

Report on online course of Social Norms, and social Change

-Course by University of Pennsylvania and UNICEF on Coursera

Niyati Saxena

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Course Description

The course, Social Norms, and Social Changes is a course that aims to unite society by teaching the procedure of testing social norms, differentiating them from other social constructs to have better policy interventions. This is significant to bring new and favorable norms or to abolish deleterious norms. The course upskills us with the wisdom of measuring the expectations of society and social norms and what leads to specific kinds of behaviors. The University of Pennsylvania and UNICEF joined hands to initiate this course. It infuses the knowledge by quoting several pragmatic examples of social norms such as child marriages, genital cutting, gender violence, and sanitation practices, etc.

Part one of Social Norms and Social Change articulates the definition of basic concepts like conditional preferences, social expectations to makes us understand how descriptive norms, customs, and social norms differentiate with each other. It is vital to have a command of how to measure preferences and expectations to bring on the table the necessary causes, evaluate whether it was successful or not and to comprehend the character of the practice one is going through. Once we get to know the cause, then we can raise our steps towards social change!

Course objective

1. This course aims at making people explore about different behavioral patterns that humans are engaged in.
2. The objective of this course is to make students measure different types of behavioral patterns and practice various survey techniques to trigger a social change.
3. It aspires to bring a change in community by showcasing the results of survey to all.
4. It also aims at extracting the causes behind certain kind of behavior of an individual and community.

Course Contents

What makes a behavior interdependent versus independent?

When other people's opinion, choice or practice influences our behavior is known as interdependent behavior. For example, conventions like fads, fashions, signalling system, and social norms. When one's practices are not based upon others choice or opinion is called independent behavior. Social customs, habits and moral injunctions are part of independent behavior. For example, if it rains, one will not care whether others are taking umbrella with them or not. It's an independent behavior.

Custom: A custom is a habitual pattern of behavior such that individuals prefer to conform to it because it meets their needs. People do many things for fulfilling sheer need or for convenience like not using latrines in a region where water is scarce, slowly and steadily it becomes custom. It is difficult to overcome religious creed, but quite easy to remove fear by providing education.

Social expectations: Social expectations are belief about past, present and future that what should have happened, what should happen and what will happen. These are expectations in context of other people's belief and behavior.

Empirical expectations: Empirical expectations are the expectations which are based on factual beliefs that our trusted people tell us how other people act in a particular situation. The empirical expectations matter to us when we want to imitate others, what others do is informative (social proof) and we want to coordinate with others. We can measure empirical expectations by asking that do people expect others to engage in a specific behavior?

Normative expectations: One believes other people think one ought to behave in a certain way, where the ought word is not merely prudent. A man who beats his wife thinks that his neighbors approve to this practice. This type of expectation always has indirect evaluation. We can measure normative expectations by asking that do people expect others to believe that they should conform to that behavior? And Personal normative beliefs means what the responder believes she should do.

Descriptive norm: A descriptive norm is a pattern of behavior such that individuals prefer to conform to it on condition that they believe that most people in their reference network conform to it. Here reference network could be important people like friends, family, relative, religious leaders, village members, people you work with or community leaders, etc

Social norm: A social norm is a rule of behavior such that individuals prefer to conform to it on the condition that they believe that most people in their reference network conform to it (empirical expectations) and most people in their reference network believe they ought to conform to it (normative expectations). If one disregards ought, then he may face sanctions.

Conditional preference: People often make mistake in understanding the difference between choice and liking, If I choose vanilla ice cream over chocolate, then one may think that I like vanilla ice cream more, but the reality is I am allergic to chocolate, that is why I am choosing vanilla. Unconditional Individual preference says that I want apples and Unconditional Social preference says I want more apples than you, whereas Conditional Individual preference says that I want apples if it is autumn and Conditional Social preference says that I want apples if my friends want apples.

Pluralistic Ignorance: Sometimes objective and perceived consensus do not coincide. That is, our normative expectations can be false. There could be a gap between people's normative belief and people's personal normative belief. It's a belief trap in which individuals are caught and do the things they dislike. Let's discuss that how change will occur, one may follow a procedure of incentivised questionnaire and behavioral experiment.

These questions could be asked in Traditional Surveys to know the behaviors and practices of responder

BEHAVIOR: "At what age did your daughter(s) get married?"

- PRUDENTIAL REASONS: "If you think about a girl marrying early rather than late, what are the advantages and disadvantages of that for the father of the girl?"

- **EMPIRICAL EXPECTATION:** “Think about married women in between 18 and 25 years old in your community. Out of 100 such women, how many do you think got married before they were 18 years old?”
- **PERSONAL NORMATIVE BELIEF:** “Some girls get married before they are 18 years old. Is this good?”
- **NORMATIVE EXPECTATION:** “Out of 100 men in your community who are at least 40 years old, how many think that it is good that girls get married before they are 18 years old?”

Vignettes

When the subject is socially sensitive, surveyor narrates a small story similar to the incident he is facing. These scenarios do not contain any pressure, so it fulfils the purpose of receiving true answers. For instance, we can give respondents stories about a father in some community who is wondering whether to marry off his young daughter or to let her finish school. We can then ask respondents what they think this father would ultimately do, why he would do that, and whether it is what the father should do. We can also vary what others in this fictional father’s community are doing or what they are approving and disapproving of (i.e., we can manipulate the social expectations of the protagonist of the story). In the stories some respondents get, all the other men are arranging early marriages, whereas in alternative stories the other men send their daughters to school until they finish high school. In some stories, all the other men think that marriage and chastity is infinitely more important than education for girls, whereas in other stories the other men in the fictitious community recognize the importance of education.

Learning Methodology used in Course

This course is divided into four weeks, Prof. Cristina Bicchieri, University of Pennsylvania along with other professionals of UNICEF who work in various countries like Sudan, Venezuela, and South Africa, etc. delivered the vibrant video lectures and provided us with the readings after every lecture. The learning methodologies of the course Social Norms and Social Change are as follows:

Video lectures: Video lectures were of very short duration, hardly 8- 10 minutes of 10-12 videos per week where Prof. Cristina used to teach, and professionals of UNICEF used to share their country's experiences.

Readings: There were readings of 2-3 hours per week.

Quiz: Two quiz of 16 minutes each were conducted every week in which scoring 75% was necessary for passing.

Key Learnings from the course

1. The social norms which glue us together in the society are the one we follow without even realising it.
2. I got to know that how we depend on each other, how and what we do depends on our expectations of what others do.
3. Expectations may or may not influence our behavior and we should be aware of what they do or do not. We can observe this while people follow traffic rules.
4. Explored the nature of social norms, how they are grounded on social expectations, how fast or slowly our social expectations change and what causes certain changes, I looked at social and cognitive drivers of dynamics and non-dynamics and the tools one uses to do social changes.

I have done one more course of Politics and Populism by John Hopkins University, taught by Yascha Mounk on Coursera