Social Cognition Approach: Using Observation and Interview Methods via Qualitative Research

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Abstract
This study focuses on social psychology and uses the social cognition approach and qualitative observational and interview methods to observe and analyze random individuals in public settings. Likewise, it aims to identify patterns, social dynamics, and psychological phenomena that govern human behavior by closely monitoring and analyzing the mannerisms and actions of diverse individuals in the same environment. The research involves unobtrusively observing individuals of various demographic backgrounds in public spaces, focusing on non-verbal cues and situational contexts. The study seeks to understand how people interact with others, navigate social situations, and respond to external stimuli in real-world settings. Key objectives include identifying similarities and differences in social behaviors, exploring the impact of environmental factors on individual actions, and observing non-verbal communication in social interactions. Additionally, the research investigates the influence of cultural and contextual variables on observed behaviors to provide insights into the complexities of human behavior. The study was conducted in Barcelona, Spain, with 10 cases for observing and interview-short conversations with some random groups. The findings have implications for understanding social dynamics, developing effective communication strategies, and understanding why people behave in specific ways based on our experience and receiving data according to the people and environment information.

INTRODUCTION
Social Cognition discusses the development of social cognition in the human brain. Social cognition is how we understand and interpret social interactions and events in our daily lives. The authors explain that our brains store many interactions and observations, which become part of our personalities without realizing it. This phenomenon can also be seen in how social media has impacted us today, where people adopt personality traits they observe online. The paper also discusses automaticity, which is the ability to adopt mannerisms without realizing them and implementing them in our daily routines. For example, checking our phones first thing in the morning has become a routine for many people, taking away from appreciating life. The concept of self-recognition is also discussed in the paper, as it is necessary to implement self-discipline in our routines. Based on the
previous explanation, it provides insights into the roots of social cognition and how it affects our perception of the world. The authors argue for the revival of an earlier theoretical approach to the "social dimensions of cognition, emotion, and behavior" that accounted for both individual and social psychology, which has been abandoned for social cognition. According to the author Greenwood, the difference between individual and social psychology is an important distinction that has been forgotten. Greenwood explains how people can believe something because the people they are associated with, also known as their "social reference group," believe the same thing and are just following them. This is known as social psychology. However, another person can believe that same thing but come to that consensus through their own experiences. This is known as individual psychology. Greenwood then explains one difference between social and individual psychology by stating that "socially anchored" beliefs are less prone to change than individual beliefs due to belonging to one social group. Greenwood then explains intrinsically social groups, which he defines as a group of people who share "socially engaged beliefs, attitudes, emotion, and behavior." He argues that for a group to be intrinsically social, they have to share collective beliefs belonging to the group and not a common belief. This means people afraid of spiders or whose favorite food is pizza are not intrinsically social groups. This goes against the thought that social groups such as women, the unemployed, and the divorced are intrinsic, and Greenwood would categorize these groups as derivative. This is because these groups do not share socially engaged beliefs. To have these groups be intrinsically social groups, a more precise categorization, like feminists, would be needed. Here, Greenwood exemplifies how not all social groups are intrinsically social and do not all contribute to social psychology as most people believe. Greenwood also mentions how people have since overlooked the fact that people can belong to multiple intrinsically social groups, which would thus change their social psychology and how many social psychologies a person can have. Social cognition defined with mentioning how it differs from psychology. As defined by Fiske and Taylor, cognition is the study of "how people make sense of other people and themselves." This is different from social psychology because psychology is how people of the same intrinsically social groups share socially engaged beliefs, and social cognition is how people perceive the world around them. Over time, the distinction between social cognition and psychology has blurred, impacting social studies and experiments. Experiments about the social engagement of cognition, emotion, and behavior in the 20th century focused on randomizing participants to see how people of different backgrounds acted with things such as voting. The problem is that it needed to measure the socially engaged forms of cognition, emotion, and behavior. This means they did not study how people of the same intrinsic social group would act in the same situation, studying if they honestly had the same beliefs (Greenwood, 2014; Mehrad et al., 2023). Bandura (1963) developed the social learning theory based on social cognition and its relation to psychology. The theory suggests that individuals can acquire new behaviors by observing and imitating others. Bandura’s research focused on the social world and the process of social behavior. Another researcher, Festinger (1950), explored the concept of Cognitive dissonance. He emphasized the importance of behavior, attitudes, and cognitions in the context of social psychology, as mentioned in Bandura and Walters (1977).

Social cognition is a field of study that focuses on how our minds process information about the social world. It involves thinking about others and the social situations we encounter. Social cognition researchers investigate how people make judgments, form attitudes, and predict future outcomes based on their understanding of themselves and others. In this current qualitative research, a group of people was observed, and short conversations were conducted to analyze their behavior and body
language. The main objective of this study is to recognize and understand people's behavior through observation and interviews.

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was to use qualitative research methods such as observation and interviews to analyze short conversations between individuals of different genders and ages in Barcelona, Spain. The study was conducted from September to December 2023. It targeted a diverse group of local and international individuals who were engaged in various activities at Arco de Triunfo, Ciutadella Park, Plaça de Catalunya, and El Corte Inglés shopping center - all of which are frequently populated areas.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Interview/ Short Conversation Section

The researchers experimented at Ciutadella Park. They asked people basic questions to see how willing they were to help a stranger and how they used social cognition concepts to answer the questions. The researchers found that younger people were likelier to help and put in more effort. For example, a group of young people gave clear directions to a restaurant near the Arco de Triunfo when asked for an excellent place to eat. Despite not speaking English, another young person even gestured and pointed to show someone where the nearest bathroom was. However, the researchers also found that older people were willing to help despite language barriers. When the researchers asked three elderly ladies where the nearest coffee shop was, they were helpful, even though they did not speak English. The researchers noticed that the person who spoke first was the most helpful. Another older group even took the researchers’ picture before the Arco de Triunfo. The researchers also learned that people not from Barcelona may feel uncomfortable answering questions, even if they are asked in their language. This is because they may feel disoriented or anxious outside their home country. However, some tourists were still willing to help. For example, a group of tourists provided a list of bar recommendations and chatted with the researchers for a few minutes. The experiment showed that younger people may be more obliging and communicative, but older people and tourists can still be helpful and welcoming. The team approached random strangers during the research and asked them common everyday questions. They met three older women and inquired about the nearby cafeteria. The women were friendly and curious about why they were in Spain. Similarly, the researchers talked to two teenage girls who suggested several restaurant options, including kebab, Asian, and small kiosk restaurants, when asked for recommendations. The girls were also accommodating and friendly. This interview / short conversation made the researchers realize that being a good person is a choice, regardless of cultural background.

Based on interviews and short conversations with researchers, locals, and tourists, it was found that most people responded kindly with a smile and attempted to help. The research conducted at Ciutadella Park revealed that younger people were more willing to help strangers and put in more effort. However, older people also assisted despite language barriers. Although tourists may feel uncomfortable answering questions, some are willing to help. The researchers approached random strangers and discovered that being a good person is a choice, irrespective of cultural background.

Observation

The researchers conducted a psychological analysis experiment at Plaça de Catalunya and El Corte Inglés shopping centers to study people’s behavior. They observed visitors of different ages, genders, and group sizes and studied the reasons for their visit. Witnessing how people with varying
backgrounds and stories come together in one place to share space and time in our short lives was fascinating. The first people the researchers observed were two male photographers outside El Cortes Ingles. These men seemed to be in their mid-twenties and had cameras wrapped around their necks while taking photos of the store. Whether they were associated with the shopping center or photographing for their own reasons was unclear. Regardless of their intentions, they were still performing some task or job. The researchers noticed they were passionate about their work and took it seriously. They focused on their cameras, paid attention to the movement of passersby, and waited for the perfect shot. They stood out from the rest of the people on the sidewalk, as if they were still in their world, thinking about what to photograph next while the crowds walked around them.

In case 2, the researchers observed a person doing a similar task at Placa de Catalunya. In the square, there was a man in his middle age who was blowing massive bubbles. It is not unusual to see someone blowing bubbles in a public area in Spain. The researchers have also witnessed similar scenes in Madrid and at the Arc de Triomphe. However, this man did not have a donation box; he only had two buckets of bubble mixture. Several children ran towards the bubbles, gazing in amazement, laughing, and trying to burst them. The researchers realized that this must be why he was doing this - to spread happiness. The hedonic way of happiness encourages these acts of kindness to assist others, which provides a sense of purpose and meaning. The evidence was apparent in the man himself. He had a massive smile while the researchers were present for 15 minutes. He kept blowing bubbles without interruption.

In Case 3, a father and his young child sat beside the researchers in the park. They appeared to be tourists, as they had accents. The father was middle-aged and had a calm and relaxed demeanor. He was enjoying the beautiful sunset and pleasant weather. On the other hand, the child was fascinated with the bubbles and kept running into them and jumping to pop them. Later on, he ran to his dad, who then explained how the bubbles were made and what the bubble man was doing. The researchers could tell that the father was enjoying the bonding moment he was experiencing with his son and was happy spending time with him. He pointed out everything and talked to his child, showing he was a good father.

Case 4. A woman was standing in a plaza next to a busy square. She had a phone up to her face and was beaming with a smile and excitement while on a FaceTime call. She was having a lively conversation with her friend, and the sound of her laughter and happy expression showed. With animated gestures, she eagerly directed her friend’s attention to the sight before her. Turning her phone towards the sculpture, she talked while moving her hands. The researcher could see her excitement as she pointed out the intricate details of the fountain’s architecture. Her expressions reflected joy and wonder, and her gestures invited her friend to partake in the moment’s beauty despite the physical distance. The woman’s energy and passion painted a picture of a shared experience, transcending the space between them through technology and a shared appreciation for the beautiful sculpture.

Case 5. While visiting the plaza, the researchers discovered a seven-story department store named Cortes Ingles, which they decided to explore. While they were there, they noticed two men who appeared to be in their middle age, standing near a Loewe store. They were fashionably dressed and were carrying a shopping bag from SVD, Sivasdescalzo, a fashion boutique that sells designer brands. It was clear that they had indulged in trendy attire recently. These two individuals were smelling the candles from the Loewe store, a part of LVMH, along with Louis Vuitton. They had a formal and refined manner, carefully selecting candles and strolling through the store. It was evident that they cared about their appearance and had a taste for luxurious things.
Case 6. A middle-aged man stood at the watch section amidst the bustling El Corte Inglés. He appeared impatient and frustrated, with his slouched posture, elbow on the table, and hand under his chin. He tapped his fingers and was fixed at the watch counter, waiting for an attendant to assist him. His eyes kept darting around, looking for someone who could help him. Despite his neat clothes, his constant movements and change of postures due to impatience made him look uncomfortable. Every passing second seemed like an eternity, increasing his agitation as he peered around, hoping for an employee's timely arrival.

Case 7. At El Corte Inglés, a touching scene unfolded. An older man dressed in plain clothes was carefully browsing through racks of clothing. He was selecting garments for his teenage daughter, scrutinizing each piece with a tender smile and a gentle demeanor, trying to match her preferences and sizes. Although fashion was not his thing, the father’s face radiated a sense of dedication and affection as he meticulously examined colors and styles to capture his daughter’s taste. Standing behind him was his daughter, a mix of shyness and pride in her eyes, observing her father’s earnest effort.

Case 8. The researchers witnessed a heartwarming moment between an elderly mother and her middle-aged daughter. They were standing in a store, admiring the beautiful Christmas decorations. The trees were adorned with shiny ornaments and bright lights, creating a festive atmosphere. The mother had an affectionate expression as she shared in her daughter’s happiness. They were enjoying their time together and reminiscing about past Christmas and family celebrations.

Case 9. While browsing the Christmas section at Cortes Ingles, the researchers observed a young boy and his father examining an ornament. The boy appeared fascinated and asked his father numerous questions about Christmas, even the minor details. Despite the seemingly trivial questions, the father gave his son his undivided attention, making the moment unique for both.

Case 10. The researchers noticed a young man in one of the offices at El Corte Ingles department store that stood out from the others. He wore a collared shirt and glasses and conversed deeply with an older gentleman sitting at a desk behind a large computer monitor. They were both analyzing a piece of paper with great attention. The young man leaned over the table, placing his elbow on it and resting his finger on his chin as if lost in thought. Although the researchers didn’t know what they were discussing, it was clear that the young man was taking it seriously. He was concentrating intently and nodding as if carefully listening to everything the other person was saying and considering it.

Based on the observations and cases mentioned earlier, people exhibit different behaviors and body language that can be observed and understood as their feelings and emotions at that particular time. Social cognition focuses on receiving data from others, the environment, and its connection with this study method. This helps researchers explain that people can easily share their feelings and communicate by focusing more on others’ reactions, behavior, tone of voice, body language, etc. The observation’s most crucial point is that people share data based on their behavior, emotions, and body language in the environment. Others receive this data based on their understanding, cognitions, and attitudes, which leads to different ideas about groups of people or society.

CONCLUSION

This study utilized qualitative research methods that focused on observations and interviews. The researchers analyzed and reported on individuals’ behaviors, emotions, and body language in specific situations and environments. People tend to react and behave based on the reactions of others and the environment around them. This is a critical concept in social psychology, and
individuals in fields such as psychology, sociology, therapy, and more should understand it for a better understanding of behaviorism. Improved communication can reduce misunderstandings, and therefore, it would be beneficial for experts in psychology and sociology to research and publish updated information on the importance of communication and its impact on attitudes and understanding in society.

**Limitation and recommendation for the future studies**

There are some limitations and recommendations that should be taken into account regarding the current study.

These include: 1. Limited Generalizability: The study was conducted in Barcelona, Spain, so it might not apply to other cultural or geographical contexts. Social behaviors can vary significantly across different regions, making it difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population. 2. Observer Bias: Qualitative observational methods may be prone to observer bias, as the researchers' interpretations of non-verbal cues and behaviors can be subjective. Different observers may interpret the same behavior differently, leading to potential data collection and analysis inconsistencies. 3. Sample Size and Diversity: Although the study mentions 10 cases for monitoring, the overall sample size and diversity could be limited. A small and non-diverse sample may not capture the full range of human behaviors and may not represent the larger population. 4. Ethical Considerations: Unobtrusive observation raises ethical concerns regarding privacy and consent. It’s crucial to ensure that the observed individuals are not identifiable and that their privacy is respected. Obtaining informed consent for interviews and conversations is also essential but may be challenging in public settings. 5. Cross-Cultural Understanding: While the study aims to investigate the influence of cultural variables, the depth of analysis may be limited. Exploring cultural nuances and their impact on social behaviors may require additional methodologies or a more extensive study.

The recommendations included: 1. Replication and Extension: Replicate the study in different cultural settings to enhance the external validity of the findings. Expanding the research to more diverse locations can provide a broader perspective on social behaviors. 2. Quantitative Complement: Supplement the qualitative approach with quantitative methods to strengthen the reliability and validity of the findings. Combining observational data with surveys or experiments can provide a more comprehensive understanding of social dynamics. 3. Interobserver Reliability: To address observer bias, ensure interobserver reliability by having multiple researchers independently analyze the data. This can help establish the consistency of interpretations and enhance the study’s credibility. 4. Ethical Guidelines: Emphasize adherence to ethical guidelines, ensuring that privacy and consent issues are appropriately addressed. Document the steps taken to protect the identity and rights of the observed individuals. 5. Longitudinal Study: Consider conducting a longitudinal study to capture the dynamics of social behaviors over time. This technique can deliver an additional in-depth understanding of how individuals adapt to changing environments and social situations. 6. Mixed-Methods Approach: Combine qualitative methods with quantitative surveys or experiments to triangulate findings. This mixed-methods approach can offer a more robust and nuanced understanding of social phenomena. 7. Public Engagement: Share the study findings with the public and engage in discussions to gather additional insights.

This can help validate findings, generate new hypotheses, and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior.

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**Author contribution**

AM, KN, and JBD: developed the research theory and completed the research methodology and data analysis. They were involved in drafting the article. AM: supervised the research data collection and conducted the study’s sapling. AM: guided the whole research and approved the final version of the manuscript. AM, KN, and JBD completed the entire manuscript and corresponded with the article.

**Conflict of interest.**

The authors announce no conflict of curiosity.

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