International Journal of Applied Research

Bincy Mathew
Proposed Ph. D. Scholar
Manonmaniam Sundaranar
University,
Tirunelveli – 627012, Tamil
Nadu.

B. William Dharma Raja
Assistant Professor (III) &
Head i/c, Department of
Education, Manonmaniam
Sundaranar University,
Tirunelveli – 627012, Tamil
Nadu.

.

Correspondence:
Bincy Mathew
Proposed Ph. D. Scholar,
Manonmaniam Sundaranar
University, Tirunelveli –
627012, Tamil Nadu.

Social cognition and understanding the social world

Bincy Mathew, B. William Dharma Raja

Abstract
The presence of others has a great push in how people act, but in order to understand how great the social influence is, one must first examine the role of the 'self.' The main objective of this paper is to understand social cognition and the social world. Social psychologists confirm that learning is not obtained through independent factors; they take into account all influences. Thoughts are not disembodied, immaterial entities that exist apart from neural events. Social cognition is thinking about others and the social world. Cognitive processes are emergent brain activities that exert determinative influence. This determinative influence is reciprocating, in that it is a bit of give and take. Social cognition has its roots in social psychology which attempts 'to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others. First impressions means other things being equal, the first information one learns about someone influences, more than later information does. The relationship between affect and cognition is very much a two-way street: the feelings and moods exert strong effects on several aspects of cognition, and cognition in turn, exerts strong effects on one's feelings and moods. Schemas are mental frame-works containing information relevant to specific situations or events, which, once established, help, interpret these situations and what's happening in them. Prototypes are mental models of the typical qualities of members of some group or category.

Keywords: Social cognition, primacy effect, schemas, prototypes, affect and cognition.

Introduction
Successful decision making in a social setting depends on the ability to understand the intentions, emotions and beliefs of others. The mirror system allows understanding other people's motor actions and action intentions. 'Empathy' allows understanding and sharing emotions and sensations with others. 'Theory of mind' allows understanding more abstract concepts such as beliefs or wishes in others (Frith & Singer 2011)[6].
Albert Bandura (1986) developed the concept of reciprocal determinism, where a person's behaviour is both influenced by and is influencing a person's personal factors and the environment. Multiple factors are taken into account when studying social learning. One key component of social leaning is the self and how one perceives the events occurring around them. "People are self-developing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflective, not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental events or inner forces" (Bandura, 2008). These inner thoughts are all shaped by outer influences and they are what make one human.
The major concerns of this approach are the processes involved in the perception, judgment, and memory of social stimuli; the effects of social and affective factors on information processing; and the behavioural and interpersonal consequences of cognitive processes. This level of analysis may be applied to any content area within social psychology, including research on intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup processes. However, the term social cognition has also come to be more widely used across other areas of psychology and cognitive neuroscience (Ochsner, Kevin& Lieberman 2011)[9]. In these areas, the term social cognition is most often used to refer to various social abilities disrupted in autism and other disorders.

What is Social Cognition?
Social cognition refers to the manner in which one interpret, analyze, remember, and use information about the social world. It is thinking about others and the social world. Social

cognition is the encoding, storage, retrieval, and processing of information about conspecifics (members of the same species). People don't model or copy every social influence they encounter; they determine which course of action to take through self-reflection. Inner thoughts are key aspects of learning and socializing; they are what make people human. "The core features of personal agency address the issue of what it means to be human" (Bandura, 2001)[2]. A major personal agency of the social cognitive theory is forethought. Through the exercise of forethought, people motivate themselves and guide their actions in anticipation of future events. When projected over a long time course on matters of value, a forethoughtful perspective provides direction, coherence, and meaning to one's life (Bandura, 2001)[2]. Forethought allows people to choose their course of action.

Individuals inevitably form attitudes about other people and groups of people- whether good, bad, or indifferent. Once they have formed such attitudes, they can be very persistent, altering the way they perceive new information about those people. Social perception and cognition describe the process to gather and remember information about others and to make inferences based on that information. Social perception and cognition are similar in many ways to the principles of visual perception and nonsocial cognition because their expectations can strongly influence what one observes, remember, and conclude.

Social Cognition - Historical development
Social cognition came to prominence with the rise of cognitive psychology in the late 1960s and early 1970s and is now the dominant model and approach in mainstream social psychology, common to social cognition theories is the idea that information is represented in the brain as "cognitive elements" such as schemas, attributions, or stereotypes (Allport, 1985)[1]. A focus on how these cognitive elements are processed is often employed. Social cognition therefore applies and extends many themes, theories and paradigms from cognitive psychology. (Huitt, 2006)[7]. It is very likely that social psychology was always a lot more cognitive than mainstream psychology to begin with, as it traditionally discussed internal mental states such as beliefs and desires when mainstream psychology was dominated by behaviourism.

Social Cognition – Its Scope
Viewed broadly, social cognition embraces everything about the cognitive mediation of social interaction. But viewed more narrowly, social cognition refers to cognition of social objects like people (including oneself), the social situations in which one encounters and the interpersonal behaviours that transpire in those situations. In the area of social psychology, social cognition refers to a specific approach in which these processes are studied according to the methods of cognitive psychology and information processing theory. According to this view, social cognition is a level of analysis that aims to understand social psychological phenomena by investigating the cognitive processes that underlie them (Bandura, 2001)[2].

Social Cognition - Theory
Social cognitive theory is the view that people learn by watching others. It explains personality in terms of how a person thinks about and responds to one's social environment. The social cognitive theory states that people learn behaviours through observation, modeling, and motivation such as positive reinforcement. Some influential psychologists of this theory were Miller, N.E & Albert Bandura. They found that this type of social learning was strengthened if the observer identified with their 'model'. This meant that children were more likely to repeat behaviours they had seen other children of their age do, although they might model adults as well. The social cognitive theory thrives on the advancement of new technologies. "Social and technological changes alter, often considerably, the kinds of life events that become customary in the society. Indeed, many of the major changes in social and economic life are ushered in by innovations of technology" (Elder, 1981).

Technology provides new and innovative methods to create social learning environments. One aspect of technology is the ability to interact and observe others. Human expectations, beliefs, emotional bents and cognitive competencies are developed and modified by social influences that convey information and activate emotional reactions through modeling, instruction and social persuasion (Bandura, 1989). Students are constantly surrounded by social influences whether it's a community influence or a media influence.

Learning from the effects of actions of others can directly influence one's choices. Any factor that influences the choice of behaviour can profoundly affect the direction of personal development. This is because the social influences operating in selected environments continue to promote certain competencies, values, and interests long after the decisional determinant has rendered its inaugurating effect (Bandura, 2001)[2].

Observing behaviours or the effects of one's own actions are types of social learning. Social psychology takes this one step further to explain how learning is influenced. "Humans have evolved and advanced the capacity for observational learning that enables them to expand their knowledge and skills rapidly through information conveyed by the rich variety of models" (Bandura, 2008). There are varieties of models both immediate and distant that socially influence people's learning or cognition. Modeling is a major component of the social learning theory.

In social cognitive theory, learning from the effects of actions is a special case of observational learning. In learning by direct experience, people construct conceptions of behaviour from observing the effects of their actions; in learning by modeling, they derive the conceptions from observing the structure of the behavior being modeled. (Bandura, 1989). Any factors that influence choice behavior can profoundly affect the direction of personal development. This is because the social influences operating in selected environments continue to promote certain competencies, values, and interests long after the decisional determinant has rendered its inaugurating effect (Bandura, 2001)[2].

Observing behaviours or the effects of one's own actions are types of social learning. The presence of others has a great push in how people act, but in order to understand how great the social influence is, one must first examine the role of the 'self.' (Huitt, 2006)[7]. Through the use of cognitive processes, people evaluate their life experiences, plan their behaviour and make decisions. The person is seen as an adaptive organism able to change the environment and tailor it to one's own needs. This pits it against theories regarding indivpiduals as basically passive respondents to their surroundings or entities governed by unconscious drives.

Social Cognition – Its Components

Social cognition has its roots in social psychology which attempts 'to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others' (Allport, 1985)[1]. The significant components of social cognition are primacy effect, social schemas, prototypes and affect and cognition.

First impressions/primacy effect: Other things being equal, the first information learned about someone influences individuals more than later information does (Belmore, 1987)[4]. Human beings are not perfect information processors. On the contrary, the social thought is subject to many different sources of potential error, ranging from the tendency to be extremely sensitive to negative information, to the planning fallacy, to magical thinking. These tendencies sometimes cause to make errors in inferences or judgments about others. Such errors are related to many aspects of social behavior, including first impressions of others, and even judgments about others' innocence or guilt.

Social Schemas: Mental frame-works containing information relevant to specific situations or events, which, once established, help to interpret the situations and what's happening in them. They are formed through experience and, once developed, exert strong effects on many aspects of social cognition, including attention, encoding, and retrieval of social information. Social schema theory build on and uses terminology from schema theory in cognitive psychology, which describes how ideas or concepts are represented in the brain and how they are categorized. According to this view, when we see or think of a concept a mental representation or *schema* is "activated" bringing to mind other information which is linked to the original concept by association. This activation often happens unconsciously (Bandura, 2001)[2]. As a result of activating such schemas, judgments are formed which go beyond the information actually available, since many of the associations the schema evokes extend outside the given information. This may influence social cognition and behaviour regardless of whether the judgments are accurate or not.

Prototypes: Prototypes are mental models of the typical qualities of members of some group or category. Prototypes constitute another type of mental framework that one use to interpret the social world. Basically prototypes involve models of the typical qualities of members of some group or category. They too exert strong effects on social cognition once formed (Bandura, 2001)[2].

Affect and Cognition: The relationship between affect and cognition is very much a two-way street: People's feelings and moods exert strong effects on several aspects of cognition, and cognition in turn, exerts strong effects on one's feelings and moods. The current moods or feelings influence the way one think, and their thoughts can influence feelings (Allport, 1985)[1].

Recommendations

Social cognitive theory is applied today in many different areas like mass media, public health, education, and marketing are just a very few.

Social cognitive learning enhances teacher's interest in acquiring knowledge and widens their area of learning. It would be helpful in their interpersonal relationship within the society. Social cognition should influence teachers in selected environments to promote certain competencies, values, and interests long after the decisional determinant has rendered its effect. Teachers can become more effortful, active, highly motivated and better educators when they perceive that they have mastered a particular task within a given environment. Teachers should ensure that the students have the knowledge and strategies that are needed to be successful at completing the tasks.

Conclusion

Social cognition involves the processes through which one notices, interprets, remembers, and later uses information about the social world. Schemas and prototypes exert strong effects on social cognition once formed. It indicates that individuals are more likely to engage in various high-risk behaviour. Social cognition is the sum total of those processes that allow individuals of the same species to interact with one another. Such interaction is a matter of survival, for individuals as well as for the species as a whole. Social cognition focuses on the ways in which individuals think about and make sense of their own social behaviour and that of others.

References

1. Allport. Fundamentals of psychology. New York: Psychology Press, 1985.
2. Bandura A. Fundamentals of psychology. New York: Psychology Press, 2001.
3. Baron RA, Byrne D. Social psychology. (8thed.). New Delhi: Prentice - Hall of India, 2000.
4. Belmore. Introduction to psychology. (5thed.). California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1987.
5. Eysenck MW. Fundamentals of psychology. New York: Psychology Press, 2009.
6. Frith, Singer Center for Social and Neural Systems. Switzerland: University of Zurich, 2011.
7. Huitt. Social psychology. (8thed). New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India, 2006.
8. Kalat JW. Introduction to psychology. (5thed.). California: WadsworthPublishing Company, 1999.
9. Ochsner KN, Lieberman MD. The emergence of social cognitive neuroscience. London: Aldine House, 2011.
10. Sternberg RJ. Cognitive psychology. New Delhi: Akash Press, 2007.