

# CAN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY THEORIES BE APPLIED TO ACHIEVE STRATEGIC POLITICAL OBJECTIVES?

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**Abstract-** Facts show that a number of developed countries apply social psychology theories to accomplish strategic political objectives. The use of social psychology theories is gaining more importance in today's life especially in business environment where they are applied to understand consumer behavior. Yet, studies concerning the use of those theories in political environment are limited in the open literature. In other words, several researchers have made use of social psychology theories in different fields. Nonetheless, little research, if any, has made to undertake this subject in particular in political arena. Therefore, additional contribution especially in political field is still needed.

**Keywords:** Case study, Social psychology theories, Political objectives, Rwandan genocide, September 11 attacks, Holocaust, Sabra-Shatila massacre

## 1- INTRODUCTION

Attitude models such as the Fishbein Model are becoming conceptual foundations for human research. In the past, researchers focused on beliefs and attitude because of the social psychology by understanding and measuring the determinants of individual's attitude, which in turn determine the personal behavior. By relying on social psychology, they developed models that could predict personal attitude based on individuals' beliefs towards attitude objects and applied these models to business and marketing research [1]. Etter [2] was concerned about the interface between attitude theories and decision theory. He examined the relationship between Fishbein's attitude model and decision theory model and pointed out that Fishbein's attitude model, at least in choice or preference situations, could be viewed as a multi attribute decision theory. Furthermore, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which is one of the most fundamental and influential theories of human behaviour, has been used to predict a wide range of behaviors. According to TRA, a person's attitude towards a behavior is determined by his or her salient beliefs about consequences of performing the behavior multiplied by the evaluation of those consequences [3].

Social psychologists have been concerned about evaluating attitude toward an object. For example, the Fishbein Model was constructed in a way that by knowing people's beliefs and feelings about an object, the attitude toward this object for those people can then be derived [4]. The behavior can be predicted by a linear combination of attitude. However, the attitude can change by the change of people's beliefs and cognitive measure of attitude. In this case, the measures of attitude based on beliefs are regarded as measures of the cognitive dimension of attitude. The relationship between the attitude and the behavior is clearly significant. The attitude has an effect on behavior and is based on feeling of favorability for or against the behavior [5]. Harrell and Bennett [6] found that the attitude and social influences to be very important determinants for the people to choose something. Attitude theories have strong relationship with individual behavior. Thus, if there is a need to study humans behavior, it is important to look at their attitudes, their varying environmental conditions, and their specific action and beliefs, then it can be related the evaluation to the specific outcome resulting from the action. Bass and Talarzyk [4] indicated that in order to understand personal choice, have to be known individual's preference and characteristics, and then apply consumer preference to humans' attitude. Individuals could be explained through their attitudes, which are made up of perceptions. They stated that the attitude theory did appear as a base for studies concerning individuals' choice behavior. They also mentioned that the direction and relation between attitude and behavior had influences on each other.

Attitudes have formed from direct and indirect experiences in life such as learning and personal experiences, friends, people, media and many more. In fact, many factors such as consumers' background characteristics, cultural backgrounds, values and demographics have an effect on attitude. Attitude might be described as a bridge between people background characteristics and consumption that satisfies their attitude. Attitude can evaluate feelings and tendencies of people toward an object or idea. The Individual behavior is influenced by internal factors including beliefs, attitude, learning, motives, perception and personality needs and external factors such as demographics, economic, social situation, and technology. Some factors influencing Individuals behavior cannot be controlled but must be taken into account such as cultural, social, personal, and

psychological characteristics. As a result, the behavior process is the motivation, perception, learning, believes, attitude formation, and decision-making [7].

Based on the above, it is clear that social psychology theories are extensively investigated in the field of business and marketing research. However, few if any, have researched the phenomena in political view point. The objective of this study is to explore the use of social psychology models by politicians to influence humans' behavior and believes towards certain political issues.

## **2- METHODOLOGY**

A case study approach is used to explore human behaviors in a political environment. 200 students in Malaysian universities were interviewed regarding some global political issues. Graduate students chosen for this study were of different nationalities, backgrounds, and field of studies. As a matter of fact, this study had one major question, that is, **have you heard about Rwandan Genocide, September 11 Attacks, Holocaust, Sabra-Shatila Massacre?** The investigation spanned over the period of six months since I had to visit different universities in Malaysia and meet the students.

## **3- FINDINGS and DISCUSSION**

In this research, it has been shown that 95% (190 students) of the respondents have not heard about Rwandan Genocide while all of them are aware of September 11 attacks. In addition, only 10% (20 students) of the respondents have not heard about Holocaust whereas 98% (196 Postgraduate students) have not heard about Sabra-Shatila Massacre.

### **3.1 Rwandan Genocide**

Only the respondents 5% of have heard about the Rwandan Genocide. Despite being recent and a death toll of an estimated 800,000 people in the small East African nation over the course of approximately 100 days. Thousands of widows, many of whom were subjected to rape, are now HIV-Positive. There were about 400000 orphans and nearly 85000 of them were forced to become heads of families. The estimation of the death toll has ranged as much as 20% of the country's total population (Human Rights Watch). It was the culmination of longstanding ethnic conflict between the majority Hutu peoples, and the minority Tutsi community. The Hutu conducted mass killing of Tutsis, the genocide had been planned by members of the Hutu power group known as the Akazu, many of whom occupied positions at top levels of the national government. The genocide was supported and coordinated by the national government as well as by local military and civil officials, and mass media.

A 95% of the respondents with no knowledge about the Rwandan Genocide is indeed surprising and unforeseen. The explanations might come to the responsibility of the international community since there has been little awareness about the genocide. Probably, the international community might consider blameworthy for not interfering to stop the genocide from taking place. In view of the fact that just before the genocide began in April 1994, a Hutu man with guilty conscience high in ranks of the "Mouvement Democratique Republicain de Parehutu" sent a fax to the United Nations and to the United States detailing the plans of a genocide against the Tutsis that would take place shortly. The fax detailed where, against whom and with exact what materials the genocide would be carried out. The information was never dealt with, for whatever reason, perhaps bureaucracy, and the word of the genocide never spread far enough to enlist help from the Security Council (PBS Frontline Documentary). The media played a crucial role in the genocide; local print and radio fuelled the killings while the international media either ignored or seriously misconstrued events on the ground. In addition, the UN peacekeepers were sent with specific instructions not to interfere unless a fellow peacekeeper or self was in danger. Under the United Nation's Capstone Doctrine, peacekeepers were to exercise their own judgment in stopping the violence; however, it was the job of the United Nations Security Council to use force.

The US was reluctant to get involved in the "local conflict" in Rwanda and refused to label the killings as "genocide". Later, President Bill Clinton publicly regretted that decision in a Frontline television interview and five years later, he stated that he believed that if he had sent 5,000 U.S. peacekeepers, more than 500,000 lives could have been saved. Even historically Belgian colonialism played a role in maintaining the divide between the Tutsi and Hutu peoples. While both the Hutu and Tutsis ethnic groups existed before colonialism, Belgian rule recognized and affirmed this pre-existing distinction. They introduced separate ID cards for the two tribes. When Belgian rule ended, most of the land and power were in the hands of Tutsis while the Hutu were relegated to positions of forced laborers, or Akazi.

According to proceedings above, it can be inferred that even it was a massive genocide; the awareness of people about it is very low because the international community and mass media mechanism were not truly given the merit

attention. Thus, people have had neither positive nor negative attitude concerning the issue since they have no idea about it.

### **3.2 September 11 Attacks**

It has been shown that all the respondents have knowledge about September 11 attacks. It is worth mentioning that September 11 attacks were a series of four suicide attacks that were committed in the United States on September 11, 2001, and coordinated to strike certain targets in New York City and Washington, D.C. The attacks were perpetrated by al-Qaeda group and the death toll was almost 3000 people. Late Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden cited the U.S. blind support of Israel, the presence of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, and sanctions over Iraq as motives for the attacks. The United States responded to the attacks by launching the “War on Terror” and invading Afghanistan and toppling the Taliban regime, which had harbored al-Qaeda. Following the launch of the “war on terror”, many countries strengthened their anti-terrorism legislation and expanded law enforcement rules.

Although the death toll of September 11 attacks is much less than that of the Rwandan Genocide, only 5% of the respondents in this study have knowledge about the Rwandan Genocide compared to 100% in the case of September 11 attacks. The results might be justified by the influence of the U.S on public through media, movies, economics, intelligence, and its noteworthy influence on international organizations, agencies, education systems, and even countries. This in turn has an influence on people awareness and perceptions of the issue, and an impact on their beliefs, attitudes, and eventually their behaviors. These are procedures of development human behavior which are based social psychology theories.

The US influence on people awareness, opinion and attitudes towards September 11 attacks initiated the alliance of “War on Terror” which many courtiers supported. This facilitated and justified the U.S invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Besides, during the US and their alliances’ invading of Afghanistan and Iraq millions of people were killed by using the philosophy of War on Terror and the so-called liberation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

### **3.3 Holocaust**

It has been found that 90% of the respondents have knowledge of the Holocaust which is considered a high percentage. Nonetheless, these respondents believe that the Holocaust is the Nazis’ genocide during World War II against European Jews with no knowledge that the Holocaust also included the Nazis’ genocide against the Romani; the Soviet prisoners of war; Polish and Soviet civilians; homosexuals; people with disabilities; Jehovah’s Witnesses; and other political and religious opponents regardless of their ethnicity. Indeed, the Jewish community works very hard to install the notion that the Holocaust genocide was only against the Jews. They have been able to influence people’s awareness, beliefs and attitudes toward the matter. The Holocaust for the Jews has thus become a license to endlessly keep on milking out sympathies and national-guilt. Currently, the Israelis are using the Holocaust to steal Palestine, keep the stolen land, and the total hegemony of Israel in Middle East.

### **3.4 Sabra-Shatila Massacre**

It has been found that 98% of the respondents have not heard about Sabra-Shatila Massacre. It is worth mentioning that Sabra and Shatila are Palestinian refugee camps in west Beirut, Lebanon. The Massacre was perpetrated by Israel Defense Forces and Lebanese Kataeb Party between September 16 and September 18, 1982, with a mass murder of an estimated 3500 Palestinians. It might be inferred that the important role of the mass media and international agencies to direct the people knowledge and their beliefs as well as attitudes about any issue since 98% of the respondents have no idea about Sabra-Shatila Massacre.

## **4- CONCLUSION**

It has been observed in this research that some developed countries might influence on the people in all over the world by their mass media, controlling or at least influencing international agencies, their education system and publications, economic power by supporting some program to influence people awareness, their intelligence and embassies etc. Therefore, once they could influence people awareness in whichever issue, they might change their beliefs, attitudes and thus their behavior. In doing so, they might be able to achieve a strategic political objective. However, little empirical evidence is documented in this field. Further studies can be conducted in this direction based on quantitative research in a more comprehensive manner will help in creating further understanding of the issue. Despite the limitations, this research is one of the first focusing on applying social psychology theories to accomplish a strategic political objective.

Overall, the results of this study have contributed to the existing literature by highlighting the utilizing of social psychology theories to reach an intentional political aim. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide insights for future research in this area.

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