This book explains how actions and inactions arise and change in social contexts, including social media and face-to-face communication. Its multidisciplinary perspective covers research from psychology, communication, public health, business studies, and environmental sciences. The reader can use this cutting-edge approach to design and interpret effects of behavioral change interventions as well as replicate the materials and methods implemented to study them. The author provides an organized set of principles that take the reader from the formation of attitudes and goals, to the structure of action and inaction. The book also reflects on how cognitive processes explain excesses of action while inaction persists elsewhere. This practical guide summarizes the best practices persuasion and behavioral interventions to promote changes in health, consumer, and social behaviors.

Dolores Albarracín is Professor of Psychology at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, USA, and a leading scholar of attitudes, communication, and behavioral change.
ACTION AND INACTION
IN A SOCIAL WORLD

Predicting and Changing Attitudes and Behavior

DOLORES ALBARRACÍN

University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
Este libro está dedicado a mis padres. A mi Padre, quien me ayudaba a escribir monografías cuando yo estaba en la escuela primaria y me alentó siempre. A mi Madre, quien fue mi modelo de pensamiento psicológico desde mi infancia.
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Preface

First and foremost, this book concerns my conceptualization of the cognitive processes underlying action and inaction dispositions and the implications of these dispositions for attitudes, persuasion, and behavior initiation and change. The theory encompasses the cognitive and motivational processes that arise from action and inaction goals as well as various information sources, including persuasive communications, past behavioral practice, experience, and other people. On the theoretical side, I propose action and inaction dispositions reflected in goals and mental representations, their contributions to attitudes and behaviors, and the mechanisms underlying the impact of persuasion and behavioral interventions. On the empirical side, I apply my theoretical principles to real-world problems and field interventions to change attitudes and behaviors. Up to this point, I have not had an opportunity to interweave these streams within my work. This book is motivated by this objective.

The book has other objectives as well:

1. The book analyzes the way in which general attitudes and general goals develop and their implications for future behavior and the success of persuasive messages and behavioral interventions. This research has not been covered in any previous volume.
2. The book describes different sequences of processes that are dependent on the type of information available at a time as well as the person’s processing ability and motivation to think about a behavior. My research has been important in elucidating these sequences, and this book integrates them and expands coverage to various other phenomena.
3. The book covers laboratory experiments, real-world research, surveys, and meta-analyses. This integration is a departure from the traditional social psychology monograph.
4. Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975, 1980, 2010) analysis of behavior prediction and change provided fundamental insights for our fields. However, in their approach, attitudes are a precursor of behavior. In contrast, this book incorporates reciprocal influences of behavior on key psychological variables (i.e., attitudes, intentions, and social norms) while also characterizing action/inaction goals, the influence of affect, and the involvement of behavioral procedures.

5. The book differentiates the initiation and change of attitudes and behavioral patterns, thus integrating proceduralization, goal activation, and the impact of prior attitudes on processing sequences.

6. The book presents my unique understanding, review, and research concerning how to interpret automatic effects of behavior, their conditions, and the varied psychological nature of intentionality.

7. The book covers the neglected role of language in attitudes, intentions, and behaviors in ways that are new and not previously researched in the field of attitudes.

8. The book connects my theoretical analysis to my own and others’ work on virtual experience, messaging, and the use of digital technology for behavioral change.

9. The book facilitates a deeper understanding of how my research has been conducted by tying the research hypotheses and findings to the methods through an extensive appendix of research materials, including questionnaires, messages, videos, meta-analytic coding sheets, messages developed in my laboratory, and individual difference measures created by my collaborators and me. I regularly receive emails asking for details and advice on how to design messages, develop measures, or conduct a meta-analysis. This book centralizes this methodological background in relation to my research findings.

My goal is to present an original conceptualization that integrates and defines interrelated issues from my own perspective. It follows the tradition of a monograph, which presents a point of view and draws connections to existing literatures. It is probably most similar to the following volumes:


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These books present the authors’ perspectives and yet are broad. Monographs are key to (a) draw attention to connections between literatures that run in parallel; (b) reach general conclusions; and, in this case, (c) provide an overarching framework. With these goals, monographs can move a field forward and stimulate new research.

My wish is that this book will be available for researchers who want to learn about the conceptualization I present. I read the above books many times, beginning in graduate school, and believe that other graduate students and researchers studying these issues will be interested in reading my volume. Applied researchers who typically cite and request my publications, including earlier ones, may also appreciate this original synthesis and organizing framework.

Secondarily, the book may also be used for instructional purposes in courses offered in psychology as well as applied disciplines like marketing, political psychology, public policy, health behavior, communication, and sports psychology, which are all fields with a high level of interest in attitudinal and behavioral change. At the undergraduate level, it may be appropriate for classes in the area of attitudes, persuasion, and behavior change. At the graduate level, this monograph could be included in specialized courses on attitudes and behaviors, probably supplemented with journal articles that present other perspectives in more detail. In addition, authors have often used their own volumes to train their research groups and teach specialized seminars. The 1975 and 2010 books by Ajzen and Fishbein are two such cases. I can see my volume serving the same goals in the future.

This volume has been inspired by a class I regularly teach on how attitudes and attitude theory can allow us to change behavior in the real world. This angle is reflected in the book’s connections between the framework I propose and my research on substantive social and health problems and interventions to mitigate them. There are 10 chapters, which, supplemented with readings, will be well suited for classes in universities with a quarter system (10 weeks) or in universities with a regular system that want to treat a particular topic in greater depth by adding journal articles. Three possible models are as follows:
More than 40 years have passed since Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen published *Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior*. Their 1975 volume was an outstanding presentation of a coherent framework about attitudes, how they are measured, how they change, how they predict behavior, and how they must be distinguished from beliefs, intentions, and behaviors. As the title of my book suggests, these concepts are as key today as they were back then. In addition, this book is inspired by contemporary problems with action excesses and the need to identify solutions to social and health problems.
I owe a debt of gratitude first and foremost to my graduate school advisors, Bob S. Wyer Jr. and Martin Fishbein. I was also greatly inspired by doctoral candidates and postdoctoral researchers who have worked with me over the years, in particular, G. Tarcan Kumkale, Laura R. Glasman, Allison N. Earl, Will Hart, Casey McCulloch, Ian Handley, Kenji Noguchi, Hong Li, Sally Chan, Justin Hepler, Melanie Tannenbaum, Duo Jiang, Jing Xu, Evan Weingarten, Jiaying Liu, Mina Kwon, Christopher Jones, Aashna Sunderrajan, Sophie Lohmann, Benjamin White, Wenhao Dai, Ozan Kuru, and Dom Stecula. I am also indebted to a number of collaborators, including Kathleen Hall-Jamieson, Joel B. Cohen, Blair T. Johnson, Alice Eagly, Sharon Shavitt, Joseph Cappella, Bob Hornik, and Icek Ajzen, as well as the many colleagues who have contributed to my interests and my thinking over the years. Of these people, Alice Eagly, Kathleen Hall-Jamieson, and Joel Cohen have been generous mentors who offered their time and advice in a selfless fashion. I am deeply grateful.

I also attribute much of my work to the education I received. My research interests have always been broad, which is probably connected to my training in linguistics and the classics at the National University of La Plata (Argentina), my studies of psychology at the Catholic University of La Plata (Argentina), and my doctoral work in social and clinical psychology at the University of Illinois and University of Belgrano (Argentina), respectively. However, of all the educational institutions I attended, none was as foundational as the Liceo Víctor Mercante, a high school for girls at the National University of La Plata. The university’s faculty have inspired many generations of girls, including my own.