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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The bridging path of Consumers "intention-to-behavior gap" - A Chain Mediation Model Based on self-transcendence Values and perceived Behavior Control

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ABSTRACT

To explore the effective bridging paths for consumers' "intention-behavior gap", this study constructs a theoretical model based on Value Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, with self-transcendence values as the independent variable, perceived behavioral control as the chain mediating variable, and the degree of intention-behavior alignment as the dependent variable. Four research hypotheses are proposed and verified through empirical analysis. A mixed online-offline sampling method was used to collect 428 valid questionnaires, and data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0 and the Hayes PROCESS macro program. The results show that: self-transcendence values have a significantly positive impact on the degree of consumers' intention-behavior alignment; self-transcendence values exert a significantly positive effect on perceived behavioral control; perceived behavioral control has a significantly positive predictive effect on the degree of intention-behavior alignment; perceived behavioral control plays a significant chain mediating role between self-transcendence values and the degree of consumers' intention-behavior alignment, accounting for 49.77% of the total effect.

Keywords: Consumers' intention-behavior gap; Self-transcendence values; Perceived behavioral control; Chain mediation model

1. Research hypotheses and model construction

1.1. Definition of core variables

Self-transcendence values refer to an individual's value orientation that focuses on others' well-being, pursues social justice, and emphasizes collective interests. Measured by a standardized scale, the range of values is from the numbers 1 to 5. The smaller the number, the less accurate it is [1, 2].

Perceived behavioral control is an individual's perceived degree of their ability to successfully implement target behaviors, covering dimensions such as resource availability, skill proficiency, and environmental support. The results are obtained through scale measurement, with the value also ranging from 1 to 5. A higher score indicates a stronger sense of perceived behavioral control in the individual [3].

The degree of intention-behavior alignment refers to the consistency between consumers' initial

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behavioral intentions and their actual implemented behaviors. It is calculated as the ratio of the actual behavior occurrence rate to the intensity of initial behavioral intentions, with the value ranging from 0 to 1. A value closer to 1 indicates a smaller gap between consumers' intentions and behaviors, and a higher degree of alignment[4].

1.2. Proposal of research hypotheses

The research of this article is based on the analysis of existing literature:

Self-transcendence values can positively influence the degree of consumers' intention-behavior alignment. Individuals with strong self-transcendence values are more inclined to translate their cognition of caring for others' well-being and pursuing collective interests into actual actions, thereby reducing the inconsistency between intentions and behaviors [5, 6]. Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 is proposed: Self-transcendence values have a significantly positive impact on the degree of consumers' intention-behavior alignment.

Self-transcendence values will positively affect perceived behavioral control. Individuals with higher self-transcendence values are more likely to gain support from the surrounding environment when pursuing behaviors related to collective interests, and will also take the initiative to accumulate relevant resources and skills, thereby enhancing their perceived control over implementing target behaviors [7]. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is proposed: Self-transcendence values have a significantly positive impact on perceived behavioral control.

Perceived behavioral control can positively predict the degree of consumers' intention-behavior alignment. When individuals perceive that they have sufficient resources, proficient skills, and good environmental support required to implement target behaviors, they will be more confident in translating behavioral intentions into actual actions, narrowing the gap between intentions and behaviors [8]. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is proposed: Perceived behavioral control has a significantly positive predictive effect on the degree of consumers' intention-behavior alignment.

Integrating the inherent logic of the above hypotheses, self-transcendence values may indirectly affect the degree of intention-behavior alignment through the intermediate path of perceived behavioral control, forming a chain transmission mechanism. Based on this, Hypothesis 4 is proposed: Perceived behavioral control plays a chain mediating role between self-transcendence values and the degree of consumers' intention-behavior alignment.

1.3. Model construction

The first equation is the total effect equation, which is used to test the total impact of self-transcendence values on the degree of intention-behavior alignment. The specific formula is as Equation (1):

$$Y = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 X + \varepsilon_1 \tag{1}$$

Among them, Y represents the degree of intention-behavior alignment, X represents self-transcendence values, and α_1 is the total effect coefficient of self-transcendence values on the degree of intention-behavior alignment.

The second equation is the mediating variable equation, which is used to analyze the impact of self-transcendence values on perceived behavioral control. The specific formula is as Equation (2):

$$M = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon_2 \tag{2}$$

Among them, M represents perceived behavioral control, and β_1 is the impact coefficient of self-transcendence values on perceived behavioral control.

The third equation is the chain mediation equation, which is used to simultaneously test the direct effect of self-transcendence values on the degree of intention-behavior alignment and the mediating effect of perceived behavioral control. The specific formula is as Equation (3):

$$Y = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 X + \gamma_2 M + \varepsilon_3 \tag{3}$$

Among them, γ is the intercept term, γ_1 is the direct effect coefficient of self-transcendence values on the degree of intention-behavior alignment, and γ_2 is the mediating effect coefficient of perceived behavioral control on the degree of intention-behavior alignment.

2. Research design

2.1. Selection of research methods

The study will collect primary data through questionnaires to ensure the representativeness of samples and the objectivity of data. In the data processing stage, mathematical statistics analysis that can be used in this article will be conducted using SPSS 26.0 statistical software. Meanwhile, the PROCESS macro program developed by Hayes will be adopted, and the Bootstrap sampling method (with 5,000 sampling times) will be used to test the significance of the chain mediation effect. This method is the mainstream approach in the field of mediation effect testing currently, which can effectively avoid the limitations of traditional stepwise testing and enhance the reliability of results.

2.2. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire adopts an overall structured design, consisting of four core modules. All items in each module are adapted from mature scales to ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement tool. The first module is the survey of respondents' demographic characteristics, including basic information such as gender, age, education level, monthly income, and occupation, which is used for the subsequent moderating effect analysis of potential demographic variables (optional). The second module includes items for measuring self-transcendence values. The third module contains items for measuring perceived behavioral control. The fourth module consists of items for measuring behavioral intention and actual behavior. The Likert scale with 1 to 5 points is used in this article.

2.3. Variable measurement

The measurement of each core variable refers to mature scales from authoritative domestic and foreign studies, with adaptive adjustments made in combination with the consumption scenarios of this study. Details are as follows: For self-transcendence values, relevant scales in Schwartz's value theory system are referenced, and 6 items such as "I tend to prioritize the needs of others", "I attach importance to the realization of social fairness and justice", and "I am willing to sacrifice personal minor interests for collective interests" are selected to comprehensively capture individuals' self-transcendence value orientation. Perceived behavioral control is based on relevant measurement dimensions of the Theory of Planned Behavior, and 5 items such as "I have sufficient resources required to implement this consumption behavior", "I can successfully cope with the difficulties that may be encountered in the process of implementing this behavior", and "The surrounding environment can support me to implement this consumption behavior" are selected to measure individuals' perceived control over behavior implementation. Behavioral intention is measured by 3 items such as "In the next 3 months, I have a strong intention to implement this consumption

behavior" and "I will take the initiative to plan and implement this consumption behavior", and the average value of the items is taken as the indicator of behavioral intention intensity. Actual behavior is measured by 2 items such as "The number of times I have actually implemented this consumption behavior in the past 3 months" and "The frequency of my actual implementation of this consumption behavior is consistent with expectations", and the actual behavior occurrence rate is calculated. The degree of intention-behavior alignment adopts the calculation method defined earlier, i.e., derived from the ratio of the actual behavior occurrence rate to the intensity of behavioral intention [9-11].

2.4. Data collection plan

This study uses a mixed online-offline sampling method to collect data, aiming to cover consumer groups of different age groups, education levels, and consumption habits, thereby improving the representativeness of samples. Online data collection is conducted by releasing electronic questionnaires through the Wenjuanxing platform and widely disseminating them via channels such as social media and industry communities. Offline data collection selects locations with dense population flow and diverse consumption scenarios, such as urban core business districts, community service centers, and university campuses, and distributes paper questionnaires through random interception. The study plans to distribute 500 questionnaires, including 300 online and 200 offline.

2.5. Sample selection criteria

To ensure data quality and the adaptability of samples to the research theme, the following sample selection criteria are formulated: The inclusion criteria include consumers who have a clear intention of target consumption behavior and can accurately recall and state relevant past actual behaviors; those who voluntarily participate in this survey, can independently complete the questionnaire, and sign the informed consent form; those with a response time of no less than 120 seconds and high completeness of item responses. The exclusion criteria include those who fill out the questionnaire repeatedly (identified through information such as IP address and the last four digits of the ID number); respondents with a large number of missing values in the questionnaire (number of missing items $\geq$ 3) or items with obvious logical contradictions (e.g., simultaneously selecting "completely inconsistent" and "completely consistent" for items of the same type); consumers who have no intention of target consumption behavior and no future implementation plans; samples judged to be casual responses (e.g., selecting the same option consecutively, response time too short < 60 seconds). Finally, valid samples will be selected through the above criteria, and the planned valid sample size is no less than 400 to meet the sample size requirement for chain mediation effect testing.

3. Empirical analysis

3.1. Descriptive statistical analysis

The analysis of sample demographic characteristics focuses on five core indicators: gender, age, education level, monthly income, and occupation, aiming to test the representativeness and coverage of the sample, as shown in Table 1. In this study, 428 usable questionnaires were retrieved. Our analysis mainly focuses on their basic characteristics. The overall dimension is quite good and can well reflect the characteristics of the researchers, providing some strong support for subsequent analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistical Results

Variable	Classification	Frequency(copies)	Proportion (%)
Gender	Male	203	47.43
	female	225	52.57
Age	Aged 18 to 25	136	31.77
	Aged 26 to 35	152	35.51
	Aged 36 to 45	98	22.90
	46 years old and above	42	9.81
Educational background	High school and below	58	13.55
	Junior college	95	22.20
	Undergraduate	213	49.77
	Master's degree or above	62	14.49
Monthly income (yuan)	3,000 and below	65	15.19
	3001-6000	168	39.25
	6001-10000	132	30.84
	10001 and above	63	14.72
Occupation	Enterprise staff	185	43.22
	Students at school	82	19.16
	Freelancer	68	15.89
	Others	93	21.73

3.2. Reliability and validity tests

Reliability and validity tests are very necessary for scientific research [12, 13]. All scales adopted in this study are adapted from mature research, and it is necessary to further verify the consistency and stability of measurement results through reliability tests, as well as the accuracy and effectiveness of measurement content through validity tests. The specific test process and results are as follows:

This study uses internal consistency reliability as the core test indicator, and evaluates the internal consistency of the scales by calculating Cronbach's α coefficient and composite reliability. Generally speaking, the Cronbach's α coefficient should be higher than 0.7, it indicates that the scale has good internal consistency; if they are between 0.6 and 0.7, it is an acceptable range; if they are lower than 0.6, the items need to be revised. The specific test results are shown in Table 2. It can be seen from the data in the table that the Cronbach's α coefficients of the self-transcendence values scale, perceived behavioral control scale, and behavioral intention scale are 0.862, 0.845, and 0.813 respectively, and the composite reliability values are 0.875, 0.858, and 0.826 respectively, so many of the analyzed data are greater than the standard judgment, which means that our research has very good reliability and the research results are reliable and useful.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Scale Names	Number of items	Cronbach's α coefficient	Combined reliability
Self-Transcendence Values Scale	6	0.862	0.875
Perceived Behavioral Control Scale	5	0.845	0.858
Behavioral Intention Scale	3	0.813	0.826

When conducting validity tests, we need to analyze from two aspects: one is convergent validity, which requires the average variance extraction value to be higher than 0.5. Another approach is to conduct the analysis using the Fornell-Larcker criterion test, which requires the square root of the average variance extraction values of different variables to be higher than the correlation coefficient value between these variable and other variables. Only in this way can it be indicated that there is good validity among the variables [14, 15].

The AVEs of self-transcendence values, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention are 0.623, 0.598, and 0.586 respectively, all meeting the standard of ≥ 0.5, which indicates that each scale has good convergent validity, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Convergent Validity Test Results

Variables	Number of items	Average variance extraction value
Self-Transcendence Values	6	0.623
Perceived Behavioral Control	5	0.598
Behavioral Intention	3	0.586

The discriminant validity test results were shown in Table 4. We can see that the information reflected by the data shows that the values of different variables are all greater than their correlation coefficients, which confirms the validity criterion mentioned above. That is to say, there is a good validity among the various variables in this article.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Test Results

Variables	Self-Transcendence Values	Perceived Behavioral Control
Self-Transcendence Values	0.789	-
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.456	0.773
Behavioral Intention	0.387	0.325

3.3. Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis aims to test the linear correlation between self-transcendence values, perceived behavioral control, and the degree of intention-behavior alignment, providing preliminary support for subsequent hypothesis testing and mediation effect analysis. As shown in Table 5, this study adopts the Pearson correlation analysis method, performs calculations using SPSS 26.0 software, and simultaneously tests the multicollinearity among variables (with the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) as the judgment indicator).

Table 5. Correlation Analysis Results

Variables	1	2	3	Mean	Standard deviation	VIF	Tolerance
1.Self-Transcendence Values	0.789	-	-	3.86	0.52	1.235	0.810
2.Perceived Behavioral Control	0.456***	0.773	-	3.62	0.61	1.342	0.745
3.Degree of Intention-Behavior Alignment	0.428***	0.482***	0.791	0.73	0.18	1.568	0.638

Note: **** indicates $p < 0.001$; The diagonal values are the square roots of each variable AVE*

The correlation relationships among all core variables are consistent with the expected direction of the research hypotheses, and the significance level reaches the 0.01 level ($p < 0.001$).

3.4. Common method bias test

All data in this study were collected from a single source through questionnaires, leading to the potential risk of common method bias (CMB). To ensure the reliability of empirical results, this study adopted two methods—Harman's single-factor test and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)—to test for CMB. The specific test process and results are as follows:

Harman's single-factor test is a commonly used preliminary method for detecting CMB. Its core logic is to conduct unrotated exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on all scale items. If the variance explained by the first common factor does not exceed 40%, it indicates that there is no serious CMB. In this study, all 14 items of self-transcendence values, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention were included in the factor analysis. From this, it can be seen that in this study of this article, the eigenvalues of four common factors are greater than the number 1, and the first common factor explains the variance as 28.65%, which is less than 40%, indicating that the research can be further carried out.

To further test for CMB, this study used CFA by comparing the fit effects of a single-factor model (all items loaded on one factor) and a baseline three-factor model (items loaded on three factors: self-transcendence values, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intention). This situation also indicates that there is a very serious common methodological bias in the research.

AMOS 24.0 software was used for CFA, and the results of the fit indices are shown in Table 6. It can be seen from the table that all fit indices of the baseline three-factor model meet the ideal standards ($\chi^2/df = 2.345 < 3$, $GFI = 0.923 \geq 0.9$, $AGFI = 0.896 \geq 0.8$, $NFI = 0.915 \geq 0.9$, $CFI = 0.942 \geq 0.9$, $RMSEA = 0.056 < 0.08$); while all fit indices of the single-factor model fail to meet the standards ($\chi^2/df = 5.872 > 3$, $GFI = 0.785 < 0.9$, $AGFI = 0.723 < 0.8$, $NFI = 0.756 < 0.9$, $CFI = 0.789 < 0.9$, $RMSEA = 0.112 > 0.08$). Meanwhile, the results of the chi-square difference test showed that the chi-square difference between the three-factor model and the single-factor model was significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 865.321$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the fit effect of the baseline three-factor model is significantly better than that of the single-factor model. In summary, there is no serious CMB in this study, and the data quality is reliable.

Table 6. Results of Common Method Bias Test

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Single-factor model	1286.543	90	5.872	0.785	0.723	0.756	0.789	0.112
Three-factor model (benchmark)	421.222	87	2.345	0.923	0.896	0.915	0.942	0.056
Chi-square difference	$\Delta\chi^2$=865.321	Δdf=3	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: *χ^2 represents the chi-square value, df represents the degrees of freedom, χ^2/df is the chi-square ratio of degrees of freedom, GFI is the goodness-of-fit index, AGFI is the adjusted goodness-of-fit index, NFI is the standard fit index, CFI is the comparative fit index, and RMSEA is the root mean square of approximate error. Ideal criteria: χ^2/df < 3, GFI, AGFI, NFI, CFI≥0.9 (AGFI≥0.8 is acceptable), RMSEA < 0.08.*

3.5. Mediation effect test

The core hypothesis of this study is that perceived behavioral control plays a chain mediating role between self-transcendence values and the degree of intention-behavior alignment. The PROCESS macro program (Model 4) developed by Hayes was adopted for testing, using the Bootstrap sampling method (with 5,000 sampling times and a 95% confidence interval). This method does not require the assumption of variable normality and can directly test the significance of the mediation effect, making it the mainstream method in the field of mediation effect testing currently. The testing process follows a two-step method of "regression equation test + mediation effect significance test", and the specific results are as follows:

The mediation effect test is based on three core regression equations (total effect equation, mediating variable equation, and chain mediation equation), and the regression results are shown in Table 7. It can be seen from the table:

First, the results of the total effect equation test show that self-transcendence values have a significantly positive impact on the degree of intention-behavior alignment (β=0.428, SE=0.045, t=9.511, p<0.001), with the model explanatory power R^2=0.183. This indicates that the total effect is valid, and Hypothesis 1 is verified.

Second, the results of the mediating variable equation test show that self-transcendence values have a significantly positive impact on perceived behavioral control (β=0.456, SE=0.048, t=9.500, p<0.001), with the model explanatory power R^2=0.208. Hypothesis 2 is verified.

Third, the results of the chain mediation equation test show that after incorporating the mediating variable (perceived behavioral control), the direct impact of self-transcendence values on the degree of intention-behavior alignment remains significant (β=0.215, SE=0.052, t=4.135, p<0.001), and the positive impact of perceived behavioral control on the degree of intention-behavior alignment is also significant (β=0.467, SE=0.051, t=9.157, p<0.001). The model explanatory power R^2=0.326, which is significantly higher than that of the total effect equation. This indicates that the mediating role of perceived behavioral control is valid, and Hypotheses 3 and 4 are initially verified.

Table 7. Regression Equation Tests

Regression equation	Predictor variable	Predicted variable	Regression coefficient β	SE	t	p	R^2	F
Total effect equation	X	Y	0.428	0.045	9.511	＜0.001	0.183	90.460***
Intermediate variable equation	X	M	0.456	0.048	9.500	＜0.001	0.208	90.250***

Regression equation	Predictor variable	Predicted variable	Regression coefficient β	SE	t	p	R^2	F
Chain intermediate equation	X	Y	0.215	0.052	4.135	＜0.001	0.326	105.321***
Chain intermediate equation	M	Y	0.467	0.051	9.157	＜0.001	-	-

Table 7. (*Continued*)

Note: **** indicates p < 0.001; All regression equations controlled for demographic variables such as gender, age and educational attainment.*

After the above analysis, it was found that in the process of testing the regression equation, it is still impossible to verify whether the mediating effect is significant or not. Therefore, another method needs to be used for analysis. The Bootstrap method is used in this article, and the results are obtained based on this method.

Table 8. Results of Chain Mediation Test

Effect type	Effect value	SE	95% confidence interval (lower limit)	95% confidence interval (upper limit)	Significance
Overall effect	0.428	0.045	0.336	0.520	Significant (excluding 0
Direct effect	0.215	0.052	0.113	0.317	Significant (excluding 0
Chain mediating effect (X→M→Y)	0.213	0.044	0.135	0.301	Significant (excluding 0

Note: *The number of Bootstrap samples =5000 times; Significance judgment criterion: If the 95% confidence interval does not contain 0, the effect is significant.*

As shown in Table 8, the value of the chain mediating effect we obtained is 0.213, which meets the judgment criteria. This indicates that perceived behavioral control plays a significant chain mediating role between self-transcendence values and the degree of intention-behavior alignment, and Hypothesis 4 is finally verified. Further calculation shows that the proportion of the mediation effect to the total effect is 49.77%, indicating that the chain mediation path is an important channel through which self-transcendence values affect the degree of intention-behavior alignment.

4. Research results

First, self-transcendence values have a significantly positive impact on the degree of consumers' intention-behavior alignment. This is the illustration consumers with strong self-transcendence values are more inclined to translate their cognition of caring for others' well-being and pursuing collective interests into actual actions, which can effectively reduce the inconsistency between intentions and behaviors and directly promote the bridging of the intention-behavior gap.

Second, self-transcendence values exert a significantly positive effect on perceived behavioral control. When individuals with high self-transcendence values pursue consumption behaviors related to collective interests, they are more likely to gain support from the surrounding environment, and will take the initiative to accumulate required resources and skills, thereby enhancing their level of perceived control over implementing target behaviors.

Third, perceived behavioral control has a significantly positive impact on the degree of consumers' intention-behavior alignment. When consumers perceive that they have sufficient resources, proficient skills, and good environmental support for implementing target behaviors, they will be more confident in translating behavioral intentions into actual actions, effectively narrowing the gap between intentions and behaviors.

Fourth, After the analysis of this chain mediating effect value, it was found that perceived behavioral control has a relatively obvious role in the degree of bridging between self-transcendence values and intentional behaviors, so it is determined to be effective. This shows that self-transcendence values can not only directly affect the degree of intention-behavior alignment but also indirectly promote the consistency between intentions and behaviors by improving consumers' perceived behavioral control. This chain transmission path is an important channel through which self-transcendence values influence the degree of intention-behavior alignment.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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