

## Bridging the intention–behavior gap: Inducing *implementation intentions* through persuasive appeals

Bob M. Fennis<sup>a,\*</sup>, Marieke A. Adriaanse<sup>b</sup>, Wolfgang Stroebe<sup>b</sup>, Bert Pol<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Groningen, The Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> Utrecht University, The Netherlands

<sup>c</sup> University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, The Netherlands

Received 16 July 2010; revised 1 December 2010; accepted 10 December 2010

Available online 22 January 2011

### Abstract

The potential of using implementation intentions—action plans that link a critical situational cue to a specific goal-directed behavior—to bridge the intention–behavior gap in consumer behavior has been limited by the practice of using explicit instructions to induce the construct. In two studies, we therefore tested the effectiveness of an indirect, persuasive strategy that benefits from the positive consequences of implementation intentions by ‘mimicking’ their underlying psychological processes. Experiment 1 showed that a strategy presenting vivid information on critical cues and appropriate behavioral responses affected mental imagery. Experiment 2 demonstrated that this strategy affected actual purchase behavior.

© 2010 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** Implementation intentions; Persuasive appeals; Vividness; Mental imagery; Buyer behavior

Although an advertisement that succeeds in persuading a substantial proportion of the target audience to form the intention to purchase the advertised product or service would be considered highly effective, a meta-analysis of meta-analyses of the relationship of intentions and behavior has shown that, in fact, intentions explain only 28% of the variance in behavior (Sheeran, 2002). Fortunately, however, this proportion can be considerably increased if one succeeds in inducing an “implementation intention”. In contrast to goal intentions, which are plans to perform a given behavior at some unspecific time in the future, implementation intentions specify the time and the context in which the behavior is to be performed and thus reflect action plans that link a critical situational cue for action to a goal-directed behavior. In a meta-analysis based on more than 8000 participants, Gollwitzer and Sheeran (2006) demonstrated that inducing implementation intentions substan-

tially increased the likelihood that individuals will act on their intentions with an effect-size indicating a medium to strong effect.

In their review, Gollwitzer and Sheeran (2009) argued therefore that implementation intentions are well-suited to bridge the intention–behavior gap in the field of consumer psychology. Because this suggestion makes intuitive sense, it is surprising that the implementation intention construct has seen only scant research attention in the field of consumer research (Fennis & Stroebe, 2010). This may be attributable to the fact that the only way implementation intentions have been induced in past research has been by *explicitly instructing* participants to form such an intention (Baumgartner & Pieters, 2008), which may not be appropriate in many consumer influence settings. In fact, a sales representative or an advertisement that instructs people to form the intention to purchase the advertised product the next time they visit their supermarket is likely to induce reactance rather than compliance (cf. Wright, 2002). Providing explicit, face-to-face instructions to form implementation intentions may therefore not be an effective strategy for influencing consumer decision-making.

\* Corresponding author. Department of Marketing, University of Groningen, P.O. Box 800, 9700 AV Groningen, The Netherlands. Fax: +31 50 3638252.

E-mail address: [b.m.fennis@rug.nl](mailto:b.m.fennis@rug.nl) (B.M. Fennis).

The two studies reported in this article investigate whether it is possible to induce implementation intentions without explicit instructions and whether the effectiveness of implementation intentions can be achieved with more indirect strategies (Baumgartner & Pieters, 2008). Therefore, in the present paper we examined the possibility of ‘profiting’ from the positive consequences of implementation intentions by ‘mimicking’ their underlying processes using a more indirect approach to influence consumer behavior. That is, instead of using explicit, face-to-face instructions, we used non-personal persuasive appeals.

We propose that such a persuasion strategy should include the critical components that have been shown to result in successful, effective implementation intentions, i.e., information which links a good opportunity to act to a specific goal-directed behavior. Moreover, we argue that such a strategy will be particularly effective when it accommodates the basic psychological mechanism that drives the effectiveness of implementation intentions, i.e., the subjectively experienced ease with which critical situational cues and appropriate goal-directed responses can be accessed from memory. In two studies, we show that a persuasion strategy that fosters mental simulation using vivid appeals is particularly well-suited to play this role.

### Implementation intentions

Many social and health psychological theories identify the presence of strong goal-intentions (e.g., “I intend to buy more fruits and vegetables!”) as the core predictor of goal-directed behavior (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; Carver & Scheier, 1982; Locke & Latham, 1990). However, even though intentions are believed to be the best predictor of behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Armitage & Conner, 2001), they account for less than one third of the variance in behavior (Sheeran, 2002; Webb & Sheeran, 2006). This frequently observed lack of correspondence between intentions and behavior (the ‘intention–behavior gap’; Orbell, Hodgkins, & Sheeran, 1997; Sheeran, Orbell, & Trafimow, 1999) led researchers to acknowledge that although having strong goal intentions is a necessary prerequisite, it is often not sufficient for goal-directed behavior (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 1998). According to Gollwitzer (1999), in addition to strong goal intentions, implementation intentions, or plans concerning where, when and how one will perform the intended behavior, are frequently required to overcome this intention–behavior gap.

Unlike intentions that merely specify a desired end-state (“I intend to achieve Z”), implementation intentions specify the where, when, and how of goal-striving (“If I am in situation X, then I will perform goal-directed behavior Y”, Gollwitzer, 1999). For example, an implementation intention to support the intention to buy more organic food specifies a situation that represents a good opportunity for acting on this intention (e.g., ‘when I walk home from work at six o’clock and pass the bio-shop’) and then links this situation to a specific goal-directed action (e.g., ‘buying vegetables for dinner’) resulting in the following implementation intention; “If I walk home from work

at six o’clock and pass the bio-shop, then I will go inside and buy vegetables for dinner!”.

Making such specific action plans promotes acting on one’s intentions in two ways. First, by specifying a critical situation in advance, this situation becomes more accessible in memory which increases the likelihood that, when encountered, the situation is recognized as a good opportunity to act upon one’s intentions (Gollwitzer, 1999; Parks-Stamm, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2007; Webb & Sheeran, 2007). Direct evidence for such memory effects was provided by Aarts, Dijksterhuis, and Midden (1999), who demonstrated that for individuals who formed implementation intentions to perform a specific behavior in a specific location, cues identifying that situation were more cognitively accessible in a lexical decision task than for individuals, who were only induced to form general intentions. Second, by linking the situation to a specific goal-directed behavior, this behavior becomes activated *automatically* upon encountering the situation (Gollwitzer, 1999; Parks-Stamm et al., 2007; Webb & Sheeran, 2004, 2007, 2008). That is, after forming an implementation intention, the goal-directed behavior is initiated immediately (Cohen, Bayer, Jaudas, & Gollwitzer, 2008; Gollwitzer & Brandstätter, 1997), efficiently (Brandstätter, Lengfelder, & Gollwitzer, 2001; Gawrilow & Gollwitzer, 2008), and without conscious intent (Bayer, Achtziger, Gollwitzer, & Moskowitz, 2009).

### Implementation intentions and consumer decision making

Ever since the introduction of implementation intentions as a strategy to promote goal-directed action (Gollwitzer, 1993, 1999), their effectiveness has been demonstrated for various types of behavior, such as health-related, academic or prosocial behaviors (for a complete overview, see Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006, 2009). Interestingly, however, despite the obvious potential to affect various behaviors, demonstrations of the impact of implementation intentions in the consumer behavior field are largely absent (Fennis & Stroebe, 2010). To date, a mere two mere studies have investigated the application of implementation intentions to influence purchase and consumption behavior (Bamberg, 2002; Kardes, Cronley, & Posavac, 2005). More specifically, Bamberg (2002) showed that implementation intentions can promote the purchase of organically produced foods among students who received a monetary voucher in order to act as ‘test buyers’ in a bio-shop for a period of 7-days. Similarly, Kardes et al. (2005) demonstrated that implementation intentions increased the use of a free sample of a household liquid.

It is important to note that the two studies that have investigated the influence of implementation intentions in promoting goal-directed consumer behavior followed earlier studies by relying on explicit instructions. Although a strategy of explicitly instructing people to formulate implementation intentions for concrete goals may be effective, its usefulness in the consumer behavior field where influence agents often aim to promote the purchase of products (rather than the use of free samples) and where participants do not receive a monetary incentive to act as a test buyer appears limited for three reasons.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882278>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882278>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)