

## SOCIAL COGNITION – NOTES (UG SEM II PSYCHOLOGY)

### 1. Meaning of Social Cognition

Social cognition refers to \*how people think about, understand, and interpret information about themselves and others in social contexts.

It focuses on:

- How we perceive others
- How we form impressions
- How we make judgments
- How we explain behavior

Keywords: perception, interpretation, mental processes, social world.

### 2. Key Processes in Social Cognition

#### (a) Attention

Selecting what social information to notice.

Influenced by:

- Motivation
- Expectations
- Importance of the situation

Example: We pay more attention to people who are attractive, powerful, or different from us.

#### (b) Encoding

Converting observed social information into mental representations.

Often shaped by schemas

#### (c) Retrieval

Bringing stored social knowledge back into awareness when needed (e.g., during judgment or decision-making).

### 3. Social Schemas

Schemas = cognitive frameworks that help organize social information.

#### Types of Schemas

1. Person Schema – beliefs about traits of individuals.
2. Role Schema – expectations about people in specific roles (e.g., teacher, doctor).
3. Event Schema (Scripts) – how events typically unfold (restaurant script).
4. Self-Schema – organized knowledge about oneself.

#### Functions of Schemas

- Reduce cognitive load

- Help predict behavior
- Guide attention and memory
- Can lead to biases and stereotypes

#### 4. Attribution

Attribution = explaining the causes of behavior.

##### (a) Heider's Attribution Theory

Internal (dispositional) causes → personality, traits

External (situational) causes → environment, external pressures

##### (b) Kelley's Covariation Model

People use 3 types of information to make attributions:

1. Consensus – Do others behave like this?
2. Distinctiveness – Does this person behave like this only in this situation?
3. Consistency – Does the person behave the same way over time?

##### (c) Weiner's Attribution Theory (Achievement)

- Attributions vary along:
- Locus (internal/external)
- Stability (stable/unstable)
- Controllability (controlled/uncontrollable)

#### 5. Errors and Biases in Attribution

##### (a) Fundamental Attribution Error

Overemphasizing internal factors and underestimating external factors when judging others.

##### (b) Actor–Observer Bias

For our own behavior → external attributions

For others → internal attributions

##### (c) Self-Serving Bias

Success → internal factors

Failure → external factors

Helps maintain self-esteem.

#### 6. Impression Formation

- Asch's Configural Model
- People form impressions based on:
- Central traits (e.g., warm/cold)
- Peripheral traits
- Impressions are holistic, not additive.

- Primacy Effect - Information presented first has the strongest influence on impressions.

## 7. Social Perception

- Non-verbal cues
- Facial expressions
- Body language
- Eye contact
- Tone of voice
- Used to judge emotions, intentions, and traits.

## 8. Heuristics in Social Cognition

Heuristics = mental shortcuts for quick decisions.

(a) Availability Heuristic - Judgments based on how easily examples come to mind.

(b) Representativeness Heuristic - Judging based on similarity to typical cases.

(c) Anchoring and Adjustment - Relying on an initial value (anchor) and adjusting insufficiently.

## 9. Stereotypes, Prejudice, and Discrimination

- Stereotype
- Cognitive component — generalized belief about a group.
- Prejudice
- Affective component — negative attitudes/feelings.
- Discrimination
- Behavioral component — unfair treatment.
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## 10. Social Identity and Categorization

### Tajfel's Social Identity Theory

- Categorization
- Identification
- Comparison
- Minimally defined groups can show in-group favoritism.

## 11. Applications of Social Cognition

- Understanding prejudice reduction
- Improving intergroup relations
- Criminal justice (eyewitness memory)
- Marketing and persuasion
- Counseling—understanding biases and self-schemas

## 12. Short Definitions (Exam-Ready)

- Schema: Cognitive structure for organizing knowledge.
- Attribution: Process of explaining behavior.
- Heuristics: Mental shortcuts for quick decisions.
- Primacy Effect: First impressions dominate.
- Fundamental Attribution Error: Overestimating dispositional causes.