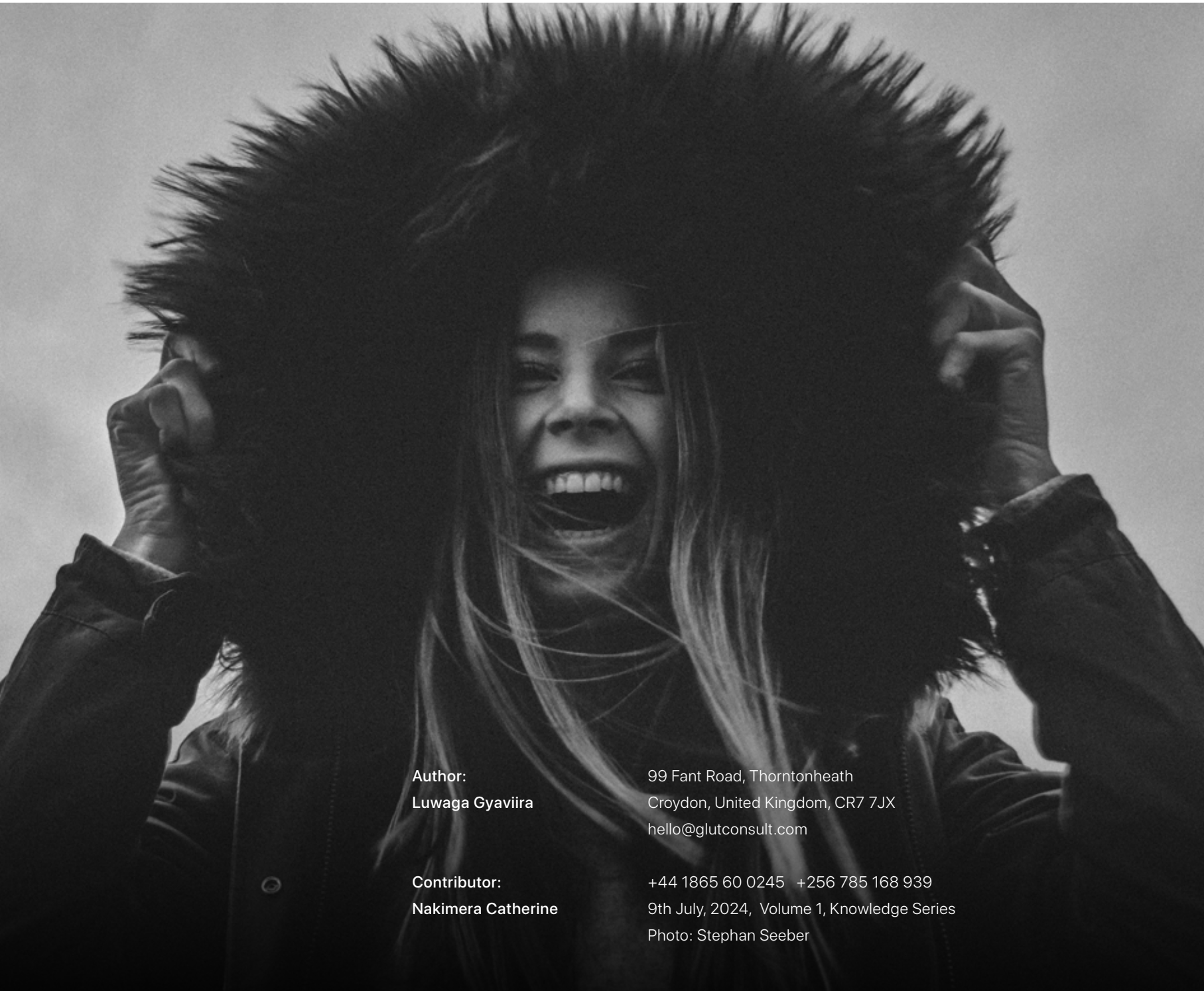




The Strategic Human Communication Knowledge Series



Theory of Planned Behaviour



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Preface:

In an era where information is abundant and communication channels are diverse, the need for strategic communication has never been more critical. Organizations, policymakers, and educators must navigate a complex landscape to effectively reach and influence their target audiences. Strategic communication involves the deliberate and purposeful use of messages to achieve specific goals, whether it is to inform, persuade, or engage.

This toolkit aims to provide a comprehensive guide for leveraging strategic communication in various contexts. It brings together insights from leading theories, case studies, and practical applications to equip you with the tools necessary to design and implement effective communication strategies. The content is structured to cover foundational concepts, practical techniques, and real-world examples that illustrate the power of strategic communication.

Central to this toolkit is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), a robust psychological framework that offers a nuanced understanding of how attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control influence intentions and behaviours. TPB has been instrumental in shaping communication strategies across health, environmental, and educational domains. By integrating TPB into your strategic communication efforts, you can develop targeted interventions that resonate with your audience and drive meaningful change.

This toolkit will delve into the core principles of TPB, providing a step-by-step guide on how to apply this theory to various communication challenges. You will find detailed explanations, illustrative case studies from different regions of the world, and actionable insights to help you craft messages that effectively influence behaviour.

Our goal is to empower you with the knowledge and skills to harness the full potential of strategic communication, making a positive impact in your field of work. Welcome to the knowledge series for strategic communications, with a special focus on the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Luwaga Gyaviira

The Theory of Planned Behaviour

Origins of the Theory

The roots of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) can be traced back to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), which was developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in the 1960s (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Fishbein was initially frustrated with the existing persuasion research, which, despite a well-developed notion of attitude, failed to convincingly link attitudes to behaviour. For instance, simply being in favour of a political candidate does not guarantee votes for that candidate, and supporting environmental conservation does not necessarily lead to consistent recycling behaviour. Recognizing that something mediates the relationship between attitude and behaviour, Fishbein, who later collaborated with Ajzen, proposed that behavioural intention plays this mediating role.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) assumed that all behaviour is intentional: people act in particular ways for specific reasons. This led to the development of the concept of behavioural intention, which means planning to act in a specific way. Fishbein and Ajzen identified two predictors of behavioural intention: attitudes and normative beliefs.

Core Tenets and Variables

Ajzen extended the TRA by adding a third predictor, leading to the formulation of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The TPB posits that three factors influence an individual's intention to

perform a behaviour, which in turn predicts actual behaviour. These factors are:

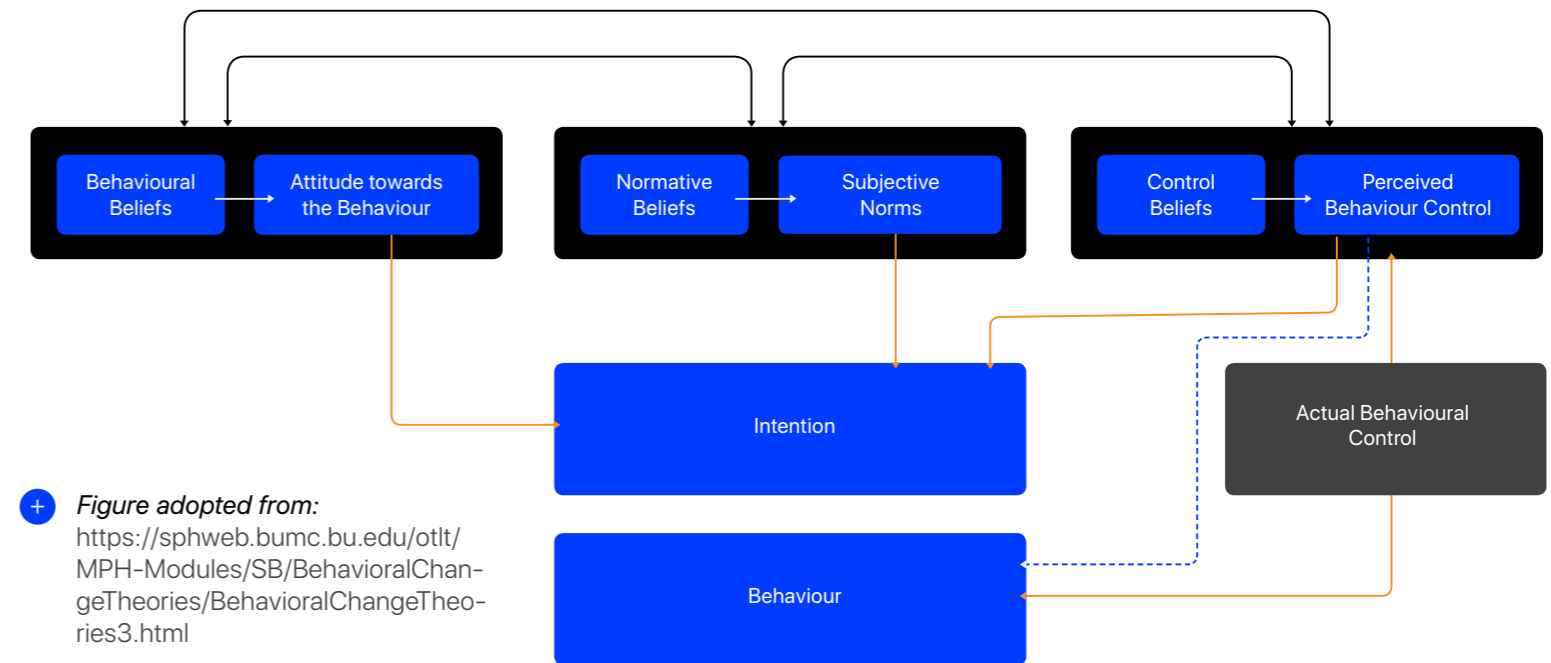
1. **Attitude Toward the Behaviour:** This refers to the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour in question. It involves the individual's beliefs about the outcomes of the behaviour and their evaluations of these outcomes.
2. **Subjective Norms:** These are the perceived social pressures to perform or not perform the behaviour. This factor reflects the influence of people in the individual's social network, particularly those whose opinions they value.
3. **Perceived Behavioral Control:** This refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour and considers past experiences and anticipated obstacles. This variable is unique to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and addresses situations where individuals do not have complete volitional control over their behavior.

The Model of the Theory of Planned Behaviour

The TPB model can be summarized as follows:

- **Behavioral Intention:** Influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, it directly predicts behavior.
- **Behaviour:** The action taken by the individual, determined by their intention and perceived control over the behavior.

The relationship among these variables is depicted in the Conceptual framework: See Figure 1.1 Below



+ Figure adopted from: <https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/MPH-Modules/SB/BehavioralChangeTheories/BehavioralChangeTheories3.html>

Limitations of the theory of Planned Behavior

There are several limitations of the TPB, which include the following:

1. **Assumption of Resources and Opportunities:** The TPB assumes that individuals have the necessary opportunities and resources to successfully perform the desired behavior, regardless of their intention.
2. **Exclusion of Other Variables:** It does not account for other factors that may influence behavioral intention and motivation, such as fear, threat, mood, or past experiences.
3. **Neglect of Environmental and Economic Influences:** While the TPB considers normative influences, it overlooks environmental or economic factors that could impact a person's intention to perform a behavior.
4. **Linear Decision-Making Process:** The theory assumes that behaviour results from a linear decision-making process, not considering that behaviour can change over time.
5. **Actual Control Over Behavior:** Although the inclusion of perceived behavioral control is an important aspect of the theory, it does not address the actual control individuals have over their behavior.
6. **Time Frame Between Intention and Action:** The TPB does not address the time frame between forming an intention and performing the behavior.
7. **Limited Utility in Addressing Complex Influences:** Despite its usefulness in public health contexts, the TPB is limited in its ability to account for environmental and economic influences. Researchers have addressed some of these limitations by integrating constructs from other behavioral theories to create a more comprehensive model.



Photo By: Sasha Kim - Pexels.com

Applications in Development and Humanitarian Communication

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has been widely used to predict and understand behaviours in various fields, including health communication, environmental studies, and social marketing. Here are two case studies relevant to development and humanitarian communication:

Case Study 1: Promoting Health Behaviours in Low-Income Communities

Context

In Sub-Saharan Africa, malaria remains a significant public health challenge, particularly in low-income communities like Uganda. Malaria prevention strategies often include the use of **insecticide-treated mosquito nets (ITNs)**, which are proven to reduce malaria transmission. Despite the availability and known benefits of ITNs, their adoption and consistent use have been less than optimal. A health campaign aimed at increasing ITN use in these communities employed the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to guide its strategic communication efforts.

Application of TPB

1. Attitude Toward the Behaviour

The campaign's first step was to positively influence community attitudes toward ITN use. The campaign messages emphasized several key points:

- **Health Benefits:** Information was disseminated about how ITNs can significantly reduce malaria incidence and contribute to overall health improvement. Testimonials from

community members who successfully used ITNs reinforced this message.

- **Economic Benefits:** The campaign highlighted the cost-effectiveness of ITNs in preventing malaria-related healthcare expenses and loss of productivity due to illness.
- **Visual and Emotional Appeals:** Posters, leaflets, and radio spots used compelling visuals and emotional stories to make the benefits of ITN use more relatable and impactful.

2. Subjective Norms

Recognizing the influence of social norms on behaviour, the campaign targeted influential community figures and peer networks:

- **Community Leaders and Healthcare Workers:** These respected individuals were trained and engaged to promote ITN use. Their endorsement served to normalize the behaviour within the community.
- **Peer Influence:** The campaign organized community meetings and group discussions where peers could share their positive experiences with ITNs. This peer pressure created a supportive environment for adopting ITN use.
- **Media Involvement:** Local radio stations, which are widely listened to in these communities, aired programs featuring community leaders and healthcare professionals advocating for ITN use.

3. Perceived Behavioral Control

To address perceived barriers and enhance the community's sense of control over ITN use, the campaign implemented several practical measures:

- **Distribution of Free ITNs:** The campaign ensured that ITNs were readily available by distributing them for free or at highly subsidized rates.
- **Education and Demonstration:** Community health workers conducted door-to-door visits to demonstrate how to properly use and maintain ITNs, thereby increasing individuals' confidence in their ability to use the nets correctly.
- **Addressing Misconceptions:** The campaign tackled common misconceptions about ITN use, such as concerns about discomfort or safety, through targeted educational materials and Q&A sessions.

Outcome

The comprehensive application of TPB principles resulted in a significant increase in ITN use within the target communities. Surveys conducted before and after the campaign revealed the following improvements:

- **Positive Attitudes:** There was a marked increase in positive attitudes toward ITN use, with community members reporting greater awareness of the health and economic benefits.
- **Social Norms:** The endorsement by community leaders and the normalization of ITN use among peers led to a strong shift in social norms. Many individuals reported using ITNs because they saw their friends, family, and respected community members doing so.
- **Perceived Control:** Practical measures such as free distribution and educational demonstrations significantly enhanced the community's perceived behavioural control, making ITN use more feasible and manageable.

Overall, the campaign demonstrated how the Theory of Planned Behaviour can be effectively used to design and implement health communication strategies that lead to meaningful behaviour change. By addressing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, the campaign successfully increased the adoption of ITNs, thereby contributing to malaria prevention efforts in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Case Study 2: Encouraging Recycling Behaviours in Urban Areas

Context

In one developing country, urban areas face significant challenges related to waste management. The rapid urbanization and increased consumption patterns have led to rising amounts of waste, posing environmental and public health risks. To address these issues, an environmental initiative aimed at promoting recycling among urban residents was launched. The campaign used the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to structure its strategy, focusing on changing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived Behavioral control to encourage recycling behavior.

Application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour

1. Attitude Toward the Behavior

The initiative aimed to cultivate positive attitudes toward recycling by emphasizing its benefits:

- **Environmental Benefits:** Educational materials and public service announcements highlighted how recycling reduces waste, conserves natural resources, and decreases pollution. The campaign showcased statistics and visual evidence of environmental improvement in areas with high recycling rates.
- **Economic Benefits:** The campaign stressed the economic advantages of recycling, such as job creation in the recycling industry and cost savings for municipalities on waste management. Success stories of individuals and communities benefiting economically from recycling were prominently featured.

- **Emotional Appeals:** Testimonials from residents who adopted recycling practices and felt a sense of pride and community spirit further reinforced positive attitudes. Visual media, such as videos and infographics, depicted recycling as a crucial and beneficial activity.

2. Subjective Norms

To shift subjective norms, the initiative leveraged the influence of respected figures and social networks:

- **Local Celebrities and Social Media Influencers:** Recognizing the power of social proof, the campaign engaged popular local celebrities and social media influencers to endorse recycling. These figures demonstrated their commitment to recycling through various media channels, making recycling a fashionable and socially accepted behaviour.
- **Community Leaders and Organizations:** The campaign involved community leaders and local organizations in promoting recycling. Workshops and community meetings were held where these leaders emphasized the importance of recycling, aligning it with community values and expectations.
- **Peer Influence and Social Campaigns:** The initiative encouraged residents to share their recycling efforts on social media using specific hashtags. This created a virtual community of recyclers, where peer influence and visible commitment to recycling fostered a collective movement.

3. Perceived Behavioral Control

Addressing perceived barriers to recycling was crucial for enhancing perceived behavioural control:

- **Accessibility of Recycling Facilities:** The campaign ensured that recycling bins were conveniently placed in residential areas, public spaces, and workplaces. Clear signage and instructions were provided to facilitate proper use.
- **Educational Campaigns:** Detailed information on what materials could be recycled, how to prepare items for recycling, and the location of recycling centers was disseminated through brochures, workshops, and online platforms. This information aimed to eliminate confusion and make recycling processes straightforward.
- **Support Systems:** The initiative established helplines and online support forums where residents could ask questions and get assistance related to recycling. This support network helped residents overcome any uncertainties or difficulties they faced in their recycling efforts.

Outcome

The initiative demonstrated a significant increase in recycling rates among urban residents, validating the TPB's utility in environmental communication efforts. Post-campaign surveys and waste management data revealed the following:

- **Improved Attitudes:** There was a marked improvement in positive attitudes toward recycling. Residents reported greater awareness of the environmental and economic benefits and expressed a stronger personal commitment to recycling.
- **Shifted Social Norms:** The involvement of

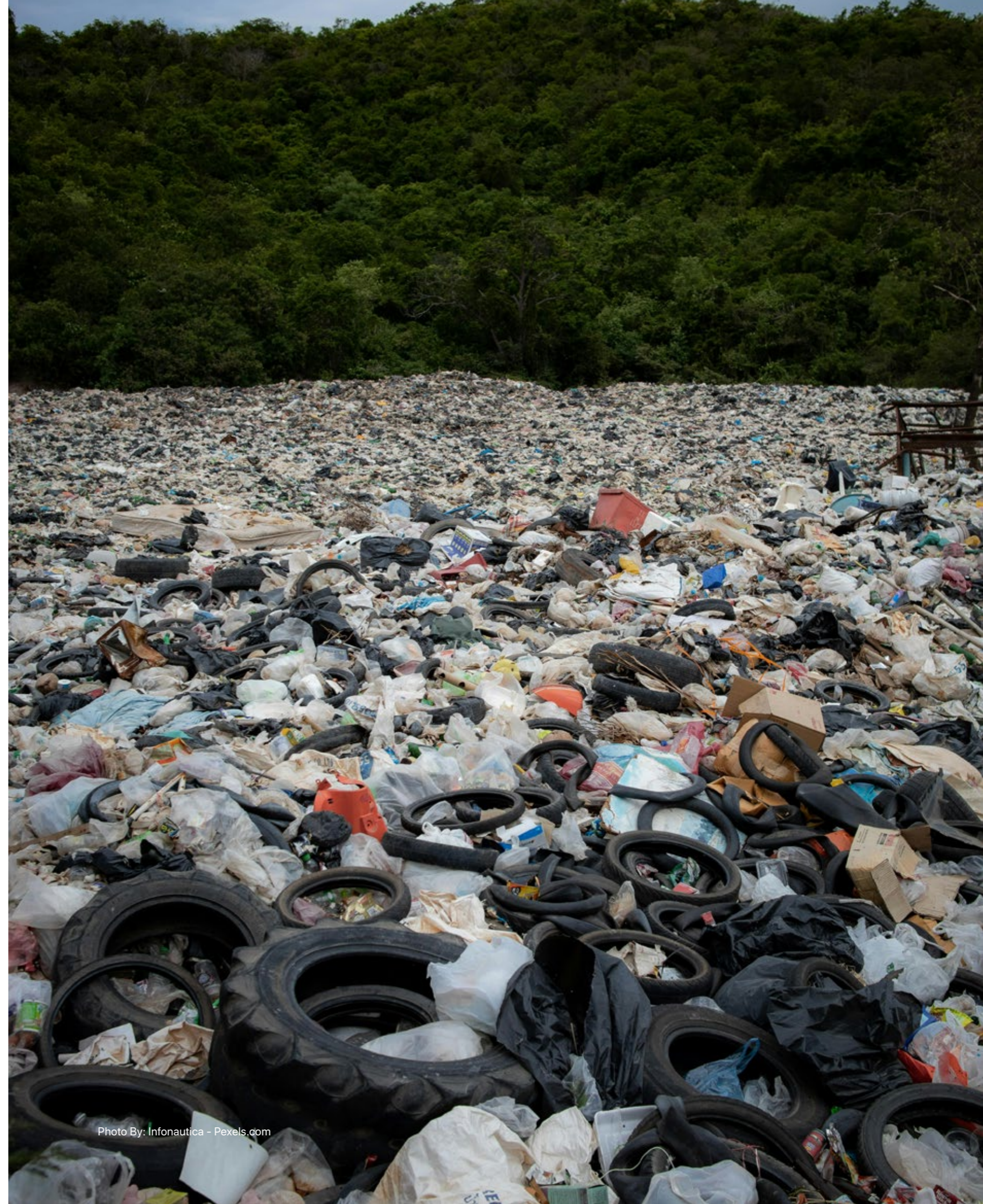
celebrities, community leaders, and peer networks successfully shifted social norms. Recycling became a widely accepted and expected behaviour within the community, with many residents reporting that they felt social pressure to participate.

- **Enhanced Perceived Control:** The increased accessibility of recycling facilities and the comprehensive educational campaigns significantly enhanced residents perceived behavioural control. Residents felt more confident and capable of engaging in recycling practices, leading to higher participation rates.

Lessons:

This case study illustrates the effective application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour in promoting recycling behaviours in urban areas of a developing country can be effective if handled methodically. By addressing attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, the campaign successfully increased recycling rates and fostered a sustainable behaviour change. Simply addressing one aspect of the theory of planned behavior is not enough, Dainton & Zelle, (2023). The TPB provided a robust framework for designing and implementing communication strategies that led to meaningful environmental outcomes.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour offers a robust framework for understanding and influencing human behaviour. By considering attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, the TPB can effectively guide the design of communication strategies in development and humanitarian contexts. The successful application of TPB in diverse case studies underscores its relevance and utility in fostering positive behavioural change.



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About the Author:

The author is a Research, Media & Communication Consultant at Glut-Consult. I believe in the ideology that to transform the world is not as important as making a difference. We have the opportunity to do so by starting with our own environments, and therefore, you and I have the moral responsibility to protect and promote the social and economic wellbeing of our communities so that the world we live in becomes a better place.

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