

Research Report

Predicting intentions to purchase organic food: The role of affective and moral attitudes in the Theory of Planned Behaviour

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Abstract

This study examined the usefulness of integrating measures of affective and moral attitudes into the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)-model in predicting purchase intentions of organic foods. Moral attitude was operationalised as positive self-rewarding feelings of doing the right thing. Questionnaire data were gathered in three countries: Italy ($N = 202$), Finland ($N = 270$) and UK ($N = 200$) in March 2004. Questions focussed on intentions to purchase organic apples and organic ready-to-cook pizza instead of their conventional alternatives. Data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling by simultaneous multi-group analysis of the three countries.

Along with attitudes, moral attitude and subjective norms explained considerable shares of variances in intentions. The relative influences of these variables varied between the countries, such that in the UK and Italy moral attitude rather than subjective norms had stronger explanatory power. In Finland it was other way around. Inclusion of moral attitude improved the model fit and predictive ability of the model, although only marginally in Finland. Thus the results partially support the usefulness of incorporating moral measures as well as affective items for attitude into the framework of TPB.

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Introduction

Numerous consumer studies in Europe and USA have shown that choices to purchase organic food are motivated by beliefs about healthiness and good taste of these products as well as by beliefs about benefits for the environment and the welfare of production animals (Bähr et al., 2004; Baker, Thompson, & Engelken, 2004; Grunert & Juhl, 1995; Magnusson, Arvola, Koivisto-Hursti, Åberg, & Sjöden, 2003; Sparling, Wilken, & McKenzie, 1992; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002). Purchases of organic foods are thus motivated both by expected positive consequences for the self and for others. In addition, qualitative studies suggest that consumers sometimes relate feelings of good

conscience and feelings of responsibility for the well-being of one's family with organic food purchase decisions (Bähr et al., 2004; Baker et al., 2004; Makatouni, 2002). A situation in which the individual is aware that the well-being of others depends on their act and where they feel responsible for the act and its consequences can be classified as a moral decision situation (Davies, Foxall, & Pallister, 2002, p. 38; Schwartz, 1970, p. 128). Although, not all consumers necessarily believe in positive unselfish consequences of organic food purchases or feel responsible for those, there is reason to believe that affective and moral considerations have influence on the decisions to purchase organic foods.

This study examines the role of affective and moral attitudes as motivators of organic food purchase in the context of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Expectancy value models are recent decades' most popular paradigms designed for the prediction and understanding human behaviour (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). One of the

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most commonly applied examples of these models, the TPB was chosen as theoretical frame of this study. The TPB assumes that behavioural intentions capture the motivational influences on behaviour. Intention is thus seen as the most proximal predictor of behaviour. Behavioural intention, in turn, is seen as a function of attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (pbc) related to that specific behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Driver, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

The TPB has been extensively and successfully applied to consumer behaviours (see Conner & Sparks, 1995) and to health behaviours (see Godin & Kok, 1996). Also food choice has been a focus of TPB studies by a number of authors (Beale & Manstead, 1991; Lloyd, Paisley, & Mela, 1993; Sparks, Hedderley, & Shepherd, 1992; Sparks & Shepherd, 1992; Towler & Shepherd, 1992). The predictive power of the model has been demonstrated in a number of meta-analyses mentioned above. For example, Armitage and Conner (2001) analysed 185 studies and found that the TPB accounted for 27% and 39% of the variance in behaviour and intention, respectively.

However, the model has been recurrently criticised for insufficient consideration of affective and moral influences on behaviour. One of the most controversial assumptions of the model is that attitudes are based on cognitive beliefs. This assumption has been challenged by numerous authors and the model has been criticised for insufficient consideration of affective aspects of attitude (Bagozzi, 1988; Zanna & Rempel, 1988). Many researchers have empirically confirmed that attitude is a complex construct comprised of separate affective and cognitive (and behavioural) components (Batra & Ahtola, 1990; Breckler, 1984; Breckler & Wiggins, 1989; Edwards, 1990; Trafimow & Sheeran, 1998). Simultaneous consideration of these two components will provide better predictions of behaviour than the consideration of a single attitudinal dimension or component alone (Bagozzi & Burnkrant, 1979; Krech, Crutchfield, & Ballachey, 1962; Norman, 1975). Measures of affect or emotion exert unique influence on attitudes; beyond the influence of cognition (see Lavine, Thomsen, Zanna, & Borgida, 1998). The affective component refers to feelings or emotions that people have in relation to the attitude object and the cognitive component refers to thoughts that people have about the attitude object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Another recurring criticism of the TPB is that the model insufficiently captures normative or moral influences on behaviour (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Gorsuch & Ortberg, 1983; Sparks & Shepherd, 2002). Moral or normative issues are known to be important in influencing behaviour (Etzioni, 1988; Harsanyi, 1982). In the TPB, all moral and normative influences on behaviour are assumed to be mediated via the measures of subjective norms and attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 247; Manstead, 2000). The construct of *subjective norm* refers to perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) as perceived by the person, and it is thus a

more restricted concept than the sociological view of norms. *Social norms*, again, are usually seen as socially shared rules of what is right and wrong (Harré & Lamb, 1986, p. 234). A measure of social norm is not, however, suitable in the context of TPB, because these are shared by a group, and do not necessary reflect the individual's own standards of behaviour. Schwartz (1977) has suggested a concept of *personal (moral) norm*, which refers to internalised norms and values of important others, i.e. each person's own views about right and wrong, which have been learned during life. What distinguishes personal norms is that the consequences of violating them or upholding them are tied to one's self-concept. Moral norm has often been operationalised identically with Schwartz's concept of personal norms as perceived moral obligation. According to Manstead (2000, p. 12) *moral norm* is an individual's conviction that acting in a certain way is inherently right or wrong regardless of their personal or social consequences. The concepts of moral norms, personal norms and moral obligation have often been used interchangeably in the literature.

Originally in the TPB, all moral or normative influences on behaviour are assumed to be mediated via the measures of attitudes and subjective norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 247). Subsequently, research has suggested that a measure of moral norm, moral obligation or personal norm can be a useful addition into the TPB model (see reviews by Conner & Armitage, 1998; Manstead, 2000). These studies have shown independent predictive effects of perceived moral obligation or personal norm on behavioural intentions in actions with moral implications, such as cheating, stealing and lying (Beck & Ajzen, 1991), attending church and returning a tax refund made in error (Gorsuch & Ortberg, 1983), providing home care (Vermette & Godin, 1996), committing driving violations (Parker, Manstead, & Strandling, 1995), donating blood (Pomazal & Jaccard, 1976), transplant donations (Schwartz & Tessler, 1972), smoking only in designated areas (Boissoneault & Godin, 1990), use of condoms (Godin et al., 1996) and doing deliberate self-harm (O'Connor & Armitage, 2003). In 9 out of the 11 studies Conner and Armitage (1998) reviewed in their meta-analysis, moral norm was a significant predictor of intentions. The role of moral norm may depend on the type of behaviour, however. Godin, Conner, and Sheeran (2005) and Gorsuch and Ortberg (1983) suggest that moral norms would be useful only in understanding behaviour that is construed in moral terms.

Also in the context of food consumption—with perhaps milder moral connotations—measures of perceived moral obligation have been found as useful additions into the TPB model (Raats, Shepherd, & Sparks, 1995; Shaw & Shiu, 2003; Sparks & Shepherd, 2002; Sparks, Shepherd, & Frewer, 1995). Raats et al. (1995) examined how mother's feelings of moral obligation for family health related to their intentions to consume skimmed milk. Shaw and Shiu (2003) studied intentions to purchase fair trade grocery

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