

Analysis of implementation intentions in healthy eating

Irene Vilà¹ 

Received: 22 June 2016 / Accepted: 21 July 2016
© Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg 2016

Abstract This is a summary of the author's PhD Thesis. The aim of this research is to promote healthy eating behaviours through the understanding of the consumer behaviour mechanisms underlying in healthy-eating diets. The study of the promotion of healthy eating habits is included in the social marketing domain and it seeks business, academic and social benefits.

Keywords Implementation intentions · Healthy eating · Meta-analysis

1 Review

Despite the increasing social interest in healthy eating, when studying the impact of this motivation on specific behaviours, there is a gap: although there are individuals motivated by healthy eating, they are not capable of consistently performing this behaviour or capable of sustainably perform this behaviour. Many researchers have studied this gap in order to offer solutions to promote healthy eating habits among population.

The studies included in this doctoral research are presented in five chapters. Chapter one presents the introduction to the problem statement and the justification as well as the interest of this research for health authorities, researchers, companies and consumers. Further, it presents the research objectives set for this PhD Thesis and the research methodologies adopted in conducting this research are presented.

Chapter two aims to review the literature related to motivational and volitional theories that study the intention-behaviour link. The conceptual framework of this research exhaustively reviews the psychological theories of consumer behaviour, including motivational models, goal models and the psychological intervention of

✉ Irene Vilà
ivila@icade.comillas.edu

¹ Department of Marketing, Comillas Pontifical University (ICADE), Alberto Aguilera 23, 28015 Madrid, Spain

implementation intentions. A systematic review of the existing literature of implementation intentions applied to healthy eating is presented, where results suggest that the effect on complex eating behaviours is smaller than on simple behaviours. However, these results are not conclusive enough.

To address this literature gap, two empirical analysis are conducted. Chapter three deals with the first empirical analysis, a meta-analysis on the existing literature that studies the effect of implementation intentions on a complex behaviour, fat intake reduction. The effect size found is considered small to medium, with a Cohen's d of .346. Moreover, three possible moderator variables that may influence the process are identified: sample type (healthy versus obese or with health problems individuals), number of behaviours (only fat intake versus fat intake plus other healthy behaviours), and initial training (received or not).

Chapter four includes the second empirical work conducted, an experiment aimed to assess the implementation intentions effect on another complex healthy eating behaviour, the increase of fibre intake. The moderating capacity of Initial Training variable is also analysed. After performing statistical analysis (ANCOVA and ANCOVA) and structural modelling tests (SEM), the results suggest an increase in fibre consumption in those groups that formulated implementation intentions and/or received an initial training. However, the results are not statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that implementation intentions effect is smaller in complex behaviours than in simple behaviours.

Chapter five presents the overview of the present research work conducted by discussing the major findings and conclusions based on the results obtained after fulfilment of the objectives of this research. Research contributions of this thesis are that implementation intentions have a smaller effect in complex behaviours than in simple behaviours; furthermore, there are three moderating variables (initial training, holistic healthy behaviours and previous health status) that can increase the effect size. Future research should be conducted to study in more depth these and similar variables that could have an effect in the process of implementation intentions on complex behaviours. Moreover, implications for policy makers and managers are presented: implementation intentions are an effective tool to promote healthy eating behaviours in society; when those behaviours are complex, the effect increases when combining implementation intentions with other elements such as initial training. This suggests that communication efforts from health authorities would be more effective if they include messages that integrate implementation intentions along with training. The last part reviews the limitations and suggestions for future research.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The author declares that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.