



Drive as I say, not as I drive: Influence of injunctive and descriptive norms on speeding intentions among young drivers

Julien Cestac^{*}, Françoise Paran¹, Patricia Delhomme²

Laboratory of Driver Psychology, IFSTTAR – French Institute of Science and Technology for Transport, Development and Networks, 25, Allée des Maronniers, 78000 Versailles, France

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 March 2013

Received in revised form 22 October 2013

Accepted 5 December 2013

Keywords:

Descriptive norm
Injunctive norm
Congruence
Young driver
Speeding

ABSTRACT

Injunctive and descriptive subjective norms are important predictors of risk behavior. However, it is not uncommon for individuals to have different perceptions about the expectations and behaviors depending on the referent considered. Similarly, an individual's perceived expectations regarding those referents may be quite different from their perceived behaviors. Our work focuses on the effects of subjective norms' congruence on intentions. We studied the effects of norms with regard to four kinds of people likely to be close to the participant: His/her mother, father, male friends, and female friends. From the participant's point of view, these four kinds of referent individuals may be seen as agreeing or disagreeing, so we examined the effects of these possibilities. More specifically, we looked at the impact of different normative situations on the speeding intentions of a sample of 2428 young French drivers. The results showed an overall additive effect of injunctive and descriptive norms. However, those respondents who perceived that the referents in question often drove over the speed limit, and who expected them to do so less often than they themselves did, had the greatest speeding intentions. This was especially true when the normative source was the mother. Conversely, respondents who perceived that the concerned referents never broke the speed limit, and expected them to behave accordingly, were the ones whose intentions to speed were the weakest, especially when the normative source was a male friend. The results are discussed in terms of psychosocial processes and applications for accident prevention.

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1. Introduction

During their first few years of driving, young adults are statistically more likely than older, more experienced drivers to be involved in a road crash (Williams, 2003). This overrepresentation of young adults in accidents is especially due to a lack of experience, and more particularly, to problems adapting their driving to the situations they have to manage on the road: Young drivers tend to overestimate their own abilities and to underestimate the difficulty of the driving task (Cestac, Paran, & Delhomme, 2011). Risky behaviors of young drivers are affected by other factors too, including subjective norms (Parker, Manstead, Stradling, Reason, & Baxter, 1992). The impact of norms on risk behaviors is being studied more and more today (for a meta-analysis, see Manning, 2009), whether in the field of health, environment, or driving. To our knowledge, however,

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +33 1 30 84 39 57.

E-mail addresses: julien.cestac@ifsttar.fr (J. Cestac), francoise.paran@ifsttar.fr (F. Paran), patricia.delhomme@ifsttar.fr (P. Delhomme).

¹ Tel.: +33 1 30 84 39 32.

² Tel.: +33 1 30 84 39 65.

the combined effects of descriptive and injunctive norms on behavior have hardly been explored. Moreover, perceived norms depend on who the referent individual is. For example, parental influence on a youth's risky behaviors differs from the influence of peers (Scott-Parker, Watson, & King, 2009; Spijkerman, Van Den Eijnden, Overbeek, & Engels, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to examine (via a questionnaire-based survey) the effects of descriptive and injunctive norms and their interaction, on young drivers' intention to break the speed limit, in relation to various normative sources. Before presenting and discussing the results of this empirical research, we will first review the literature on descriptive and injunctive norms and the influence of various normative sources.

1.1. Descriptive and injunctive subjective norms

Deutsch and Gerard (1955) defined normative social influence as “an influence to conform with the positive expectations of another.” They also distinguished two types of normative influence: Descriptive norms and injunctive norms. The injunctive subjective norm is a factor in the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the model of interpersonal behavior (Triandis, 1977). It corresponds to the perceived expectations of others regarding a given behavior (i.e., “what I think others expect me to do”). For example, “People whose opinion is important to me would surely think that I should not speed.” The injunctive norm is often defined in reference to a group of individuals such as “significant others” or “people you trust”. The descriptive (or behavioral) subjective norm (i.e., “what I think others do”) has been studied in various fields, including extradyadic sex (Buunk & Bakker, 1995), green communication (Cialdini, 2003), littering (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Kallgren, Reno, & Cialdini, 2000), alcohol drinking (Larimer, Turner, Mallett, & Geisner, 2004), physical exercise (Rivis & Sheeran, 2003b), household recycling (White, Smith, Terry, Greenslade, & McKimmie, 2009), and speeding and dangerous overtaking (Forward, 2009). Concerning speeding behavior, recordings of actual speeds on roads indicate a propensity to imitate other drivers, since people tend to drive fast when other motorists are driving fast and to drive more slowly when others are driving more slowly (Connolly & Åberg, 1993). This finding has been confirmed by a sample of Danish and Swedish drivers, a majority of whom declared it was more important to drive like others than to abide by the speed limit, even if the others were driving well above the limit (Åberg, Larsen, Glad, & Beilinson, 1997).

Some authors have suggested that rather than there being two types of subjective norms, there is a single construct with two complementary components, one of which is injunctive and the other, descriptive (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2005; Rhodes & Courneya, 2003). However, the distinction between descriptive and injunctive norms has turned out to be significant, and two distinct processes of influence have been isolated (for a meta-analysis, see Manning, 2009). There are two types of approaches to studying the joint effects of injunctive and descriptive norms on behavior: A comparative approach (Which is the best measure?) and a crossed approach (What is the relationship between the two measures?).

The comparative approach consists of determining which of the two measures is the best and whether to favor one over the other, depending on the field under investigation. The descriptive norm is sometimes considered a better predictor of behavior or behavioral intentions than the injunctive norm (see meta-analyses by Rivis & Sheeran, 2003a, and White et al., 2009). However, studies that have focused on comparing these two types of norms have often found an additive effect of the two measures (Cialdini et al., 1990; De Pelsmacker & Janssens, 2007; Forward, 2009).

Smith and Louis (2008) explored the interaction between the two types of norms in two studies conducted with Australian students. They manipulated peers' injunctive norms (73% vs. 29% in favor of the new rule) and descriptive norms (73% vs. 29% signed the petition) about the introduction of full-fee places for undergraduate students (Study 1) and the introduction of comprehensive examinations at Australian universities (Study 2). The authors obtained an interaction between the two types of norms but it was ambiguous, being negative in the first study and positive in the second (“In Study 1, injunctive norms increased action only when the in-group was not already acting [...]. In Study 2, injunctive norms increased action only when the in-group was acting”, p. 663). They suggested that the inversion might be related to the targeted attitude, which was more important for the participants in the first study than for those in the second (the introduction of full-fee places was a measure actually being proposed and discussed at the time of the study, unlike the introduction of comprehensive examinations). Another study found a negative interaction between an injunctive norm (social approval) and a descriptive norm (typical student alcohol consumption) to explain alcohol drinking among Texan students (Rimal & Real, 2003). In that study, students perceiving social disapproval of alcohol use but frequent consumption by peers (situation of normative incongruence) were the ones who drank the most alcohol. The authors interpreted this result as a reactance phenomenon, i.e., deliberate defiance and rebellion against the social norm.

1.2. Normative sources

Subjective norms (injunctive and descriptive) are rarely measured at the specific level, i.e., with respect to a specific person or group such as “mother” or “same-gender friends”. Yet the views of kinfolk can be antagonistic sources of influence, particularly for young adults. This is important, since young adults are in the process of developing their identity, opinions, and values (Miller, 1989). During this phase of development, they are more susceptible to social influences (Gibbons & Gerard, 1995, 1997), are striving to become independent of their parents (Engström, Gregersen, Hernetkoski, Keskinen, & Nyberg, 2003; Laapotti, Keskinen, Hatakka, & Katila, 2001), and are more likely to comply with normative pressure from peers. Accordingly, studies of risk-taking among young adults, particularly regarding the use of alcohol or drugs, have generally distinguished between the subjective norms of parents and those of peers (Ary, Duncan, Duncan, & Hops, 1999; Cook,

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