

Should We Expect More From Expectancy-Value Models of Attitude and Behavior?

ANTONY S. R. MANSTEAD AND JOOP VAN DER PLIGT¹

*Department of Social Psychology
University of Amsterdam
Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

Over the past 2 decades, expectancy-value formulations of attitudes have met with considerable success in predicting the influence of attitudes on behavioral intentions and behavior. Two general models—the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985)—have been responsible for generating most of the research on attitude-behavior consistency issues.

A recent survey (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1993; see also Ajzen, 1996) identified more than 250 empirical investigations explicitly based on the two theories. Recent years have seen a further increase of applications of these two theories, and this increased attention is in line with Petty, Wegener, and Fabrigar's (1997) view that "attitude" seems once again to be the single most indispensable construct in social psychology. Certainly, the sheer amount of published research in the first half of the 1990s and new books on attitudes and attitude-related issues point to something of a renaissance of research interest in this field.

This Special Issue describes recent developments in research on expectancy-value models of attitudes and behaviors. Although there have been numerous studies based on Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action and Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, it can be argued that theoretical progress has not been dramatic. There has been some research comparing the effectiveness of the two models (e.g., Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992), but most research tends to focus on their applied value in new behavioral domains such as AIDS-related sexual behavior (e.g., Fishbein, Chan, O'Reilly, Schnell, & Wood, 1992; Richard, van der Pligt, & de Vries, 1995). It seems reasonable to observe that research in this tradition has emphasized the predictive accuracy of the models and paid less attention to whether or not they accurately describe and explain the psychological processes underlying attitudes and behavioral

¹Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Joop van der Pligt, Department of Social Psychology, University of Amsterdam, Roetersstraat 15, NL-1018 WB Amsterdam. e-mail: sp_pligt@macmail.psy.uva.nl.

choice. This Special Issue attempts to readdress this imbalance by focusing on conceptual and theoretical matters related to Fishbein and Ajzen's models of attitude-behavior consistency.

This Special Issue therefore consists of a series of papers that are primarily theoretical in nature, although these theoretical views are generally tested in applied contexts, thereby underlining the view that applied research is good for theoretical developments. The various papers cover a wide variety of behaviors, including travel mode choice, sexual risk taking, eating behavior, and academic achievement.

In the opening chapter, Stephen Sutton discusses the distinction between prediction and explanation and the various standards of comparison against which the predictive performance of attitude-behavior models can be judged. It is argued that social (and other) psychologists are unduly pessimistic in discussing the predictive performance of their models. Sutton puts this in perspective and presents nine reasons why attitude-behavior models do not always predict as well as we would like them to, if we adopt 100% of the explained variance as an explicit or implicit criterion. In his view, the two models perform well when judged in relation to typical effect sizes in the behavioral sciences. In our view, this applies to an even greater extent when the models are judged in relation to medical research. Modest effect sizes in medical research quite often have much greater impact on policy than do more profound effect sizes often observed in psychological research. Sutton's article reminds us that we should be less modest about the contribution of expectancy-value models in helping us to predict and understand human behavior.

Next, Joop van der Pligt and Nanne de Vries focus on the role of belief importance in expectancy-value models of attitudes. In their view, the assumptions of the theory of planned behavior are unduly optimistic with respect to the information processing capabilities of human decision makers. They propose adding belief importance as a separate measure in order to provide a more adequate reflection of the processes by which people form attitudes, and to provide a more adequate description of the structure of individual attitudinal decisions.

In the following paper, Henk Aarts, Bas Verplanken, and Ad van Knippenberg describe a program of research on the determinants of repeated behaviors and the decision processes underlying these behaviors. They build on the old debate about the role of previous behavior or habit, showing that habit and intention interact in the prediction of behavior, and that strong-habit persons differ from their weak-habit counterparts in how they search for and use information relating to the behavioral decision. These findings are discussed in the context of attitude-behavior models, and the authors conclude that research on attitude-behavior models should pay closer attention to the cognitive processes underlying (habitual) behavior.

Antony Manstead and Sander van Eekelen report a new empirical examination of the extent to which perceived behavioral control and self-efficacy can be distinguished. Their possible roles as determinants of behavioral intention and behavior are discussed in the context of Ajzen's theory of planned behavior and tested in one specific behavioral domain; namely, academic achievement. The authors show that these two constructs can be empirically distinguished, and that a measure of self-efficacy is more predictive of academic achievement intentions and behaviors than is a measure of perceived behavioral control.

Paul Sparks and Carol Guthrie focus on another factor that has been proposed as a useful addition to the structure of the theory of planned behavior; namely, self-identity. They test the possible role of self-identity in the context of diet behavior and find self-identification as a health-conscious consumer to have a predictive effect independent of the standard factors of the theory of planned behavior (attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and social norms). Sparks and Guthrie argue that the theoretical rationale for the observed effects merits further research attention.

Next, René Richard, Nanne de Vries, and Joop van der Pligt examine the affective versus cognitive basis of attitudes. They stress the importance of anticipated, postbehavioral emotions, such as regret, and test their role in the context of sexual risk-taking behavior. Their study shows that treating anticipated affect and attitudes as separate factors provides a better fit of the data than a model that incorporates anticipated affect within the attitudinal component of Ajzen's theory of planned behavior.

In the final paper, Mark Conner and Christopher Armitage review recent research on the theory of planned behavior and summarize the results of a series of meta-analyses by way of support for their main conclusions. Their review discusses each of the factors discussed in the preceding articles of this Special Issue, that is, belief importance, the role of past behavior or habit, perceived behavioral control versus self-efficacy, self-identity, and the affective versus cognitive basis of attitudes. One other construct, *moral norm*, is also addressed in their analyses. Moral norms are defined as the socially determined and socially validated values attaching to a particular behavior, and it is argued that concepts such as moral norms may help to improve our insight in the impact of normative influences on behavior. Finally, the authors discuss the distinction between spontaneous versus more deliberative and reasoned influences of attitudes on behavior, and the necessity of paying more attention to the impact of intentions on behavior.

The papers included in this Special Issue are a subset of those that were presented at a workshop held in Rolduc (The Netherlands). This workshop received financial support from the Kurt Lewin Institute (KLI), the Netherlands Foundation for Scientific Research (NWO), and the Dutch Association of Social

Psychology Research (ASPO). This support is gratefully acknowledged. Karin George helped us tremendously in organizing the workshop and in the selection and review process that led to this Special Issue. Finally, we would like to thank all the reviewers who helped us and the authors to develop the original workshop papers into the papers published here.

We hope that this Special Issue testifies to the vitality of research using attitude-behavior models and that it will be of interest to both basic and applied researchers working in this domain. Moreover, we hope that the papers included in this Special Issue warrant an affirmative answer to the question posed in the title of this introduction, and that we can expect further progress in this research field.

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