

Norm

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Social norms are the accepted behaviors within a society or group. This sociological and social psychological term has been defined as "the rules that a group uses for appropriate and inappropriate values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. These rules may be explicit or implicit. They have also been described as the "customary rules of behavior that coordinate our interactions with others."

These vary and evolve not only through time but also vary from between social classes and social groups. What is deemed to be acceptable dress, speech or behavior in one social group may not be accepted in another.

Deference to the social norms maintains one's acceptance and popularity within a particular group; ignoring the social norms risks one becoming unacceptable, unpopular or even an outcast from a group. Social norms tend to be tacitly established and maintained through body language and non-verbal communication between people in their normal social discourse.

As humans mature, one learns when and where it is appropriate to say certain things, to use certain words, to discuss certain topics or wear certain clothes, and when not to. Such knowledge about cultural norms is important for impression management, which is an individual's regulation of their nonverbal behaviour. One also comes to know through experience what types of people he/she can and cannot discuss certain topics with or wear certain types of dress around. Mostly this knowledge is derived through experience.

Overview

Social norms can also be viewed as statements that regulate behavior and act as informal social controls. They are usually based in some degree of consensus and are maintained through social sanctions. Three models explain normative rule content:

Focus on the actions of one's personal ego

Focus on ego's reactions to actions of alternative

Negotiation between ego and alternative.

Norms are rules of behavior. They exist as both formal and informal norms, but often the latter is found to be more strong and reinforced. These informal norms are divided into two:

Folkways: Informal rules and norms whose violation is not offensive, but expected to be followed. It's a kind of adjusting, accommodating type of habits. It does not invite any punishment or sanctions, but some reprimands or warnings.

Mores: They are also informal rules that are not written, but result in severe punishments and social sanction upon the individuals like social and religious exclusions.

Terms related to social norms

A descriptive norm refers to people's perceptions of what is commonly done in specific situations. An injunctive norm refers to people's perceptions of what is commonly approved or disapproved of within a particular culture.

Prescriptive norms are unwritten rules that are understood and followed by society. Everyone does these every day without thinking about them.

Proscriptive norms are unwritten rules that are known by society that one shouldn't do, or follow. These norms can vary from culture to culture.

Deviance is "nonconformity to a set of norms that are accepted by a significant number of people in a community or society (Appelbaum, 173)." In simple terms it is behavior that goes against norms.

Looking Glass-Self is how one sees themselves by interacting with others, seeing how others perceive oneself, what others expect from one, and how one should behave.

Definitions of social norms

Norms in the context of Sociology "are principles or rules people are expected to observe; they represent the dos and don'ts of society (Appelbaum, 173)."

One might also say they are rules that define the behavior that is expected, required, or acceptable in particular circumstances. They are learned by interacting in society.

Examples of norms

Norms affect very much the way one behaves in public. When one enters an elevator, it is expected that one turns around to face the doors. An example of a social norm violation would be to enter the elevator and remain facing the rest of the people.

Norms applied to environmental sustainability

A view on norms has been established that proves to foster a more sustainable lifestyle for that of human society. Societal norms as a whole, now anyway, if changed or sought after for change would create a sense of discord and in this the aspect of attaining some sustainable behavior becomes harder as is blocked by social barriers locking us in to confine or conform to current statuses. "If social norms or economic circumstances would make it very unlikely for many individuals to engage in a questionable practice," such as energy conservation, environmental regulation and recycling, to name such easier tasks, "it probably represents little threat to the system overall." If the behavior is changed as a whole or the general way of thinking could be altered the emergence of new more "green" norms would progress humanity to further sustainable

livelihood.

Game-theoretical analysis of norm

A general formal framework that can be used to represent the essential elements of the social situation surrounding a norm is the repeated game of game theory.

A norm gives a person a rule of thumb for how they should behave. However, a rational person only acts according to the rule if it is optimal for them. The situation can be described as follows. A norm gives an expectation of how other people act in a given situation (macro). A person acts optimally given the expectation (micro). For a norm to be stable, people's actions must reconstitute the expectation without change (micro-macro feedback loop). A set of such correct stable expectations is known as a Nash equilibrium. Thus, a stable norm must constitute a Nash equilibrium.

From a game theoretical point of view, there are two explanations for the vast variety of norms that exist throughout the world. One is the difference in games. Different parts of the world may give different environmental contexts and different people may have different values, which may result in a difference in games. The other is equilibrium selection not explicable by the game itself. Equilibrium selection is closely related to coordination. For a simple example, driving is common throughout the world, but in some countries people drive on the right and in other countries people drive on the left (see coordination game). A framework called comparative institutional analysis is proposed to deal with the game theoretical structural understanding of the variety of social norms.