

How Cultural Change Creates Social Change

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Introduction

Any significant changes in the cultural values and behavior patterns of people can be referred to as social change. However, these changes necessarily need to generate profound social consequences and long-term impacts on the behaviour of society. Previously, the industrial revolution, the feminist movement, and the abolition of slavery have caused social changes. Therefore, contemporary social movements are highly acknowledged by sociologists as an inspiring factor of social change. Moreover, their efforts to comprehend many other potential factors that cause social change have led to the development of several theories, for example, evolutionary theory, conflict theories, and demography theories. These theories, on the one hand, explain the patterns of change in societies, while on the other hand, they also describe the several hindering factors that resist the potential changes.

Despite the different variations in their understanding of social change, all theories admit its universal nature which slowly but gradually transforms the social processes, social interactions, social patterns, and social organizations. Therefore, all societies whether they are primitive or civilized, experience fundamental alternations in their behaviours (Lumenlearning). Although the speed of this change is not uniform, it is often too slow to be subjectively experienced by the members of the societies. Another significant characteristic of social change is that it does not occur simultaneously in all aspects of society. Instead, the change in one particular aspect often triggers the change in the other aspects, and thus a series of changes starts, which consequently leads to profound change on the societal level.

However, the determining factors of social change are not varied largely. Social scientists have discussed the most prominent factors of social change as technology, social institutions, population, and environment. When a successful social change occurs, it consequently leads to cultural change and modernization, which increase the differentiation and specialization within a society (Lumenlearning). However, sometimes a particular change in a specific aspect of the culture can also bring about social change as noted by Crowley and Heyer, technological change links [cultural change and social change](#). The following section, in this regard, further discusses the different aspects of this relationship to investigate how cultural change creates social change.

Explanation

According to Landis, social change is the desirable variations in the social process, social interactions, and social organization while cultural change is the fundamental change in the desires and needs of humans. Thus, cultural changes become social changes when they affect both human relations and

social organizations within a society or a community.

Social and Cultural Change Process

The fundamental components that define the social and cultural change process are discovery, innovation, diffusion, acculturation, and modernization. The discovery element is observed when society adopts regularly new changes in the existing socio-cultural pattern that can further occur in any aspect of the society, such as technology, philosophy, politics, culture, or economics. Innovation is the application of knowledge to create new ideas and techniques to make social change possible. Therefore, it is dependent on the level of human creativity in society and people's adaptability to new inventions. Diffusion relates to the adaption of a particular set of attributes of another society by the individuals of a particular society when they regularly contact each other.

Acculturation is the process of continuous development in two or more cultures when they influence the behaviour patterns of each other through continuous direct contact. The phenomenon is mostly observed when a specific culture is influenced by modern culture and begins to adapt its norms and values. Finally, modernization happens when society completely transforms itself according to the dominant ideas, lifestyles, and ways of communicating of the present time. Thus, modernization utterly changes the language, customs, ideas, and even the personal preferences of the people of the society under transformation.

Factors of Social and Cultural Change

As there are certain dimensions of social and cultural change, there are some prominent factors that bring about the changes in society. These include the economy, technology, education, and demography. The economic pattern of the society has a great influence on the behaviour of the society. Therefore, any significant change in a subsistence economy can lead to a change in the existing social and cultural patterns. For example, the hunting culture of primitive societies has transformed into today's modern industrialization process due to continuous [economic changes](#). Thus, any changes in the economic aspect of society consequently lead to changes in all other aspects of society.

Technology is the systematic knowledge of using different tools and machines to reduce human efforts in doing a particular task and make their lives more comfortable. Today's era is mostly called the technological era, when machines have replaced humans in almost every field of life. Such technological changes in the means of production, communication, transportation, etc., have led to urbanization and structural changes in the behaviour of societies.

Education is another intervening variable in the process of social and cultural change as it is often regarded as an agent in the process of change that changes the attitude of the people living in a society. Similarly, education can eliminate many prejudices, narrow idles, and misunderstandings in

society and thus promote collective efforts of individuals to adopt modern ways of living, which directly increases the speed of social change.

The comprehension of human populations in terms of qualitative or quantitative terms is called demography which also provides a great estimation of different compositions in the society based on gender, age, race, language, etc. These factors largely influence the behaviour pattern of society by impacting government policies and [social movements](#).

There are some other factors as well that cause socio-cultural change and are often categorized as physical factors. These include natural calamities like famine, flood, cyclones, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and war, etc. The primary reason why these factors are important is that they are directly linked to the vast changes in the size, location, and population of the society. Therefore, there are many historical instances when a particular civilization was wiped out as a result of [natural disasters](#), and a new civilization emerged.

How Technology Links Social Change and Cultural Change

Technological advancements have completely transformed the way people communicate with each other. Since there are now better and more effective ways of communication available, people from one part of the world can easily engage online with others sitting thousands of miles away. And as this communication goes on, people begin to better understand each other which not only promotes their separate cultural identities but the natural mixing of their cultural attributes as well. The fast and reliable means of transportation are another tool that enhances this process of acculturation. This can be observed from the [globalization phenomenon](#) of many brands such as Coke, McDonald's, and Pepsi, which are now spread throughout the world. They are a strong symbol of Westernization.

The cultural lag is a popular concept by Hankins and Ogburn which describes that there are often time lapses between the change in a particular aspect of the society and the subsequent changes in the other aspects. Thus, this can be regarded as the time difference between the initial social change and the final social change. To further elaborate on the concept, Hankins and Ogburn provided a specific example soon after the American Civil War when the rapid rise of machines in several sectors of society was observed. Consequently, the workplace environment for the workers became very dangerous, and therefore a record increase in the number of accidents in industries was noted. However, at that time, the available laws used to deal with cases involving persons only and not machines so injured workers were unable to receive any financial compensation.

However, with time when the number of workers' protests increased significantly, lawmakers were forced to formulate ways for the financial assistance of workers in case they get injuries while working at the factories. As a result, some states in the USA permitted workers to sue companies that did not ensure the safety practices at their factories. However, since these companies were liable to award

huge funds to their workers in case of their injuries, they developed a new process of workers' compensation, which saved them from lawsuits while workers also got a fairly automatic payment receiving channel (Barkan).

To further elaborate on the phenomenon of social change, Varnum and Grossmann in their research study, built their discussion around two basic questions: why societies change and how societies change. To answer the question, they referenced cultural evolution and social ecology. The evolutionary aspect of the change is based on some of the factors that are discussed above, such as the technology that transforms the contents of the culture and thus provides us with an understanding of how societies change. On the other hand, ecological approaches describe why social change happens. In this regard, they define certain specific environmental pressures which alter the psychological behaviour of the people, finally leading to social change. Thus, according to Varnum and Grossmann, these evolutionary and ecological approaches are an important framework for understanding societal shifts based on cultural change.

Today, some sociologists also argue that the tremendous rise of technological instruments in the fields of communication and transportation is likely to give rise to global culture. The reason why they support this idea is the diffusion of the different cultures as discussed above. Since now the population is traveling across different parts of the world very rapidly, the rate of diffusion is also increasing alarmingly. The mass media, such as telephones, television, films, the internet, and international institutions, have bridged the gap between different parts of the world, accelerating the appeal for global culture. However, despite the fact that the world has become a global village and people are no longer separated by time and space, the distinct cultural aspects can be observed in different societies where people are still observing and preserving their norms and values. This shows that the concept of the global village is not a big success.

Conclusion

Social change is a universal phenomenon that happens in all societies; however, it is a slow and gradual process. There are many factors that cause social change, such as technology, education, demography, etc.. Therefore, many theories of social change are oriented around them. However, cultural change is also a potential factor for major societal shifts in the world, while the cultural aspects are mainly influenced by similar factors that cause social change.

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