



The Truman Show: From a Socio-Cognitive Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates with Peter Weir's Truman show, a 1998 science-fiction movie and focuses on its analogy with the Socio-Cognitive Theory developed by Albert Bandura. The Truman show is story of an insurance salesman whose entire life has been telecasted worldwide unknowingly by a television series organization named *The Truman Show* which is directed by Christof. First, it discusses about human behaviour and focuses on the study of visible behavior that can be observed or measured and then it argues that the behavioral changes happening to Truman in the movie is clearly related with all the principles of The Socio-Cognitive Theory.

Keywords: - Social Cognitive Theory, Behaviour, society, Social Learning Theory, Truman show

INTRODUCTION

Behavior refers to all the actions of an individual towards his surroundings and the way he reacts to his day to day life experience, particular situations or stimulus. We blindly believe what we see, thus behavior is the potential of an individual to take action to all the mental and physical stimuli. When a child is born, he is being exposed to all the norms and rules that the society exhibits. Hence, he grasps each and every moment that he sees in his surroundings and installs them unknowingly by himself in his occipital lobes of his brain and act accordingly in the society. We can say that all our behavioral instincts are preplanned therefore we have to say that we mostly live for the sake of our society. We put us back all our feelings and happiness to those around them and how they fit into their groups, and imitate the behaviour of others almost automatically and as mentioned before each and every stages of life a human is being noticed and all he has in his mind is how do the others or the society see him. Either he can live as a good gentleman hiding all his emotion and true self or he can live as a vulgar creature that reacts to everything and thus become a mole in the society where he become an outcast.

Social influence is not the only factor that affects human behavior, psychological aspect such as mental and emotional factors too affect them. There are two ways in which human's think, one is the automatic system and next is the deliberate system. The way one reacts to real life situation reflects their

psychology and their behaviour. The automatic system inside an individual works automatically, effortlessly and considers what comes to mind first. There they take decisions associatively or in accordance with the previous experience. The deliberate system on the other hand is more manual, and considers a broad set of relevant factors. Here they act in accordance with the present situation. The outcome of both systems may either be positive or negative.

THEORY BACKGROUND

SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

There are a lot of theories explaining about the societal influence on human behaviour. One such theory is Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The theory was proposed by Albert Bandura in the 1960. Albert Bandura was the renowned Stanford psychology professor. Bandura also developed social learning theory and the concept of self-efficacy, which had great influence across social, psychological, cognitive, educational and clinical psychology. He had also received the National Media of Science. The theory was first introduced as Social Learning Theory in the 1960's and in 1986 the theory developed into Social Cognitive Theory. It explains that learning takes place in the dynamic and reciprocal area of the social context where behavioral, personal, environmental interaction taken place. The theory points out that people observe others and study all their actions and their consequences and observe that they get to learn that particular behavior and thus they engage in that behaviour they have learned. Thus we can say that one does not learn something from himself or by his own, it's the actions or the behaviour of others that they reflect.

Major root of the Social Cognitive Theory is observational learning. The two other strings in the theory are outcome expectancy and self-efficacy. Outcome expectancies make one to think about the expected or related consequences of one's action. Self-efficacy is the amount of personal-control expects by an individual at everyday life situations. The Social Cognitive Theory has also influence many other theories that are related to behavioral psychological theories.

Before going deep into the theory, it would be better to explain how the theory got established. In the 1960's, Albert Bandura and his colleagues conducted few experiments on observational learning and the experiment was called the Bobo Doll Experiment. Firstly they conducted the experiment on pre-school children's by exposing them to an aggressive and non-aggressive adult model to check whether they are imitating the model's behaviour. There were both male and female gender among the models and some children were observing the same sex models and the others were observing opposite sex models.

The researchers arranged an aggressive session with a Bobo doll for the models and they were exposed to aggressive condition. There the models were physically and verbally aggressive towards inflated Bobo doll and all the sessions were played in the presence of the child. After their session with the models the child was taken to another room with a full of toys that the child liked the most. To frustrate and irritate them the play was stopped after two minutes and then they were taken to another room full of Bobo dolls and other different toys and they were allowed to play for the next 20 minutes. From the second room the researchers noticed that the children are in aggressive condition, after taking them from their favorite toys showed more verbal and physical aggression and they showed it towards the Bobo doll and expressed other forms of aggression. The researchers also noticed that boys were more aggressive than girls, and boys who were exposed to male aggressive models were more aggressive.

The researchers later conducted a similar experiment and here the children weren't exposed to real life models. The children were taken to observe a film of aggressive models and another group of children's were taken to monitor a film with aggressive cartoon characters. The children were subjected to mild frustration before they were taken to the experiment room to play and again the gender of the models was varied in the films they viewed. The children in all these aggressive conditions exhibited more aggressive behaviour than those in the controlled group and here also boys were more aggressive than girls. Through these experiments we can easily come up to the idea that media are more likely to influence children in negative manner than the real life models. Thus Bandura's experiments were summed up into his theory named Social Learning Theory and in 1986 he renamed it as Social Cognitive Theory to give more importance on the cognitive components of observational learning and also to find out how cognition, behaviour and environment shape people.

There are five strands that has developed as part of the Social Learning Theory and an extra sixth strand was also introduced as the theory was evolved into Social Cognitive Theory.

- Reciprocal Determinism

- Behavioral Capability
- Observational Learning
- Reinforcement
- Expectations
- Self-efficacy

Reciprocal determinism is the stem of Social Cognitive Theory and this refers to his or her lively and mutual interaction with a set of socially learned individuals, their environment and moving on by understanding each and every aspects of life and then to move on successfully. This is said to be the central concept of Social Cognitive Theory.

The next is the Behavioral Capability and it says that an individual has the skill and knowledge to perform a behavior in a society and to perform that successfully he or she must know what to do and how to do it. They learn certain things from their own consequences of their behaviour and it may also affect the environment in which they live. The third one Observational learning has already mentioned and to give a short idea, the title itself is enough. It means to learn by observing others actions and reproducing those actions during certain situations. The apt example is the one mentioned above with the experiments taken place by children with the help of models. So it can also be called as “modeling” of behavior.

Reinforcement refers to the mental or physical type of responses that may cause positive or negative impact in his/her life. These Reinforcements may be self-initiated or environmental and from all these consequences the person tends to continue or discontinue that behavior, Reinforcement is the important part of The Social Cognitive Theory that connects to the reciprocal relationship between behavior and environment.

Fifth one is Expectation and it refers to the expected consequence of a person's behaviour. Everyone in this universe prepares for the consequences of their actions before doing something and they expects it to be positive or negative and the outcome expectations can be health related or non health related. Expectations are derived by an individual from his previous experiences and it leads to successful completion of his behaviour.

The last strand is the Self-Efficacy and it was added when the Social Learning Theory was developed into Social Cognitive Theory. As the term itself it refers to ability of a person to perform his/her behavior successfully. Self-efficacy is influenced by his/her capabilities and the environmental factors.

These are the six strands to which The Truman Show written by Andrew Niccol and directed by Peter Weir is related. On going into the plot, The Truman Show is the story of an insurance agent and whose whole life is being telecasted as a TV show and he realizes that he's always being followed and he comes to know that he is under surveillance. And in the end he realizes his assumption was right and then he escapes from that society which was fully setup for the TV show.

THE TRUMAN SHOW

They begin the movie by introducing the two major characters and they give a brief detail about their life in the Island which is made entirely for Truman. They say that there's nothing fake about Truman and it's completely genuine. All the artists in that island live their life there and even Marlon, who tends to be Truman's best friend say that they are living a real life there. The only thing is that it's just merely controlled. Every moment of Truman's life is been recorded and telecasted around the world. World around Truman has an archaic nature and this movie also reflects the reality of media manipulation, in which news, ads, and the radio are progressively shaping society.

When Truman visit's the basement to find a sweater, he suddenly drifts into his past life. There we see Truman's love interest, Lauren Garland. She represents the potential of a new, emancipated existence. Her real name is Sylvia and she was there in the island just as a crew and she fell in love with Truman. For that reason she had been taken away from that island. She knows that she's just a character in the show and the authority won't let anything happen between them. Later on Truman and Lauren plan to go to a beach and there they kiss each other. But soon a man come to them by a car telling that she has schizophrenia, a mental disorder and tells him that she brings all her boyfriends to that beach. There she tells Truman her real name and also tells him that everything in that island is made up for Truman and also tell him to escape from there and to come find her. The

man who pretends to be her father tells him that he's taking her to Fiji and that's the reason why we see Truman wishing to go to Fiji. Mean while Truman keeps all her belongings in a box down the basement and on a rebound Truman marry Meryl

The radio that he listens every morning has a great role in shaping his life. But one day the radio frequency gets jammed and the frequency changes to that of the frequency of broadcasting station of the show where Truman happens to hear things that he was doing at the movement just like someone spying him. Everything was happening as per direction from the broadcasting station and every other people living around him have their microphone plugged into them for their directions except for Truman. They are easily manipulating the truth and Truman is living in a world where he is surrounded by lies.

Truman suspects nothing until his early thirties. After this glitch in the radio frequency made him realize that there is something wrong and then runs into the nearby building creating an unpredictable behavior. There he runs into a lift and finds something unusual. Behind the elevator, there was no backing on it and few people were eating food behind the elevator. This brings more anxiety in Truman and the security forcefully takes Truman outside that building. Then runs into Marlon's shop and informs him that he's being setup for something and also tells him that many strange things are happening around him. He himself let know Marlon that when Truman behaves unpredictably they can't just workout things that are planned

The next morning he chases Meryl to her hospital to find whether it is authentic or not. Where too he finds things susceptible and was forcefully kicked out of the hospital. After being kicked out from the hospital he goes to book a ticket for Fiji and there he finds that ticket is not available for the next one month and then he goes to get a bus to Chicago and all of a sudden bus go phut. The driver here purposefully jams the gear box according the direction from the broadcasting station. Truman then waits for his wife to come back and by that time Truman takes a close analysis around him and finds that everything is just happening as a loop and they are all acting accordingly to someone's order. There Meryl comes and Truman gives a prediction on things happening around him. Then he takes his wife and tells her that now they are going to Atlantic City and on their way they encountered a traffic block and he realizes that he's getting blocked at every turn of his will and he now understands that all these are being made up by someone. So to trick them he tells his wife that they can go back home and then after giving few turns in the round, he make an unpredictable move by going to the same direction, and finds that traffic has vanished just in few minutes and Meryl was unable to answer.

Then they tried to stop Truman by setting a forest fire and they even tried manipulating his mind by using Meryl. Truman didn't give up. Finally they make a fake plot that the nuclear power plant has leaked and they said that they are evacuating the town. The fireman there came's and appries them by calling out Truman's name and Truman became suspicious about how the fireman got his name. He understood that he won't be able to escape there by car, so he runs into the forest. And the situation ends up in a quarrel with Meryl after his arrest from the fake town evacuation. Then the show authority send's Marlon to solve the situation and Marlon take Truman to a bridge. There Truman tells his absolute mental situation that he's losing his mind. Marlon tries to manipulate Truman mentally by tracking him back to their childhood. He tells Truman that he was the closest thing ever had and by words and deeds they are manipulating Truman and makes him believe that everything happening around him is not unusual or suspicious, it is real and then they bring in his father back to Truman. This was a way to manipulate Truman's decision to escape

Later Truman pretends to be sleeping in the basement and escapes from the house. The people of the island look for Truman and they finally finds him in the sea that is made up for the show. Here all the audience including us understands that Truman is self-efficient and by all his decisions he's becoming an inspirational character as Christof says. Truman is sailing by sea, overcoming his fear of ocean and the fact said by Christof become true,"everyone move on with their life realizing the realities". The things that drive Truman were to find the love of his life Sylvia and his yearning for his actual freedom. There in the ocean they can control the ocean currents and wind and by that they tried their best to knock him back to the island and they even tried drowning him in the ocean. Until his last breath Truman fight for his life and didn't give up.

Finally Truman reach the end of the studio where the artificial ocean ends and he sees the path to escape and Christof reminds him of the real world that he is about to see and again tells him about the day of his birth, his first day at school, the day when he loses his first tooth and all to make him stay there. Still Truman was not convinced by his words and he looks up wishing the whole team the that he says every day “in case I don’t see you, good afternoon, good evening and good night”.

THE TRUMAN SHOW AND SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

The main strands of Social Cognitive Theory are Reciprocal Determinism, Behavioral Capability, Observational Learning, Reinforcement, Expectations and the last Self-efficacy as mentioned before.

Reciprocal Determinism

There are three factors that affect Reciprocal Determinism; they are Behavioral factor, environmental and Personal factor. According to the notion of reciprocal determinism, cognitive processes and environmental elements such as social cues influence a person's behavior. In movie *The Truman Show*, the same aspect Truman as an individual imitates the actions taught by his surroundings. He wishes his neighbors every morning in the same way and his everyday actions are the same throughout. This has been shown to him by the society and thereby he is facing no troubles from his family and friends, that way the society is smoothly moving on with him. The show is truly imitating a perfect society where there is no trouble, just an utopian society. He was tired of his mundane life and he himself got totally frustrated with his life in the island. By his repeated actions Reciprocal Determinism can be seen from the side of Truman and he’s a successful insurance agent leading a normal perfect life, thus Truman’s situation becomes an excellent example for reciprocal determinism.

Behavioral capability

This refers to a person's ability to accomplish a behavior through the use of essential information and skills. A person known’s what to do and how to accomplish it in order to perform an activity successfully. They learn certain things from their own consequences of their behavior and it may also affect the environment in which they live. From Reciprocal determinism it is clear that Truman leads a successful life. Even though he was struggling with his daily routine, he always had a smile in his face not to trouble others. Later on his unpredictable behavior make him feels that there is something wrong about his surroundings and the consequences of that unpredictable behavior leads him to his understanding that he’s been followed and later on he escapes. His escape totally shatters the equilibrium of the people of Seahaven Island and they all go in search for him. Thereby we can come to the conclusion that Truman with his skills and knowledge get away from the Island

Observational Learning

Observational learning is a way of learning that involves observing and modeling the behavior, attitudes, and emotional displays of another person. From the day Truman is born, he was exposed to factors that limit him. He was not allowed to go across his limits and by that way he started to grow by seeing others and all the others around Truman was trained to act in a way where Truman follows their behavior. He grows, goes to school, fell in love and after his studies he works as an insurance agent and then to have a child. This was the system followed in the society. Looking at this whole world we see the same system. Through the observational learning we get to know good and bad behavior. The society around Truman was trained to show Truman good stuffs only and they are being imitated by Truman. Observational learning made Truman to stay there in the island for that long period without any case and concerns.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement, there are several different types of reinforcement that can be applied. Positive and negative reinforcement are the two most common types of reinforcement. It's crucial to realize that the terms positive and

negative don't necessarily imply nice or evil. Instead, they indicate that you are adding (positive) or eliminating (negative) something to strengthen the desired behavior. Truman in the movie is really afraid of all the water bodies. This is because he lost his father from the ocean and there after he is afraid to go through the water bodies. Here the series society purposefully creates that tragic scene to make Truman stay there in the Seahaven Island not to escape by sea. This mental reinforcement is causing a negative impact in his life. We can say that both positive and negative Reinforcement can be seen here in the movie. One of the positive reinforcement is that all the cast and crew are getting paid and the negative reinforcement is that Truman is getting used; Positive reinforcement in Truman comes after he moves to the real world where he has his fame. From his life he detached his fear of water and he builds on his caliber to cross the sea and to say good bye to the Island.

Expectations

The expected outcomes of an individual's behavior are known as outcome expectancies or expectation. Outcome expectations, more specifically, pertain to the anticipation of bodily, self-evaluative (or affective), and social consequences of one's behavior. Truman expectations are clear in the movie. By the end of the movie we find Truman's expectations starts working out and he escapes. He finds out that everything happening around him is just a loop. On his way to New Orland's he expects to find the traffic gone and many such situations makes his understand that everything around him is made up for some purpose and Truman expects to happen things in a way that Christof plans and thus he behave in an unpredictable manner by understanding all these and he escapes through the basement by faking them. During his last encounter, as his boat bumps into the outer wall of Seahaven Island he gets his last evidence that he's living falsly all his life there.

Self-efficacy

Human motivation, well-being, and personal achievement are all built on self-efficacy beliefs. This is because people have little motivation to act or endure in the face of adversity unless they believe their actions can yield the desired results. In case of Truman we can say that he gets fully self-efficient, to be given the chance to live his own life, he must overcome immense challenges, including a severe and life-threatening storm at sea and he over comes all these circumstances. Human functioning is, of course, influenced by a variety of circumstances. People's experiences of success or failure as they engage in the numerous tasks that make up their lives inevitably impact the numerous decisions they must make. Furthermore, the knowledge and skills they possess will undoubtedly play a vital influence in what they choose to do and what they choose not to do. After watching the movie we can come up to the fact that Truman is well self-efficient. Even though he is circled by a society which controls and moulds him to moves on by their ways, we see Truman finding his love in Sylvia and he stands to his last breath to find her. From his life and his work we can find that he is a successful business man too.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to identify effectiveness of applying The Social Cognitive Theory in movie *The Truman Show*. Based on the analysis, it can be conclude that the theory is well applicable in the movie. The idea that is developed is that individuals act in accordance with their principles and strive to get the results they desire. There are multiple behaviours shown by the protagonist of this movie to get to his desired result. Relationships with others provide much more insight on their growth, knowledge, learning and achievement of goals. The world around Truman or the cast, crew and even the climate there in the Seahaven Island were intended to keep Truman there in the Island and this mission was successfully carried out by them till the end. They all acted in a way to mould Truman accordingly to their show.

CITATION

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