

Expectancy-value Theory

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Expectancy-value theory was originally created in order to explain and predict individual's attitudes toward objects and actions. Originally the work of psychologist Martin Fishbein, the theory states that attitudes are developed and modified based on assessments about beliefs and values. Primarily, the theory attempts to determine the mental calculations that take place in attitude development. Expectancy-value theory has been used to develop other theories and is still utilized today in numerous fields of study.

History

Dr. Martin Fishbein is credited with developing the expectancy-value theory (EVT) in the early to mid-1970s. It is sometimes referred to as Fishbein's expectancy-value theory or simply expectancy-value model. The primary work typically cited by scholars referring to EVT is Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen's 1975 book called *Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research*. The seed work of EVT can be seen in Fishbein's doctoral dissertation, *A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation of the Interrelation between Belief about an Object and the Attitude toward that Object* (1961, UCLA) and two subsequent articles in 1962 and 1963 in the journal *Human Relations*. Fishbein's work drew on the writings of researchers such as Ward Edwards, Milton J. Rosenberg, Edward Tolman, and John B. Watson.

Concepts

EVT has three basic components. First, individuals respond to novel information about an item or action by developing a belief about the item or action. If a belief already exists, it can and most likely will be modified by new information. Second, individuals assign a value to each attribute that a belief is based on. Third, an expectation is created or modified based on the result of a calculation based on beliefs and values. For example, a student finds out that a professor has a reputation for being humorous. The student assigns a positive value to humor in the classroom, so the student has the expectation that their experience with the professor will be positive. When the student attends class and finds the professor humorous, the student calculates that it is a good class. EVT also states that the result of the calculation, often called the "attitude", stems from complex equations that contain many belief/values pairs. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) represented the theory with the following equation where attitudes (a) are a factorial function of beliefs (b) and values (v).

Current Usage

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Fishbein and Ajzen expanded expectancy-value theory into the theory of reasoned action (TRA). Later Ajzen posited the theory of planned behavior (TPB) in his book *Attitudes, Personality, and Behavior* (1988). Both TRA and TPB address predictive and

explanatory weaknesses with EVT and are still prominent theories in areas such as health communication research, marketing, and economics. Although not used as much since the early 1980s, EVT is still utilized in research within fields as diverse as audience research (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985) advertising (Shoham, Rose, & Kahle 1998; Smith & Vogt, 1995), child development (Watkinson, Dwyer, & Nielsen, 2005), education (Eklof, 2006; Ping, McBride, & Breune, 2006), health communication (Purvis Cooper, Burgoon, & Roter, 2001; Ludman & Curry, 1999), and organization communication (Westaby, 2002).

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