

# Illegal Street Racers' Behavior: The Proposed Theory

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## Abstract

*This paper reviews the nature of the illegal street racers' behavior and theories underlying risky behavior of illegal street racers to understand factors that influence individual behavior to commit illegal street racing. Generally, there are several theories could be applied to study street racing behavior which include the choice theory, the trait theory, the psychodynamic theory, behavioral theory among others. The findings of the reviews concluded that the most suitable theory to study the behavior of the street racers are the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) developed by Ajzen (1985,1991). These theories suggested that reasoned action and planned behaviors are associated to individual attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavior control. This paper presents the process of how these theories could be used as the theoretical framework for studying the Malaysian illegal motorcycles street racers termed "Mat Rempit".*

## Keywords

*Illegal street racers, Theory of Reasoned Action, Theory of Planned Behavior, attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavior control.*

## 1.0 Introduction

Illegal street racing is not a new phenomenon, but it is well known among the general public in Malaysia. The term 'illegal racers' in Malaysia means individuals who participate in illegal racing using a small under-powered motorcycle (Rozmi et al., 2005). They are also labelled as road hooligans as they often creates chaos on the roads and are associated with many other social problems such as robbing, raping, attacking and killing those who oppose them (Wan Shahrazad et al., 2012; Rozmi et al., 2015; Noh Amit et al., 2016).

The mainstream media often report the public views and outcry as a result of the confusion caused by illegal motorcycle racers such as civil disturbances such as noise at midnight, drug and alcohol problems, stealing for the purpose of buying drugs, gambling, and sexual promiscuity share of women in droves. Their activities not only violate the

boundaries of social norms and values of society but they also have brought a change in lifestyle that lead to the growth of new negative sub-culture (Ismail, 2006; Ismail & Ibrahim, 2007; Norudin & Azman, 2011; Wong, 2011; Nurullah et al., 2012).

The biggest problem faced by the authorities dealing with illegal street racers was that many of those taking part in illegal road racing had scant regard for safety of other road users. Another problem was that those participating in illegal road racing might be trying to emulate their motorsports heroes without taking into consideration that these professional racers were backed by intense training, racing only on tracks approved and sanctioned by Automobile Association of Malaysia (AAM). According to experts, they recognized that there are some riders acting irresponsibly on the roads and the Saturday Night Sprint event held at the circuit was introduced to counter the problem (Syarizal et al., 2017).

In terms of legislation, performing racing on public roads is against the law as it endangered motorcyclists and motorists as well as pedestrians and other road users. Illegal racing is included in Section 42 of the Road Transport Act 1987 (Act 333) and the Commercial Vehicles Licensing Board Act 1987 (Act 334).

There are varieties of individual factors identified in the literature that stimulate young people to commit illegal street racing. These are self-esteem, sensation seeking, resilience, perceived gains, amiability, impatience, risk perception, risky driving, risky behaviors, violation of social norms/values, road rage, traffic violation, rebellion against society, rebellion against parents, masculinity, impulsivity, aggression, hostility, stress (Ulleberg, 2001; Ulleberg & Rundmo, 2003; Dahlen et al., 2005; Olstedal & Rundmo, 2006; Schwebel et al., 2006; Machin & Sankey, 2008). Whereas, Nurullah et al., (2012) in their study on the Malaysian "Mat Rempit" detailed out the street racers' personality traits within the demographic factors into six individual factors in terms of spiritual well-being, self-efficacy, self-image, desire for recognition and attention, escape from social-psychological stress, self-actualization as important factors leading to illegal street racing. In addition several past studies identified the significance of extremely self-confident personality that may indirectly influence risky driving behaviors via attitude (Wong et al., 2009; Ryb et al., 2006; Harre & Sibley, 2007; Vanlaar et al., 2008; Akaateba, 2013). Conclusively the literature suggests that an illegal street racer is a mixer of these personal traits of individual factors. This mixture results in individual riding intentional behavior translated into risk perception actions via attitude.

## **2.0 Related Literature Review**

### **2.1 Driving Attitudes, Behaviour and Traffic Safety Violations**

Eagly and Chaiken (1993) defined attitude as the tendencies to evaluate an object with some degree of favor or disfavor, expressed in affective, cognitive or behavioral responses. On the other hand, Stanton and Salmon (2009) defined violations as a complex category of errors and are categorized as behavior's that either deliberate or unintentional that deviate from accepted procedures, standards and rules. According to Parker et al. (1995) and Evans (1996) there are documented evidences indicating that driver behavior plays a key role in traffic safety as it is important in traffic accident. Whereas, attitudes have been revealed by many studies to be significant predictors of drivers' behavior and have also identified to indirectly affect involvement in traffic accidents (Parker et al., 1995; Iversen & Rundmo, 2004; Iversen, 2004; Rakauskas et al., 2007; Yunesian et al., 2008; Eiksund, 2009; Lund & Rundmo, 2009; Nordfjaern et al., 2010). These studies provide evident that attitude, risk perception and behavior were found to be related to each other

and to traffic safety within traffic psychology. Akaateba and Amoh-Gyimah (2013) explained that the attitude-behavior-traffic safety relationship has been an old phenomenon that has been widely analyzed with theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TBP) in developed countries. The explanation by Akaateba and Amoh-Gyimah (2013) support the assumption of the writers that studies on risky driving behavior of youngsters who involved in illegal street racing in the developing countries lacked established theories to support their findings.

Numerous studies have investigated the direct and indirect effects of personality traits on risky driving behaviour (Ulleberg, 2001; Ulleberg & Rundmo, 2003; Dahlen et al., 2005; Olteidal & Rundmo, 2006; Schwebel et al., 2006; Kim & Yamashita, 2007; Machin & Sankey, 2008). By clustering the personality traits and driving behaviors of young drivers, Ulleberg (2001) claimed that high-risk populations share general characteristics of low altruism and high driving anger, normlessness and sensation seeking. Several works also have suggested that high driving anger, sensation seeking and normlessness increase the frequency of risky driving behaviors (Ulleberg, 2001; Ulleberg & Rundmo, 2003; Dahlen et al., 2005; Olteidal & Rundmo, 2006; Schwebel et al., 2006; Machin & Sankey, 2008). Furthermore, possessing both driving anger and sensation seeking characteristics may increase traffic violations. Dahlen, Ulleberg and Rundmo (2005) define sensation seeking as a personal trait involving individual desire for excitement and stimuli (Ulleberg & Rundmo, 2003; Dahlen et al., 2005).

## **2.2 Related Theories on Personal Behaviors and Attitude**

There are several theories that relates to the study of personal behaviors and attitude. Among others are behavioral theory (Regoli and Hewitt, 2006), personality theory, psychoanalytic theory (Arrigo, 2006:20), choice theory (Jackson and Knepper, 2003:69; Siegel, 2002:47), psychodynamic theory (Siegel, 2002:47) and theories relating to criminality.

Behavioral theory claims that individual's behavior is a social product that arises in the course of interaction with others (Regoli and Hewitt (2006). Even though some experts view that the cause of delinquency is psychological as they assumed that most delinquent behaviors are manifestations of some psychological problem, Arrigo (2006:20) argue that the best documented and controversial of the perspectives explaining criminality, are the personality theory, psychoanalytic theory and criminal thinking patterns. Whereas the choice theory argues that delinquent behaviors are the products of individual's rational decision making that the acts committed are purposeful, meaningful, beneficial, and necessary at the time they commit them (Jackson and Knepper, 2003:69; Siegel, 2002:47). McCaghy, Capron & Jameson, (2003:12) explain that choice theory is based on the assumption that "human are fundamentally rational and hedonistic; possessing free will and make deliberate decisions to behave based upon the calculation of the pain and pleasure involved".

Siegel (2002:47) explains that central to the trait theory is the assumption which implies that delinquent actions as impulsive or instinctual rather than rational choice. The trait theory blames delinquent or criminal behavior on individuals' aberrant physical or psychological traits which they have very little, if any, control. Even though some experts view that the cause of delinquency is psychological as they assumed that most delinquent behaviors are manifestations of some psychological problem, Arrigo (2006:20) argue that the best documented and controversial of the perspectives explaining criminality,

are the personality theory, psychoanalytic theory and criminal thinking patterns. Arrigo (2006:20) concluded that these theories share the view that delinquency and crime originate in the personality structure and cognitive processes of the individual.

The psychodynamic theory on the other hand, assumed that law violations are manifestations of abnormal personality which is formed early in childhood (Siegel, 2002:65). On the other hand, Regoli and Hewitt (2006) explain that leading behaviorist, B.F. Skinner's theoretical opinion, conformity and deviance are learned from the punishments and reinforcements receive by individuals in response to their behavior. In Skinner's view, children will repeat behavior which brings tangible rewards and terminate behavior which incurs punishments (Regoli and Hewitt, 2006).

Based on the above argument, individual psychological personality can be regarded as the reflection of the internal or the psychological characteristics of individual differences which demonstrates consistent patents and tendencies in individual reactions to the external environment (McCrae & Costa, 1994; Ulleberg & Rundmo, 2003). This forms the personality traits of individual psychological factors and the explanatory constructs of risky driving behaviour.

In the case of risky driving behaviour of illegal street racers, the literature review carried out by the writers, found that individual psychological factors that stimulate young people to commit in illegal street racing consisted of self-esteem, sensation seeking, resilience, perceived gains, amiability, impatience, risk perception, risky driving, risky behaviors, violation of social norms/values, road rage, traffic violation, rebellion against society, rebellion against parents, masculinity, impulsivity, aggression, hostility, stress; spiritual well-being, self-efficacy, self-image, desire for recognition and attention, escape from social-psychological stress and self-actualization (Ulleberg, 2001; Ulleberg & Rundmo, 2003; Dahlen et al., 2005; Oltedal & Rundmo, 2006; Schwebel et al., 2006; Kim & Yamashita, 2007; Machin & Sankey, 2008; Wong et al., 2009; Ryb et al., 2006; Harre & Sibley, 2007; Vanlaar et al., 2008; Akaateba, 2013; Ismail, 2006; Ismail & Ibrahim, 2007; Norudin & Azman, 2011; Wong, 2011; Nurullah et al. 2012; Wan Shahrazad et al. 2012; Rozmi et al. 2015; and Noh Amit et al. 2017. In addition several past studies identified the significance of extremely self-confident personality as an individual psychological factor that may indirectly influence risky driving behaviors via attitude (Wong et al., 2009; Ryb et al., 2006; Harre & Sibley, 2007; Vanlaar et al., 2008; Akaateba, 2013).

Jackson and Knepper (2003) explain that sociologically, personal trait which involves individual desire for excitement and stimuli is well influenced by several factors which can be categorized into macro and micro perspectives as suggested by theories on crime and deviance. The macro perspective among others stresses on the importance of the environmental factors such as poverty, violence, education system and mass media in shaping human behavior. Whereas, the micro perspective stresses on the importance of the role of the agents of socialization such as peer groups, parents and teachers. Sociologically, this implies that law violations and offending behaviors are the products of the interactions of individual traits with the conditions that exist in the surrounding environment (Jackson & Knepper, 2003:80).

The literature review carried out by the writers pertaining to the conditions that exist in the surrounding environment that interacted with the individual traits or individual psychological factors of the illegal street racers consisting of macro and micro socio-economic factors. These are: macro environmental factors of poverty, violence, education system, social pressure, social labelling, social isolation, authority surveillance, recreational

facilities. Micro environmental factors of agents of socialization: peers, teachers, and familial factors: low household income, family violence, parental conflict, divorced families, parenting style, relationship with family members, parents hold permissive attitudes; social contact, learned attitude which encouraged behavior.

Conclusively an illegal street racer is a mixture of these personal traits of individual psychological factors that reacted with the existed surrounding macro and micro socio-economic environmental factors. This mixture results in illegal street racers' individual risky riding behavior being translated into reasoned action in violating safety traffic regulations.

### 3.0 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The issue of reasoned action was studied by Ajzen (1985) and they have developed a social psychological model which explained the intention reasoned action of behavior. Central to this theory is the assumption that people act or behave rationally based on their attitude, belief and intention which take the effect and result of actions into consideration, then make decision based on their reasoning to do or not to do an action (Ajzen, 1985). According to the TRA, the intention of an individual to perform a behavior is influenced by the positive attitude and subjective norms which are the degree to which an individual perceives how other people approve the individual's participation in a specific behavior. In the TRA, attitude is defined as the disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to the self, other people and the environment. Whereas subjective norm is defined as the way individuals think and expectation from other people towards individual actions (Ajzen, 1985). TRA represents the attitude and social norms which influences the individual intention to act or not to act on an action. This theory is widely used by many researchers to determine the intention of individual behavior in a multidisciplinary area. Figure 3.1 shows the dimensions of the TRA. Figure 3.2 shows the application of TRA dimensions on the behaviour of illegal street racers.

Figure 3.1: Theory of Reasoned Action

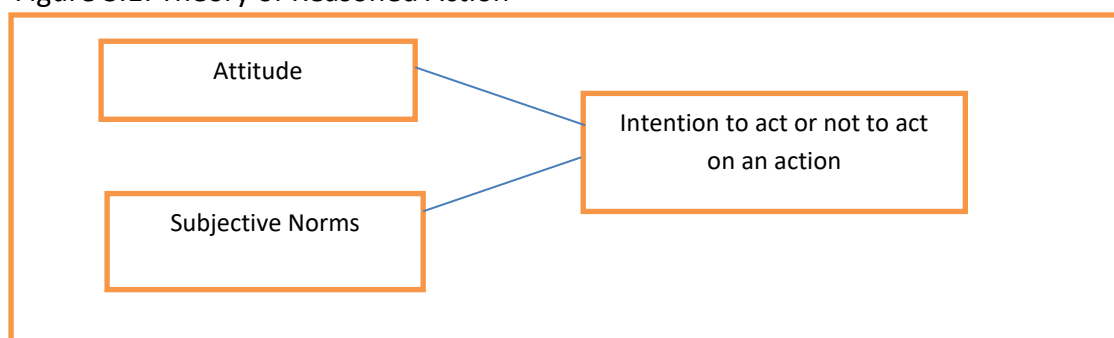
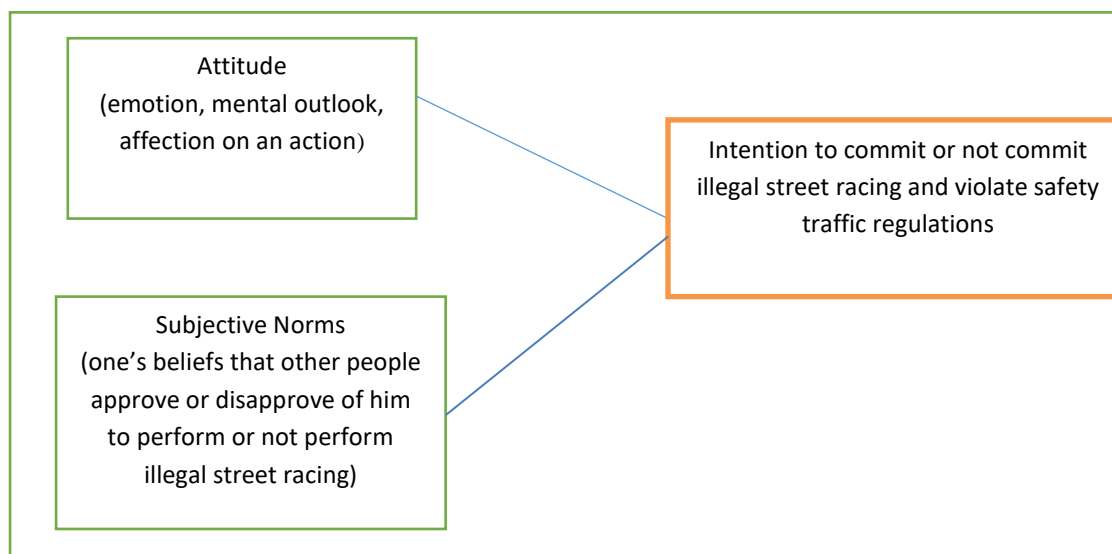


Figure 3.2: Theory of Reasoned Action of Illegal Street Racers



Initially, the TRA proposed that behavior of an individual can be predicted from his/her behavioral intention which is influenced by his attitude and subjective norms. In addition, TRA assumes that a person's behavior is based on his own free will or in other words under his volitional control (Ajzen, 1988). However, problems emerged when TRA is applied to behaviors that are not fully under volitional control. These may be behaviors that fail to fulfil its goal due to some personal deficiencies or external obstacles (Ajzen, 1991). Due to the requirement that the behavior must be under volitional control has led Ajzen (1988) to develop a new model the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as extension to the TRA in order to overcome the limitation of the original TRA in dealing with behaviors of people who do not have complete volitional control (Ajzen, 1991). Thus to cater for this aspect an additional dimension of perceived behavior control (PBC) was added to the new TPB model.

The PBC is about beliefs of individual skills and opportunities to engage in behavior. It is the extent to which a person feels able to perform the behavior in two conditions (i) individual able to control over the behavior and (ii) level of individual confident being able to perform or not perform the behavior. PBC is closely associated with individual's perception of what he or she naturally possess in order to enable him or her to perform a behavior such as skills, abilities, resources, opportunities, feelings and any other necessities required to perform that particular behavior. PBC pertains to the extent to which a person thinks that whether he or she performs a particular behavior or not relies within his or her own free control. PBC is formed by one's belief of whether he or she has the required resources and opportunities that may assist or inhibit him or her to (in this case) to perform illegal street racing. The enabling prerequisites for illegal street racing consist of both physical and non-physical supports such as the availability and ease of use of physical tools such as a car or motorcycle; the non-physical supports such as driving skill, past experience, time, money to fund their cars or motorcycles etc.

Thus, from the above discussion it is very clear that the TPB proposed that the individual psychological traits consisting of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavior control affect behaviors via intention. Figure 3.3 shows the dimensions of the TPB



developed by Ajzen (1991) as an extension to the TRA. Figure 3.4 shows the TPB of illegal street racers.

Figure 3.3: Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen (1991))

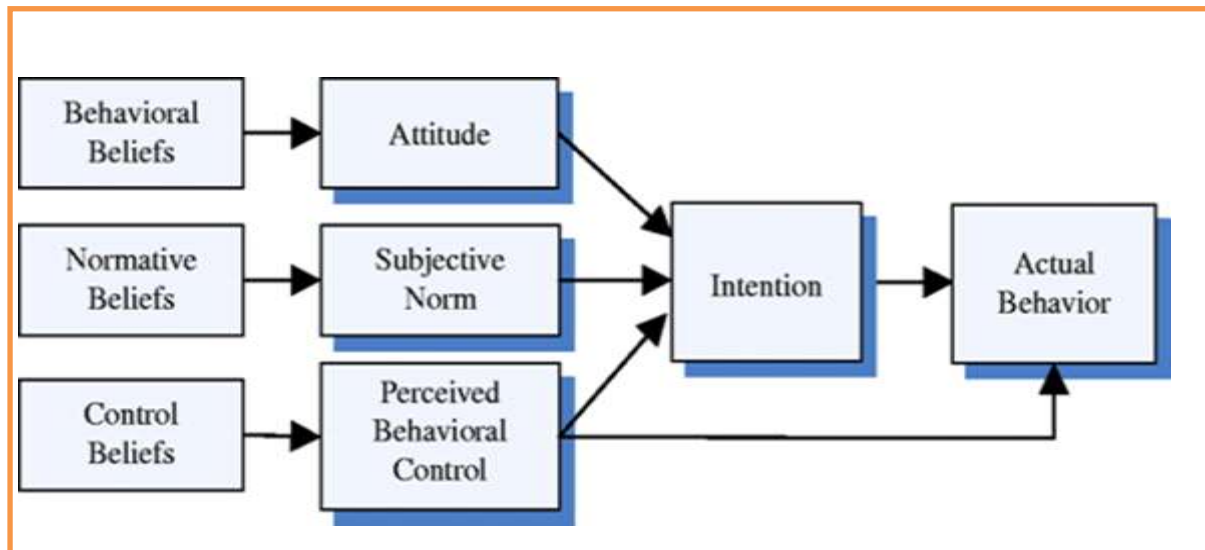
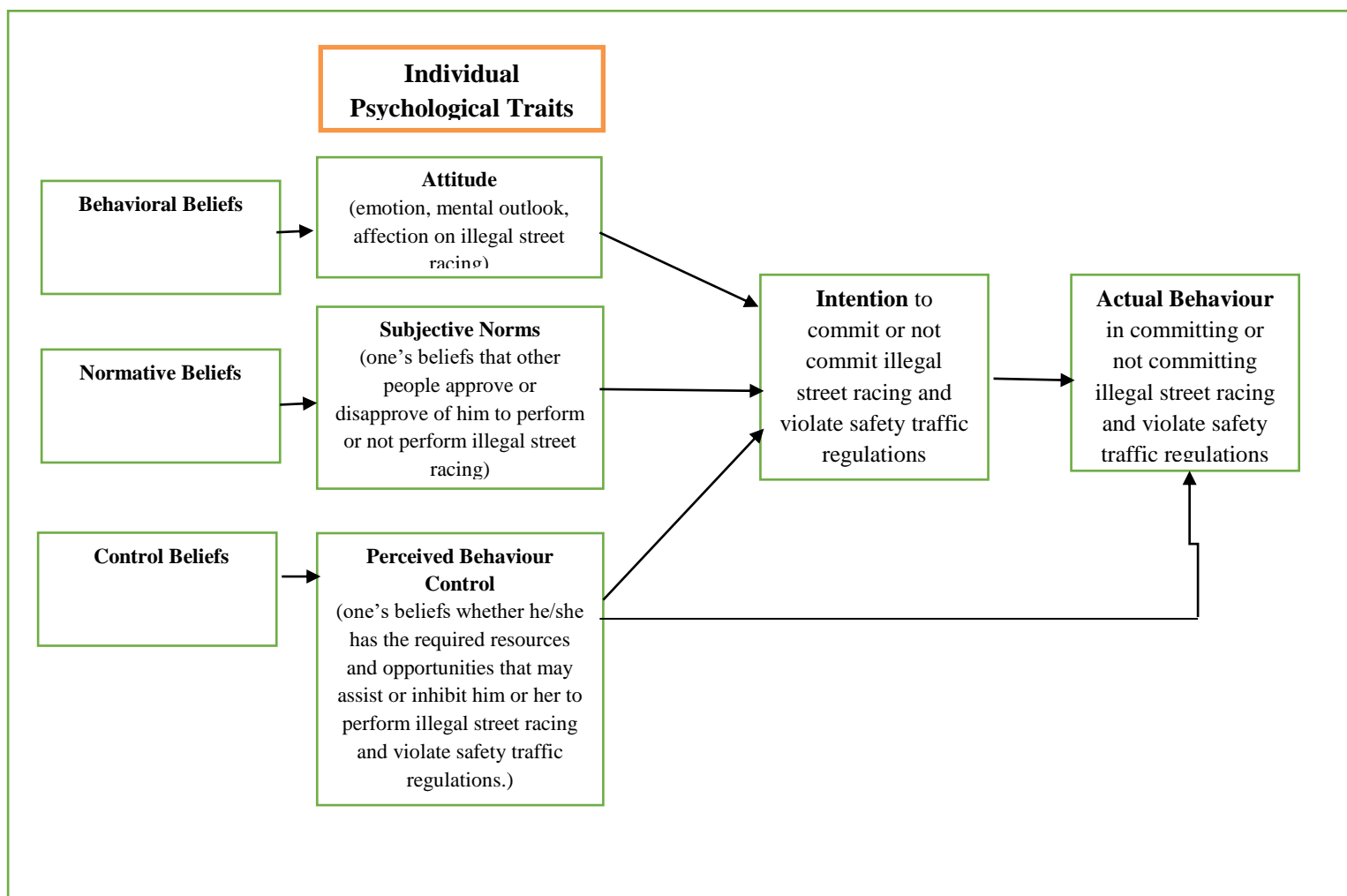


Figure 3.4: Theory of Planned Behavior of Illegal Street Racers





## 4.0 Conclusion

The primary objective of this paper is to highlight the factors that may affect the behavior of street racers in committing illegal street racing and violate safety traffic regulations by identifying a model adapted from Ajzen (1985, 1991) which integrates the racers' individual physical traits of attitude, subjective norms and perceived control behavior in order to determine the actual reasoned action and planned behavior of the illegal street racers via intention to commit or not to commit illegal street racing. By adopting and adapting the TPB in the study of illegal street racers such as the Malaysian "Mat Rempit", the expected contributions of this paper is that researchers may explore the relationships of the individual psychological traits of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavior control that may affect the reasoned action and planned behavior of "Mat Rempit". Even though many researchers have intensively studied and considered psychological traits as significantly affecting risky driving behavior, this proposed model will validate an established model of TPB in a different Malaysian environment which may add new understanding of the interactions of individual psychological traits of attitude, subjective norms and perceived control behavior with the conditions that exist in Malaysia local surrounding environment. It is hoped that the findings of this literature review will provide some insight into the relative importance of the various factors which influenced illegal street racers' reasoned action and planned behaviour.

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