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## APPLICABILITY OF FISHBEIN AND AJZEN THEORY OF REASONED ACTION IN CONTEMPORARY ADVERTISING

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**\*Inemesit Asuquo Eyo, Chiasoka Lynda Onuigbo, Matilda Joseph Inyangetoh and Edidiong Udobia Udobia**

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Nigeria.

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\*Corresponding Author: Inemesit Asuquo Eyo

Nigeria.

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### ABSTRACT

Advertising is integral in linking the target audience to a specific goal, commodity or service and interchangeably persuades consumers to act in a specific way. This study looks into the applicability of Fishbein and Ajzen Theory of Reasoned Action in Contemporary Advertising and carefully analyzes how components of the theory is played out in the Nigerian economy using a qualitative research methodology. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) posits that behavioural intention is driven by attitudes toward the behaviour and subjective norms primarily determined by action. The study recommends a need to integrate the TRA with other relevant psychological and behavioural models that incorporate behavioural control and emotional response, and ethical considerations should be prioritized when applying the principles of the TRA in crafting compelling messages, handling media interviews and engaging effectively with the public.

**KEYWORDS:** Reasoned Action Theory, Advertising, communication models, political communication, Nigerian Politics.

### INTRODUCTION

Advertising plays an important role in society. It is responsible for creating ideas and actions to facilitate promotion of goods and services thereby broadening thoughts and consumption. Advertising deals with creative writing, thus, the establishment of the printing press resulted in written ideas being shared and distributed widely. These developments have contributed to the existence of various vehicles of advertisements; print newspapers and much later radio, telephone, and television. The advent of Internet has advanced advertising to bridge time and

space.

Social media has increasingly become an indispensable platform for communication given its rapidity in delivering information within record time. Online news portals and applications have not only enabled vital news and information to be disseminated within minutes but have also connected to a wider audience and created consumers who can feedback views and news, and even create their own media communication platforms.

Oluwafemi (2019) avers that the primary objective of advertising is to communicate with the target audience and achieve specific goals. One of the major advertising goals is to educate people about a brand or product. Tecno, a mobile technology firm while introducing a new brand communicates through advertising the features of the product to the Nigerian market using vast approaches to inform its potential audience. Amandeep, Varshney, & Aulia, (2017), notes that educational advertising focuses on informing the audience about the product's features, benefits, and uses. This type of advertising is particularly useful for new products or services, as it helps to create awareness and build knowledge among potential customers. By educating the audience, advertisers can establish a foundation for future sales and build a loyal customer base.

Another key advertising goal is to persuade people to purchase a product or service. Persuasive advertising aims to influence the target audience's attitudes and behaviour towards a brand or product.

This type of advertising highlights the unique benefits and features of the product, creating a preference for it among potential customers. Persuasive advertising often uses emotional appeals, such as storytelling or imagery, to connect with the audience and drive sales. By persuading the audience, advertisers can increase conversions and ultimately drive revenue.

The third major advertising goal is to remind people of a brand or product. Reminder advertising is used to maintain brand awareness and keep the product top of mind. This type of advertising is particularly useful for established brands, as it helps to reinforce previous messages and prevent customers from forgetting about the product. Reminder advertising can take many forms, including social media campaigns, email marketing, or special promotions. By reminding the audience about the brand or product, advertisers can encourage repeat business and build customer loyalty.

The three cardinal advertising goals - to educate, persuade, and remind - are essential for achieving marketing objectives. By understanding these goals, advertisers can create effective campaigns that resonate with their target audience and drive desired outcomes. Whether it's introducing a new product, driving sales, or maintaining brand awareness, advertising plays a

critical role in achieving business success.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate phenomenon of human communication, a diverse array of scholars, scientists, and theorists have dedicated their efforts to dissecting its fundamental mechanisms. Their collective intellectual endeavours have resulted in the development and proposition of various communication models. These frameworks serve as conceptual tools, aiming to elucidate the complex processes involved when individuals interact and exchange information, ideas, and emotions. By constructing these models, researchers seek to provide structured explanations for how messages are encoded, transmitted, received, and interpreted within different contexts.

Through rigorous observation, analysis, and theoretical reasoning, scholars have identified key components and stages involved in communication. This dedicated exploration has paved the way for the formulation of various communication models. These models, ranging from linear and interactive to transactional and constitutive perspectives, offer different lenses through which to examine the flow of communication and the interplay of its constituent elements.

In essence, the journey towards a deeper comprehension of human communication has been significantly shaped by the creation and refinement of communication models. These theoretical constructs, born from the efforts of numerous scholars seeking to define and analyze the communication process, provide valuable frameworks for understanding how individuals connect and create meaning together. The development of these models represents a continuous intellectual pursuit aimed at illuminating the complexities and nuances of human interaction.

The Nigerian advertising scene has evolved and morphed with the dynamics of the society, thus, to clearly understand the process of advertising in the contemporary society, scholars have used basic advertising theories to represent the process. Fishbein and Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Action alongside other advertising theories and models are applicable and can be used to understand contemporary advertising in Nigeria.

### **Review of Literature Theory of Reasoned Action**

This theory was first developed by Fishbein (1967) and later revised and expanded by Fishbein and Azjen (1975, 1980) in the following decades. Fishbein observed that researchers must distinguish between attitude toward an object and attitude toward behaviour in relation to the object. Fishbein and Ajzen further argued that attitude toward the behaviour is a better predictor of the behaviour, than

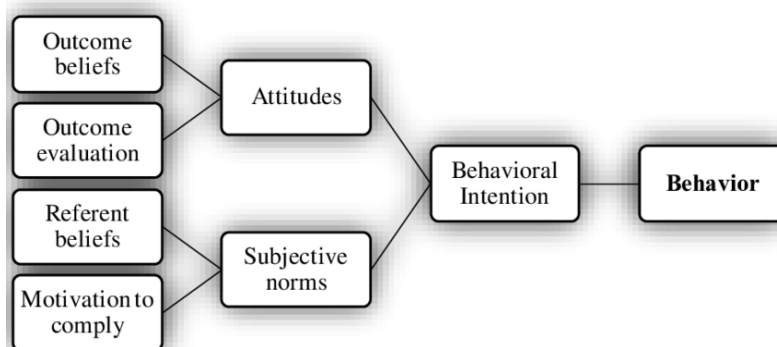
merely linking attitude with an object. The TRA reflects this argument as it explains human behaviour as a reason for them to behave in a certain manner.

Fishbein and Ajzen also measured a high degree of relationship between attitude, norm, perceived control, intention, and behaviour in terms of action. These variables could be tested for context and time. Any changes to any of these factors will thus directly result in different behaviour. These constructs were further developed based on studies by Rotter (1954), Rosenberg (1956) and Edwards (1954) in the field of social psychology, including learning theories, attitude theories, and decision-making theories.

Based on this theory, individuals behave rationally to achieve favourable outcomes and to avoid disappointing others by confounding their expectations (Edewor, 2020). Therefore, people’s intention to adopt certain behaviour is an antecedent variable of their real behaviour. Ezeah & Gever (2020) pointed out that this intended behaviour is determined by the attitude toward that behaviour and by the subjective norms.

This attitude component is characterised by the beliefs of people in terms of their behaviour’s probability in generating the outcomes desired which can be regarded as either positive or negative (Ezeah & Gever, 2020). As for subjective norms, this component concerns normative beliefs of the individual with regards to whether important referent individuals such as family members, friends, and colleagues, agree or disagree (normative beliefs) to the individual performing the behaviour which weighs the individual’s motivation to comply with those referents.

This component provides insights into the individual’s perception of the relationship between a particular behaviour and what important referent individuals are thinking about the behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). As such, intention is influenced by both the personal factor (Attitude) and the social factor (Subjective Norms). This relationship between behaviour and behavioural intention determined by attitude toward behaviour and subjective norms.



### **Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)**

Ajibola & Olatunji (2019), aver that prior to creation of this theory, attitude had been used as the only explanatory variable of behaviour, mediated by behavioural intention. However, there has been much evidence of a large discrepancy between attitude and behaviour. To address this gap and to predict consumers' future behaviour more accurately, the theory suggests one more determinant of behavioural intention called subjective norms (a social factor).

It is premised that an individual's behavioural intention and his/her actual behaviour are likely to be influenced by that individual's own judgment and by social pressure toward the behaviour. That is, TRA looks at both the person's attitudes toward that behaviour, as well as the subjective norms of influential people or groups that could affect behavioural outcomes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

According to the theory, both attitude and subjective norm are constituted by salient beliefs. Attitude is determined by salient behavioural beliefs that consist of importance and evaluation of the behaviour outcome. In contrast, subjective norm is determined by normative beliefs that consist of referent beliefs and the motivation to comply with others. Ultimately, behavioural intention is formed on the basis of a weighted average of attitude and subjective norm.

### **Advertisement: An Overview**

An advertisement is a paid public announcement through a communication medium, promoting the sale of products or services, political support or propagating an idea. As a tool to present and promote ideas, goods and services, it seeks all means to encourage or influence consumers to purchase such products. It is the paid use of a product, service or idea that can be given expression through various media outlets.

Advertisements such as video, graphic designs, photography, audio, etc., could be through print, broadcast media, etc. Integrated marketing communication, advertising, has been alluded to by various scholars depending on the situation. Advertising is a way of announcing what the organization wants to sell (the attributes and advantages of its products). We cannot overestimate the importance of advertising; as such, it performs several functions in society, such as education by making products known, communicating information about products, and at times, the location of sales to consumers. It encourages potential consumers to react positively to the propositions of the organization. It helps introduce new products and even re-modified ones for consumers to use.

Advertising as a communication model is considered to have both positive and negative effects on society. Its positive achievements include economic, educational, social, etc. On the other hand are debates of its possible effect mentally and emotionally on the audience such as children, women's image etc. negatively or positively. As a result, a regulatory council known as Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) by Act 55 of 1988 as amended by Act 93 of 1992 was created to regulate advertising practice in Nigeria. It is now known as Advertising Regulatory Council of Nigeria. (ARCON) since 2022 and as a regulatory body it is meant to tackle the many challenges of the advertising industry in the nation.

For advertising to be effective, advertisers need to be aware of how customers may meet the message and so Amandeep et al. (2017) states that most advertising agencies try to understand what their target market may desire in their various approaches to advertising. To make this easier, academics and professionals have tried to develop theories and models that can show how customers respond to the advertising they are being exposed to. By understanding the different behavioural levels that customers pass through, the advertiser can create a message that will meet all requirements and be effective. The inherent benefits of integrated marketing communication are such that they cannot be ignored.

However, issues arose regarding how messages are passed across and their effect on the audience, especially stereotyping women through adverts. In the contention of Smith & Johnson (2017), it is seen as good and criticized for its role in selling products and its influence on the economy of societies. Toffoletti & Thorpe (2018) defined advertising as “a communication strategy that entails carrying out an intricate persuasion process, the execution of which uses a variety of particular instruments capable of applying psychological pressure to the target audience. Advertising as a vital tool for marketing is known to involve communication and convincing to achieve desired results and various tools are used to propagate the message.

### **Advertisements and the Nigerian Experience**

According to Oluwafemi & Adebisi (2019, p.1), advertising is the most effective means of reaching out to customers. It assists clients in learning about the many brands available on the market. Everyone, even children, young and old, is exposed to advertising. In today's competitive world, advertising is extremely vital. Advertising has become a requirement for everyone in today's world, whether they are the producer, the trader, or the buyer. It aids in the

growth of sales. Advertising aids in the education of the general public on social concerns such as child labour, smoking, family planning, and education, among others.

Advertising attracts the interest of potential buyers to buy a new product. Advertisements have the power to persuade buyers to purchase a specific product. It provides details on a product. Through "Branding," commercial advertisements hope to boost product usage. The major purpose of advertising is to use the behaviour of potential consumers, advertising and consumer behaviour are inextricably linked. Advertising's purpose is to encourage people to buy something. It in some way touches the hearts of the end- users to buy the product. Advertisements introduce the product so that the customer can buy the product.

The invention of the printing press in 1450, together with the 1859 founding of Nigeria's first newspaper, revolutionised advertising. The first advertising agency was founded in 1928, while radio and television were introduced in 1932 and 1959, respectively, marking a major turning point in the 20th century. The Association of Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria, later known as AAAN, was formed during the 1970s due to the rising number of professionals. The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) was established in 1988 to further regulate the industry (Oluwafemi & Adebisi, 2019; Ezeah & Gever, 2020).

The integration and development of various sectors is made possible by advertising campaigns propelling socio-cultural growth, technological developments, and regulatory strictures in a complex interplay that reduces the potential for advertising to reflect and sustain the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria. This makes it imperative to engage in a critical review of the history of advertising in Nigeria for bridging gaps and creating information that will help in making and promoting relevant advertising processes.

By learning how advertising has influenced the behavioural attitude, subjective norms and behavioural intention across a range of socio-cultural contexts in Nigeria, we can begin working out ways through which advertising can be applied to promote consumer attitude, norms and intentions within the context of Nigerian advertising and ultimately work toward a more sustainable and culturally diverse advertising sector.

### **The Applicability of Fishbein and Ajzen Theory of Reasoned Action in Contemporary Advertising**

The Nigerian advertising economy is a dynamic and complex environment characterised by diverse stakeholders, competing interests and intriguing creatives. The emergence of traditional mass media tools like; radio, newspaper, and magazine in the 19th century broadened the frontiers of the advertising media landscape thereby bolstering advertisement.

Fishbein and Azjen's theory of Reasoned Action is built on three pillars; Behavioural Attitude, subjective norm, and behavioural intention.

Before the printing press, Nigerians used various methods to promote goods and services, including town criers, product displays, and "hawking," where sellers called out to potential customers. These acts of advertising sort to persuade the attitude of to-be customers to products and services. Consumer behavioural attitude, in its broad sense, is concerned with understanding both how purchase decisions are made and how products or services are consumed or experienced. To understand the mental processes used in purchasing decisions, some authors employ the concept of the "Black Box", a figurative term used to describe the cognitive and affective processes used by a consumer during a purchase decision. Sproles and Kendall (1986), developed a consumer style inventory (CSI) consisting of 8 factors, such as: price-sensitivity, quality-consciousness, brand-consciousness, novelty-seeking, fashion-consciousness and habits

### **Advertising and Behavioural Attitude**

Advertising plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer behaviour, as it leverages the vast reach and interactive nature of mass media platforms to engage consumers and influence their attitudes, preferences, and purchase decisions. Studies by Edewor (2020) and Okoro (2017) have shown that mass media advertising significantly impacts consumer attitudes and perceptions toward brands and products. Attitude can be seen as a mindset to act in a particular way as a result of an individual's experience and knowledge. In most cases, attitude is regarded as the foundation of an intention.

Lee and Koo (2015) found that consumers exposed to advertising were more likely to develop positive attitudes and higher levels of brand awareness. This positive brand perception can lead to increased purchase intentions and brand loyalty (Smith & Johnson, 2017). With the innovation of the new media, advertising has evolved moving to a personalized and targeted approach, allowing brands to deliver relevant content to specific consumer segments, which enhances its effectiveness in driving consumer behaviour.

Furthermore, the interactive nature of the new media fosters two-way communication between brands and consumers, enabling businesses to gather feedback, address queries, and build stronger relationships. The direct engagement with consumers through new media advertising enhances consumer trust, brand credibility, and overall brand-consumer interactions, ultimately influencing their purchasing decisions. Therefore, businesses today recognize the significance of advertising as an essential tool in understanding and influencing consumer behaviour effectively.

According to Edewor (2020), recognizing and analyzing consumer attitude helps advertisers create more effective marketing strategies, tailor products to meet consumer needs, and build long-term relationships with customers. Edewor (2020) lists some key reasons why consumer behaviour attitude is crucial in advertising:

- 1. Understanding Consumer Needs and Wants:** Consumer behaviour research helps advertisers understand the needs, wants, and preferences of their target audience. By identifying consumers' motivations, desires, and pain points, businesses can develop products and services that address specific consumer demands, leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.
- 2. Market Segmentation and Targeting:** Consumer behaviour data aids in segmenting the market based on various factors like demographics, psychographics, and buying behaviour. Advertisers can then target specific segments with customized advertising messages, promotions, and offerings that resonate with their interests and preferences, maximizing the effectiveness of advertising campaigns.
- 3. Product and Service Development:** Consumer behaviour research provides valuable insights into product and service design and improvements. By analyzing consumer feedback and behaviour, businesses can refine existing offerings or create new products that better meet consumer expectations and preferences.
- 4. Brand Positioning and Messaging:** Understanding consumer behaviour helps advertisers position their brands effectively in the minds of consumers. By aligning brand messaging with consumer values and aspirations, businesses can build stronger brand identities and emotional connections with their target audience.
- 5. Influencing Purchase Decisions:** Consumer behaviour research aids in understanding the factors that influence purchase decisions. Advertisers can leverage this knowledge to develop persuasive advertising strategies, such as using social proof, endorsements, or limited-time offers, to encourage consumers to make purchasing decisions.
- 6. Customer Relationship Management:** Consumer behaviour data assists in building and maintaining strong customer relationships. By understanding consumer preferences, communication styles, and purchase patterns, businesses can personalize interactions, provide relevant recommendations, and offer exceptional customer experiences.
- 7. Assessing Marketing Effectiveness:** Monitoring and analyzing consumer behaviour allows marketers to evaluate the effectiveness of advertising initiatives. By tracking consumer responses, engagement metrics, and sales data, businesses can measure the impact of advertising efforts and make data-driven decisions for future advertising campaigns.

From the above, consumer behavioural attitude is a prerequisite in designing, implementing or adopting any advertising strategy for any campaign such as campaign towards behavioural change in eradicating child labour, jungle justice, and any unethical behaviour. As noted by Ajibola and Olatunji (2019), if an advertising message is not people-inclusive and guided by their particular appropriateness for the target audience, the rate at which each communication tool will generate awareness and the rate of response if not it will all boil down to a mere rhetoric and waste of time, efforts and resources and an exercise in futility.

### **Advertising and Subjective Norm**

Subjective norms are perceptual social pressure from the peers who can be individuals or groups on whether to undertake or not a particular action. Subjective norms pertain to the domain of social psychology. Kokila and Sampathlakshmi (2020) postulated that people will get information and evaluations from neighbours, relatives, and other close or aspirational people. As per the theory of reasoned action, people will try to comply with social or general behavioural norms and regard peer pressure or expectations as per the code of conduct. Thus, subjective norms will impact consumers purchasing intentions.

According to Dinc & Budic (2021), subjective norm refers to the extent to which relevant persons or individuals support or do not support the performance of a particular behaviour. They are rules for behaviour we follow because we believe others follow them, and because we believe those other people think we should follow them, too (Bicchieri, Thomas & Rob., 2018). It is a function of the perceived normative beliefs of significant others such as school mates, family, friends etc weighted by the individual's motive to comply with each normative belief.

The inclusion of subjective norm provides the opportunity to measure the influence of social norm in a collectivistic society like Nigeria, where people tend to be in-group compliant and socially responsive. It is observed that people in collectivistic societies are likely to be interdependent and pursue group rather than individual goals. Hence, subjective norm may be a key factor in influencing vital decisions. It is what people in some group believe to be normal in the group, that is, believed to be a typical action, an appropriate action, or both (Dinc & Budic, 2021). It is the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1993). For the purpose of this discuss, subjective norm is viewed as the typical and appropriate actions/inactions emanating from the Nigerian consumers' environment that create and encourage them to patronise a commodity or service.

## **Behavioural Intention**

The concept of behavioural intention can be explained as the perceived reason a consumer puts forward for performing a particular action. Normally depending upon the access to resources, like the economic cost, efforts to be taken, and time that consumers consider as needed to spend in the buying process. Armitage and Conner recorded two parameters of behavioural intention:

‘controllability,’ which elaborates the consumers’ perception of whether they can control their buying behaviour in terms of resources that are available and opportunities to be made use of. Individuals possessing essential resources or abundant avenues of opportunities are highly confident in controlling the performance of the behaviour and have more buying purchasing intentions

Fishbein and Ajzen Theory of Reasoned Action provides more comprehensible and commonly appropriate research framework that allows for the understanding intention for several goods and services by considering attitudinal and personal but also the societal factors. **Theory of Reasoned Action and Factors that Influence Consumer Behaviour**

Consumer behaviour in a multifaceted economy as Nigeria, is influenced by a combination of cultural, social, economic, and technological factors. These factors shape the attitudes, perceptions, and decision-making processes of consumers. Here are some key factors that influence consumer behaviour

- 1. Cultural Factors:** Nigeria is known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse ethnic groups. Cultural norms, values, and traditions influence consumer preferences and buying behaviour. For instance, certain products or services may be more appealing to specific ethnic groups, and advertising messages need to be sensitive to cultural beliefs and practices.
- 2. Social Factors:** The social environment plays a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour. Peer influence, family preferences, and social norms impact consumers' brand choices and purchase decisions. Social media, as a powerful communication channel, also influences consumer opinions and perceptions of products and brands.
- 3. Economic Factors:** Nigeria's economic conditions, such as income levels, employment opportunities, and purchasing power, impact consumer spending patterns. Economic fluctuations can influence consumer confidence and willingness to spend on certain products or services.
- 4. Technological Factors:** The increasing access to smartphones, internet connectivity, and social media platforms has transformed consumer behaviour. Consumers now use digital channels for product research, price comparison, and online shopping, influencing their

purchase decisions.

**5. Lifestyle and Demographic Factors:** Consumers' lifestyles, age, gender, and educational backgrounds influence their preferences and priorities. For instance, younger consumers may be more tech-savvy and open to trying new products, while older consumers might be more traditional and price-sensitive.

**6. Marketing and Advertising:** The effectiveness of marketing and advertising campaigns impacts consumer perceptions and brand choices. Engaging and persuasive advertising strategies can influence consumer preferences and lead to brand loyalty.

**7. Product Quality and Reputation:** A wide array of consumers in Nigeria value product quality and the reputation of brands. Positive word-of-mouth and customer reviews influence consumer trust and purchase decisions.

**8. Environmental Consciousness:** Consumers' increasing awareness of environmental issues may influence their preference for eco-friendly products and socially responsible brands.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative research methodology, strategically focusing on the in-depth exploration of existing information data. To achieve its objectives, the study relied extensively on secondary data sources, gathered important materials from a variety of scholarly works. This approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of existing knowledge and perspectives relevant to the research topic.

Library research formed a crucial component, involving the examination of scholarly books, academic journals, and other relevant publications. Furthermore, the study incorporated internet findings, leveraging the vast resources available online to identify pertinent articles, reports, and digital archives. Finally, a thorough review of existing writings in journals and textbooks provided a foundational understanding of established theories, empirical findings, and scholarly discourse related to the research focus.

## CONCLUSION

Advertising plays a crucial role in the contemporary Nigerian economy as it influences intention, behaviour, and purchase decisions. Fishbein and Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Action is fundamental in understanding the mechanisms of advertising in shaping behavioural attitude, subjective norm, and behavioural intention which are cardinal points of advertisement. The theory emphasise the need for understanding the cognitive processes

underlying human behaviour and decision-making.

### **Recommendations**

From the analysis of Fishbein and Ajzen Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the following are put forward as recommendations:

1. Advertisers must prioritise ethical considerations when applying the principles of the TRA. While understanding and influencing consumer attitudes and subjective norms is a core objective of advertising, it is crucial to avoid manipulative or deceptive practices. Transparency, honesty, and respect for consumer autonomy should be paramount. Advertising Practitioners of Nigeria (APCON) and Association of Advertising Agencies of Nigeria (AAAN) should effectively regulate advertising practices.
2. Advertising research should be directed at measuring attitudes and subjective norms, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving digital interactions. Employing techniques such as sentiment analysis of social media data, analysis of online community discussions, and implicit association tests could provide richer and more ecological insights into the factors influencing consumer intentions in the digital age.
3. There is a need to integrate the TRA with other relevant psychological and behavioural models. Given the limitations of the TRA in accounting for impulsive behaviour, habits, and external factors, incorporating elements from theories like the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) – which includes perceived behavioural control – or models focusing on emotional responses and heuristics can provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making.

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