

Necessary but not sufficient: convergence of Theory of Planned Behaviour constructs is a condition for drug use intention

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Introduction

The theory of planned behaviour postulates independent and linear relationships between three constructs : attitude [ATT], subjective norm [SN], perceived behavioural control [PBC] and intention (Ajzen, 1991, p.188). Even if many studies have shown that a linear model is appropriate for intention that are normally distributed among participants, it may not be the case for intentions that are asymmetrical. If intention of drug consumption has an asymmetrical distribution, with a minority of people willing to do it at different strengths, and the majority not willing to do it, are linear models appropriate to predict this category of behaviour? Rather, asymmetrical distributions of constructs suggests a **ON-OFF mechanism of intention formation, for which a conditional model could be a better approach**. In this study we hypothesized that a conditional model would better predict the intention that have asymmetrical distribution: the intention is positive under condition that the three constructs are both positive. In other words, a high/favourable score on each of the three constructs will be a boundary condition for having the intention, as a code for a lock.

ATT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
SN	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
PBC	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
INTENTION TO USE DRUG							

What has been done

We analysed data from a quantitative survey on cannabis and cocaine (N=6126, aged between 15-35 mainly). Attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control and intention were measured for cannabis use and cocaine use. Each predictor was estimated with multiple items, alpha ranged from .67 to .95.

As expected, distribution of the TPB constructs were asymmetrical, therefore attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control were dichotomized and considered positive when the subject scored above the median. Intention was considered positive when the composite score was above one on a 7-point scale. We compared intention to smoke cannabis and use cocaine for subjects with 1, 2, or 3 positive predictors of intention (ATT, SN, PBC).

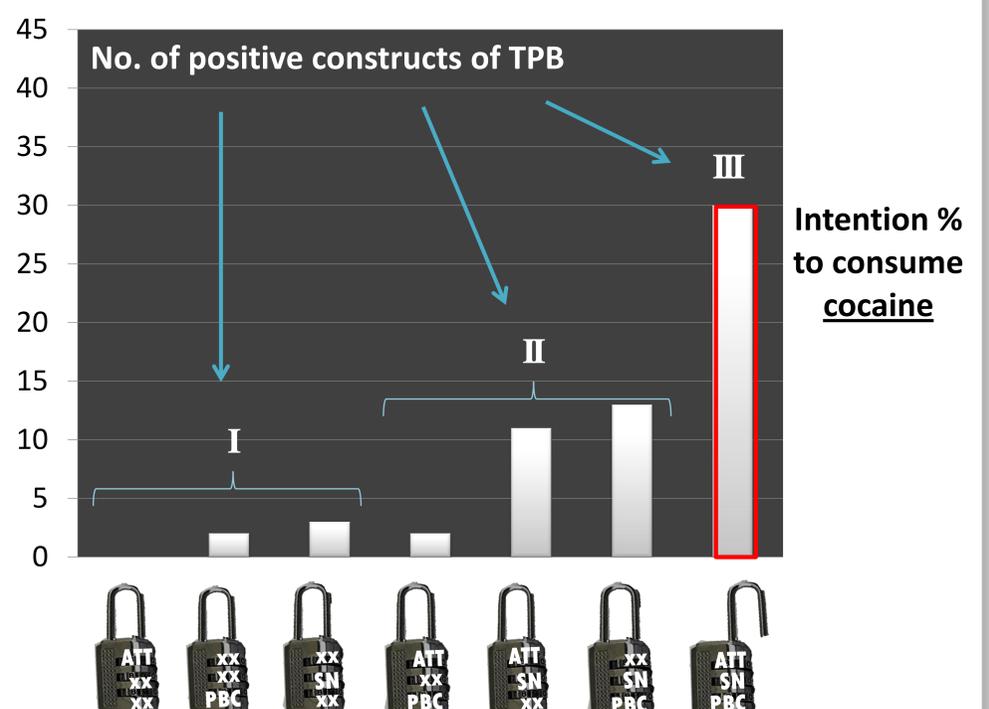
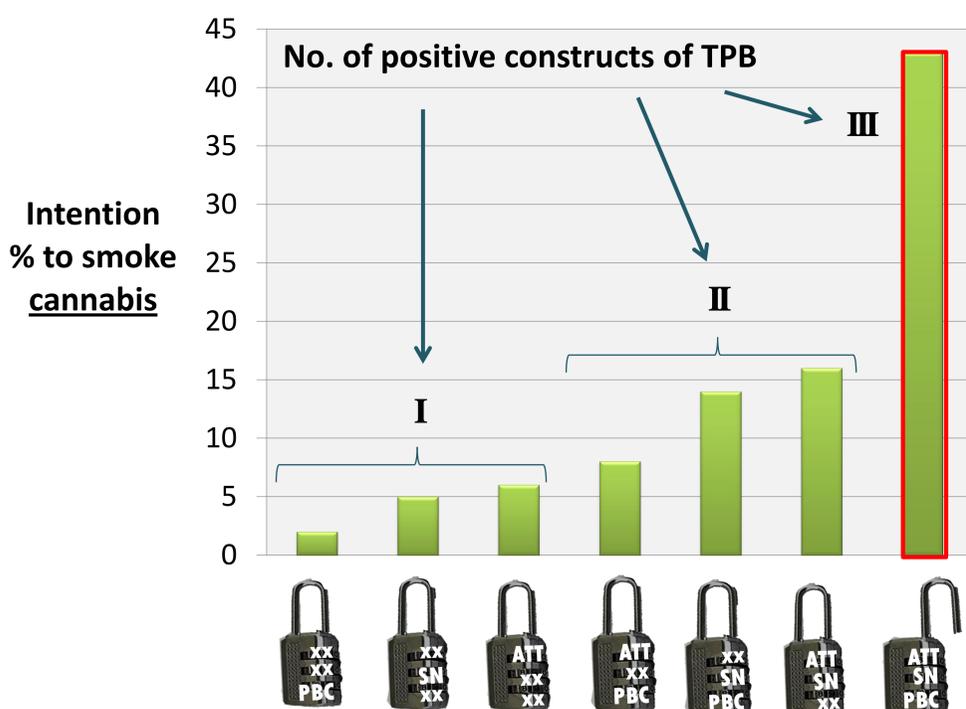
Results

Results show a ON-OFF rather than linear pattern :

When the three constructs are positive (28% of the sample), the percentage of intention to smoke cannabis rises to 43%, compared to less than 16% when two or less constructs are positive.

Similar patterns are observed with cocaine: 30% have the intention to use cocaine (9% of the sample) compared to maximum 13% when two or less constructs are positive.

The results clearly show that when the three predictors are both above the threshold, the intention to use drug is boosted.



Conclusion

Our results are compatible with the idea that for some categories of behaviours, rather than obeying an additive relationship with predictors, intention is triggered under the condition that attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control are both above a threshold. More research is needed to test if this effect is specific to drug consumption or could be extended to other behaviours with an asymmetrical distribution (eg. dieting/fasting), and if it is not present when the behaviour has a normal distribution (eg. compliance with traffic rules). The effect on behaviour, beyond intention, should also be examined (differences in acting out).