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## Lights, Camera, Recruitment: Analyzing DoD-Hollywood Synergy and its Effects on Attitudes and Behaviors Towards the Military

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Lights, Camera, Recruitment: Analyzing DoD-Hollywood Synergy and its Effects on Attitudes  
and Behaviors Towards the Military

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
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## **DEDICATION**

I wanted to dedicate this thesis to all those who supported me. Thank you to my mom for alleviating stress I had through this process. Thank you to my dad who gave me words of encouragement and helped lift me out of hardship. Thank you to my sister for always making me laugh when I needed it. Thank you to my best friends, Daniel and Alex, for giving me an escape from reality. Thank you to Dr. Werder for being an excellent thesis chair and being an amazing guide and mentor. Thank you to my loving wife for supporting, motivating, and loving me.

Thank you.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to research priming effects on DoD influenced films and uncover if there are significant effects affecting attitudes, beliefs, military support, and behaviors. This study is important because there is a lack of literature on the effects of DoD influenced films. A portion of top grossing films are influenced by the DoD while there is little research on the effects consumers have. This study conducted an experiment testing the effects of behaviors and attitudes when a priming stimulus is presented. The priming stimulus was a military-influenced film clip and a military advertisement. Three groups were made, each encountering different amounts of stimuli. All Participants were asked a questionnaire after. 125 participants participated in the study. The results found no significance in the overall scales but did find significance with specific questions. Longer exposure to stimulus could be required for data.



## **CHAPTER 1:**

### **INTRODUCTION**

On May 12th, 1986, the original *Top Gun* (Scott, 1986) movie starring Tom Cruise premiered. Universally acclaimed for its visual effects and soundtrack, *Top Gun* was the highest grossing domestic film of 1986 (The Numbers, 2023). The film takes place during the 1980s and centers around Pete “Maverick” Mitchell, a U.S. Navy pilot training in the topflight school called “Top Gun.” Throughout the film, there are scenes depicting U.S. Navy jets flying in awe-inspiring stunts that showcase the heroism and “cool” personae of Navy pilots.

The films’ success brought forth an 8% increase in U.S. Navy recruitment compared to the previous year (Summers, 2022). This increase in recruitment did not just randomly happen; it was engineered.

During World War II, the U.S. government created systematic relations with Hollywood to drive increased military recruitment through entertainment (Stockwell & Muir, 2003). The military provided Hollywood with storylines and provided funding attached (Stockwell & Muir, 2003). The U.S. Military not only targeted able-bodied men, but it also targeted children through contracts with The Walt Disney Company (Mollet, 2019). Images of the U.S. Military are usually positive in most forms of media (Powell , 2014).

For decades, the Department of Defense (DoD) has worked closely with Hollywood filmmakers in a symbiotic relationship (Powell, 2014). Filmmakers are granted millions in military equipment and personnel, while scripts must go through approval from the DoD

(Powell, 2014). Oversight from the DoD ensures a clean image of the United States. After a tough 2022, the U.S. Military has increased their recruitment from years before (Garamone, 2023). Although recruitment is challenging, the U.S. DoD will continue to increase its efforts in recruiting (Garamone, 2023). There have been many script changes through various movies since the formulation of this partnership (Powell, 2014). This partnership is called the military entertainment complex.

In the 1986 film *Top Gun*, the DoD changed a major plot point in the script—Goose’s death (Lamar, 1986). In the original script, Goose, Maverick’s wingman, dies from a fiery midair collision (Lamar, 1986). The U.S. Navy did not want to depict its pilots as being untrained, so they altered the script to Goose dying in a spinout, an accident that was not directly the pilots’ fault (Lamar, 1986).

On another film, *Thirteen Days*, a film about the Cuban missile crisis, writers were asked to modify the script after the production team requested support from the Pentagon for filming (Robb, 2004). The studio decided to favor historical accuracy rather than funding from the DoD and did not make alterations to the script (Robb, 2004).

In the film *Black Hawk Down*, names of the characters were changed from their real-life counterparts for being “uncool” (Robb, 2004, p. 91). Gore and violence are lowered to a minimum in films funded by the military, so movies such as *Saving Private Ryan*—known for showcasing the brutality of World War II—were not funded by the DoD (Martin, 2023).

It is the mission of the U.S. military to present themselves in a positive light (Martin, 2023). The DoD actively tries to recruit through not only advertising campaigns and in-person recruitment, but also through entertainment media seen by regular consumers (Martin, 2023). The entertainment media filtered through the DoD maintains a hyperbolized image of the

military that may lead to publics being “on board” with the military, by either joining or actively voicing support (Martin, 2023, p.1). Increased perceptions of the military’s significance to society through consistent positive depictions in media and popular culture can boost recruitment numbers (Martin, 2023). Martin (2023) describes recruitment as “being a targeted initiative with the purpose of attracting candidates to a job with success in mind” (p. 2).

Mass media content and its effects has a multitude of extensive literature about the subject (Bermeitinger, 2016, Bos et al., 2016, Chong, 2007, Lecheler, 2019). Research has been devoted to understanding cognitive responses to messages disseminated through mass media channels. Work on media framing and priming effects (Hoewe, 2020, Lecheler, 2019, Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2016) has contributed to the understanding that the way or when a message is presented can have lasting effects on the consumer.

Framing theory is when the meaning of a message is changed when it is presented using a frame (Lecheler, 2019). A frame can be the way something is captured on video, the angles, lighting, or even background music. This theory has been applied to understand how framing in movies can influence people’s opinions (Mulligan, 2011). One study found that pro-choice framing on abortion in movies led to pro-choice opinions in movie consumers (Mulligan, 2011).

Priming theory is the idea that messages in the media can alter attitudes and behaviors to ideas or concepts (Bermeitinger, 2016). Studies have shown that priming can change behaviors such as spending habits and attitudes towards concepts (Nagar, 2021). One study found that commercials featuring celebrities using a product led to viewers having a more positive attitude towards the product (Nagar, 2021).

If consumers are exposed to positive frames of the military, they will view the military more favorably.

To test this hypothesis, a post-test only between-subjects experimental design was used. Findings from this study will be useful because it will uncover if DoD influence in Hollywood is a reliable strategy to increase support and recruitment efforts for the military. This information will also be useful to movie consumers as it would shed light on the background of these military-backed movies and create a more critical viewing experience.

This research is important because there is a lack of information about the effects of the relationship between the DoD and Hollywood (Mirrlees, 2017). The lack of information concerning the military entertainment complex is in due part to most of it being classified (Mirrlees, 2017). Many freedom-of-information requests pertaining to the relationship between the DoD and Hollywood have been denied and continue to be (Mirrlees, 2017).

The next chapter provides a review of the literature pertaining to the background of the military entertainment complex, movies with DoD influence, theoretical framework, and application of theory of reasoned action.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The purpose of this study is to research priming effects on DoD influenced films and uncover if there is a relationship with these effects affecting attitudes, beliefs, military support, and behaviors. The literature review will expand upon the background of the military entertainment complex, review of films with DoD influence and recruitment, theoretical foundation, and application of the theory of reasoned action.

#### **Background of the Military Entertainment Complex**

Since World War I, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has worked closely with Hollywood to produce movies that sets a positive agenda surrounding the military and its branches (Mirrlees, 2017). A mutually beneficial relationship, Hollywood gains access to military equipment and locations while the military can dictate how they are portrayed in film (Keegan, 2011).

During World War II, the military connection with Hollywood developed rapidly. CBC radio did a series on the military entertainment complex and said that “between 1942 and 1945, the Bureau reviewed 1,652 scripts, revising, or discarding anything that portrayed the U.S. unfavorably, including any material that made Americans seem ‘oblivious to the war or anti-war’ (CBC, 2022). The Office of War Information was created to work with Hollywood in developing films. The agency was created in June 1942. The agency “was responsible for formulating and implementing information programs to promote, in the United States and abroad, understanding

of the status and progress of the war effort and of war policies, activities, and aims of the U.S. government” (National Archives, 2022). Elmer Davis was the director of the Office of War information during World War II. Davis said, “The easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most peoples’ minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize they're being propagandized” (CBC, 2022).

Moving forward to the 1980s, the Cold War was in full effect. The U.S. military was actively trying to recruit to build their forces. During this era, the popular movie, *Top Gun* (1986), was released. The movie starred Tom Cruise who portrayed Pete ‘Maverick’ Mitchell, a hot-headed Navy pilot. This movie utilized real fighter jets and pilots that were provided by the U.S. military (Martin, 2023). Since the film required the use of military equipment and personnel, the DoD had heavy involvement in the film and its script (Martin, 2023). One of the major changes the DoD implemented in the film was changing Kelly McGillis’s character Charlotte Blackwood from an enlisted member of the military to an independent contractor (Martin, 2023). The reason for this change is the military wanted to avoid a depiction of fraternization between military officers since it is not allowed in the military (Martin, 2023).

*Transformers* (Bay, 2007), a science-fiction film depicting alien robots fighting against each other on Earth, had extensive amounts of DoD involvement (Mirrlees, 2017). *Transformers* producer Ian Bryce detailed the relationship between the film crew and the Pentagon this way: “Without the superb military support we’ve gotten it would be an entirely different-looking film. Once you get Pentagon approval, you’ve created a win-win situation. We want to cooperate with the Pentagon to show them off in the most positive light, and the Pentagon likewise wants to give us the resources to be able to do that” (Turse, 2021). Movies that require the use of military equipment or personnel will have to face vetting from the DoD.

As of 2023, the DoD still largely influences Hollywood with recent releases such as *Top Gun: Maverick*, *Wonder Woman 1984*, and *Transformers: The Last Knight* (Spy Culture, 2019).

Movies funded by the DoD contain similar messages of heroism, bravery, and strength (Mirrlees, 2017). Various blockbuster movies contain these messages that are then consumed by large audiences. People are spending more time with media because of the rise of streaming services and digital content (Morgan et al., 2015).

The promotion of American military is not limited to the United States. Hollywood is the global leader of blockbuster films. A portion of these films are funded by the DoD with their agenda to have positive influence on attitudes about the military (Maisuwong, 2012). These movies can shape viewers perceptions about the military and fill gaps in knowledge.

It is important to note that research between the association of Hollywood and the DoD is sparse as a significant amount of information is classified (Mirrlees, 2017). There have been many freedom-of-information requests that have been denied pertaining to the relationship between the DoD and Hollywood.

The 2017 Intelligence Act requires that U.S. intelligence communities release information about engagements with entertainment industries (Alford & Secker, 2017). Currently, there are no reports available to the public.

## **Review of DoD Influenced Films and Recruitment**

Increasing recruitment is the goal of DoD influence in Hollywood movies (Mirrlees, 2017). The DoD takes advantage of filmmakers who need military equipment to showcase their vision for the film.

In the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Spottiswoode, 1997), the U.S. Navy allowed producers to use ships and helicopters but in return wanted to alter the script (Robb, 2004). This alteration concerned a line where Bond pokes fun at a U.S. Ambassador, joking about the U.S. defeat in Vietnam (Robb, 2004). Phil Strub, head of the Pentagon film liaison office, requested that the line be removed entirely (Robb, 2004). Strub argued that the line could escalate tensions between Vietnam and the U.S., and it painted the military in a negative light (Robb, 2004). Producers agreed and the line was cut from the film (Robb, 2004).

*Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1996) is a film that attempted to garner support from the DoD but failed (Robb, 2004). There were various script changes as the original script depicted Marines as inept while civilians saved the day (Robb, 2004). The DoD refused to give any support to the movie until the script passed its vetting process (Robb, 2004). One DoD official made this comment regarding the film: “The military appears impotent and/or inept; all advances in stopping aliens are the result of actions by civilians.” (Robb, 2004, p. 69). Dean Devlin, one of the scriptwriters, told Strub, “If this doesn’t make every boy in the country want to fly a fighter jet, I’ll eat this script” (Robb, 2004, p. 69). Even with all the changes, the film failed to get support from the Pentagon (Robb, 2004). This film is an example of the lengths filmmakers will go to get support from the military (Robb, 2004).

The *Transformers* franchise secured the most military assistance compared to any other Hollywood film (Alford & Secker, 2017). Usually, filmmakers must submit early drafts of screenplays for DoD approval (Alford & Secker, 2017). However, the DoD waived those rules for the *Transformers* franchise in return for early influence on the scripts (Alford & Secker, 2017). Joint meetings between producers and military officials were held before scripts were completed (Alford & Secker, 2017). The DoD used the third *Transformers* film to showcase the



advanced technology the U.S. military has to offer (Alford & Secker, 2017). The DoD leveraged these films to showcase their power and boost recruitment numbers (Alford & Secker, 2017).

*Transformers* (Bay, 2007) broke records in the amount of military aid received (Alford & Secker, 2017). The film featured twelve types of Air Force aircraft and actual military troops from four different bases (Alford & Secker, 2017).

An example of a script change in *Transformers* (Bay, 2007) is an added line from Jon Voight, playing the Secretary of Defense (Alford & Secker, 2017). Voight and Strub both agreed that his character needed to express more concern for the troops safety and added the line “Bring ‘em home.” (Alford & Secker, 2017).

*Iron Man* (Favreau, 2008) received many script alterations in return for DoD support (Alford & Secker, 2017). Some of these changes include thematic changes such as attitudes towards war (Alford & Secker, 2017). The initial script in 2004 had main character Tony Stark fight against the “military industrial complex” and have stronger opposing views to war (Alford & Secker, 2017). The final version of the film depicted Tony having a better relationship with the military and not opposed to war (Alford & Secker, 2017).

The DoD has prevented movies from being made (Alford & Secker, 2017). *Fields of Fire* (Webb, 1993) was a film that was set during the Vietnam War. There were various scenes depicting the U.S. military in a negative light such as a Marine posing with dead bodies for photos, torturing civilians, and setting villages on fire (Alford & Secker, 2017). The DoD attempted to get Webb to fix these issues, but Webb refused (Alford & Secker, 2017). Without assistance from the DoD, the film was never made (Alford & Secker, 2017).

## **Theoretical Foundation**

This study attempts to further understanding of the effects of the military entertainment complex (MEC) on individual's beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions toward the military. Specifically, this study examines the use and effectiveness of framing and priming by the U.S. Military by applying the theory of reasoned action. To understand how films convey messages to the consumers, it is important to know the foundation of framing and priming. After an overview of framing and priming, an overview of the theory of reasoned action will be provided. It is important to understand previous studies on theory to explain the context and reasoning for the behavior being tested.

### *Framing effects of media*

According to Chong, framing is a “process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (Chong, 2007, p. 32). A frame is used to shape a message or idea for an audience. Framing is closely related to agenda-setting theory, which is the idea that media sources have behind-the-scenes interests and utilize frames to set their agenda to the audience (Lecheler, 2019). Frames affect how people will perceive an idea. However, people have different effects from frames because of different moderators (Lecheler, 2019). These moderators include individual and contextual moderators such as ideals and issue importance (Lecheler, 2019).

Issue importance can change the way a specific frame is perceived by the audience (Lecheler, 2019). For example, a student who finds climate change to be important will be affected more by frames depicting climate change as wrong compared to someone who finds climate change unimportant. This is true with attitudes towards the military. People who already

find the military to be of importance will have different reactions to positive frames than those who do not (Lecheler, 2019).

According to Bos (2016), “Media frames suggest specific judgments, attitudes, and decisions to the individual – and consequently result in a ‘framing effect’” (Bos et al., 2016, p. 55). There are two types of frames that studies typically identify: issue-specific frames and generic frames (Bos et al., 2016). Issue-specific frames are used in certain contexts or issues and is one of the focuses of this paper (Bos et al., 2016).

Using media frames as independent variables in experiments leads to changes in attitudes, opinions, or individual frames (Scheufele, 1999). The DoD uses positive frames to paint the military in a positive light. The film *Transformers* depicts all military members to be smart, brave, and heroic which leads to viewers believing that real members of the military share these traits (Mirrlees, 2017). A hyperbolized and stylized image of the U.S. military is depicted to audiences using a various number of media frames. Movies with positive frames of the military has led to higher recruitment in the military (Australian Associated Press, 2022).

One experiment testing framing effect found that positive primes can lead to changed attitudes (Mulligan, 2011). In this experiment, participants were shown the film *Cider House Rules* (Hallström, 1999) where the issue of abortion is framed in a pro-choice way (Mulligan, 2011). After the film, groups who watched or did not watch the film were given the same survey to research their attitudes towards abortion (Mulligan, 2011). Those who viewed the film had more positive attitudes towards abortion than those who did not (Mulligan, 2011).

In experiments testing framing effects, it is important to note that moderators will affect the effects frames will have. Although framing effects will be different across the board, the experimental design can be created in a way to prevent moderators from heavily affecting results.

Such ways could be making sure the participants have similar ideals or notions about a subject or keeping sample sizes small to avoid variances. Framing effects are volatile, so the experimental design is crucial to get valid results.

### *Priming effects of media*

Priming theory is defined as a process where the processing of a stimulus is affected by a previous presentation (Bermeitinger, 2016). Most priming evidence is based on experiments or analysis of important events (Togoby, 2007). Results from priming experiments can be manipulated by outside factors such as moderators (Togoby, 2007). Moderators may include values, ideals, and issue importance. For example, if someone has a negative attitude towards the military, priming effects of a DoD funded movie may not produce positive effects compared to someone who values the military.

Priming is a theory of memory and recall (Hoewe, 2020). Usually, priming effects happen outside of the individual's conscious thought from stimuli consumed in the past (Hoewe, 2020). Movies funded by the DoD have an agenda to persuade people to either join or support the military. Certain frames in these movies may function as priming stimuli when consumers are forming opinions about the military.

Media priming is the effect of media content on later behavior or judgments (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2016). Media scholars have questioned in the past whether media priming exists since there are only a few studies of its existence (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2016). Studies of media priming must include a control condition where a group receives no priming stimulus (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2016). A meta-analysis done by Roskos-Ewoldsen found that only 42 studies had appropriate control conditions (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2016).

Chronic accessibility is a concept where concepts are found to be highly accessible from memory (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2016). For example, an attitude towards spiders is chronically accessible compared to an attitude towards obscure foods (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2016). For a concept to become chronically accessible, it must be reinforced multiple times (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2016). Constant exposure to positive frames about the military can be reinforcing primes that create concepts that are chronically accessible.

Awareness of the priming stimulus is not an important factor in priming research (Hoewe, 2020). An individual's awareness of the priming stimulus is crucial when conducting research (Hoewe, 2020). Manipulation checks to see if participants could pinpoint primes in a stimulus (Hoewe, 2020). Results from media priming experiments will only be significant if the participants were unaware of a prime being deployed (Hoewe, 2020).

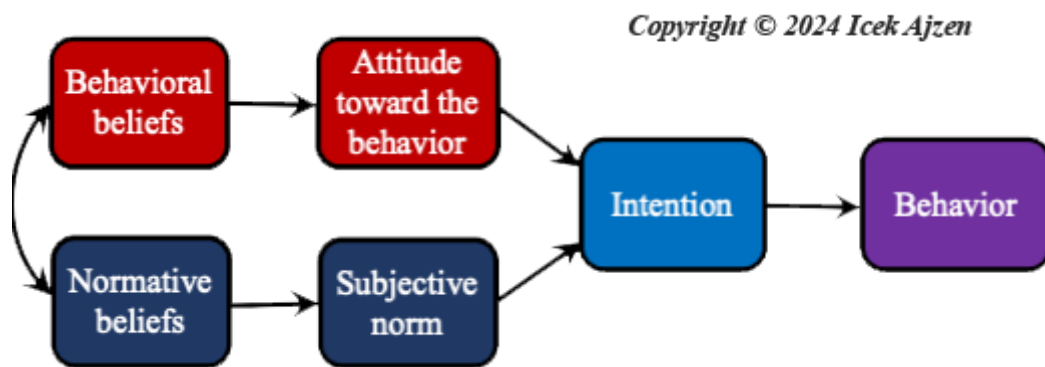
#### *Theory of reasoned action*

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) explains that "behavior is determined by the behavioral intentions to emit the behavior" (Vallerand, 1992, p. 98). The two factors that determine behavior intention are attitudinal factors and social normative factors (Vallerand, 1992). When people believe a suggested behavior to be positive, they are more likely to perform the behavior.

The definition of an attitude is a person's "evaluation" of a concept, idea, or entity (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977, p.889). Subjective norm is "the belief that an important person or group if people will approve and support a particular behavior." (Ham et al., 2015, p.740) When combined, attitude and subjective norm will form a person's intention, what they plan to do. A person acting out on their intention is then defined as behavior.

Operationalizations of variables in the model must consist of elements, including action, target, context, and time (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977) as appropriate. Action specifies a class of behaviors such as cooperations or aggression (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977, p.890). The target element is classified as the group that share similar traits such as males or females (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Contexts refers to the environment where the attitude and behavior can differ such as home, church, grocery store (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). The last element is time, which refers to attitude's and behavior's being affected by time (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977).

Below is a model that illustrates the theory of reasoned action.



**Figure 1: Theory of Reasoned Action**

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) has elements to explain and predict moral behavior (Donald & Cooper, 2001). People decide how to behave by their attitudes towards behavior and their own outcome evaluations (Vallerand, 1992). People behave in a certain way because they refer to memories that would convince them to perform said behavior.

An individual's attitude can predict an individual's intention, whereas subjective norms can also predict individual's intention (Peslak et al., 2010). Attitude can also be a predictor of

behavior (Peslak et al., 2010) as well as subjective norms can also be a predictor of behavior (Peslak et al., 2010). Intention is another predictor of behavior (Peslak et al., 2010).

There are numerous studies that have applied TRA to understand and predict behaviors (Peslak et al., 2010) (Hoewe, 2015) (Ham et al., 2015). These studies research how behavior is influenced by various factors such as attitudes, intentions, and subjective norms. Experiments have proven that there are predictors when it comes to behavior (Peslak et al., 2010, Hoewe, 2015, Ham et al., 2015).

#### *Applying theory of reasoned action to MEC influence*

In movies funded by the DoD, many characters in the military are seen as heroic and supported by the cast of characters. These movies want to push the agenda that members of the military will be supported by those around them. With consumers adopting the pro-military agenda, consumers will be more likely to adopt pro-military behaviors such as joining or supporting.

This can be applied to research about DoD influence on people through entertainment media. Positive frames in DoD funded movies could cause people to form positive attitudes about the military which would then lead to intentions of enlisting and then recruitment.

Priming in DoD funded films may affect attitudes and support for the military, which can be predictors of intentions and behaviors, according to TRA.

Applying this theory, DoD funded films persuade (action) potential recruits (target) in an intimate (context) approximately two-hour (time) session. These movies provide a measure where viewers can evaluate positive frames about the military which may later affect their behavior towards the military.

## **Hypothesis and Research Questions**

There is little research on the effects these movies have on individuals' attitudes towards the military. Therefore, this study is driven by the following research question:

RQ1: Do movies that contain positive frames about the military prime individuals to have a more positive belief towards the military?

The purpose of this study is to research priming effects on DoD influenced films and uncover if there is a relationship between these effects affecting attitudes, beliefs, support towards the military, and behaviors. An experiment will be conducted to answer the following hypothesis:

H1: Individuals who are exposed to positive frames of the U. S. Military in film will have increased positive beliefs toward the military.

H2: Individuals who are exposed to positive frames of the U. S. Military in film will have more support towards the military.

H3: Individuals who are exposed to positive frames of the U.S. Military in film will have increased positive attitudes toward the military.

H4: Individuals who are exposed to positive frames of the U.S. Military in film will have increased positive behavioral intention toward the military.

The following hypotheses test the relationships proposed by the TRA in the context of the present study:

H5: Individuals' beliefs about the U.S. Military influence attitudes toward the U.S. Military.



H6: Attitudes toward the U.S. Military influence behavioral intention toward the U.S. Military.

## **Conclusion**

There is a significant history between Hollywood and the DoD, spanning back to World War II and continuing in present times.

Framing and priming theory lays the theoretical framework behind the argument that DoD has positive influence on attitudes and behavior towards the military. The theory of reasoned action explains why these behaviors and attitudes occur. The next chapter will outline the methodology and rationale of the experiment.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The goal for this research is to produce empirical evidence that DoD funded projects having significant priming effects on individuals and their attitudes and behaviors towards the military. A quantitative approach was used to gather data for this study.

#### **Participants**

Participants were young adults ranging from 18-35. This targeted the age range the U.S. military is actively trying to recruit (Army, 2024). Participants were sourced from undergraduate classes at the University of South Florida. Extra credit was given as an incentive for completing the survey. A total number of 125 participants were surveyed. The group who saw no clips had 47 participants, the group who saw one clip had 36 participants, and the group who saw two clips had 42 participants.

#### **Procedure**

The experiment contained two pieces of stimuli: A contemporary movie scene from a DoD funded project that frames the military in a positive light and a military ad. There were three groups of participants: a control group that received none of the clips, a group that received both video clips, a group that received only the military ad, and a group who only received the questionnaire.

After the questionnaire, participants answered a brief demographic section to determine gender, age, military status, and political affiliation.

The questionnaire was comprised of questions used to measure attitude toward the military. Participants answered on a five-point Likert agreement scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” These questions addressed attitudes about the military, beliefs about the military, behavior indicators, and support for the military. The questionnaire was comprised of twenty questions to measure scales describing attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs toward the military.

## **Independent and Dependent Variables**

### *Manipulations*

The variable that was manipulated was the exposure of positive frames in DoD funded films. Group A received the priming stimulus through a film clip utilizing positive frames about the military and was immediately exposed to a military advertisement after. Group B was only exposed to the military advertisement. Group C was exposed to no stimuli and only received the questionnaire. Group C did not have a manipulation check.

This experiment was adapted from a similar experiment researching priming effects on aggressive behavior (Coyne et al., 2012). The experiment used three groups, where each group was shown a video clip with different levels of aggression (Coyne et al., 2012). The results found that the group that saw the clip with the highest aggression were more likely to have aggression cognitions (Coyne et al., 2012).

Adapting from Coyne’s (2012) experiment, this experiment followed a similar method where one group was exposed to a different priming stimulus compared to another group.

### *Dependent variables*

The dependent variables were beliefs about the military, behavior indicators, support for the military, and attitudes.

These variables were measured using a survey presented after the stimuli. The survey was created using an adaptation of a previous five-point scale concerning war attitudes (Dupuis, 2011).

### **Instrumentation**

Adapted from: Dupuis, E. (2011). A new scale to measure war attitudes: Construction and predictors - core. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/72051723.pdf>

#### Ordinal Scale

#### Survey questions

#### Likert Scale ranging from SD-SA

##### Beliefs about the Military

1. The U.S. military saves people around the world.
2. I believe U.S. military members have good intentions.
3. The U.S. military keeps us safe.
4. The U.S. military is usually justified in its actions.
5. U.S. military members are heroes.

#### Behavior Indicators

1. I vote for pro-military candidates.
2. I would donate to charities that aid veterans.
3. I would consider joining the military.
4. I would like to research more about military history.
5. I would defend the policies of the U.S. military.

#### Support for U.S. Military

1. I would be friends with military members.
2. I would attend public rallies supporting the U.S. military.

3. Joining the U.S. military is a good opportunity.
4. People who join the U.S. military are brave.
5. People who join the U.S. military are good people.

#### Attitude towards the Military

1. I feel safe due to the U.S. military's existence.
2. I place trust in U.S. military members.
3. I would feel proud as a member of the U.S. military.
4. I agree with the U.S. military's decisions in times of war.
5. I think being a member of the U.S. military is a positive experience.

#### Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. Are you a member of the armed forces or have a family member who has joined?
4. What is your political party?

Beliefs about the military included questions inquiring about support for military operations overseas, attitudes about past military operations, and if members of the military are heroes. Behavior indicators included questions about potential behaviors toward the military such as voting for political candidates with pro-military views, donating to charities that benefit veterans, or considering joining the military. Questions about supporting the military asked if the participants would be willing to have friends serving in the military, if they would go to rallies supporting the military, and if joining the military can be a good experience.

#### **Stimulus Materials**

The experiment was designed using Qualtrics software. It consisted of three different versions of the questionnaire. One version showed both clips, another version showed one clip, and the third version showed no clips. The demographics portion was included after the questionnaire for every version. Each version had a questionnaire at the end.

The first video clip was a scene from the film *Top Gun* (Scott, 1986) where U.S. military soldiers are depicted as heroes after finishing a combat mission. The second clip was a U.S. Marine Corps public service announcement released in 2021. The military PSA is named “JUMP | BE ALL YOU CAN BE | GOARMY” and follows a U.S. Army soldier jumping from a plane.

### **Data Analysis**

Following data collection, the data was analyzed using SPSS 26. A  $p < 0.05$  is used as the criteria for significant in all hypothesis tests. ANOVA was used to identify significant differences in mean scores for the dependent variables examined in this study across experimental treatment groups. (H1-H4).

Linear regression analysis was used to test the relationships among variables proposed by the TRA (H5-H6). Incomplete questionnaires were removed from the database.

The independent variable is the priming stimulus provided to the participants. The dependent variable will be attitude and behavior towards the military.

### **Methodological Limitations**

As previously explained, there are methodological limitations within this study. One limitation is that there are individual level moderators that would influence the participants attitude towards the military, no matter if they received the priming stimulus or not. Some of these moderators can include ideals, gender, and issue importance. To minimize impact, these moderators were recorded in the demographic section of the experiment. Another limitation will be sample size. A larger sample size would result in more accurate data.

The next chapter will display the results of the ANOVA and linear regression to reveal if any of the data was significant.

## CHAPTER 4:

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to uncover if there are effects of DoD-influenced media on consumers attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and support toward the U.S. Military.

This section will go over the hypotheses researched through the survey data.

#### Demographics

Out of the 125 participants, 28% were male, 68% were female, less than 1% identified as other, and 3% did not disclose. 32% of respondents were either involved or had family members involved with the military. 88% of respondents were ages 18-24 and 11% were ages 25-35; all under recruitment age for the U.S. military. 28% described themselves as conservative; 40% described themselves as liberal and 31% described their political ideology as “other.”

**Table 1:**

*Are you or a member of your family involved with the military?*

|       |       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Yes   | 40        | 32.0    | 32.0          | 32.0               |
|       | No    | 85        | 68.0    | 68.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total | 125       | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

**Table 2:***What is your gender?*

|       |                   | Frequency |         | Valid   | Cumulative |
|-------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------|------------|
|       |                   | y         | Percent | Percent | Percent    |
| Valid | Male              | 35        | 28.0    | 28.0    | 28.0       |
|       | Female            | 85        | 68.0    | 68.0    | 96.0       |
|       | Other             | 1         | .8      | .8      | 96.8       |
|       | Prefer not to say | 4         | 3.2     | 3.2     | 100.0      |
|       | Total             | 125       | 100.0   | 100.0   |            |

**Table3:***What is your age?*

|       |       | Frequency |         | Valid   | Cumulative |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------|------------|
|       |       | Frequency | Percent | Percent | Percent    |
| Valid | 18-24 | 111       | 88.8    | 88.8    | 88.8       |
|       | 25-35 | 14        | 11.2    | 11.2    | 100.0      |
|       | Total | 125       | 100.0   | 100.0   |            |

**Table 4:***My political ideology is*

|       |              | Frequency |         | Valid   | Cumulative |
|-------|--------------|-----------|---------|---------|------------|
|       |              | Frequency | Percent | Percent | Percent    |
| Valid | Conservative | 35        | 28.0    | 28.0    | 28.0       |
|       | Liberal      | 51        | 40.8    | 40.8    | 68.8       |
|       | Other        | 39        | 31.2    | 31.2    | 100.0      |
|       | Total        | 125       | 100.0   | 100.0   |            |



## Reliability

**Table 5:**

| <i>Reliability Statistics (Belief Scale)</i> |  |            |
|--|--|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha                             | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| .827   | .827   | 5          |

| <i>Reliability Statistics (Behavior indicator scale)</i> |  |            |
|--|--|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha   | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| .716   | .716   | 5          |

| <i>Reliability Statistics (Military Support scale)</i> |  |            |
|--|--|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha                                       | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| .759   | .765   | 5          |

| <i>Reliability Statistics (Attitudes Scale)</i> |  |            |
|---|--|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha                                | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| .813  | .814   | 5          |

A four-part questionnaire was sent to 125 participants. The belief subscale consisted of 5 items ( $\alpha = .82$ ), the military support subscale consisted of 5 items ( $\alpha = .75$ ), the behavior indicator subscale consisted of 5 items ( $\alpha = .71$ ), and the attitudes subscale consisted of 5 items ( $\alpha = .81$ ). The consistency of the scale questions ranged from acceptable ( $0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$ ) to good ( $0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$ ).

## Analysis

**Table 6:**

*ANOVA*

|                        |                | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F     | Sig. |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|------|
| Belief Scale           | Between Groups | 3.018          | 2   | 1.509       | 2.350 | .100 |
|                        | Within Groups  | 78.369         | 122 | .642        |       |      |
|                        | Total          | 81.388         | 124 |             |       |      |
| Attitude Scale         | Between Groups | .440           | 2   | .220        | .324  | .724 |
|                        | Within Groups  | 82.861         | 122 | .679        |       |      |
|                        | Total          | 83.300         | 124 |             |       |      |
| Behavior Scale         | Between Groups | 2.519          | 2   | 1.259       | 1.947 | .147 |
|                        | Within Groups  | 78.921         | 122 | .647        |       |      |
|                        | Total          | 81.440         | 124 |             |       |      |
| Military Support Scale | Between Groups | 1.615          | 2   | .807        | 1.434 | .242 |
|                        | Within Groups  | 68.684         | 122 | .563        |       |      |
|                        | Total          | 70.299         | 124 |             |       |      |

H1: Individuals who are exposed to positive frames of the U.S. Military in film will have increased positive beliefs toward the military.

An ANOVA was executed to evaluate the relationship between exposure to positive frames and beliefs towards the military. Means and standard deviation are shown below in table 3. A Likert scale was used with 1 being the lowest belief score and 5 being the highest. To be significant,  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 7:**  
**Belief Scale**

---

| Group         | Mean   | N   | Std. Deviation |
|---------------|--------|-----|----------------|
| Control Group | 3.8553 | 47  | .76409         |
| One Clip      | 3.9167 | 36  | .96732         |
| Two Clips     | 3.5571 | 42  | .67648         |
| Total         | 3.7728 | 125 | .81015         |

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The results of the ANOVA were not significant as  $[F(2, 122) = 2.35, p = 0.10]$ . There was no significant change in belief to individuals who are exposed to positive frames so there was no support for H1.

Although overall there was no significance comparing the scales between the groups, individual questions did have significant change when compared between the groups. In the belief scale, participants were asked if they believed the U.S. Military had bad intentions. When comparing the control group to the group who viewed two pieces of media, the second group was significantly less likely to believe the military had bad intentions. The p value for this question when running a least significant different test (LSD) was .02.

The third question in the belief scale also generated similar results as the LSD test generated a p value of .01 for the question. Question three asked if the U.S. military kept participants safe.

H2: Individuals who are exposed to positive frames of the U. S. Military in film will have increased support toward the military.

An ANOVA was executed to evaluate the relationship between exposure to positive frames and positive support toward the military. Means and standard deviation are shown below in table 4. A Likert scale was used with 1 being the lowest belief score and 5 being the highest. To be significant,  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 8:**

Military Support Scale

| Group     | Mean   | N   | Std. Deviation |
|-----------|--------|-----|----------------|
| Control   | 3.8426 | 47  | .63374         |
| One Clip  | 3.9833 | 36  | .86371         |
| Two Clips | 3.6952 | 42  | .76667         |
| Total     | 3.8336 | 125 | .75295         |

The results of the ANOVA were not significant as  $[F(2, 122) = 1.43, p = 0.24]$ . There was no significant change concerning an individual's support when exposed to positive frames so there was no support for H2.

H3: Individuals who are exposed to positive frames of the U.S. Military in film will have increased positive attitudes toward the military.

An ANOVA was executed to evaluate the relationship between exposure to positive frames and attitudes towards the military. Means and standard deviation are shown below in table 5. A Likert scale was used with 1 being the lowest belief score and 5 being the highest. To be significant,  $P < 0.05$ .

**Table 9:**

| Attitude Scale |        |     |                |
|----------------|--------|-----|----------------|
| Group          | Mean   | N   | Std. Deviation |
| Control Group  | 3.4809 | 47  | .74910         |
| One Clip       | 3.5444 | 36  | .97817         |
| Two Clips      | 3.3952 | 42  | .75803         |
| Total          | 3.4704 | 125 | .81962         |

The results of the ANOVA were not significant as [F (2, 122) = .32, p = 0.72]. There was no significant change in attitudes of individuals who are exposed to positive frames so there was no support for H3.

H4: Individuals who are exposed to positive frames of the U.S. Military in film will have increased positive behavioral intention toward the military.

An ANOVA was executed to evaluate the relationship between exposure to positive frames and behavior intention towards the military. Means and standard deviation are shown below in table 6. A Likert scale was used with 1 being the lowest belief score and 5 being the highest. To be significant,  $P < 0.05$ .

**Table 10:**

| Behavior Scale |        |     |                |
|----------------|--------|-----|----------------|
| Group          | Mean   | N   | Std. Deviation |
| Control Group  | 3.1234 | 47  | .79734         |
| One Clip       | 3.3722 | 36  | .94192         |
| Two Clips      | 3.0190 | 42  | .67399         |
| Total          | 3.1600 | 125 | .81042         |

The results of the ANOVA were not significant as  $[F(2, 122) = 1.94, p = 0.14]$ . There was no significant change in attitudes of individuals who are exposed to positive frames so there was no support for H4.

Question five of the behavior scale did generate significant results. This question asked if participants would go against the policies of the U.S. military. Compared with the control group, viewers who only viewed the military ad were more likely to support the policies of the U.S. military. After running an LSD test, the p value was .03.

H5: Individuals' beliefs about the U.S. Military influence attitudes toward the U.S. Military.

A linear regression test was used to determine if beliefs predicted attitudes toward the U.S. Military.

**Table 11:**

*Model Summary<sup>b</sup>*

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .807 <sup>a</sup> | .651     | .648              | .48610                     |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Belief Scale

b. Dependent Variable: Attitude Scale

Beliefs significantly predicted attitudes.

The table below shows attitudes correlated with beliefs. There is a relationship between attitudes and beliefs.

**Table 12:**

*Correlations*

|                     |                | Attitude Scale | Belief Scale |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Pearson Correlation | Attitude Scale | 1.000          | .807         |
|                     | Belief Scale   | .807           | 1.000        |
| Sig. (1-tailed)     | Attitude Scale | .              | <.001        |
|                     | Belief Scale   | .000           | .            |
| N                   | Attitude Scale | 125            | 125          |
|                     | Belief Scale   | 125            | 125          |

There was a positive correlation between the two variables,  $r=.807$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<.001$ . There was also significant data for beliefs predicting attitudes. Using the data above, there is support for H5.

H6: Attitudes toward the U.S. Military influence behavioral intention toward the U.S. Military.

A linear regression test was used to determine if attitudes predict behaviors towards the U.S. Military.

**Table 13:**

*Model Summary<sup>b</sup>*

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .757 <sup>a</sup> | .573     | .570              | .53167                     |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Attitude Scale

b. Dependent Variable: Behavior Scale

Attitude significantly predicted behavior.

The table below shows behaviors correlated with attitudes. As an individual's attitude rises positively, behavior will be more positive.

**Table 14:**

*Correlations*

|                     |                | Behavior Scale | Attitude Scale |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Pearson Correlation | Behavior Scale | 1.000          | .757           |
|                     | Attitude Scale | .757           | 1.000          |
| Sig. (1-tailed)     | Behavior Scale | .              | <.001          |
|                     | Attitude Scale | .000           | .              |
| N                   | Behavior Scale | 125            | 125            |
|                     | Attitude Scale | 125            | 125            |



There was a positive correlation between the two variables,  $r=.757$ ,  $n=125$ ,  $p<.001$ . There was also significant data for attitudes predicting behaviors. Using the data above, there is support for H6.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The goal for this research is to produce empirical evidence that DoD funded projects having significant priming effects on individuals and their attitudes and behaviors toward the military. A quantitative approach was used to gather data for this study.

#### **Summary**

While certain questions were impacted by the inclusion of a priming stimulus, the data was not strong enough to support hypotheses 1-4. The data did uncover that an individual's beliefs about the U.S. Military is a predictor of attitude towards the U.S. military. The data also supported H6, attitudes towards the Military influence behavioral intention towards the U.S. Military. The analysis supports the theory of reasoned action where it explains why attitudes and behaviors affect each other.

The following research question in mind when collection data was:

RQ1: Do movies that contain positive frames about the military prime individuals to have a more positive attitude, behavior, or belief toward the military?

Although the data did not sufficiently support H1-H4, responses to specific questions did show a significant effect when comparing groups. When asked if the U.S. Military had good intentions or if the U.S. Military kept people safe, there was significant change comparing the three group's responses. Behavior question five asked if the participant would go against the policies of the U.S. military, which also had significant change. The data showed that participants who viewed only the military advertisement had a significant increase in support

U.S. Military policy. The two belief questions concerned perceptions of the U.S. military keeping individuals safe and if the Military had bad intentions. These questions had significant change when comparing the control group and the group that viewed both clips. The data showed that positive perceptions about beliefs about the U.S. Military keeping individuals safe and the U.S. Military intentions increased.

### **Interpretation**

Unexpectedly, the data suggested the opposite of what the hypotheses predicted. When comparing the group that viewed both clips to the other two groups, the group that viewed both clips had fewer positive attitudes, beliefs, behavior intention, and support for the military. The data was not strong enough for a significant result but the means of the group who viewed both clips tended to be lower compared to the other two groups.

Individuals who know they are trying to be persuaded tend to stray away from what the pursuer is trying to push on them (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This is supported by the persuasion knowledge theory (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This theory explains that individuals who know they are being persuaded will be averse to any persuasion (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The data from this experiment supports Friestad and Wright's (1994) persuasion knowledge theory. The results demonstrate that individuals who had viewed both clips had weaker attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and support for the military compared to those who had viewed one clip.

Although the data did generate significant data to prove H1-H4, some data such as belief question two, belief question three, and behavior question five show that there are potential priming effects of DoD- influenced content.

The strong correlations between belief/attitude and attitude/behavior stayed in line with hypotheses H5-H6. The data strongly confirms the theory of reasoned action as an explanation for the relationships between beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

### **Limitations**

The generalizability of the results is limited as the sample was solely college students. The recruitment target for the U.S. military is anyone aged 18-35. Ideally, the questionnaire would be answered with a more diverse sample size.

Due to the digital nature of the experiment, there was no way to confirm whether participants viewed the entirety of the clips. Since most participants were sourced from mass communication classes, there was potential for these students to be familiar with persuasion techniques used in the experiment thus leading to a higher chance of backlash against the questions.

The smaller sample size may have impacted results and may be a reason why some of the data was not significant.

As discussed in the literature review, perceptions of primes and frames can be manipulated by modifiers such as issue importance and ideals (Lecheler, 2019). These are called individual and contextual modifiers (Lecheler, 2019).

Although there were limitations that affected the results, the results are nonetheless still valid as it shows that aspects of belief and behavior can be changed by priming stimulus.

### **Recommendations**

For future studies, it should be noted that time is an important factor for a priming stimulus to take effect (Hoewe, 2020). Due to time constraints of this experiment, participants

were only exposed to the stimuli once. Priming has to do with memory recall so therefore when an individual is exposed to a stimulus repeatedly, they are more likely to recall it when exposed to another stimulus (Hoewe, 2020).

Future studies should take account of sample diversity and make sure the sample accurately reflects the population the U.S. Military is targeting.

To avoid participants skipping over the stimulus, questions should be asked to determine if participants watched the stimulus. Incorrect answers could be a sign the media was skipped over, and those responses could be discarded.

Another valuable avenue of research could be seeking out participants who are already familiar with movies concerning the U.S. military and comparing their questionnaire responses to groups who are not so familiar.

## **Conclusion**

On May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the sequel to *Top Gun* (Scott, 1986), *Top Gun: Maverick* (Kosinski, 2022) was released 35 years after the original. Although much has changed since then, the partnership between the DoD and Hollywood has not. The U.S. Military will always need recruits and will source through schools, jobsites, online and television advertisements, and of course, Hollywood. Further research must be done to explore the effects of DoD-Hollywood synergy on recruitment.

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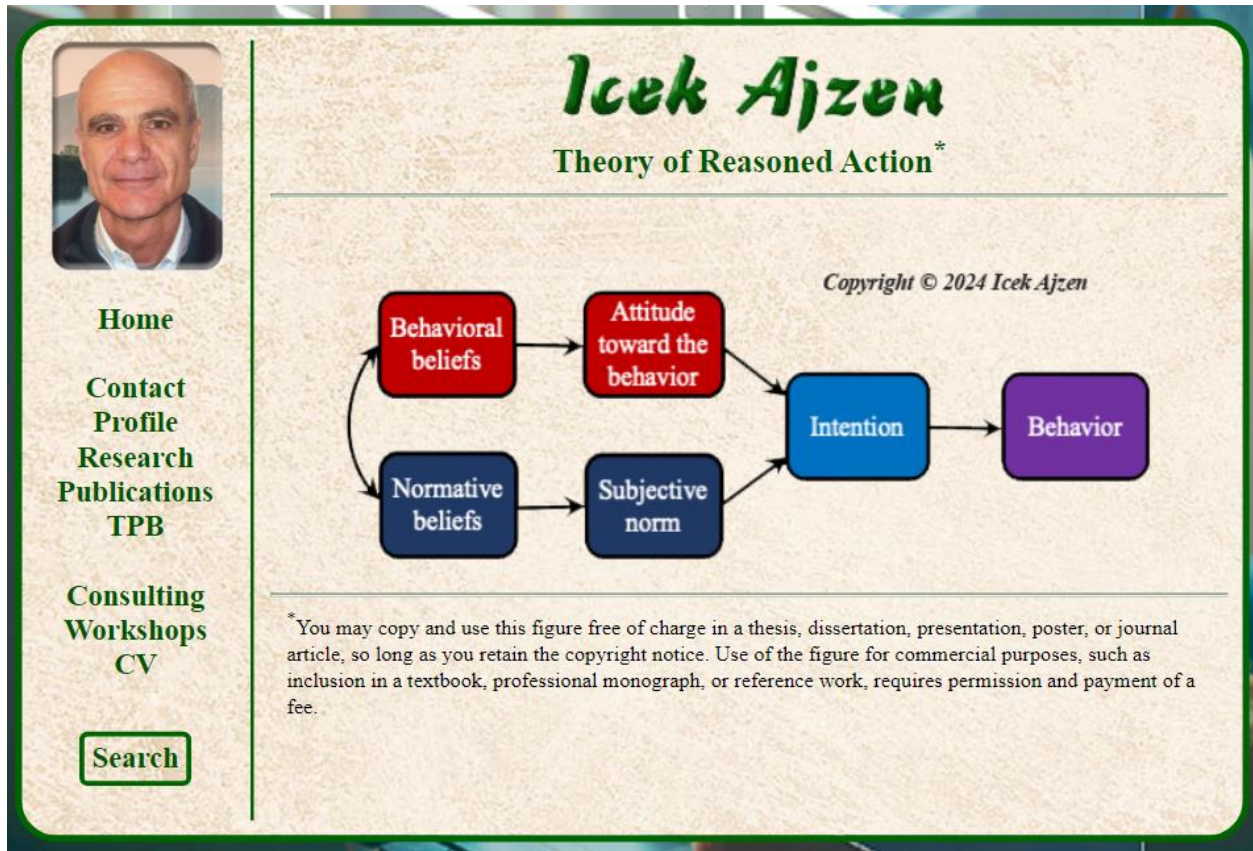
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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Theory of Reasoned Action

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