Ajzen (1985): theory of planned behaviour

- Rebutted Wicker’s doubt – addressed the issue of attitude specificity and introduced variables to better understand how and when attitudes may predict behaviour
- Developed from the theory of reasoned action
- Introduced a new element to the model – perceived control: how easy/difficult the target behaviour is thought to be by the individual
  - Very important in this theory as it influences behaviour intentions and has a direct effect on behaviour (not mediated by behavioural intentions)
- More emphasis on the possible interaction between elements
- Application to the issue of weight loss over 6 week period (Schifter & Ajzen, 1985)
  - Questionnaire items
    - Attitudes to weight loss: participants’ favourable/unfavourable evaluations of losing weight and trying to lose weight in the next six weeks
    - Subjective norms: the extent to which most people who were important to them think that they should lose weight and try to lose weight over the next six weeks and the extent of their support
    - Perceived control: the extent to which participants felt their actions could effect weight loss (ease/difficulty of losing weight)
    - Behavioural intentions: desire to reduce weight
  - Relationship between the elements yielded a high regression coefficient of 0.74
  - Perceived control was the single factor that had the strongest association with actual weight loss (outcome)

Critiques of theory of planned behaviour

- Perceived control should be reconceptualised: internal control-related perceptions (self-efficacy) to be distinguished from external perceived control over behaviour (opportunity) (Karl et al., 2005)
  - Some behaviours are more influenced by efficacy and some by opportunity
- Other moderating factors improve the attitude-behaviour correspondence e.g. prior, habitual behaviour

Critical approaches to attitudes

- Our cultural biases may make us expect to find measurable, mental objects within the individual that cause behaviour

Attitudes as social rather than purely individual

- Attitudes can arise from, reflect and are sustained and challenged by shared understandings or representations of the social world (so differ by cultures and times) – fundamentally social rather than fundamentally individualistic
  - Talk is intricately linked with the broad social representation