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Original Research Article

Development and Application of Social Learning Theory

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Abstract: Social learning theory is the most mentioned theory in understanding people's learning process. This theory mainly explains the learning process of individuals in a social environment. In a social environment, individuals can learn through imitation, observation, and modeling. Social learning methods take the thinking process into account and provide a more comprehensive explanation of human learning through understanding and observing the role of the learning process.
Keywords: Social Learning Theory; Learning Process; Motivation

1. Introduction

Albert Bandura developed the social learning theory in 1977, which focused on explaining the learning process of individuals when they are in social contexts. Bandura believed that this learning process could not be explained through reinforcement alone, but also by the presence of other people. He stated that the state of mind was also crucial in the learning process; in the social contexts, individuals could learn through imitation, observation, and modeling. Similarly, he posited the learning process could occur through vicarious reinforcement, external reinforcement, and internal reinforcement. Bandura's theory was highly dependent on behaviorism as well as cognitivism. Social learning theory incorporated the cognitive process such as attention and motivation into imitation, observation, and modeling. Through observation, Bandura explained that people could acquire skills, knowledge, values, and behavior that were relevant to the social environment (Bandura, 2002)[1].

2. Elments of social learning theory:understanding process

Modeling is one of the main pillars of social learning theory. A model is an individual whose behavior is observed. Through modeling, an individual gets an idea of how new behaviors are carried out. Later, the coded information acts as a guide for action. There are necessary conditions for efficient modeling to take places, such as attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, which were also known as the four principles of social learning or sub-processes (Bandura, 2002). These principles form a understanding process that takes place between the moment an individual observes the behavior and when they imitate it.

(1)Attention

An individual cannot learn much through observation if he or she neither attends nor recognizes the significant features of the model's behavior . Contact with the model does not mean that a person will pay close attention, or that they will choose the most relevant features from the model's numerous characteristics (Bandura, 2002). Therefore, attention is an important part of learning. Within most social groups, some individuals may be able to command more attention. Therefore, their behavior could be the one that is paid attention to. For example, children are surrounded by many obvious role models such as parents, friends, and teachers.

(2)Retention

Retention describes one's ability to store information and encode the behavior in the memory. Most of the social learning is not directly shown, so people need to remember details of the behavior in order to learn and reproduce it. The ability of an individual to retain is influenced by whether the behavior is verbal or visual. Retention of behavior is enhanced through symbolic coding or rehearsal (Bandura, 2002). Observers who do not concentrate on the performance of the models remember less compared to those who code the modeled activities into concise labels or words. Similarly, those who rehearse more times are also able to perform the pattern of the behavior. Imitating immediately after observing the behavior, or later imitation, also determines the ability of the observer to remember the pattern.

(3)Reproduction

How an observer can demonstrate the behavior of the model is another part of the modeling process. If the observer has acquired the necessary coding of the behavior, then they can integrate the behaviors to produce new patterns of behavior. Some performances of the models are complex and may require practice for the observers to produce them; however, some observers may be unable to reproduce the behaviors effectively, since they have physical limitations or other restrictions, which influences people's decisions whether to imitate a behavior or not. For example, an 80-year-old lady may have watched a ballet, and may think it is very beautiful, paid attention, and remembered the details, but she will not try to imitate it because she knows her body cannot do it. Therefore, people

doi: 10.18282/l-e.v10i7.3002

adjust some of the performances that they observed depending on the informative feedback they get.

(4)Motivation

Motivation describes the force that drives one to imitate. Performing the behavior is rewarded or punished, and the observer has to take this reinforcement into consideration before they perform an action. Providing positive incentives motivates observers to put the observed code into action. If the observational learning is unfavorable, then its implementation opportunities will be reduced. Reinforcement can be external or internal. External reinforcement is motivation from the environment, such as approval, while internal reinforcement is motivation from a feeling such as happiness. Furthermore, people also consider what happens to others when deciding whether to copy someone's behavior or not.

3. Research design and methodology in social learning theory

Social learning theory can obtain quantitative and qualitative data because its research methods can be experimental and non-experimental. From a quantitative perspective, researchers can study how participants learn behavior. For example, Bandura used the Bobo doll experiment to demonstrate that children learn through observing adult behavior. From a qualitative perspective, researchers can study behavioral issues through a narrative of participants' experiences and opinions.

Similarly, using social learning theory as a theoretical framework can determine whether the participants learned new behavior by observation or participation, identifying different reinforcements that led to a change in behavior, and identifying whether a society/system has reinforcements promoting the adoption of new behavior. Hence, social learning theory also is used in determining variables in research involving new behaviors.

4. Contributions of social learning theory

The social learning theory extends to other approaches and fields as well. In organizational contexts, social learning theory is used to explain the behavioral transmission that effect among organizational members, which are organizational members observe the behaviors of other members and imitate these behaviors.

According to the viewpoint of social learning theory, because of the authority, visibility, and credibility of the leaders, employees will learn to imitate the various behaviors of the leader in the interaction process, which include negative behaviors(Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005)[2].For example, one study looked at the impact of boss phubbing on employees' work performance through the lens of social learning theory.

Similarly, the social cognitive theory also borrowed from the social learning theory in the behavioral aspect. The social cognitive theory is an extension of the social learning theory and describes a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of person, environment, and human behavior (Akers & Sellers,2012)[3].

Social learning theory has also been applied to e-learning. When people want to learn something on the internet, they visit YouTube where there are videos of someone demonstrating how to carry out a task or describing specific behavior verbally. In this case, when the e-learning shared on the online platforms is interesting, individuals learn by observing and keep information for later. The motivation aspect of social learning theory is applied through the addition of gamification to the e-learning process. For the learner to comprehend the courses on the e-learning platforms, they have to psych their state of minds instead of always expecting social rewards. People learning on the electronic platform also follow the meditational process of social learning theory. Therefore, e-learning used social learning theory to describe how learners acquire new knowledge and skills.

5. Conclusion

Social learning approaches take the thinking process into account and provide a more comprehensive explanation of human learning by understanding the role of the observational learning processes. Social learning theory provides a good approach to develop other theories of methodology and research design. Social learning theory is linked with positivism and phenomenology in its development. However, social learning theory aspect of incorporating "observational learning" summarized that people would learn by just watching others.Therefore, in today's applications, social learning theory is mostly used together with other theories as a theoretical framework.

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