

Bridging Intention-Behavior Gap through Implementation Intention: Conceptual Insight

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ABSTRACT

The gap between intention and behavior is considered as a psychological state of the individual to perform any planned action. Scholars define this gap by implementation intention, and they argue the impact of implementation intention to transform intention into an action. It can be argued that this transformation is much more relevant and important in Entrepreneurship as it entails a series of planned actions. Thus, entrepreneurs must play a major role in converting intention to actions/behaviors. The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept “implantation intention” to bridge the gap between intention and behavior from entrepreneurial perspective. A thorough literature review and integration of prominent psychological and social psychology theories are used to conceptualize the implementation intention. Further, empirical review shows its impact as a mediating and moderating variable in understanding the link between intention and behavior. This review provides meaningful insights to understand and link intention and behavior. Further increased understanding helps to enhance intention-based behaviors and positive impact can be expected on performance. There is a dearth of scholarly investigation on implementation intention in entrepreneurship. Thus, this paper contributes the field of entrepreneurship by exploring the role of implementation intention in an entrepreneurial perspective.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial intention, Theory of Planned Behavior, Intention-behavior gap, Implementation intention

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurial intention has gained a substantial attention in the recent entrepreneurship literature (Kolapo, Aboluwodi, Nomlala, & latiff, 2023). However, the research studies focused on well recognized theories such as Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975), Theory of Planned Behavior (Barba-Sánchez, Mitre-Aranda & Brío-González 2022). Amongst those theories, TPB received the dominance in explaining entrepreneurial intention in entrepreneurship (Ellikkal & Rajamohan, 2023; Ngat & Tuyet, 2023). TPB specifies intention is deemed as the key and immediate influencing factor of any behavior (Farrukh, Alzubi, Shahzad, Waheed, & Kanwal, 2018). In general, many people form intentions/goals in their lives, but it seems that a few are realized into actions. This demonstrates a large gap between intention and behavior (Hassan, Shiu, & Shaw, 2016). TPB and TRA provide a framework for

studying behavioral decisions but fail to present a complete picture of behavior showing a weak intention-behavior link. This calls for further investigations of intention-behavior link which is really important (Bălău, 2018). This situation is backed by several reasons. However, if individuals do not take action beyond the intentions the real benefit cannot be obtained (Van Gelderen, Kautonen, & Fink, 2015). This is crucial for entrepreneurs as well as the field of entrepreneurship. If they limit to the intention they miss valuable opportunities in the market, because in nature they are expected to explore and grasp the opportunities in the market to for the growth and survival. In this setting, it is important to discuss the intention -behavior relationship and what conditions may impact (Van Gelderen et al., 2015). Accordingly, Intention does not guarantee the actual behavior (Santika, Wardana, Setiawan & Widagda, 2022; Gelaidan & Abdullateef, 2017) which represents an intention-action gap. However, exploring intention-behavior link is somewhat challenging especially in entrepreneurial research. Although, intention-behavior link received special consideration in the recent entrepreneurial literature still the knowledge is incomplete due to poor theoretical and empirical evidences (Wang, You, Wang, Wang, Lai, Su, 2023; Aloulou, 2018). Thus, intention to entrepreneurial behavior remains under explored in the recent literature (Cordova-Buiza, Toribio-Tamayo, Garcia-Portuguez & Martínez-Torres 2022; Bogatyreva, Edelman, Manolova, Osiyevskyy, & Shirokova, 2019), emphasizing the need to study from intention to behavior (Al-Shammari & Waleed, 2018; Farrukh, Alzubi, Shahzad, Waheed, & Kanwal, 2018; Liguori, Bendickson, & McDowell, 2018; Brännback & Carsrud, 2018). On the other hand, scholars have pointed out that the intention-behavior link is so important to examine in the context of entrepreneurship (Weiss, Anisimova, & Shirokova, 2019). Scholars argue that if entrepreneurship is all about planned actions and behaviors, the presence of limited research investigating the intention-behavior link is surprising and research on entrepreneurial intention should go beyond predicting intention to predicting subsequent behavior (Brännback & Carsrud, 2018). Further, it is emphasized that the importance of implementation intention in translating the entrepreneurial intention to entrepreneurial behavior (Aloulou, 2018). Thus, the scholars argue that intention-behavior gap is substantially filled by the implementation intention, which enhance the predictive validity of behavioral intention within the context of TPB (Schlaegel & Koenig, 2014 ; Fayolle & Liñán, 2014). Accordingly, this study fills the gap in academia by discussing the role of implementation intention in intention-behavior link from an entrepreneurial perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing Gap between Intention and Behavior

Theory of planned behavior suggests that intention immediately predict the subsequent behavior and the positive relationship between intention and behavior is proven by empirical evidences. (Sheeran, Webb, & Gollwitzer 2005) presents a decomposition of intention-behavior relationship based on two criterion intention (positive and negative) and subsequent behavior (act and do not act) as follows.

Table 1. Matrix of intention-behavior relationship

		Subsequent behavior	
		Did act	Did not act
Intention	To act	Inclined actors	Inclined abstainers
	Not to act	Disinclined actors	Disinclined abstainers

Source: (Sheeran, Webb, & Gollwitzer 2005)

According to the above table 1, four types of intention-behavior relationship categories can be identified. Based on the relationship between intention and behavior two types of combinations can be directly

identified. “inclined actors” have an intention to act and do act accordingly; “disinclined abstainers” do not have an intention to act and they do not act. There are two another combinations; “inclined abstainers” (individuals with intention to act and do not act) and “disinclined actors” (individuals no intention to act and do act).

Implementation Intention Theory

Even though it is clear that the intentions play an important role in guiding human action, recent research reveals the complexities involved in translating intentions into actual behavior (Ajzen, 2001). In this connection Gollwitzer has proposed implementation intention to bridge the intention and behavior suggested by TRA and TPB in 1993 (Orbell, Hodgkins, & Sheeran, 1997). The distinction between goal intention and the implementation intention was initially discussed by Gollwitzer in 1990. Goal intentions stipulate what individuals want to do within a certain period of time whereas implementation intention (also referred to as action plans) specify when, where and how of the intended action or behavior in question. Thus, implementation intention was clearly conceptualized by emphasizing how, when and where aspects of goal implementation (Gollwitzer, 1993). However, most of the studies has focused on when and where aspects while ignoring the how aspect of implementation intention (Bas Verplanken and Suzanne Feas, 1999). Based on the TPB, they argued that individual desires are translated into goals through goal intentions, but it merely does not guarantee the intended behavior or outcome. In other words, it is the way that the individual commits himself or herself to respond a certain situation in a specific manner. Implementation intentions occurs subsequent to the goal intention specifying the distinct way of achieving goals (Gollwitzer, 1999). It creates a mental link between critical situation and intended behavior putting a sound foundation to detect easily, recall effectively and readiness to attend the critical situations (Gallo & Gollwitzer 2007). This mental link subsequently creates a cognitive accessibility of the implementation intention (Achtziger, Bayer, & Gollwitzer, 2012). Thus, implementation intention pushes individuals who are not focused on the intended behavior and to carry out that behavior (Ajzen, Czasc, & Flood, 2009). Implementation intentions are if-then plans that stipulates in advance how anyone prepare to strive for a set goal. This will enhance the rate of achieving goals and facilitates the goal attainment (Gawrilow, Morgenroth, Schultz, Oettingen, & Gollwitzer, 2013). However, it is clearly points out that implementation intention does not depends on the behavior but may affect the intensity of the intention-behavior link emphasizing that implementation intention should be considered as a moderator rather than mediator. In other words, it is a facilitating factor of goal intentions towards behaviors (Norman, Webb, & Millings, 2019; A. F. Adam & Fayolle, 2015). According to (Gollwitzer & Brandstatter, n.d.). Implementation intentions were found to facilitate the immediate initiation of goal-directed action when the intended opportunity was encountered. In line with the (Bas Verplanken and Suzanne Feas, 1999), the implementation intention should be analyzed via when, where and how aspects, which are so important in the imitation of a targeted behavior. Formulating plans in the form of implementation intentions, will enhance the possibility of realizing those goal intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2004). Thus, it indicates the degree to which implementation intentions had been formed (Rise, Thompson, & Verplanken, 2003). Implementation intention contributed as an effective self-regulatory tool in health psychology, clinical psychology, and social psychology. However, it calls for further researching the functioning of implementation intention to comprehend a better insight towards it (Gallo & Gollwitzer 2007). It directly re-activated the individual’s higher order goal through effectively enhancing the self-control over them (van Koningsbruggen et al., 2011). In entrepreneurial research, sufficient evidence are available for the gap between intention and behavior. Various studies have showed that goal intention alone is not a substantial condition for an intended action (Kautonen, van Gelderen, & Fink, 2015). It is evident that the concept of implementation intention has been investigated in the context of entrepreneurship arguing that the implementation intention plays major role in pursuing the goal of entrepreneurship. Studies also have emphasized that exploring beyond the goal intention and studying how entrepreneurial goals are translated in to entrepreneurial behaviors (van Gelderen, Kautonen, Wincent, & Biniari, 2018).

The Impact of Implementation Intention

A plenty of studies has focused on the factors that determine the behavioral intention arguing that the intention is the immediate predictor of a specific behavior while substantially ignoring the mediating effect of intention on behavior (Brandstätter, Lengfelder, & Gollwitzer, n.d.). Studies have attempted to examine the intention-behavior gap using different moderators such as culture, assuming the culture is an important factor to stimulate intention into specific action-oriented behaviors (Bogatyreva et al., 2019). The impact of implementation intention has been examined as a mediating variable (van Gelderen et al., 2018) and as well as a moderating variable (Brännback & Carsrud, 2018). Even though, (Krueger, 2009) indicates that behavioral intention affects on behavior (action) there seems to be a significant difference between individual's intention to perform a particular behavior and what that individual is actually do in the future regarding the intention. This is in line with the argument of (Esfandiar, Sharifi-Tehrani, Pratt, & Altinay, 2019). Contradictory, different argument was presented by (Orbell & Sheeran, 1998). Although, the implementation intentions are effective in goal attainment, some of the results lead to further empirical investigation into this. Individuals who formed implementation intentions responded faster to the specified situational prompts. Many studies have come to the conclusion that goal intention with an additional implementation intention significantly increases the likelihood of actually performing the intended new behavior (Bamberg, 2002) emphasizing the implementation intention would increase rate of goal achievement (Webb & Sheeran, 2008). It is empirically supported that the participants with implementation intention for a healthy eating day, demonstrated a higher degree of healthy eating behavior. Further, the effect of implementation intention is independent of behavioral intention and it would improve the predictive power of intention on behavior (Bas Verplanken and Suzanne Feas, 1999; Brandstätter et al., n.d.). Bas Verplanken and Suzanne Feas (1999) argue that implementation intention and habits affect the behavior independently and both with and without habits can be benefitted from implementation intention. An experimental study was carried out based on the undergraduates of University of Nijmegen in Netherlands to assess the effect of implementation intention. The results revealed that the undergraduates with the implementation intention to complete the assignment are more positive in completing the assignment than those without an implementation intention and increases the actual rate of goal attainment (Koole & Spijker, 2000). Consistently, it is found that individuals who supplement goal intentions with implementation intention are tend to be more success than the individuals who merely focusing on the goal intention (Henderson, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2007).

Interestingly, it is found that the action initiation cannot be only facilitated by the implementation intention but also by money. Higher incentives associated with a specific behavior motivates individuals to realize action initiation though the formation of implementation intention (Bamberg, 2002). A longitudinal study was undertaken based on outpatient orthopedic rehabilitation center, where participants received daily exercise therapy to compare the predictive power of goal intentions and implementation intentions. The results suggest that if the behaviors are continuous and routine, the cognitive control of goal intention and the implementation intention would be less. However, implementation intention largely impacts on behavior than goal intention even though the behaviors become routine claiming that the planning fosters behavior and lack of planning fails the behavior (Ziegelmann, Luszczynska, Lippke, & Schwarzer, 2007). In an attempt to test whether implementation intention is sensitive to activate the specified situational cues, found that situational cues associated with implementation intention received more attention than non-specified cues. This implies the implementation intention results in sharp activation which is stable over time and tend to depends on the commitment of implementation intention (Achtziger et al., 2012).

Even though, intention is the best predictor of behavior based on the TPB, intentions account for only 20% to 30% of the variance in behavior. Further, the variance explained by entrepreneurial intention in actual behavior is estimated at 37% (A.-F. Adam & Fayolle, 2016). Intention-behavior relationship varied

significantly due to the type of behavior and the past behavior s of individuals may be the best predictor of intended behavior than intention. Hassan, Shiu, & Shaw (2016) assessed the planning and actual behavioral control in reducing the intention-behavior gap proposing the mediating role of planning on intention-behavior link and the moderating role of Actual Behavioral Control on planning-behavior link. The results suggest that planning fully mediates the relationship between intention and behavior. In contrast to the evidence to date that planning is helpful in the enactment of behavior, it is found that implementation intention does not have a positive effect on the behavior. It specifies that the implementation intention is not able to break the link between past and future behavior, which shows that the past behavior is more important than implementation intention (Carrera, Royer, Stehr, Sydnor, & Taubinsky, 2018.) Scholars also argued that social support received from social capital influence on attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control subsequently influencing on intention and in turn affect the implementation intention (Tatarko & Schmidt, 2016). Interestingly, the intention-behavior relationship is weakened not because of they are having goal intention but because of their failure act on the intention. (A.-F. Adam & Fayolle, 2016) has investigated the impact of implementation intention on intention-behavior link in the context of entrepreneurship. The results support the claim that forming implementation intention increases the probability for intended entrepreneurs to become entrepreneurs and concluded that individuals who plan their work will perform better in the entrepreneurial process based on exploratory study using cross sectional data. Distinguishing from the recent studies, have evaluated the concept of “implementation intention” in the context of entrepreneurship in translating entrepreneurial intention into entrepreneurial behavior. They proposed intention-plan-behavior path validating the entrepreneurial implementation plan completely mediates between entrepreneurial intention and behavior (Hou, Liu, Wu, & Yan, 2017). The literature suggests that TRA/TPB has been extensively used to predict and explain entrepreneurial intentions and ends with entrepreneurial intention. However, entrepreneurship is all about planned actions. It requires further investigation from intention to action by scholars in entrepreneurship as the inclusion of implementation intentions facilitates the intention-behavior relationship in entrepreneurship research (Brännback & Carsrud, 2018). Further, it is empirically proven that the implementation intention provides positive results with strong goal intention and even benefitted with weak goal intentions (van Gelderen et al., 2018). (Ajzen et al., 2009) have examined the impact of implementation intention on intention and behavior link and confirm that implementation intention facilitates the behavior. The results of the later studies also support the claim that implementation intention formation benefitted the goal attainment. More precisely, individuals who have plans complete the specific behavior those who do not have a plan (Webb & Sheeran, 2007). Similarly, it is empirically proven that the implementation intention is beneficial in health related goal intentions (Sheeran, Webb, & Gollwitzer, 2005). In the light of these facts they argue that implementation intention best performs as the moderating variable rather than mediating variable.

CONCLUSION

Implementation intention has been identified by many scholars as the bridge linking behavioral intention with the planned behavior. It is an emerging psychological agenda and deserves significant attention in the field of entrepreneurship. By combining TPB and IIT would generate better results as the core of the entrepreneurship is actions and behaviors. Further, this study explains and understands IIT in terms of planning. In the review of the theoretical underpinnings and the empirical findings, implementation intention is still debatable, and the discussion is open for scholarly contribution.

IMPLICATIONS

This study provides implications to the theory and practice. Although TPB explains intentions positively impacts behaviours, Implementation Intention Theory (IIT) suggests an important consideration to bridge the intention-behavior gap through implementation intention. In other words, IIT explains how intentions

are translated into behaviors practically. Accordingly, this study provides useful insights for entrepreneurs regarding how to translate intention into actions as intentions merely do not generate any results. Entrepreneurs are results-oriented and they should necessarily be action-oriented. They can use II in a way of proper planning to convert intention into actions.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The scope of the study only covers examining implementation intention to bridge the intention-behavior gap and does not provide any empirical evidence. And this study explains how entrepreneurs can use implementation intention to convert their intentions into behaviors in their entrepreneurial initiatives. Accordingly, future researchers can focus on more qualitative studies such as developing case studies in the application of implementation intention into practice. This helps to understand the role of implementation intention in different firms, industries when translating intention into behaviours. Further, future studies can explore the problems of practicing implementation intention under different business settings. Further, the conceptualization of implementation intention differently can be of an interest in future studies. On the other hand, the future studies can focus on the impact of implementation intention on the intention-behavior link to add empirical evidence to understand the role of implementation intention in the real-world setting.

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