



# Extending the Theory of Planned Behavior to examine the role of anticipated negative emotions on channel intention: The case of an embarrassing product



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## ABSTRACT

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is successful in predicting consumer intentions for a wide variety of products and behaviors. However, little is known about how effective the TPB is when the behavior under study is embarrassing. To this end, this paper extends the TPB to create a conceptual model to examine the role of anticipated negative emotions on channel intention. An empirical study was conducted whereby the model was tested using survey data on the purchase of Regaine (a hair loss product that is embarrassing to buy) in Boots (a well-known UK multichannel drugstore). The embarrassing nature of Regaine created differences in the importance that emotions played when consumers intend to purchase using face-to-face channels (such as the physical drugstore) as against multichannel options or the internet. The results were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The effectiveness of the TPB was improved. The variance explained ( $R^2$  to intention) was 0.44% for the total sample, 49% for the drugstore, 58.4% for the internet, and 42.5% for multichannel.

## 1. Introduction

Multichannel retailing has changed the way consumers shop (Carlson et al., 2015). Although it is understood that multichannel shoppers spend more, the unanswered question remains *why?* (Anesbury et al., 2015). Moreover, little is known about what drives consumers to use single or multichannel options, with studies focusing on multichannel consumer behavior few and far between (Dholakia et al., 2010). Specifically, additional research has been called for to examine the interaction effects of rational and emotional drivers, the influence of environmental factors, and the use of multiple channels that influence shopper decisions (Pookulangara et al., 2011; Shankar et al., 2011). Accordingly, this paper contributes to the multichannel literature that studies the determinants of channel choice. It also indicates the best channel alternative for embarrassing products. This is important given the growing consumer preference for retailers who offer online channels (Pantano and Viassone, 2015) and multichannel options (Dennis et al., 2005).

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1985), hereafter TPB, has been found as a useful lens to study consumer behavior (Heinhuis and Vries, 2009) and, arguably, has the potential to predict multichannel

shopper behavior and channel choice intentions. However, survey length has forced researchers to selected a limited number of the TPB constructs, or analyze only one channel at a time. This limitation has also been experienced by store format researchers (Nilsson et al., 2015). To the best of the authors' knowledge, the study reported in this paper is the first to overcome this limitation by analyzing channels under similar parameters.

One of the strengths of the TPB is its ability to capture the influence of social norms on intention. Arguably, this is needed in the retail area where social presence has a high influence on consumer behavior (Argo et al., 2005) because it can ignite negative emotions, such as embarrassment. The TPB has been used repeatedly to study behaviors that could be embarrassing (Katsanis, 1994). For example, TPB studies of condom purchasing found that the channel influences the prediction of behavior, i.e., to obtain condoms from a clinic is different to buying them from a pharmacy (Fishbein and Middlestadt, 2011).

Channels satisfy consumers in different ways, and these differences become clearer when a consumer is shopping for an embarrassing product: the advantages or disadvantages of a particular channel become more prominent. The embarrassing product used in this study to magnify these differences is a hair loss restorer, Regaine: a product

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in a category that has been previously classified as embarrassing (Lau-Gesk and Drolet, 2008). Regaine is studied in the context of a recognized multichannel UK retailer: Boots. The embarrassing nature of the purchase situation under study supports the need to extend the TPB with a variable that accounts for the emotional charge created by the purchase. Anticipated Negative Emotions (ANE) are therefore included in this paper to respond to this challenge.

A particular channel, or combination of channels, could potentially offer the consumer a reduction of ANE, such as embarrassment, that create tension and inhibit a purchase. However, research has underscored that ANE is not adequately represented in TPB (e.g. Abraham and Sheeran, 2003; Buunk et al., 1998; Parker et al., 1995; Richard et al., 1995; Sheeran and Orbell, 1999), but could potentially explain more variance than other TPB constructs (Sandberg and Conner, 2008; Ajzen and Sheikh, 2013).

To this end, the overall aim of this paper is to determine how effective the TPB is in predicting consumer behavior for an embarrassing product, in the context of a face-to-face channel (i.e. a drugstore) versus the internet and multichannel options. The research aim is answered using the TPB that allows for comparison between behavioral intention in terms of attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. In addition, the paper includes the role of ANE and answers to two research questions: (1) Are the direct measurements of the TPB able to explain intention in the case of shopping for an embarrassing product using a face-to-face versus the internet or multiple channel options? (2) What is the role of ANE in consumer behavior when shopping using face-to-face channels versus the internet or multichannel options?

In terms of organization, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The TPB is briefly reviewed, and the role of emotions and embarrassment in purchase decisions are considered. This is followed by the presentation of a conceptual model that extends the TPB by proposing the effects of ANE on channel intention. Thereafter, the methodology employed in this research is presented. The results are then described and discussed with reference to the extant literature, in particular the TPB variables and the introduced constructs. Finally, the main limitations of the findings are outlined, the managerial implications are described and discussed, and suggestions for further research are presented.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The Theory of Planned Behavior

The TPB has achieved a considerable reputation for predicting and explaining human behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 2002). Intentions are explained as a consequence of attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1985). The TPB has been used in a wide range of business and non-business related studies. A summary of the relevant literature that has used TPB in the context of channels and/or shopping behavior can be found in Table 1. Other examples include: the prediction of organizational behavior, job performance, turnover, withdrawal behaviors, political behavior, voting participation and voting choice (Ajzen, 2011), as well as cardiovascular problems (Krones et al., 2010), motivations to exercise (Kwan and Bryan, 2010), the use of educational technology (Lee and Cerreto, 2010), downloading pirated software (Liao et al., 2010), extent of study (Liem and Bernardo, 2010), participation in recycling programs (Nigbur et al., 2010), undertaking cancer screening (Kim et al., 2010), self-identity (Rise and Hukkelberg, 2010), and the consumption of fruit (de Bruijn, 2010), alcohol (Glassman et al., 2010), and halal food (Alam and Sayuti, 2011).

The effectiveness of the TPB has been underscored by several meta-analyses (Godin and Kok, 1996; Hausenblas et al., 1997; Van den Putte, 1991; Armitage and Conner, 2001; Manning, 2009). Nevertheless, the TPB has numerous constraints and limitations that

leave room for conceptual and operational improvement. For example, the TPB has been criticized because it overlooks the relative importance of norms, the nature of the situation, how behavior is being reported, and the control of internal or external factors (Armitage and Conner, 2001; Terry and Hogg, 1996; Terry et al., 1999; White et al., 1994). The current research addresses how the behavioral target context affects the relative importance of TPB variables. Another contextual related weakness in TPB is self-report bias (Armitage and Conner, 2001). Hessing et al. (1988), for example, found inconsistencies between the self-reported intention to pay taxes and the official documentation presented. Although shopping for Regaine is not a dishonest behavior, it could be socially undesirable, affecting self-reports. When the nature of the situation is charged with emotional implications, accounting for emotions in the TPB model could improve its efficacy.

### 2.2. Emotions

One of the contributions of the present research is to provide more evidence for the significance of anticipated affect. Emotions are therefore included in this paper because the consumer will experience them when using any channel. The current research explores the role of anticipated negative emotions (ANE), like embarrassment, nervousness, or tension. From a TPB perspective, anticipated regret and anticipated affect are a part of attitudes (Ajzen and Sheikh, 2013), and regret has been studied in shopping situations (Reynolds et al., 2006). However, anticipated affect is not satisfactorily embodied in the TPB (Abraham and Sheeran, 2003; Buunk et al., 1998; Parker et al., 1995; Richard et al., 1995; Sheeran and Orbell, 1999). Reducing negative emotions, including embarrassment, can help managers to achieve the win-win solutions desired by shopper marketing (Shankar et al., 2011). In this study, the term anticipated is used to highlight the fact that the focus is on the feelings generated about the possible consequences of the behavior.

ANE are therefore defined as the negative feelings that might arise after a certain action or inaction (Pligt, 1998). ANE are measured using a combination of negative emotions, such as regret, sadness, shame, embarrassment, etc., depending on the context studied (see, Conner et al., 2006; Sandberg, 2008). ANE are distinct from attitudes, and focus on the feelings that individuals anticipate if, or after, they perform a bad behavior (Abraham and Sheeran, 2004; Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005; van der Pligt and de Vries, 1996).

### 2.3. Embarrassment

Embarrassment occurs when individuals experience threats to their public self (Miller and Leary, 1992). Embarrassment can also be experienced in private, when individuals imagine what others might think of them (Sabini et al., 2001). Embarrassment is very powerful in regulating social behavior; this includes shopping. Embarrassing products are those that people need and seek out, but do not discuss openly, and include personal hygiene products, birth control, or condoms (Katsanis, 1994). It has been suggested that the internet creates an emotional relief from embarrassment (Wolfenbarger and Gilly, 2000). Embarrassment has been studied using the TPB in the case of counterfeit products (Penz and Stottinger, 2005), breast-feeding (Khoury et al., 2005), de-shopping (King and Dennis, 2003), music piracy (Morton and Koufteros, 2008), mammography (Steele and Porche, 2005), and coupons (Bagozzi et al., 1992).

There is also more research needed to understand men's feelings, insecurities, and desires (Crossley, 2004). Today, many men feel less embarrassed about shopping for beauty products (Datta and Paramesh, 2010). Retailers and manufacturers are aware of men's apprehension about being labeled feminine or 'gay', and train salespeople to provide an appropriate service to hesitant consumers of grooming products (Zayer and Neier, 2011). Grooming products are used more predominantly by men who live in urban populations, compared with their

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