

## THE BEHAVIOURAL METHOD OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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### Abstract

*The application of epistemic research models and the intersection revolving around concepts, attitudes, and character very often provides little compass to issues of contextualizing behavioral methods in studying individuals, groups and the larger society. Additionally, decision-making processes in social sciences such as economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, international relations and diplomacy are very plagued by biases, flip-flops, and even rational inadequacy, thereby, complicating social science research outcomes. This paper therefore extrapolate the contours of behavioral research methods in the contextualization of social sciences such as international relations and diplomatic studies. It contextualize the agency of behavioral instincts in the various research methods in social sciences and how such epistemic outcomes pan out in the final analysis. The study passionately argues that while the reliance on behavioral methods opens new vista for epistemic inquiry, researchers must remain vigilant about ethical considerations and cultural sensitivities, ensuring that the outcomes of their research are applied responsibly and equitably, by extension meet the empirical thresholds expected of social sciences.*

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**Keywords:** Social Science, Behavioural Approach, Quantitative Research, Quantitative Methods, Empirical Research

### Introduction

The study of social science, specifically, international relations from various dimensions and ramifications is rooted in the distillation of ideas and decision-making as a byproduct of human behavioral tendencies that crystallized into diplomacy and international relations (IR) itself. Ability to decipher the behavioral intents, actions, activities and decisions remains the basic epistemic trajectory of social sciences, same as in diplomacy and international relations studies. Hafner-Burton *et al* (2017) talked about the interjections of human instincts in the study of social sciences, specifically, international relations as behavioral revolution that explore decisions and their outcomes using rationalist tools in distilling problems and heralding asymmetries in information within the diplomatic field. Added to that, decision-making processes in social sciences - international relations and diplomacy are plagued by biases, flipflops, floppy and even rational inadequacy, and compounding diplomatic outcomes in several layers as well.

To that end, Mintz (2007) traces the challenges of behavioral methods in researching international relations and the broader social sciences field to human biases, errors, cognitive limitations and uninspiring rational analyses, thereby, derailing critical policy processes in

international relations. Thus, behavioral methods in research underscore the prime phase of how social sciences, like international relations are unpacked and enunciated in terms of the chain of decision-making and the consequential outcomes that becloud those decisions in the long run. Roth (1995) then indicated that in behavioral methods for social sciences and international relations scholars are speaking to theories, data generation – searching for facts, searching for meaning, experimenting functionalities and testing hypothesis in a sense. Mintz et al (2011) further added that experimental research methods in themselves is to espouse both micro-level and macro-level behavior in international relations.

As part of the broader contextualization of international relations as social science, the behavioral intersections foster policies, transcending diplomacy and strengthening decision making, are all essential in understanding how international relations itself works. Davis and McDermott (2021) also observed that the field of behavioral international relations as a fold within social sciences is undergoing rapid transformation through acts of innovation in methods, models and data induced mostly rational choice and psychology. Powell (2017) on the hand stressed that behavioral international relations face daunting challenges in those quasi-behavioral methodologies in striving to i) collate unmeasured assumptions and presumptions on decision-making, beliefs and preferences and ii) the fluidity in building theories in international relations studies. According to Powell (2017), there is often a weak link between such assumptions and empirical findings, and even epistemic foundations that are laid out as outcomes in international relations and diplomatic field.

James (2007) on the other hand argued that behavioral research methods in international relations studies should beyond rational choice, further stressed that, though behavioral international relations rest firmly with political psychology, much studies need to focus on preference formation in a scientific approach as well. James (2007) prognosis on behavioral international relations research methods also aligned with the thoughts of Mintz (2007) in the combination of rational choice, political psychology in the decision-making processes in diplomacy and international relations. It is also important to state the issues and debates surrounding behavioral research methods in international relations has not been without controversies. There has been dichotomies between what theoretical canon to follow or methodological folds in research, particularly, on how to approach behavioral concepts in the aggregation of rational choice and decision-making processes within the field of social science studies.

This paper is therefore sets to extrapolate the contours of behavioral research methods in the contextualization of social sciences such as international relations and diplomatic studies. It contextualize the agency of behavioral instincts in the various research methods in social sciences and how such epistemic outcomes pan out in the final analysis. Therefore, the paper provides the different layers in which behavioral research methods aligned with epistemic knowledge in social sciences as a way of advancing the field in today's modern world. This focus will demonstrate the salience of behavioral methods in studying the broader body of knowledge in social sciences and humanities generally.

## **Literature Review**

Earlier scholarly focus on behavioral research methods in social sciences explore the understanding of theory, concepts, phenomenon, methods, models and outcomes in a more nuanced and empirical ways and means. Still, most intellectual and epistemic explorations in the social sciences tend to prioritize concepts over corresponding outcomes and value of such

social science research. Hechter (1993) contended that in scholarly circles, concepts are far more dominant approach at the expense of research value in many cases. But beyond the concepts challenge in behavioral research methods in social sciences, on his part, Eidelson (1997) pushed for the application of complex adaptive systems (CAS) as fundamental elements in the study of individuals, groups and society as social sciences, drawing from psychology, sociology, economics, political science and international relations, mostly from the standpoints of attitudes such as norm formation, coalition, formation, diplomacy, economic instabilities, urban development, social movements, international negotiations and even criminal behaviours.

McGrath (1995) while exploring the critical links between research methods and behavioral mien within the social sciences, observed that, the essence of research is invariably interrelated to the methods adopted in producing both the research evidence and the outcome. In McGrath's view, research evidence, significances, implications and even limitations should be hinged in the proper (dis)articulation of behavioral concepts in line with tactics, techniques and operation in the study of social sciences. In such trajectory, behavioral research methods drive towards the instinctive variables of the processes and the attendant byproduct of such social sciences research. To that effect, Osgood (1956) stressed that the cardinal foundations of behavioral theory itself is rooted and encapsulated within the frames of 'stimulus and response.'

Another challenge associated with behavioral research methods in social sciences that most scholarly literature points to lies in data collation and sampling in research procedures. Here, the behavior of individuals, groups and the larger society is imperative on how research methods and processes are all codified to response to rational choice in decision-making and the epistemic nuances at play in such a social science endeavour of study and research. Paolisso and Hames (2010) stated that the primacy of any social sciences lies in the unfettered and dispassionate collation of human behavioral data is critical in the theoretical foundations of all behavioral sciences and research, considering two basic processes of time consciousness and instant sampling based participant observatory and ethnographic research. Thus, it is in most of these areas of behavioral research methods in social sciences that biases and primordial tendencies crippled in in research. To what extent then can behavioral research methods be approached?

To unravel the above research puzzle, Gintis (2007) called for unification of behavioral research methods in studying social sciences across the broad spectrum of the academic field. In exploring the different layers of behavioral research methods in social sciences, it is assumed that there no clear-cut pathways of what is the most suitable model, tactics, techniques and concepts in addressing behavioral social sciences research wise. But the most profound approach to fathom is the extent to which such behavioral research method provides value and empirical understanding as Hechter (1993) stipulated earlier. It is important to understand the dynamics of behavioral research method a better exposition of critical epistemic foundations of social sciences. However, such practical and empirical concepts must as well align with theoretical foundations of the field and the underlining concepts that guide such research explorations within the social sciences. How does theory fits into behavioral research methodological approaches in social sciences?

### **Theoretical Foundations: Theorizing Behavioral Methods in Social Sciences**

Behavioral research in the social sciences is pivotal for understanding the complexities of human behavior within social contexts. This discussion will focus on several core aspects,

including theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, significant findings, and implications for future research, all supported by relevant literature. Theoretical frameworks guide researchers in formulating hypotheses and interpreting findings. Some prominent theories include Social Learning Theory and Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Likewise, Social Learning theory posits that behavior is learned through observation and imitation. Bandura's work on aggression and media violence illustrates how individuals can model behaviors observed in others, particularly in children (Bandura 1977). For example, a study by Anderson et al. (2003) investigated the effects of violent video games on aggression, supporting the notion that exposure to media influences behaviour. Also, Cognitive Dissonance Theory suggests that individuals experience discomfort when holding conflicting beliefs or when their behaviors do not align with their values. This dissonance can lead to attitude changes to reduce discomfort (Festinger 1957).

Extrapolating behavioral theory in the social sciences somehow compels the intersection of cross-disciplinary fields within behavioral sciences and even natural sciences. Some of these theories tend herald variations and differentiations in what methods, concepts and approaches should be adopted in the processes of research for public good. Burke et al (2009) for example argued that though most studies on behavioral theory focus on the proximal influence of behavioral, there is an urgency to embody research that marries the social context within the environment under study. Theories in themselves are sustainable through models of continuation as a result of roughly interrelated participation and observation to the best empirical outcomes, values and precision.

Thus, most social sciences, including international relations is not atheroretical, as most experts, academics and scholars often tilt towards theories formulate their social sciences research based on facts, empirical data and proven evidence in the course of aggregation and appropriation of research investigation. The implications for such theoretical foundations would be that both behaviors and the social context vis-à-vis environmental conditionalities must be central in the conceptualization of the behavioral research methods. It therefore beholds on social science researchers the distinguish between the functionality of such research methods and the hypothetical (de)construction, as overdose array of theories and hypothetical construction has the potential to reduce such social and behavioral research to an epistemic convolution. Theory, therefore, should be geared towards explicating the most contentious issues and debates with utmost clarity and be succinct with all intents and purposes.

More so, another point to consider on behavioral theory is that theoretical foundations bridges different fields, behaviors, attitudes, norms, values and principles in the conceptualization and contextualization of knowledge-driven exercise within the social sciences. Even though our society requirement for behavioral sciences epistemic and ontological enquiry is vast and broad, prevailing pragmatic suffers from limited epistemic knowledge production that can cover all the gamut of the social sciences. In turn, some of the theories propounded also exhibit some degree of gaps and inexplicable directions in terms of upholding such theory in the social sciences. The application of epistemic research models and the intersection revolving around concepts, attitudes, and character very often provides little compass to issues of contextualizing behavioral tendencies of individuals, groups and the larger society.

In fields like international relations, political science, psychology, normative research traditions are systematically made to align with principles operational in social sciences. The major task here is how social scientists, researchers and scholars alike contextualize methods and models

of behavioral studies. Hence, it is pertinent to understand the extent to which how these connections involving models, concepts, theories and research outcomes are valued and analyzed in a manner that fits into the realm of behavioral social sciences. Biglan and Hayes (1996) in postulating the nexus between such models and theory explained that there should a connection that reflects behavioral sensations in a more practical sense. Such nexus ought to link itself with the behaviour under focus in order to grasp the fundamental elements of the study of social sciences.

However, Kwon and Silva (2019) provided a critical mapping of the landscape of behavioral theories in the social sciences, locating about sixty-two (62) different behavioral theories within social sciences and other related fields. Their study hypothesis to five key ramifications contributing to synthesizing a better behavioral theory, including, i) amalgamation of data-related research, ii) classification and categorization, iii) understanding of terms and taxonomy, iv) clarity in appropriating theories and v) dialogical effects. According to Kwon and Hayes (2019), “some literature attempted to review behavioral theories for general application; however, there is not yet a publication that systematically reviews the academic journal database across all disciplines to provide a comprehensive landscape of behavioral theories.” These postulations appear to be very incisive in helping us understand the relativity between behavioral methods and theories alike (See the diagrams below).

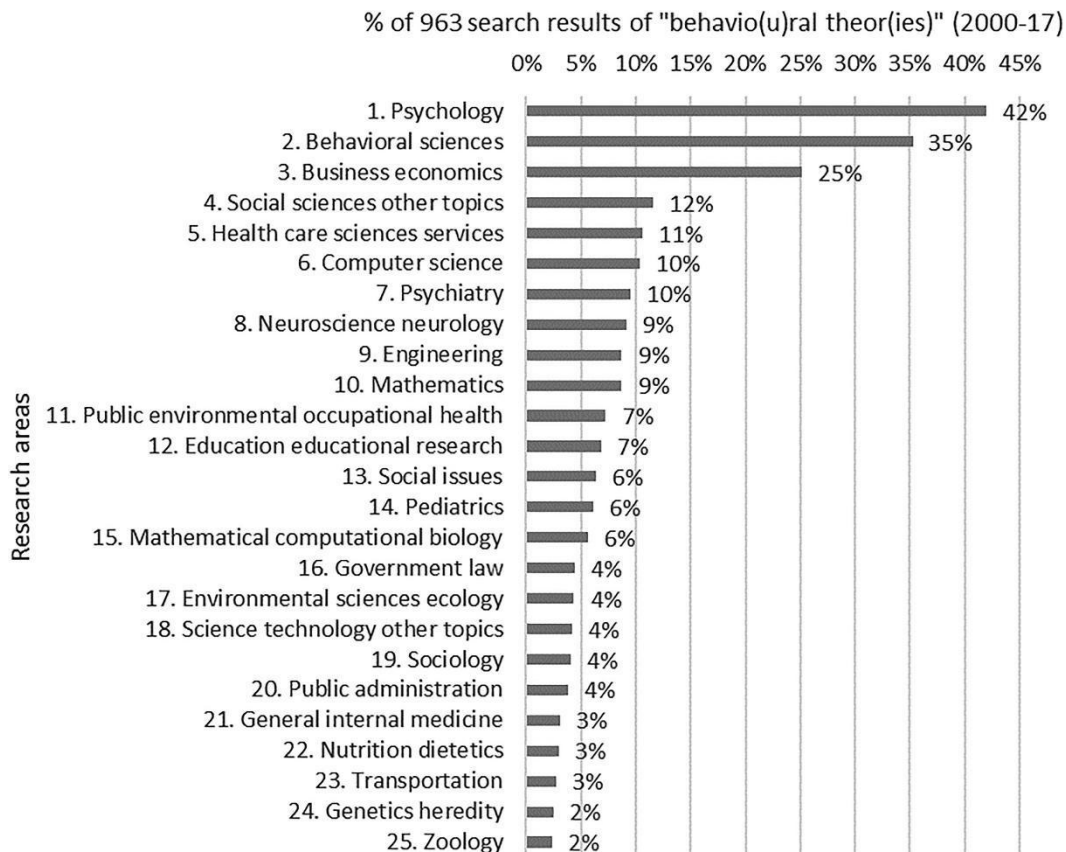


Figure 1: Research Areas Covered by Behavioral Theories  
 Sources: Kwon & Hayes 2019



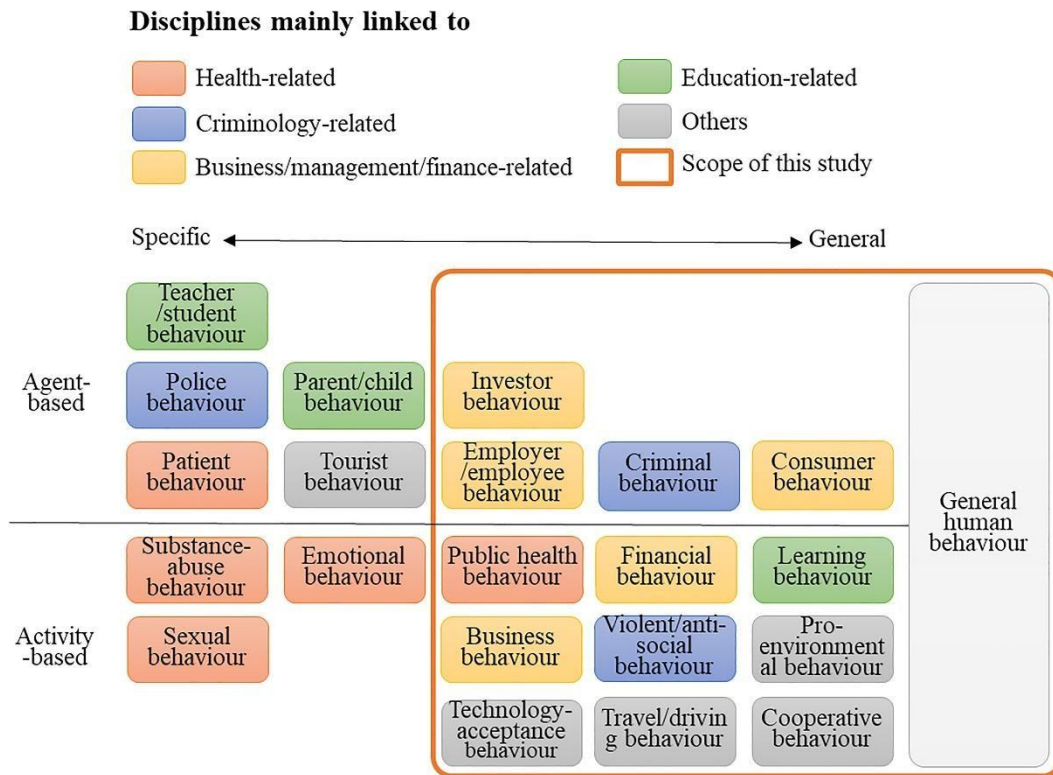


Figure 2: Types of Human/Social Behaviors Linked to Behavioral Theories

Source Kwon & Hayes 2019

## Methodology

More significantly, behavioral research in the social sciences and humanities is primarily geared towards grasping the actions, emotions, thought processes and emotional vibes of individuals, groups and society with the aim of arriving at an epistemic value or outcome.

The following are the methods suitable for behavioral research in the social sciences:

### 1. Quantitative Methods

Quantitative research focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis to identify patterns and make predictions.

#### i. Surveys and Questionnaires

- **Description:** These tools collect data from a large number of respondents.
- **Example:** A researcher might distribute a survey to assess public attitudes toward climate change.
- **Strengths:** Can gather data from a large sample size, making results generalizable.
- **Limitations:** Responses may lack depth or context.

#### ii. Experiments

- **Description** : Controlled studies where variables are manipulated to observe effects.

- **Example:** A psychologist might conduct an experiment to see how sleep deprivation affects cognitive performance by comparing two groups—one that is sleep-deprived and one that is not.
- **Strengths:** Allows for causal inferences to be made.
- **Limitations:** May lack ecological validity if conducted in artificial settings. iii.

### Longitudinal Studies

- **Description:** Research conducted over a long period to observe changes over time.
- **Example:** A study following a cohort of children from infancy to adulthood to examine the effects of early education on future academic success.
- **Strengths:** Can identify trends and long-term outcomes.
- **Limitation:** Resource-intensive and time-consuming.
- **Strengths:**

## 2. Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research seeks to understand the meaning behind behaviors and social phenomena through non-numerical data.

### i. Interviews

- **Description:** In-depth conversations with individuals to explore their perspectives.
- **Example:** A researcher might conduct interviews with refugees to understand their experiences and challenges.
- **Strengths:** Provides rich, detailed data and insights into personal experiences.
- **Limitations:** Results may not be generalizable due to small sample sizes. ii. **Focus**

### Groups

- **Description:** Guided discussions with a group of participants to gather diverse opinions on a specific topic.

## Discussion: Imperative of Behavioral Research in International Relations as a Social Science

More importantly, behavioral research provides a critical role in the fields of international relations and social sciences, providing insights that are essential for understanding the complexities of human interaction on states, international political systems, and individuals and at diplomatic levels. The appropriation and aggregation of behavioral science into these disciplines has transformed theoretical frameworks and conceptual applications, enabling researchers and experts to distill and (de)construct the impulses, observations, and decisionmaking processes that trigger social and political behavior. This study outlines the impact of behavioral research in social sciences as it relates to international relations within this section of the paper by exploring its implications for hypothetical advancements, real-world applications, and ontological considerations.

At the very core, behavioral research as extrapolated above seeks to grasp how individuals and groups behave in social and political contexts. By utilizing methodologies from psychology, sociology, international relations, and anthropology, behavioral scientists study the cognitive, emotional, and social factors influencing human actions. This multidisciplinary approach has enriched international relations broadly, where understanding state behavior is vital and consequential. Normative and traditional theories of international relations, such as realism and liberalism, very often depend on rational choice models that show states behave in a premeditated and anticipated modus. However, behavioral research highlights that human emotions, biases, and sociocultural factors significantly impact decision-making processes. For instance, concepts such as groupthink, nationalism, and identity politics illustrate how psychological factors can lead to decisions that deviate from purely rational orientations, signifying the necessity for a more nuanced thoughtful international interactions.

Moreover, behavioral research facilitates a profound examination of the role of cognitive thinking in international relations. How leaders and citizens perceive threats, opportunities, and the intentions of others can decisively influence foreign policy and diplomatic outcomes. Studies in social psychology, such as social identity theory, espouse how group dynamics and the in-group/out-group mentality influences international relations by fostering conflict or cooperation. Critically, the way states perceive each other's experiences and intentions can lead to arms races or, conversely, treaties. By relating behavioral frameworks to analyse these perceptions, scholars can obtain more accurate extrapolations of state behavior, ultimately leading to nominal policy formulations. Additionally, in view of augmenting theoretical understanding, behavioral research has pragmatic implications for policymakers and practitioners in the field of international relations. The ability to understand the behavioral motivations behind political actions can inform diplomacy, conflict resolution, and negotiation strategies. For instance, integrating insights from behavioral economics can aid negotiators in constructing agreements that consider the human predisposition towards loss aversion and the framing of options. Understanding the psychosomatic philosophies overriding decisionmaking can improve the effectiveness of diplomatic communication and build trust between conflicting parties.

Furthermore, behavioral research is instrumental in addressing multifaceted global challenges, such as conflict, political contestation, climate change, terrorism, and humanitarian crises. These issues often stem from mutual behavior and necessitate synchronized efforts across borders. By examining the behavioral dimensions of such challenges—such as how beliefs, values, and social norms shape public responses—researchers can design more effective interventions. The psychological factors that drive public support for environmental policies can help governments tailor their messaging and implement strategies that foster public buyin. Similarly, behavioral insights can guide counter-terrorism efforts by identifying the social and psychological roots of radicalization, enabling more effective prevention strategies.

The ethical considerations surrounding behavioral research in international relations and social sciences are of paramount importance. As behavioral insights are increasingly utilized for policy development, researchers must grapple with the potential consequences of their findings. For example, understanding how to manipulate perceptions or behavior raises ethical questions about consent and autonomy. The use of behavioral insights in surveillance, propaganda, and disinformation campaigns poses significant risks to democratic processes and individual rights. Therefore, it is crucial for scholars and practitioners to navigate these ethical dilemmas



responsibly, ensuring that behavioral research is applied in ways that uphold human dignity and promote social good.

In conclusion, the integration of behavioral research into international relations and social sciences significantly enhances our understanding of human behavior and its implications for governance and diplomacy. By emphasizing the psychological and social factors that drive actions, behavioral research challenges traditional paradigms and enriches theoretical discourse. Its practical applications empower policymakers to address complex global challenges more effectively and ethically. As these fields continue to evolve, ongoing collaboration between behavioral researchers and practitioners will be essential for fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the nuances of human behavior in the international arena. The insights derived from behavioral research not only advance academic knowledge but also contribute to the development of informed, nuanced, and impactful policies that address the pressing issues facing our world today.

### **Africa, Behavioral Research Methods, Social Sciences and International Relations Studies**

Behavioral research methods have increasingly gained prominence in international relations studies, particularly in the context of Africa, where the interplay of social, political, and cultural dynamics shapes the continent's unique geopolitical landscape. Traditionally, international relations (IR) analytical frameworks have leaned heavily on positivist methodologies, often prioritizing state-centric and rational actor approaches. However, the integration of behavioral research methods allows for a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence decision-making processes, leader behavior, and conflict dynamics within African states. This essay critically examines the significance of behavioral research methods in the context of African international relations studies. The key contributions of behavioral research methods is their capacity to illuminate the role of identity, culture, and historical legacies in shaping political behavior in Africa. The continent's diverse ethnic groups, languages, and colonial histories inform a complex social fabric that impacts national and international politics. Behavioral research emphasizes how individual and collective identities influence perceptions and relationships between states. This is particularly evident in conflicts such as those in the Great Lakes region, where ethnic identities play a pivotal role in fuelling tension and animosity. Scholars employing behavioral methodologies can analyse how group identities and allegiances manifest in political decisions, thus providing an enriched understanding of conflict dynamics that extends beyond traditional state-centric theories.

Furthermore, behavioral research methods facilitate insights into the decision-making processes of African leaders, often influenced by psychological factors such as fear, nationalism, and personal experience. For instance, leaders may approach foreign relations with a historical lens, interpreting external interactions through the prism of past colonial subjugations or contemporary power dynamics. By applying frameworks from psychology and behavioral economics, researchers can dissect how these leaders navigate complex geopolitical environments, negotiate partnerships, or respond to crises. This understanding is critical for comprehending why certain states may exhibit aggressive behavior while others choose diplomacy, contributing to a richer analysis of regional and international relations. Additionally, the incorporation of behavioral research methods in African international relations studies enables the examination of citizen behavior and public opinion as essential mediators of foreign

policy. The rise of social media and grassroots movements in Africa has transformed the political landscape, empowering citizens to express their views and mobilize for change. By employing behavioral research tools such as surveys, experiments, and qualitative interviews, scholars can gauge public sentiments regarding foreign policy issues, such as interventions by foreign powers, trade agreements, or humanitarian aid. Understanding how public perceptions and behavior interact with elite decision-making offers a more comprehensive view of governance and international relations in African contexts.

Moreover, behavioral analysis can inform strategies for conflict resolution and peace building in Africa. Given the continent's history of civil wars and conflict, it is crucial to understand the psychological underpinnings that lead to violence or cooperation. Behavioral approaches can assist peace practitioners in designing interventions that address the root psychological causes of conflict, such as trauma, mistrust, and identity grievances. By fostering dialogue and understanding through such interventions, policymakers can promote sustainable peace and development. However, the application of behavioral research methods in African international relations studies is not without its challenges. There is a risk of oversimplification when applying behavioral models rooted in Western contexts to diverse African societies. Researchers must remain cognizant of the local cultural and historical specificities that shape behavior. Additionally, ethical considerations arise when conducting behavioral research, especially regarding informed consent and the potential misuse of findings to manipulate social and political dynamics. **Conclusion**

Behavioral methods of research in social sciences provide an important progression over traditional paradigms by prioritizing the understanding of human behavior through pragmatic observation and psychological acumens. These processes enable researchers to explore the complexities of individual and group activities, shedding light on the cognitive, emotional, and social factors that drive decision-making processes. All these processes and procedural contours have elucidated in this paper and study. By engaging techniques such as experiments, surveys, and observational studies, behavioral research nurtures a richer understanding of social dynamics, facilitating the analysis of phenomena ranging from consumer behavior to political participation to international relations and diplomatic negotiations. This empirical method not only enhances the rationality of findings but also allows for the submission of results in practical contexts, informing policies and interventions that address actual social issues.

Moreover, the integration and aggregation of behavioral methods into social sciences necessitates a multidisciplinary perspective, bridging psychology, economics, sociology, and anthropology, among other fields. This convergence enhances the robustness of research findings and promotes innovative solutions to complex social challenges. While the application of behavioral methods opens new avenues for inquiry, researchers must remain vigilant regarding ethical considerations and cultural sensitivities, ensuring that the outcomes of their research are applied responsibly and equitably. As the social sciences continue to develop, the ongoing modifications and application of behavioral research methods promise to further enrich our understanding of human behavior and its implications for society, fostering greater awareness and pragmatic societal actions in view of a more dependable sociological and international governance structures and changes.

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