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## **Master Thesis Exposé**

# ***The Mystery of Consumer Behavior – Revealing Intention-Behavior Gaps***

Submitted to

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Submitted by

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Kassel, 11/21/2019

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## 1. Introduction

Current global challenges such as climate change, excessive consumption of natural resources, desertification, land degradation, loss of biodiversity, and intensification of farming practices or the rise in animal production are increasingly becoming the focus of human attention, as these may ultimately be attributed to human activity (Terlau & Hirsch 2015, p. 2).

These challenges probably result in problems for future generations like emissions, waste products and environmental damages in general. Responsible for these global challenges is amongst others the extensive consumption by humans. Whether it is the exorbitant consumption of meat, the environmental pollution by using cars and airplanes or the incorrect disposal of any kind of waste, humans are responsible for these current global challenges.

Against the background of the dramatic situation our natural environment is in, humans increasingly becoming aware of their responsibility to protect the environment and thereby to secure the living space of future generations. Hence, a lot of people develop intentions to behave more eco-friendly in order to counter environmental challenges such as climate change. For instance they intent to consume less meat and more organic food, they intent to go by foot or by bike more often and less by car, or intent to use plastic to a lesser extent and to dispose waste more proper.

Although a lot of people are aware of their accountability for the environment and intent to behave more eco-friendly, it fails ultimately because of the implementation. This phenomenon of a clear inconsistency between intentions and actual behavior is the so called intention-behavior gap. Reasons for the deviation from intention and behavior are manifold. Possible reasons may be aspects like price, availability, lack or overload of information or individual habits (Hughner et al., 2007, p. 104; pp. 478; Terlau & Hirsch, 2015, p. 6; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018, pp. 425 – 426).

## **2. Theoretical background**

The reasons for the intention-behavior gap have not yet been sufficiently investigated. Research attempts to explain the intention-behavior gap in various disciplines, including biological, psychological and economic perspectives (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015, p. 1 - 2).

It is recognized that human behavior is complex. Undertaking and implementing strategies to address sustainability problems requires a solid understanding of how people behave in different situations and contexts. Consumers do not always translate their preferences into reality and are influenced by numerous factors (Lehner et al. 2016, p. 176). So, it is possible that a sustainable attitude (behaving eco-friendly) will rarely translate into real consumer behavior - resulting in the intention-behavior gap. Researchers are therefore becoming increasingly aware that new strategies are needed to overcome this gap and to help consumers make more sustainable decisions (Lehner et al. 2016, p. 166).

A possible foundation for explaining the gap between intention and behavior could be the theory of planned behavior developed by Icek Ajzen (1985). The theory assumes that the best predictor of behavior is behavioral intention, which in turn is determined by attitudes toward the behavior, social normative perceptions of it and perceived behavioral control.

The concept of self-efficacy is often compared with perceived behavioral control as a determinant of intention and in turn a determinant of behavior. Perceived self-efficacy, refers to beliefs about one's own capability to fulfill a certain exercise by one's own resources even in the face of possible hurdles (McCaul, 1993).

The theory of social identity ties in with the social normative perception in the context of the theory of planned behavior. The theory suggests that people who identify themselves with a group tend to adopt their norms and adapt their behaviors regarding the accepted norms of the group (Turner, 1985).

The theory of self-concept describes how a person perceives oneself (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and is therefore closely connected to social identity theory, which is assumed as a predictor of human intention as well as behavior.

### 3. Purpose

With respect to the theoretical basis stated above the purpose of the master thesis will be to define the intention-behavior gap before the background of consumers' disposal behavior by covering self-efficacy, self-concept and the social-identity theory in the context of the theory of planned behavior.

After the establishment of a theoretical basis and the definition of each construct, the relation to the intention-behavior gap should be analyzed. Finally implications as well as limitations should be derived.

The definition and analysis will be carried out on the basis of selected literature contributions.

### 4. Methodology

This work will be based on a literature review. For this purpose, relevant literature contributions will be sought and evaluated.

In the first step, the research problem is to be narrowed down and defined on the basis of selected literature contributions. In order to find the right material, keywords have to be defined, on the basis of which the literature search can be carried out. Possible keywords might be *Intention-behavior gap*, *social-identity theory*, *self-efficacy*, *self-concept*, *theory of planned behavior*, *theory of reasoned action*, *consumer behavior*, *human behavior*, etc.

Afterwards each theoretical construct (intention vs. behavior, intention-behavior gap, self-concept, self-efficacy, social-identity theory, the theory of planned behavior) has to be defined. Here the procedure is similar to the one described above.

After the theoretical basis is established, results of relevant literature contributions for different theoretical constructs are to be linked to each other and compared with each other (e.g. the investigation of the relationship between the theory of planned behavior and the social-identity theory). By means of this comparison, an interpretation of the results is to be made, from which implications as well as limitations are to be derived (e.g. to what extent does social-identity theory explain human behavior and what

implications can be derived from it? What are the limitations of social-identity theory in explaining human behavior?).

The search strategy of relevant materials applied here, limits itself on materials published from the year 2000 up to 2019. Exceptions here are long established theories such as the theory of planned behavior by Ajzen, which was published well before the year 2000.

For literature searches common databases such as <https://www.researchgate.net/>, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/> and <https://scholar.google.de/schhp?hl=de> will be used.

## 5. Literature review

Authors	Title	Source	Content
Ajzen, I.	The Theory of Planned Behavior	Organizational Behavior And Human Decision Processes, (1991), 50, pp.179-211.	The article considers cognitive self-regulation as an important aspect of human behavior in the context of a dispositional approach to the prediction of behavior.
Ajzen, I.	Perceived Behavioral Control, Self-Efficacy, Locus of Control, and the Theory of Planned Behavior	Journal of Applied Social Psychology, (2002), 32, 4, pp. 665-683.	Study which shows that measures of perceived behavioral control need to incorporate self-efficacy as well as controllability items that are carefully selected to ensure high internal consistency.
Armitage, C. J., Conner, M.	Efficacy of the Theory of Planned Behaviour: A meta-analytic review	British Journal of Social Psychology (2001), 40, pp. 471–499.	Quantitative integration and review of the research regarding the theory of planned

			behavior.
Balau, M.	Exploring the Link between Intention and Behavior in Consumer Research	European Integration Realities and perspectives, (2013), 18, pp. 134-141.	The article reviews several perspectives on this role, starting from models frequently used in consumer research and enriching the perspectives by discussing the influence of implementation intention and the effect of intent measurement on product and brand actual buying behavior.
Chatzisarantis; N. L. D. et al.	The Effects of Social Identity and Perceived Autonomy Support on Health Behaviour Within the Theory of Planned Behaviour	Current Psychology (2009), 28, pp. 55–68.	The study utilizes constructs from social-identity theory and self-determination theory to provide a more accurate estimation of social influence within the theory of planned behavior.
Decker, R., Kroll, F., Meißner, M., Wagner, R.	Marketing - Eine entscheidungsorientierte Einführung, 1st ed. Springer, Berlin	1st ed. Springer, Berlin (2015)	
Echegaray, F. F., Hansstein, F. V.	Assessing the intention-behavior gap in electronic waste recycling: the case of Brazil	Journal of Cleaner Production, (2017), 142, pp. 180-190.	This paper discusses determinants of consumer intentions and behavior towards e-waste recycling.
Lee, S. J., Kim, H. L.	Roles of perceived behavioral control and self-efficacy to volunteer tourists' intended participation via theory of planned	International Journal of Tourism Research (2018), 20, pp. 182–190.	Comparing the strength of perceived behavioral control with self-efficacy to predict volunteer tourists' intentions

	behavior		within the theory of planned behavior.
McCaul, K. D.	The Value of the Theory of Planned Behavior, Perceived Control, and Self-Efficacy Expectations for Predicting Health-Protective Behaviors	Basic And Applied Social Psychology, (1993), 14(2), pp. 231-252.	Examination whether self-efficacy expectations and perceived control predict intentions to act and the performance of health-protective behaviors.
Norman, P., Hoyle, S.	The Theory of Planned Behavior and Breast Self-Examination: Distinguishing Between Perceived Control and Self-Efficacy	Journal of Applied Social Psychology, (2004), 34, 4, pp. 694-708.	The study examines the predictive utility of the TPB in relation to BSE intentions and behavior. The study also considers the distinction between self-efficacy and perceived control and the sufficiency of the model as assessed by the influence of past behavior.
Raab, K., Wagner, R.	Disposal Behavior of Extreme Poor People Living at the Base of the Pyramid.	WASET (Ed.), Proceedings of 20th International Conference on Solid Waste, Sydney (2018)	
Sheeran, P.	Intention - Behavior Relations: A Conceptual and Empirical Review	European Review of Social Psychology, (2002) 12 (1), pp. 1 - 36.	A meta-analysis of meta-analyses is used to quantify the behavior-intention gap and a conceptual analysis of intention-behavior discrepancies is presented.
Shin, J. et al.	Analysing the failure factors of eco-friendly home appliances based on a	Business Strategy and the environment, (2018), 27 (8), pp.	The study analyses the attitude-behaviour gap that occurs in



	user-centered approach	1399-1408.	the consumer decision-making process, and the consumer preference with respect to the core attributes.
Sniehotta, F. F.	Bridging the intention-behaviour gap: Planning, self-efficacy, and action control in the adoption and maintenance of physical exercise	Psychology and Health, (2005), 20, pp. 143-160.	The sheds light on three constructs (planning, self-efficacy, action control) that may bridge the intention-behavior gap.
Terlau, W., Hirsch, D.	Sustainable Consumption and the Attitude-Behaviour-Gap Phenomenon - Causes and Measurements towards a Sustainable Development	International Journal on Food System Dynamics, (2015), 6, pp. 159-174.	This paper presents a review of interdisciplinary research literature on the complexity of sustainable food consumption and an empirical analysis of selected countries worldwide.
Timokhina, G.S., Wagner, R., Ürkmez, T.	Cross-cultural Variations in Consumer Behaviour: Review of Scientific Studies	Marketing and Marketing Research 122, 126–142, (2016).	Identifying consumer behavior among cross-cultural variations.
Timokhina, G.S., Taylan, U., Wagner, R.	Cross-Cultural Variations in Consumer Behavior. A Literature Review of International Studies.	South East European Journal of Economics and Business 13, 49–71. (2019)	The objectives of this study are to systemize conceptual and methodological approaches to research of cross-cultural variations in consumer behavior; to present an extended understanding of consumer behavior in related industries; to identify conceptual and methodological gaps and empirical issues in these studies.
Tolotti, G., Raab,	Disposal Behavior at the Base of the Pyramid	Journal of Consumer Affairs (2017)	

K., Wagner, R.	Consumer Decisions on Personal and Household Items.		
Vermeir, I., Verbeke, W.	Sustainable Food Consumption: Exploring the Consumer “Attitude – Behavioral Intention” Gap	Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics (2006), 19, pp.169–194.	This study investigates the presumed gap between favorable attitude towards sustainable behavior and behavioral intention to purchase sustainable food products. The impact of involvement, perceived availability, certainty, perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE), values, and social norms on consumers’ attitudes and intentions towards sustainable food products is analyzed.

## **6. Temporary outline**

### **1. Introduction**

### **2. Literature Review**

### **3. The intention-behavior gap (IBG)**

3.1 Distinction intention vs. behavior

3.2 Possible reasons for the occurrence of IBGs

3.3 Underlying theory: The theory of planned behavior

### **4. Selected theories to declare human behavior**

4.1 The theory of self-efficacy

4.1.1 Explanation

4.1.2 The relation of self-efficacy and the theory of planned behavior

4.2 The concept of self-concept

4.2.1 Explanation

4.2.2 The relation of self-concept and the theory of planned behavior

4.3 Social identity theory

4.3.1 Explanation

4.3.2 The relation of social identity and the theory of planned behavior

### **5. The Correlation between the IBG and selected theories to declare human behavior before the background of consumers' disposal behavior**

5.1 IBG and the theory of self-efficacy

5.2 IBG and the concept of self-concept

5.3 IBG and the social identity theory

5.4 Implications

5.5 Limitations

### **6. Conclusion**

### **7. References**

## 7. Schedule

<b>Week</b>	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Content</b>
1-4	Literature research	Identification and evaluation of important literature and materials to adequately answer the research question.
5-11	Composing the introduction and the theoretical basics	Chapter 1, 2, 3
12-18	Composing the main part as well as the conclusion	Chapter 4, 5, 6
19-21	Revision	Revision with regards to contents and formal revision
22	Submission date	

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