

An Empirical Study of the Relationship between the Theory of Reasoned Action and Buyers Preference.

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ABSTRACT: *The success and failure of marketing strategies hinge on the ability of organisations to understand the purchasing psychology of consumers in the market. A lot of research has been done on the matter of buyer's preference, but very few studies have factored in the buyer's attitudes, subjective norms and motivation as factors that affect buyer's preference. These variables come together under the Theory of Reasoned Action by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen. The objective of this study investigated if preferences exist in buyer's choices of products, and if so why these preferences exist. This study specifically investigated the purchase of mobile phones, whose brands offered near same values and prices. Data on buyer preferences was sourced from 100 respondents through the use of a questionnaires. The data was analysed on SPSS 23 using Kendall's Tau correlation to determine the relationship between buyer's preference and choice of product. The findings suggest that a relationship does exist between buyer's preference and choice of products and the reasons given for these preferences. The findings of the study have implications for organisations in the development of marketing and corporate strategies in enhancing competitive advantage and advances the body of knowledge in relation to the validity of the theory with respect to costumers from the Nigerian context. The marketing department of every organization should conduct analysis on the purchasing psychology of consumers in their industry and maximize it in order to influence their choice of product.*

KEYWORDS: *Attitudes, Behavioural Patterns, Motivation, Purchasing Power, Subjective Norms*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The ability of firms to understand and influence the psychology of their customers is what determinesthe long run future of such firms. A number of theories and assumptions have been propounded by way of addressing issues around the psychology of buyer's, from the perspective of the dimensions of rationality and irrationality.

One of such theories is the theory of reasoned action, as expounded by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975). This theory has been employed by many inexplaining the decision making processes of individuals when dealing with alternatives. It brings to play constructs like attitudes and subjective norms as well the underlying assumption of there being a motive at play.

The theory of reasoned action has been applied to studies on ethical behaviour, coupon usage, brand loyalty, social commitment, behavioural adoption in the use of condoms to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS as well as road safety (Paul, Modi, & Patel, 2016) (Zarzuela & Anton, 2015) (Shimp & Kavas, 1984) (Chang, 1998) (Vallerand, Deshaies, Cuerrier, Pelletier, & Mongeau, 1992) (Fishbein & Middlestadt, Using the Theory of Reasoned Action as a Framework for Understanding and Changing AIDS-related Behaviors, 1989) (Ha C. , 1998). Although it had been used to try and address brand loyalty, it had not been used to address the initial questions firms ask before seeking brand loyalty; why are our customers our customers?It is this gap therefore that this paper seeks to address, amongst other things.

According to Peter Drucker (2008) the first goal of every firm is not to make a profit but to make a customer, and customers do not buy a product but the satisfaction derived from the product. So as a firm in a competitive market, identifying the driving forces behind the decisions taken by consumers who buy your goods or services instead of a substitute good or service is very important in order to not just increase your market share but also to retain the present customer base that has been established and to boost brand loyalty by maintaining the favourable policies that made the customers, customers in the first place.

The theory of reasoned action has been viewed by many as a theory of persuasion. For the purpose of this study an additional construct which shall be added to further buttress and give better clarity to the subject matter. Looking at the theory of planned behaviour which was an expansion on the theory of reasoned action, we shall be adding perceived behavioural control to our constructs to improve on the predictive power of the theory of reasoned action.

Understanding the relationship between the theory and buyer's preference can be key to unlocking consumer psychology which would go a long way in the development of more innovative marketing strategies and improve the levels of competition in the market place.

II. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The main objective of this study was to find if there was a relationship between the theory of reasoned action and buyer's preference when selecting between substitute products of replica value. However, the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the relationship between Attitudes and Buyer Preference when selecting between substitute products of replica value
2. To examine the relationship between Subjective Norms and Buyer Preference when selecting between substitute products of replica value
3. To ascertain the relationship between Perceived Behavioural Control and Buyer Preference when selecting between substitute products of replica value

III. HYPOTHESIS

H₀₁. There is no relationship between attitudes and buyer's preference when buying a mobile phone.

H₀₂. There is no relationship between subjective norms and buyer's preference when buying mobile phone.

H₀₃. There is no relationship between perceived behavioural control and buyer's preference when buying a mobile phone.

IV. SCOPE OF STUDY

This study focused on mobile phone brands and buyer's preference considering and analysing responses from 100 respondents consisting of undergraduates, postgraduates, engineers, educationists, doctors and other occupational fields. The study seeks to know if there is any relationship between the theory of reasoned action and buyer's preference when choosing between mobile phone brands. The questionnaires were distributed in Covenant university, Covenant University was chosen because of its rich diversity of its students, teaching and non-teaching staff, the university has a fully operational health centre with an on the ground medical team as well as its own power, water and ICT stations with engineers on ground around the clock.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Reasoned Action

The Purpose of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) work in developing the Theory of Reasoned Action was to explain customer behaviour intentions. The theory was initially developed and aimed at predicting intentions to take reasoned action in ordinary life scenarios, such as the use of birth control pills (Paul, Modi, & Patel, 2016).

The Theory hypothesizes that a person's intention to carry out a certain behaviour is what determines that behaviour, intentions are indicators of how much effort would be put in, in order to perform that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) The measure of behavioural intention will predict the execution of any voluntary behaviour, unless the intention changes before execution or unless the intention measure does not measure up to the criterion in terms of action, target, context, time-frame and/or specificity (Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1998). Therefore, the individual's attitude towards the behaviour and subjective norms of the society the individual finds himself in would determine intention.

Attitudes

In psychology attitude is seen as a construct, a mental or emotion substance that exists in or better explains a person (Perloff, 2016), Attitudes towards a behaviour can be defined as "a person's general feeling of favourableness or unfavourableness for that behaviour" (Ajzen & Fishbein, Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior, 1980). Based on the functional theory of attitude by Katz (1960) we have come to understand that attitudes facilitate social behaviour and they exist to fulfil different functions.

Some of the functions include:

Utilitarian function: A person will develop some attitudes towards products or service simply on the basis of if these products or services provide satisfaction or discomfort. This function theorizes that a person should have a positive attitude towards stimuli that indicate straightforward benefits (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006).

Value-express function: A person should gain satisfaction expressing attitudes that reflect his personal values and to his notion of self (Katz, 1960). The personality trait of self-monitoring has been used as an indirect construct to measure this function by Snyder and Debono in 1985 which was further reflected on by (Maio & Olson, 1994).

Ego-Defensive function: Under this function a person seeks to defend from accepting the basic truths about his or her self or the cold truths of his external environment, or as phrased by Lapinski and Boster (2001) it is protecting one's self-concept from counter attitudinal messages about the self.

Knowledge function: The thought is that essentially having attitudes toward products, affairs, and so on can give a comforting feeling of comprehension and facilitate the task of making decisions (Shavitt, 1989).

Taking a deep look at attitudes it can be broken down into three major components, the cognitive, affective and behaviour components (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998). Under the ABC model of Attitudes which was developed by Eagly & Chaiken (1998), they defined the cognitive components as beliefs and individual has about an attitude object, affective components as the way an individual feels about an attitude object and behaviour component as the individual's intentions towards the attitude object. Other studies carried out by Spooncer (1992) and Schiffman & Kanuk (2004) support the above model, stating that attitudes are constructed around three components; the cognitive (beliefs) component, the affective (feelings) component and the conative (behaviour) component.

Subjective norms

Subjective norms were defined by Ajzen (1991) as the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour. They reveal the beliefs of persons on how they would be seen by their reference groups if they performed certain behaviour (Al-Swidi & Hafeez, 2014).

Under the theory of reasoned action, the relatedness of attitudes and subject norms have been critically examined, some studies finding it hard to draw out the differences between the two constructs (Miniard & Cohen, 1981) (Trafimow, Theory of Reasoned Action, 2009), while others argue that there is a significant path between attitudes and subjective norms leading to behaviour (Al-Swidi & Hafeez, 2014). McClelland (1965) in his acquired-needs theory proposed that individuals with higher need for affiliation tend to conform to the norms of the reference group. Studies have noted the positive relationship between subjective norms and intention (Dean, Raats, & Shepard, 2011) (Ha & Janda, 1984). In the three process theory, Kelmen (1958) suggested that the influence of subjective norms could be categorized into three factions: compliance, identification and internalization. Compliance is said to have happened when the individual accepts the influence because he hopes to gain a favourable reaction from another person or group of people, identification is said to have occurred when a person accepts the influence in order to establish or maintain a satisfying self-defining relationship with another person or group of people and internalization is said to happen when an individual accepts the influence due to the substance of the induced behaviour, its intrinsic rewards.

Perceived behavioural control

Perceived behavioural control is the extent to which an individual feels he has control over the outcome of an event. The theory of reasoned action could only predict the intention to perform a given behaviour, the underlying assumption being that the stronger the intention to engage in a behaviour the more likely its performance. However behavioural intention can only lead to behaviour if the behaviour is under the individuals will control (Ajzen, 1991). This was seen as a huge limitation to the theory, an individual may intend to carry out a particular behaviour but might not perform it because of lack of ability (Trafimow, Sheeran, Conner, & Finlay, 2002). According to Ajzen (1991) the performance of most behaviour depends to some degree on certain factors which are non-motivational such as the availability of resources and opportunity, these factors represent the individual's actual control to perform the behaviour (perceived behavioural control).

VI. METHODOLOGY

Study Population

The ideal sample population for this study are adults within the ages of 18 or above, the availability of minors with financial as well as legal capacity to partake in this study is difficult to come by. For this reason, adults are attributed greater ability to compare and evaluate the available choices and make a selection. Therefore, the target population for this study were the adult residents of Covenant University, they were selected using simple random sampling technique.

Measure

The study used measurement scales that have been validated in other studies (Paul, Modi, & Patel, 2016) (Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1998). A nominal scale type was used in this study from questions one (1), three (3) and four (4) under the demographic section of the questionnaire while for question two (2) an interval scale was used. For questions one (1) and three (3) under the usage section of the questionnaire a nominal scale was used while for questions two (2) an interval scale was used. An Ordinal scale was used to measure attitudes, the study used a six (6) item, five (5) point Likert type scale, to measure subjective norms a

four (4) item, five (5) point Likert type scale was used and to measure perceived behavioural control a three (3) item, five (5) point Likert type scale was used.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire was made up of a list of questions relating to the objectives and hypothesis to be verified to which the respondents were required to answer. The questionnaire is structured, based on five (5) sections, A, B, C, D and E. Section A consisted of four (4) questions on personal information of respondents, section B consisted of three (3) questions on usage of mobile brands, section C consisted of six (6) questions on attitudes, section D consisted of four (4) questions on subjective norms and section E consisted of three (3) questions on perceived behavioural control. Section B, C, D, E were all closed-ended questions using Likert scale.

Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected is going to be analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data analysis will be done both qualitatively and quantitatively. Analysis will also be done with the use of tables and frequencies.

VII. ANALYSIS OF DATA

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis of the study (*H₀*) was stated as, “there is no relationship between attitude and the buyer’s preference when buying a mobile phone” and the corresponding alternative hypothesis (*H₁*), was that, “there is relationship between attitude and the buyer’s preference when buying a mobile phone”. The result in table 1 shows that there is a relationship between attitude and the buyer’s preference when buying a mobile phone ($r=0.231, p<0.01$). Therefore, we do reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis of the study (*H₀*) was that “there is no relationship between subjective norm and the buyer’s preference when buying a mobile phone” and the corresponding alternative hypothesis (*H₁*) was that “there is relationship between subjective norm and the buyer’s preference when buying a mobile phone”. From Table 2, the correlation between subjective norm and the buyer’s preference when buying a mobile phone was found to be ($r=-.040, p>.05$). This leads to reject of the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis was stated as (*H₀*) that “there is no relationship between perceived behavioral control and the buyer’s preference when buying a mobile phone” and the corresponding alternative hypothesis (*H₁*) that “there is relationship between perceived behavioral control and the buyer’s preference when buying a mobile phone”. The result in Table 3 shows that “there is relationship between perceived behavioral control and the buyer’s preference when buying a mobile phone” ($r=.176^*, p<.05$). Therefore, this leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

CORRELATIONS			
		Preference	Attitude
Attitude	Kendall's tau_b	1	.231**
	Sig (2-tail)		.007
	N	100	100

Table 1: Kendall Dau correlation between Preference and Attitude

CORRELATIONS			
		Preference	Subjective Norm
Subjective Norm	Kendall's tau_b	1	.040
	Sig (2-tail)		.635
	N	100	100

Table 2: Kendall Dau correlation between Preference and Subjective Norm

CORRELATIONS			
		Preference	Perceived Behavioral Control
Perceived Behavioral Control	Kendall's tau_b	1	.176*
	Sig (2-tail)		.033
	N	100	100

Table 3: Kendall Dau correlation between Preference and Perceived Behavioral Control

Demographic Variables

Variable		Frequency	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	65	65
	Female	35	35
Age	20 and younger	27	27
	21-30 years	58	58
	31-40 years	11	11

	41-50 years	2	2
	50+ years	2	2
Education	Secondary school	9	9
	Undergraduate	34	34
	MSc/MBA	50	50
	PhD	7	7
Occupation	Student	68	68
	Education	8	8
	Information Technology	6	6
	Engineering	3	3
	Doctor	3	3
	Others	12	12

VIII. CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study aimed to draw out the link between the theory of reasoned action and buyer's preference, focusing on substitutes goods that have replica value across the spectrum of users. Studies of the theory have shown a strong correlation when examining alternatives and not non choice situations. The findings of the paper show that the theory can be used as a predictor for consumer actions when picking between alternatives, it showed a positive correlation between attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and buyer's preference.

The finding of this study has practical expressions on the marketing environment in today's world. With businesses searching for competitive advantage, the analysed data shows a rough thought process of the buyers of the mobile phonebrands in question. The information can further be analysed to show organizations marketing departments what areas more funds should be allocated to. This gives Pareto's 80/20 principle better expression, by helping companies identify the areas of maximum impact in their marketing strategies.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

For further study, it is recommended that research be carried out on this theory to validate its role in employee commitment and motivation. Seeing as the constructs of the theory can apply to both scenarios indicating the direction in which employee commitment and motivation would turn. It takes its bearing from the leanings of the employee's attitudes towards work and subjective norms at play in the organisation which depict the larger frame of the organizations culture and climate.

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