) to the desirable nature of these behaviors or these judgments.

In this study, we are considering normativity as a unitary construct formed of several dimensions, by considering these as tending towards congruence: a customary judgment or behavior is likely to give rise to expectations, to tend to be the subject of valuation as a fundamental option of social functioning and to tend to be internalized as a "good" way of thinking or acting. With regard to the different normative dimensions, one thus has to wait until a usual, descriptive and therefore highly probable norm, from the point of view of its performance, tends to be perceived as desirable, that is to say

value-laden and socially expected. One might expect the congruence between intention and its determinants (attitude, norm and behavioral control) to become subject to normativity (Hypothesis 1).

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 72 undergraduate students (34 men, 38 women; $M = 22.9$ years) participated in a mass-testing session. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and agreed to reply to the questionnaire without remuneration. Their participation was voluntary. After completing the questionnaire, they were invited to provide their contact details so the main researcher could send them the results of the study or answer any questions they might ask about it.

Variables and Material

Independent variables

We constructed 12 proposals (congruent *versus* non-congruent judgments) in accordance with a plan (low intention *versus* high intention) X (positive *versus* negative valence of the determinant) for the three types of determinants (attitude, subjective norm and behavioral control). For the relationship between attitude and intention, the following proposals were made to the participants: A behavior which one has the intention of performing is a good behavior (congruence, positive valence of attitude, high level of intention); A behavior which one has the intention of performing is a bad behavior (incongruence, negative valence of attitude, high level of intention); A behavior which

one does not have the intention of performing is a good behavior (incongruence, positive valence of attitude, low level of intention); A behavior which one does not have the intention of performing is a bad behavior (congruence, negative valence of attitude, low level of intention). The construction of proposals was identical for the subjective norm: A behavior which one has (does not have) the intention of performing is a behavior of which people who are important to us (parents, friends) approve (disapprove); and the perceived behavioral control: A behavior which one has (does not have) the intention of performing is a behavior which is easy (difficult) to perform. The twelve propositions were presented to the participants in a pseudo-random fashion (See Appendix).

Dependent variables

Participants had to evaluate the normativity of each one of these 12 judgments using a 7 point scale (0 for "Not at all" to 6 for "Completely") based on seven items (This is what I think in the majority of cases; This is what people who I do not know generally

think; This is what people important to me generally think; This is what people important to me expect me to think; This is what you have to think in order to be accepted by others; This is what you have to think when you are a good person; This is what you have to think to avoid being ashamed or feeling bad; This is what people should think in my opinion; You can't think like that when you are a good person; You can't think like that if you want to be accepted by others).

Results

The seven items allowing us to evaluate the normativity for each type of judgment were averaged (Cronbach $\alpha = .87$) before conducting a repeated measures ANOVA on the four types of judgment using VI within-subjects (Intention X Valence) and the type of determinant (Attitude, Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavioral control) using VI between-subjects.

The result of the Mauchly test indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated ($W = .841$, $\chi^2(5, N = 72) = 36.74$, $p < .001$). The degrees of freedom were corrected

Table 1 *Mean and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of the perceived normativity about the link between intention and its determinants*

	<i>Intention</i>	<i>Valence</i>	Attitude	Subjective Norm	Behavioral Control
Congruence	<i>High</i>	<i>Positive</i>	2.71 (1.01)	2.71 (.98)	2.32 (1.02)
	<i>Low</i>	<i>Negative</i>	2.44 (1.25)	2.40 (1.12)	2.33 (1.14)
Non Congr.	<i>High</i>	<i>Negative</i>	1.76 (.93)	1.83 (1.07)	2.11 (1.07)
	<i>Low</i>	<i>Positive</i>	1.97 (1.04)	2.15 (1.17)	2.02 (1.04)

in accordance with the Huynh-Feld estimation of sphericity ($\epsilon = .913$) to estimate the effect of the type of determinant (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Likewise, the result of the Box test indicated that the covariance matrices were unequal ($M = 35.08$, $F(20, 162854) = 1.71$, $p = .02$), which involved the use of Pillai's Trace to analyze the multivariate effect. For the four congruence modalities, the Levene test allowed us to decide on the homogeneity of the variances ($F(2, 213) < 1.52$, $p = .22$).

An interaction with a strong effect was observed between the type of determinant and the type of judgment ($V = .107$, $F(6, 424) = 4.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .054$). The scores observed differed weakly between the three types of determinant ($F(2, 739) = 38.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$). It could be observed that the relationships between intention and attitude on the one hand and subjective norm on the other hand were evaluated as being more normative in the case of congruence than in the case of non-congruence. On the other hand, when the link concerned intention and behavioral control, the fact of expressing a strong intention was perceived as more normative than the fact of expressing a low intention, and this whatever the valence of the behavioral control.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we could expect that the congruence between intention and its determinants would be perceived as more normative than non-congruence. A normativity of judgments congruent between attitude, subjective norm and behavioral intention is clearly observed. In this case, the fact of expressing a level of intention consistent with the evaluation of the behavior and the perceived expectations of the social environ-

ment is judged as being more usual for oneself and others, as corresponding to the expectations of others whether they are close or not and as being associated with a more positive image and social relationships than non-congruent judgments.

This normativity of congruence confirms a preference for congruent judgments between intention and its determinants, as was observed by Budd (1987; Budd & Spencer, 1986). More precisely, the preceding studies on congruence bias were based on the observation that the format of the questionnaire may or may not lead the respondents to respond coherently. In our study, it was observed that from an external point of view, congruent responses are perceived as more normative (usual, expected, good) than non-congruent responses. They are therefore more likely to occur in the case of a social interaction involving others directly or symbolically. This is the first contribution of this study and may be the most important. This result appears to us to be important as it allows us to explain the congruence between intention and determinants in terms of a shared symbolic universe (here the norm) rather than in terms of the existence of a cognitive bias. Therefore, although this congruence may appear to be arbitrary from a psychological point of view (people do not necessarily think or act in a logical fashion), it appears to be a social necessity supported by a norm. Budd and Spencer (1986) observed that congruence was associated with judgments on rationality, honesty and intelligibility *vis-a-vis* the respondent and their position. The observations of Armitage and Conner (1999) and of Beck and Ajzen (1991) minimize the importance of the role of desirability in the responses to TPB questionnaire. It could, therefore, be thought that the so-

cial image of the respondent is not greatly challenged (i.e., rationality and honesty). On the other hand, it is possible that the preference for congruence makes the position expressed by the responses to the questionnaire more intelligible, as Mojzisch, Kerschreiter and Schulz-Hard (2012) observed in dyadic interaction situations. As Auzoult and Abdellaoui (2009) indicate, congruence which expresses rationality of judgment may be founded on the fact that it allows us to understand, predict and control the behaviors of others. Expressing a congruent point of view may allow us to infer a stable judgment on which one can rely for interaction with others.

Congruence is perceived as normative, that is to say in the area of social influence. This implies that a preference for congruence may not be considered as a simple bias but that it is constructed through social interaction, here in relation to the expectations and habits of others. This result agrees with the studies which highlight the fact that the expression of attitudes and their correlates is contingent on the context and systematically incorporates the point of view of others or the norms particular to the situation (Riemer, Shavitt, Koo, & Markus, 2014).

With regard to perceived behavioral control, congruence appears as secondary, compared with the fact of expressing a strong intention, whatever the perceived ease of the behavior. Everything happens as if it appeared normative to express a propensity towards action through strong intention. This disposition to act rather than to focus attention on feelings linked to the difficulty of the behavior may express the impact of a standard of effort or of perseverance (Hormuth, 1986; Duval, Duval, & Mulilis, 1992) with regard to the regulation of judg-

ments of intention. This is the second contribution of this study.

On the whole, our results suggest that the response strategies of the respondents to this type of questionnaire could be controlled using different standards. Based on the different dimensions of the self which can be regulated, Wiekens and Stapel (2010) propose a typology of behavioral standards, which are activated following an increase in self-awareness. They distinguish individual standards, such as the fact of being accurate, autonomous and different, from social standards, such as the fact of showing oneself to be conformist or favorable to others and seeking to be accepted, admired and consistent in one's judgments. Moreover, we know that to answer a questionnaire is likely to induce self-awareness (Buss, 2001). In the present case, the fact of evaluating a congruent judgment as normative may be induced by different standards, in a non-univocal manner. The fact of finding responding in a congruent fashion usual and expected may correspond to the desire to present a good self-image, to conform to the majority opinion or be consistent with the expression of a past attitude but not necessarily with the demonstration that one is accurate. Future studies should examine the role of these standards on the regulation of judgments.

This study contains one key limitation. We relied on a very general operationalization, without drawing on precise and specific behaviors. However, if participants do not have knowledge in their memory of the target behavior, knowledge produced through questioning allows participants to construct their responses (Feldman & Lynch, 1988). One may think that the abstract nature of our proceedings prevent the participants from developing a response based on their experi-

ence. It remains for us to reproduce our results in real contexts and to consider whether the behaviors in themselves do not activate certain regulation registers.

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APPENDIX

A behavior which one has the intention of performing is a good behavior (congruence, positive valence of attitude, high level of intention)

A behavior which one has the intention of performing is a bad behavior (incongruence, negative valence of attitude, high level of intention)

A behavior which one does not have the intention of performing is a good behavior (incongruence, positive valence of attitude, low level of intention)

A behavior which one does not have the intention of performing is a bad behavior (congruence, negative valence of attitude, low level of intention).

A behavior which one has the intention of performing is a behavior of which people who are important to us (parents, friends) approve (congruence, positive valence of norm, high level of intention)

A behavior which one does not have the intention of performing is a behavior of which people who are important to us (parents, friends) approve (incongruence, positive valence of norm, low level of intention)

A behavior which one has the intention of performing is a behavior of which people who are important to us (parents, friends) disapprove (incongruence, negative valence of norm, high level of intention)

A behavior which one does not have the intention of performing is a behavior of which people who are important to us (parents, friends) disapprove (congruence, negative valence of norm, low level of intention)

A behavior which one has the intention of performing is a behavior which is easy to perform (congruence, positive valence of behavioral control, high level of intention)

A behavior which one does not have the intention of performing is a behavior which is easy to perform (incongruence, positive valence of behavioral control, low level of intention)

A behavior which one has the intention of performing is a behavior which is difficult to perform (incongruence, negative valence of behavioral control, high level of intention)

A behavior which does not have the intention of performing is a behavior which is difficult to perform (congruence, negative valence of behavioral control, low level of intention)

JE NORMATÍVNA ZHODA MEDZI ZÁMEROM SPRÁVANIA, POSTOJOM, NORMOU A KONTROLOU SPRÁVANIA?

L. A u z o u l t

Súhrn: Teóriu plánovaného správania kritizovali kvôli tomu, že predstavuje inštinktívnu a naivnú psychológiu, ktorá skresľuje zhodu medzi zámerom a jeho determinantmi. Vychádzajúc z tejto hypotézy hodnotíme normativitu takéhoto úsudku. 72 respondentov vyhodnocovalo normativitu úsudkov zhodných alebo nezhodných so zámerom, postojom, subjektívnou normou a kontrolou správania. Výsledky odhalili, že zhodné úsudky boli vnímané ako normatívnejšie, keď zahŕňali postoj a subjektívnu normu. Sú tiež vyjadrením silného zámeru, ktorý je vnímaný ako normatívny, ak sa daná položka dotazníka týka kontroly správania. Normativita zhody vysvetľuje, prečo možno pozorovať konzistenciu odpovedí v tomto type dotazníka. Podľa našej štúdie je toto skreslenie výsledkom sociálnych vplyvov prislúchajúcich kontextu našej štúdie.