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## TOC REVIEW

21/07/25

### Scrutinising the Magdeburg Christmas Market Terror Attack under Fishbein & Ijzen's Reasoned Action Approach

By:  
Kevin Darmawan

Magdeburg, Germany, December 20<sup>th</sup> 2024, five days to Christmas. The city is in winter festive of welcoming the celebration the date of birth of Jesus Christ, indulging themselves in the snowy streets and sparkly-illuminated buildings on an annual bazaar held in the city's heart, Old Market in Altstadt known as the *Magdeburger Weihnachtsmarkt* (lit. Magdeburg Christmas Market). At 7.00 PM (local time), the crowd are participating in the festive jolly, unbeknownst to them that a terror awaits across the corner of the street. 2 minutes later at 7.02 PM, a car accelerated straight towards the gathering crowd in the market, ramming through the market for at least 400 metres, killing 5 people (4 adults and one child) and injuring more than 200 people.

Shortly after, the car driver was detained on 7.05 PM on the site due to a local traffic congestion. The driver was identified thereafter by the local authorities: Taleb al-Abdulmohsen, a Saudi refugee who was also actively advocating on X (formerly twitter) for human rights—specifically for Saudi atheist refugees in Europe, including Germany. This tragedy led the whole Magdeburg, Germany, and Europe into a deep fear for terrorism, particularly after discovering that Taleb is an Euroskeptic and Islamophobic individual, raising fears during public events and debates on extremist motivations. How to *understand* this case critically?

Reasoned Action Approach (RAA) is a psychological framework used to understand and predict human behavior. Developed by Martin Fishbein & Icek Ajzen in 2010, it builds on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by incorporating additional factors that account for the complexities of decision-making in real-world contexts. RAA suggests that behavior is primarily influenced by three components:

- **Attitude Toward the Behavior:** An individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behavior.
- **Perceived Norms:** Social influences, including *injunctive norms* (perceived social pressure) and *descriptive norms* (perception of others' behaviors).
- **Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC):** The individual's belief in their ability to execute the behavior, considering external constraints.

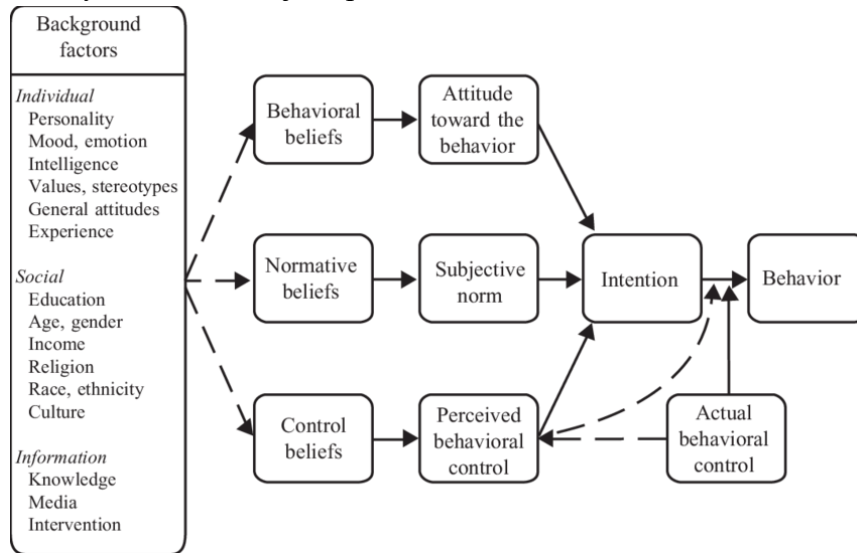
These three factors shape an individual's behavioral intention—which alongside PBC, determines whether the behavior will occur. RAA recognizes that even strong intentions may not lead to action if external obstacles or insufficient resources hinder execution. Additionally, The RAA framework also emphasizes the role of background factors, such as culture, past

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experiences, and demographic influences, which indirectly affect attitudes, norms, and control perceptions. Ultimately, Fishbein & Ajzen provided the model as follows:



First of all, we need to assess Taleb's background factors. In the Individual dimension, Taleb's personality could be considered straightforward, bold—yet reckless. His excessive paranoia regarding the Islamisation of Europe led him to do *things* beyond social norms as reflected on his personal X post:



Taleb's islamophobia and paranoia of the european islamisation as reflected on his X posts, specifically targeted at the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, saying that she has been conducting the secret project to islamise Europe. Moving on to the social dimension, he was born in Saudi Arabia—where Islam is the sole legally recognised religion, Taleb cannot express his atheism there. He later migrated to secular Germany to express his atheism and later developed a website to help ex-Muslims flee persecution in their homeland across the Arabian Peninsula. Meanwhile, on the dimension of information, Taleb is well informed and updated on islamophobia, indicated by his X account interaction with other mutual

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islamophobic profiles and posts that show sentiments towards Islam and Europe. This snapshot is taken from Taleb's X profile, showing that he reposted @JohannPbook 's post regarding the so-called 'islam global domination'.



Based on Fishbein & Ajzen's model, we could assess Taleb's case on each parameter of the model:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Behavioural Beliefs:</b> Taleb may have believed the attack would send a powerful political or ideological message regarding European Islamisation. He may have seen causing fear and disruption as a justified and "positive" outcome based on his radicalized views.</li><li>• <b>Attitude toward Behaviour:</b> Taleb likely developed a positive attitude toward the attack, viewing it as an effective way to fulfill his ideological goals or retaliate against perceived grievances.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Normative Beliefs:</b> Taleb believes that Europe is corrupted—specifically Germany under Merkel that allows Islam to spread by allowing refugees to enter Germany</li><li>• <b>Subjective Norm:</b> Exploited atheist Arab women refugees and immigrants in Germany sparks Taleb's effort to fight for their justice</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Control Beliefs:</b> Taleb believed he had sufficient resources (e.g., a vehicle, the element of surprise) and that security measures at the market were insufficient to stop him. Additionally, He may have perceived a low risk of immediate arrest by the authorities, which increased his confidence in successfully executing the attack.</li><li>• <b>Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC):</b> High perceived control (ability to drive the car) likely reinforced his intention to commit the act, as he believed external and internal conditions favored his success.</li></ul>

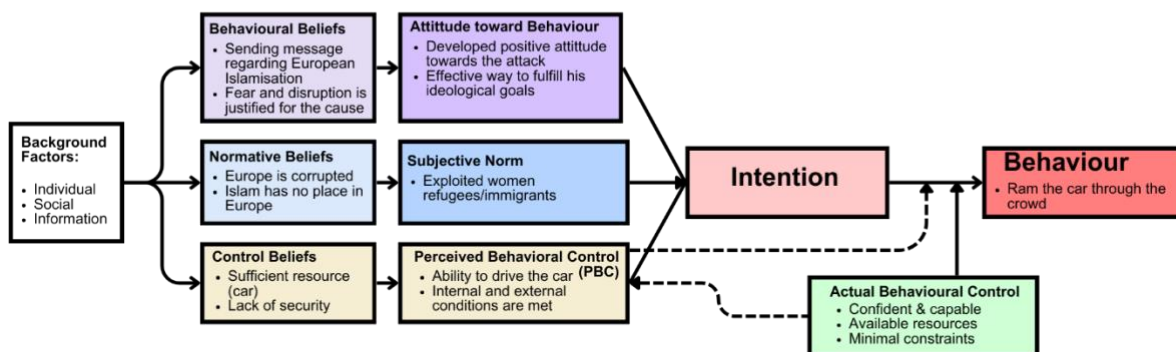
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Intention:</b> Ramming the Christmas Market, not even slightly concerned about the innocence of people in the crowd that could be injured or even killed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Actual Behavioural Control:</b> Taleb's high PBC (confidence in his ability) was supported by actual control (available resources, minimal constraints). If actual behavioural control had been restricted (e.g., stronger security measures or a lack of resources), his perceived control might not have translated into behavior.</li> </ul>

Having the data assessed above, we could fill in the model as follows:



The Magdeburg Christmas Market terror attack highlights how a perpetrator's beliefs, intentions, and actual control interact to drive behaviour. Taleb al-Abdulmohsen's strong intention to commit the attack was shaped by his ideological goals—to develop islamophobia in Europe, driven by social pressure—exploitation of fellow refugees, and confidence in his ability to act. This intention translated into action because Taleb's actual behavioural control—access to resources, favourable conditions, and a lack of barriers—aligned with his perceived control. As a recommendation to prevent similar incidents, it is essential to disrupt this link by



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limiting actual control through stronger security measures, better surveillance, and early intervention strategies.