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The Role of Planned Behavior in Predicting Customer Orientation

1. Introduction

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Customer orientation is a key component of market orientation and an important driver for firm performance (Kirca et al. 2005). Companies can gain competitive advantage by focusing on customer satisfaction (Jeong et al. 2006). However, customer orientation is often not a priority for monopolies that are characterized by a lack of competition but the current situation is going to be a norm or as a culture in service providing. In these organizations, managers must consider different approaches to change employee behavior and build a culture that supports customer orientation. This should be done in a way that ensures both a focus on employee performance and the quality of services, which is especially important in the energy sector where organizations and companies provide vital services to customers. It also increases the living cost in Iran.

The distinctive characteristics of services compared to goods make it more difficult to evaluate the quality of services and it is not easily definable, in its conventional form, for

the companies which have no direct contact with customers such as energy providers (Ardabili et al. 2012). This requires the use of appropriate tools to evaluate the quality of an intangible product (Osinski et al. 2012). In general, most definitions of service quality are customer-centered and are measured based on customer perceptions of services (Sahney et al. 2004). Customer perception is in part influenced by the behavior of the service provider and its marketing tactics (Eskandari et al. 2017), which is linked to their behavioral intention. The present research investigated the role of planned behavior in predicting customer orientation in the Iranian gas industry.

2.Theoretical Framework

2.1.Customer Orientation

According to Levitt (1960), “the view that an industry is a customer-satisfying process, not a goods-producing process, is vital for all businessmen to understand.” Customer orientation requires a customer-focused business culture that promotes an understanding of the business the organization operates in and what the customers value (Bennett and Cooper, 1979). Organizations that have a customer orientation strategy direct their internal efforts towards creating superior value for customers (Slater and Narver, 1998). Over the last 80 years, the terms “customer orientation”, the marketing concept “customer-led” and “market orientation” have been used interchangeably in practice (Brady and Cronin, 2001), but customer orientation is conceptually different from the other constructs (Duffy et al. 2020). Organizations should not only think about what they produce, but also consider what value that can provide to customers. In this way, customer orientation can be viewed as an extension of the marketing concept (Kankam-Kwarteng et al. 2019). Customer-led organizations are similar to those that adopt a customer orientation strategy as they view the customer as central to the organization’s activities, and thus focus on understanding the customers’ wishes and developing products and services that meet their wishes and needs (Slater and Narver, 1999).

Customer orientation refers to the willingness of employees to identify and satisfy the needs of their customers (Blocker, 2011). Brown et al. (2002) define this construct as “an employee’s tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context”. They propose two dimensions for customer orientation in a service setting: (1) the needs dimension, which refers to employees’ beliefs about their ability to meet the needs of the customer; and (2) the enjoyment

dimension, which refers to the degree to which an employee enjoys interacting with and serving customers (Brown et al. 2002). Donovan et al. (2004) develop a four-dimensional model of customer orientation for service industries: (1) pampering customers; (2) reading customers' needs; (3) developing a personal relationship with customers; and (4) delivering quality service to solve customers' problems (Donovan et al. 2004). Based on empirical evidence from the UK financial services industry, Egan and Shipley (1995) develop a model of customer orientation consisting of seven dimensions: service systems, customer contact, image/reputation, service delivery, customers' performance, communications, and customer base.

2.2.Theory of Planned Behavior

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is one of the most popular theories for understanding and predicting human behavior. Its popularity is manifested in the number of citations that contain the keyword "theory of planned behavior", which has increased from 510 in 1985-2000, to 5,830 in 2001-2010, and to 17,900 in 2011-2018 (Madden et al. 1992; Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Along with Self efficacy which is works in close relationship of work control and decision-making styles (Ajzen, 2002; Narangerel and Semerci, 2020) TPB is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA), but in addition to attitudes and subjective norms, it also considers perceived behavioral control (PCB) as an additional dimension, which facilitates predicting individual behavior in certain cases (Armitage and Conner, 2001; Ajzen, 2002) Perceived behavioral control consists of a set of control beliefs and their perceived power, which facilitate or inhibit the performance of a behavior) (Ajzen, 2001) in all organizations. For example, Ardabili (2021) suggested in the conceptual framework to explore the leadership effects of TPB in international organizations due to the importance of the TPB in multicultural organizations for effectiveness of the leadership.

The three determinants of intention under the TPB are as follows (Ajzen, 1991):

1. *Attitude toward behavior*: the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question. It reflects the individual's belief about a behavior and its consequences. Attitudes are residues of past experience and are determined by two components: behavioral beliefs and evaluation of behavioral outcomes.
2. *Subjective norms*: the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior. The strength of this dimension depends on two components: normative beliefs and the person's motivation to comply.

3. *Perceived behavioral control*: the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. The rationale behind the addition of this dimension is that it allows for prediction of behaviors that are not under complete volitional control. indicates that a person's motivation is influenced by how he perceives the level of difficulty or ease of displaying a particular behavior. If someone has strong control beliefs about existing factors that will facilitate a behavior, then the person has a high perception to be able to control a behavior. Conversely, a person will have a low perception in controlling a behavior if he has strong control beliefs about factors that hinder behavior. This perception can be the result of past experience, anticipation of future events, and attitudes influenced by the norms of the individual's environment. Perceived behavioral control is determined by two factors: control belief and perceived power.

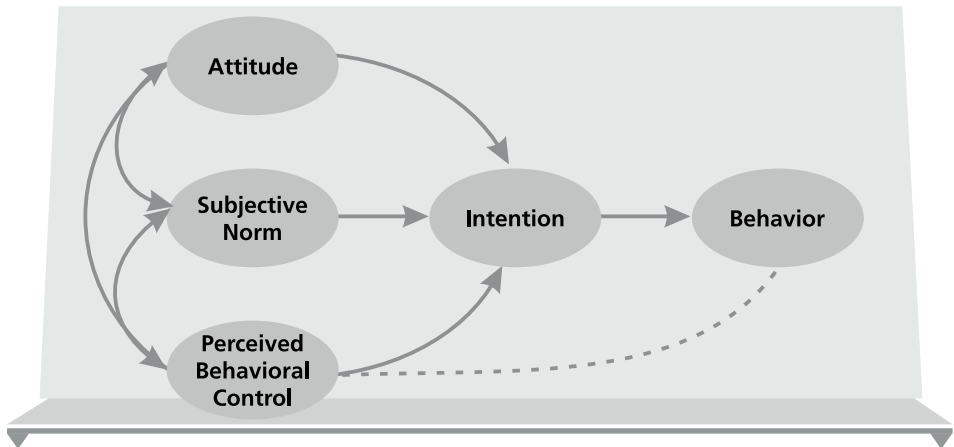


Figure 1. Theory of planned behavior

Source: Ajzen, 1991

As shown in figure 1, consumer behavior can be predicted from their intention, which in turn is influenced by their perception of social pressure, attitudes, and their ability to control the situation.

According to the TPB, intention is the most proximal determinant of behavior. Behavioral intentions are an indication of the extent to which an individual is willing to perform a specific behavior, while the behavior is something that the

individual is currently performing. According to TPB, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norms related to a specific behavior and the greater the perceived behavioral control, the more likely it is that the individual will have an intention to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 2001).

Although the original TPB specification is useful (Pérez and Egea, 2019), additional predictors can be added to it provided that they can explain a significant proportion of the variance in intention. In fact, the original TPB model has been criticized for its predictive power, mainly due to insufficient number of variables and the inability of the model to explain the reasons behind certain behaviors. As a result, many analysts to add other explanatory variables to the model that have been shown to explain human behavior, including past behavior, ethical norms, perceived moral obligation, perception of ease of use, capacity to reject, etc. (Tommasetti et al. 2018).

The TPB has been widely used to examine the factors driving individual behavior in various areas such as health care (Menozzi et al. 2015; Manyapelo et al. 2017), consumption (Moons and De Pelsmacker, 2015; Qi and Ploeger, 2019), and blood, organ and body donation intentions (Chen, 2017; Hyde et al. 2013; Delaney and White, 2015) among others (Pérez and Egea, 2019) and even about consumption of the agricultural products with purified wastewater (Ahmadi et al., 2021)

Customer orientation is another area where TPB can be used to predict behavior. Customer orientation is part of the broader construct of service quality, which is directly influenced by the human factor (Korunka et al. 2007) and is a key driver of customer satisfaction, especially in service organizations (Ro and Chen, 2011). Listening to customers' issues and concerns and meeting their needs is crucial to the success of organizations.

In Iran, many studies have used the TPB to examine different behaviors such as green purchasing (Zand-Hessami and Parvinchi, 2014; Abbasi et al. 2019), safe-driving (Ashoogh et al. 2013), online shopping (Akhavan Kharrazian and Mesbahi Jahromi, 2014), substance abuse (Basharian et al. 2012), and whistleblowing (Sarikhani et al. 2019). However, to our knowledge, there have been no studies that use the TPB to predict customer orientation. Given that the gas industry is a dynamic industry that provides vital services to the public, it is interesting to apply the TPB to customer orientation in this sector. As intention affects consumer behavior, it is possible to infer that customer orientation of employees can be improved through changes in attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Therefore, the present research investigates the role of planned behavior in predicting customer orientation in the Iranian gas industry.

Therefore, the goal of the study is to identify the planned behavior categories which are related to the consumer orientation behavior. To answer the main question we have three hypotheses as follows:

H₁: Which categories of attitude toward behavior are related to the customer orientation behavior.

H₂: Which categories of Subjective behavior are related to the customer orientation behavior

H₃: Which categories of Perceived behavioral control are related to the customer orientation behavior

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were a mix of academic experts and employees in order to analyze planned behavior in relation to customer orientation in the gas industry and to explore its categories. 17 participants were selected between March 2021 and June 2021 to provide different perspectives on the issues in question. The participants were the most experienced individuals in their group according to Ardabil Gas Company management report. Among the participants, 91% were male, with 53% aged between 30-40 years and 47% above 41 years of age.

3.2. Interview Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to facilitate a free flow of ideas and generate information-rich data (Dapkus, 1985) in order to understand the meanings conveyed in communications between employee and customers in organizations. The participants were ensured about anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality of the interviews.

Two main areas were covered in the interview: What is your opinion about customer-orientation in the gas industry? Describe how the company plans to promote customer orientation as it relates to planned behavior?

Responses were divided into three categories:

1. Employees' attitudes regarding service delivery and marketing (e.g., service quality, customer satisfaction, ...).
2. Employees' subjective norms regarding customer orientation.
3. Customer orientation and service quality.

The interviews were conducted during 10 days with tape recording and in different locations at the request of the respondents. Interviews had no time limit

to allow respondents to express their opinions easily and to not limit the range of topics that are discussed. This strategy was adopted to obtain a wide range of responses. Following the interviews, data were analyzed in three stages. First, the recordings were transcribed using conversation analysis (CA) in order to identify potential themes and develop a formal codebook. In the second stage, the research team used a sample text to ensure intercoder reliability for every theme in the codebook. After ensuring adequate intercoder reliability, the codebook was systematically applied to the entire text in the final stage (Kurasaki, 2000).

Stage 1. Codebook Development.

In this research, grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) was used to identify potential themes and develop a codebook. Grounded theory has been extensively used in qualitative research on various fields, from psychology to information science, education, health care, and management and organization. In the domain of qualitative research, the original text has assumed canonical status (Locke, 2001).

Stage 2. Intercoder Reliability.

At this stage, four individuals, including the two interviewers, were trained for coding. After completing the code definitions, the coders were asked to independently code the same sample text to assess their consistency in text segmentation and code application. In order to test their understanding of each code, each coder coded the same parts of six randomly selected interviews for all 34 code categories. The coding behavior of the coders was compared in order to evaluate the measures of intercoder reliability. Following Kurasaki (2000), the four coders were calibrated to an agreed level of 0.70 based on the data presented during the training phase.

The coders were also instructed to independently define text units and assign numeric codes to each unit. A text unit is a unit of conversation representing a single message (McFadden, Seidman, & Rappaport, 1992), a distinguishing feature (Pennartz, 1986), or a change of subject (Dapkus, 1985).

73 codes were extracted in the open coding stage. Then, these were categorized into 55 codes and six themes based on their similarities and differences.

Below is an excerpt from an interview with one of the nurses:

"In my opinion, in addition to the above, there are other factors that determine intention and behavior. One of these is the experience of employees and managers. When people have a lot of experience, they can feel more comfortable to perform the behavior in question. On the other hand, ethical values and organizational commitment

can also be a strong predictor of behavior. A person with these values will have greater integrity and responsibility. Also, knowledge or education of individuals can increase behavioral intention, because more knowledge means greater awareness, which can lead to intentional behavior”.

“In my opinion, by using capable and skilled managers, the Iranian Gas Company can promote desirable behaviors and improve functions along with the planned behavior model to advance organizational goals and increase the efficiency of the company. Performance that is based on planned behavior can lead to increased efficiency”.

4. Results

The initial six transcripts were annotated. Annotations are the notes that are written on the margins of a transcript with regard to the interview content. A verbatim list of all annotations was compiled. The annotations on this list were sorted into categories and subcategories by the two members of the research team. Redundancies were removed and an initial hierarchy of thematic categories was created. 110 thematic categories were identified through this consolidation step.

Descriptive labels were developed the 110 thematic categories, representing the intended meaning of each category. Next, these categories were operationalized and individual reports were generated for each theme in order to examine the taxonomy for possible redundancies that were missed during the earlier sorting step (Kurasaki, 2000). Several redundancies were observed and, after additional sorting, 73 were selected for further analysis (table 1).

A decimal numbering system was applied to ensure that numerical digits represent different levels of the themes. For example, all themes designated with the numeric code “1.x” were related to attitude toward behavior. The digit following the decimal distinguishes different types of attitude toward behavior in no specific order. The numeric codes assigned to the themes are provided in table 1.

The codebook was further refined when training the two research assistants as coders. In the training session, the coders became familiar with code definitions, applications of the themes, and the coding procedure (Kurasaki, 2000). At the request of the coders, two revisions were made to the extracted codes. First, codes 2.3, 2.6, 2.8, 2.9, 4.7, 4.9, 5.7, 5.12, 6.5, 6.12, and 6.13 were combined with other codes (table 1) as it would better reflect their intended meaning. Secondly, codes 1.3, 5.16, 5.17, 6.2, 6.18, and 6.19 were removed from the codebook.

To calculate intercoder agreement, five interviews were randomly selected. The coders individually reviewed and coded all five interviews. Then,

segments where the coders agreed on were given a score of 1, and segments with no agreement were given a score of 0. This step can highlight any lack of consistency in the application of codes for each segment (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein, 1998). Intercoder agreement results are shown in table 1. The results indicate that agreement across 55 themes varies between 0.76 to 1 with an average of 0.93.

Table 1. Coding and intercoder agreement

Themes	Numeric Code	Agreement	Themes	Numeric Code	Agreement
Utility of the behavior	1.1	1.00	Avoiding excuses at work	5.1	0.95
Effectiveness of the behavior	1.2	1.00	Keeping promises	5.2	0.88
Impact of the behavior	1.3	Removed	Solving problems	5.3	0.79
Pleasantness of the behavior	1.4	1.00	Addressing behavioral problems	5.4	0.85
Feeling good or bad about the behavior	1.5	0.95	Truthfulness	5.5	1.00
Positive behavior	1.6	0.95	Honesty in words and actions	5.6	1.00
Negative behavior	1.7	0.95	Integrity	5.7	Combined with 5.6
Friends' acceptance or approval of the behavior	2.1	1.00	Fairness	5.8	1.00
Friends' views about the behavior	2.2	1.00	Being good at keeping secrets	5.9	1.00
The importance of friends' opinions about behavior	2.3	Combined with 2.2	Trustworthiness	5.10	1.00
Pressure from the family to perform or not perform the behavior	2.4	1.00	Good character	5.11	1.00

Persuasion and encouragement by the family	2.5	0.98	Having moral virtues	5.12	Combined with 5.11
Positive or negative view of the family about the behavior	2.6	Combined with 2.4	Philanthropy	5.13	0.95
The importance of society's view of the behavior	2.7	1.00	Patience	5.14	0.98
Society's acceptance or rejection of the behavior	2.8	Combined with 2.7	Tolerance	5.15	0.86
Pleasantness or unpleasantness of the behavior from society's perspective	2.9	Combined with 2.7	Open-mindedness	5.16	Removed
Alignment of the behavior with the society's beliefs and customs	2.10	0.98	Lenience	5.17	Removed
Similar experiences with the behavior	3.1	0.95	Goal setting	6.1	1.00
Unsuccessful experience with the desired behavior	3.2	0.95	Changes in goals and objectives	6.2	Removed
Pleasant or successful experience with the behavior	3.3	0.95	Having an individual vision for work	6.3	0.92
Predicting the outcome of the behavior	3.4	1.00	Long-term goal setting	6.4	0.88
The importance of behavior outcome	3.5	1.00	Identification of horizons	6.5	Combined with 6.3
Expecting the behavior to be successful	3.6	1.00	Order in the workplace	6.6	0.89
Expecting the behavior to be unsuccessful	3.7	0.95	Proper placement of objects	6.7	0.78

Laws governing the society	3.8	0.88	Improve productivity by not wasting time searching for items	6.8	Removed
Rules governing the organization	3.9	0.95	Placing everything in its specific place	6.9	0.86
Environmental attitudes	3.10	0.85	Returning everything to its specific place	6.10	0.92
Having the most up-to-date topics	4.1	0.88	Standardization of archives	6.11	0.80
Having new knowledge	4.2	1.00	Determining the location of objects	6.12	Combined with 6.9
Having high general information	4.3	0.82	Maintaining order in storage on the shelves and tables	6.13	Combined with 6.9
Having the knowledge of technology	4.4	0.92	Clear definition of responsibilities and duties at work	6.14	0.79
Behavioral knowledge	4.5	1.00	Identifying and fixing deficiencies and breakdowns	6.15	0.76
Expertise and expertise in the field of desired behavior	4.6	1.00	Identification of pollution sources	6.16	0.82
Scientific awareness of the type of behavior	4.7	Combined with 4.5	Cleaning the workplace	6.17	0.95
Having a scientific education	4.8	0.95	Dust collection and air pollution control	6.18	Removed
Having a level of academic education	4.9	Combined with 4.8	Cleaning blind spots	6.19	Removed
Having academic fields related to behavior	4.10	0.88			

Source: own study

Stage 3. Applying the Codebook Systematically to the Data.

Descriptive labels were developed to reflect the intended meaning of codes, perform thematic search of the data, and basic themes for each constructs. Table 2 shows the global theme, the organizing themes at two levels, and the basic themes or concepts in prediction of customer orientation through planned behavior. As can be seen, the first-level organizing themes (main categories) include six themes and the second-level organizing themes (subcategories) include 18 themes related to planned behavior.

Table 2. Descriptive labels of constructs and codes

Global Theme	First-level Organizing Themes	Second-level Organizing Themes	Basic Themes
Planned Behavior	Attitude toward behavior	Favorable behavior	Beneficial behavior, effective behavior
		Pleasant behavior	Enjoyable behavior, feeling good about the behavior
		Behavior appraisal	Positive appraisal, negative appraisal
	Subjective norm	Peer pressure	Approval or disapproval of peers, positive or negative attitude of peers, placing importance on views of peers
		Family pressure	Approval or disapproval of family members, encouragement or discouragement by family members, positive or negative attitude of family members
		Social pressure	Approval or disapproval of the society, positive or negative attitude of the society, placing importance on the view of the society, alignment of the behavior with social beliefs and norms
	Perceived behavioral control	Past experience	Having had similar experiences in the past, successful or unsuccessful experience with the behavior, pleasant or unpleasant experience with the behavior
		Anticipation of future events	Anticipating the outcome of behavior, importance of the outcome of the work, expecting successful behavior, expecting unsuccessful behavior
		Environmental norms	Laws governing the society, laws governing the organization, environmental attitudes

Planned Behavior	Knowledge	Up-to-date knowledge	Being up-to-date, having the latest knowledge, having general knowledge, tech-savvy
		Behavior-related knowledge	Behavior-related knowledge, skills and expertise, scientific knowledge of the type of behavior
		Education	Academic education, high-level academic degree, behavior-related education
	Ethical norms	Responsibility	Avoiding excuses at work, keeping promises, solving problems, solving behavioral problems of employees
		Ethical principles	Veracity, honesty, integrity, fairness, confidentiality, trustworthiness, good character, moral virtues, benevolence
		Resilience	Patience, endurance tolerance, fortitude
	Discipline	Organization	Formulating goals, changing goals and objectives, developing a personal vision for work, setting long-term goals, identifying horizons
		Order	Order in the workplace, proper placement of objects, improving productivity by eliminating wasted time from searching for objects, placing everything in its place, returning everything to its place, standardizing archiving procedures, determining the position of objects, maintain order in equipment and storage items
		Streamlining	Defining responsibilities and tasks in the workplace, identifying and eliminating deficiencies and breakdowns, identifying sources of debris, maintaining a clean workplace, removing dust and debris, cleaning hidden areas

Source: own study

The organizing theme “attitude towards behavior” consists of 3 subthemes: favorable behavior, pleasant behavior, and behavioral appraisal. That is, the intention to perform a specific behavior is influenced by the individual’s appraisal of how favorable and it is. Attitude towards behavior is one of the most important factors in predicting customer behavior. In other words, the more managers and employees consider customer orientation to be favorable, the more likely they are to engage in such behavior.

The organizing theme “subjective norms” consists of 3 subthemes: peer pressure, family pressure, and social pressure. That is, the intention to perform a specific behavior is influenced by pressures from peers, family, and the society. In a company or organization, employees are more likely to be customer-oriented if the leadership and management approves of this behavior. The organizing theme “perceived behavioral control” consists of 3 subthemes: past experience, anticipation of future events, and environmental norms. That is, the intention to perform a specific behavior is influenced by similar experiences in the past, future predictions, and environmental or conventional norms. The organizing theme “knowledge” consists of 3 subthemes: up-to-date knowledge, behavior-related knowledge, and education. That is, the intention to perform a specific behavior is influenced by whether the individual possesses the latest general

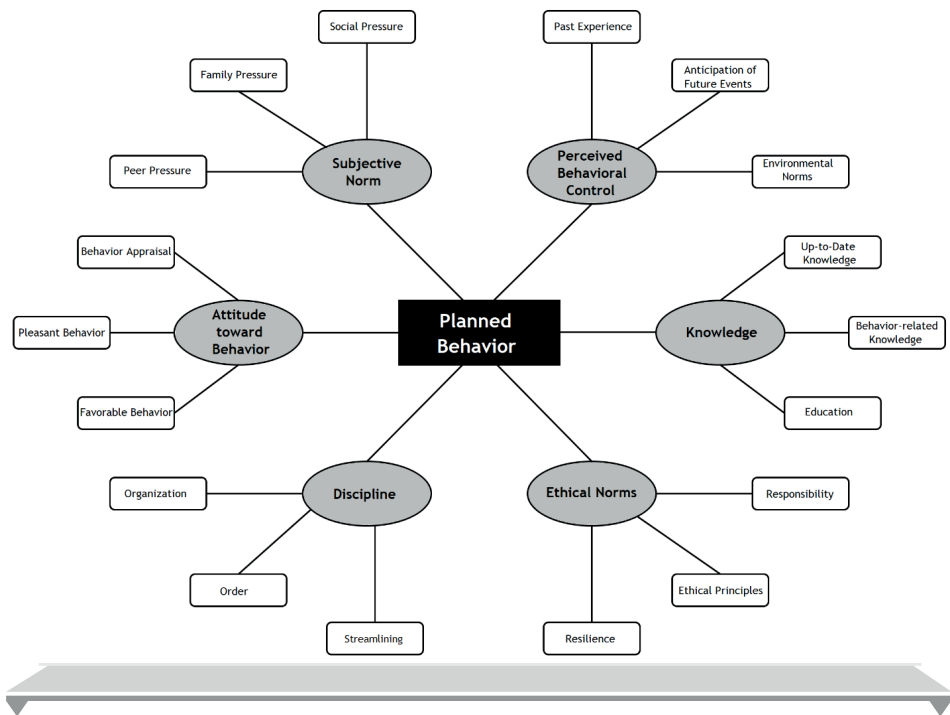


Figure 2. Dimensions of planned behavior

Source: own study

and scientific knowledge, knowledge related to the behavior in question, and relevant education. Therefore, customer orientation is significantly influenced by the organizational knowledge of the employees. In other words, high organizational knowledge is a predictor of customer orientation. The organizing theme “ethical norms” consists of 3 subthemes: responsibility, ethical principles, and resilience. That is, the intention to perform a specific behavior is influenced by the individual’s sense of responsibility, ethical principles, and resilience. Therefore, customer orientation occurs in organizations where the management is responsible, resilient, and uphold ethical principles. The organizing theme “discipline” consists of 3 subthemes: organization, order, and streamlining. That is, the intention to perform a specific behavior is influenced by the level of organization, order, and streamlining in the workplace. Therefore, the more disciplined the managers and employees of an organization, the more likely they are to engage in customer-oriented behaviors.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results showed that attitude towards behavior, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, knowledge, ethical norms, and discipline are key variables in predicting customer behavior, which are described in detail in the next section. As discussed in the findings section, six main themes and 18 subthemes were identified as determinants of planned behavior. The first determinant was “attitude toward behavior”. It refers to the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question and reflects the individual’s belief about the behavior and its consequences. Attitudes are influenced by past experience, behavioral beliefs, and evaluation of behavioral outcomes. Therefore, if there is a positive attitude to customer orientation in an organization, it is more likely that all the elements of the organization, including its top management, will put the needs of the customer ahead of their own needs.

The second determinant of planned behavior was subjective norms. It refers to the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior, and depends on two normative beliefs and the person’s motivation to comply. In other words, subjective norms are pressures from peers, family, and the society that affect an individual’s intention for performing a behavior. Their approval or disapproval of the behavior, their attitude toward it, and their possible encouragement or discouragement can affect individual behavior. Similarly, subjective norms can foster more attention to customer orientation in an organization. That

is because approval of this behavior by the leadership and management will likely permeate customer orientation in the entire organization.

The third determinant of planned behavior is perceived behavioral control. According to the theory of planned behavior, not all behaviors are under the volitional control of the individual. Thus, the theory of planned behavior has been developed as a means to predict these types of behaviors. This dimension is defined as the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior. If someone has strong control beliefs about existing factors that will facilitate a behavior, then the person has a high perception to be able to control a behavior. Conversely, a person will have a low perception in controlling a behavior if he has strong control beliefs about factors that hinder behavior. This perception can be the result of past experience, anticipation of future events, and attitudes influenced by the norms of the individual's environment (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). Therefore, the stronger the perceived behavioral control of managers and employees in terms of customer orientation, the more attention they will pay to customer needs and customer satisfaction. For example, response to calls and inquiries about Gas demand in winter or during the increasing the cost of charging needs managers to provide service with the discipline, and with ethical norms which are breakable in each encountering between employees and customers.

The fourth determinant identified for planned behavior was knowledge. An individual with up-to-date knowledge, knowledge related to the behavior in question, and relevant education is more likely to make the right decision whether or not to perform the behavior. In other words, managers and employees with greater knowledge can foster customer orientation in the organization. That is because knowledge brings awareness, and awareness guides the members of the organization in identifying customer needs and striving to meet them. Additionally, the knowledge about behaviors in organization and people behavior, would help employees to consider their weakness in response to customers' needs and also to find better ways to provide services.

Ethical norms were the fourth determinant of planned behavior. An individual with a sense of responsibility (e.g., avoiding excuses, showing commitment, and actively solving problems), ethical principles (e.g., honesty, integrity, fairness, trustworthiness, and benevolence), and resilience (patience, endurance tolerance, fortitude) can better decide whether or not to perform the behavior.

Discipline was the fifth determinant of planned behavior. Discipline refers to organization (e.g., setting goals, developing a vision, planning, identifying horizons), order (e.g., order in the workplace, proper placement of objects, im-

proving productivity by eliminating wasted time from searching for objects, standardized archiving procedures), and streamlining (e.g., defining responsibilities and tasks in the workplace, identifying and eliminating deficiencies and breakdowns, identifying sources of debris, removing dust and debris) and can influence individual behavior. The work discipline of managers and employees is an indicator of their attention to the needs and wishes of customers. That is because discipline in the workplace facilitates work processes, which leads to customer satisfaction. Therefore, having discipline can lead to increased customer-oriented behavior.

Based on the results of the present research, the following suggestions can be made in line with the theory of planned behavior:

1. Managers are advised to focus on both employee performance and service quality.
2. It is suggested that organizational functions be aligned with the overall strategy of the organization in order to pay attention to the needs of customers, commit to meeting customer needs, and improving customer satisfaction.
3. It is suggested that the position of customers in the Iranian Gas Company be transferred from the bottom of the customer pyramid to the top, that is, to put the needs of the customer over the needs of the business.
4. It is recommended to pay attention to improving service quality in the Iranian Gas Company and make every effort to increase customer satisfaction in all areas of service and support.

Summary

The Role of Planned Behavior in Predicting Customer Orientation

The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate the role of planned behavior in predicting customer orientation in the Iranian gas industry. The participants were 17 experts from the National Iranian Gas Company who were selected using purposive sampling and based on theoretical saturation. Data were collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews and were analyzed using thematic analysis and MAXQDA software. The results showed that attitude toward behavior (favorable behavior, pleasant behavior, behavior appraisal), subjective norms (peer pressure, family pressure, social pressure), perceived behavioral control (past experience, anticipation of future events, environmental norms), knowledge (up-to-date knowledge, behavior-related knowledge, education), ethical norms (responsibility, ethical principles,

resilience), and discipline (organization, order, streamlining) are important components in predicting customer orientation in the gas industry. The results can help managers in the energy sector to improve their customer orientation and performance through planned behavior.

Keywords: *Behavior Prediction; Planned Behavior; Customer Orientation; Gas Industry.*

JEL Codes: M12; M14; M31

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