

## **Social Interaction**

### **I. Introduction**

Within economics, the study of social interactions has expanded the domain of inquiry to incorporate many ideas that are traditionally associated with sociology. Social interactions analysis also extends the methodological individualism of economics in new directions through its focus on the feedbacks between individual behaviors and aggregate outcomes. By social interactions, we refer to interdependences among individuals in which the preferences, beliefs, and constraints faced by one person are directly influenced by the characteristics and choices of others. We emphasize the word directly as these interactions do not occur because of interdependences due to prices, as occurs in an Arrow-Debreu world. In fact, social interactions often represent externalities. Canonical social interactions examples include conformity effects, which occur when the utility from a given behavior increases when others make the same choice, and social networks effects in which information diffuses via direct contacts. Social interactions have been used to help explain phenomena ranging from cigarette smoking to the persistence of ghettos and inner-city poverty.

### **II. Sociological Definition of Social Interaction**

- Social interaction is any communication process between members of a society. Examples of social interaction include cooperation, conflict, social exchange, coercion, and conformity.
- In sociological terms, it is defined as the process of reciprocal influence exercised by individuals over one another during a social encounter.
- Social interaction refers to a mutual inter simulation and responses between two or more people and groups through symbols, language, gestures, postures and ideas.

- Social interaction is a fundamental unit of analysis within sociology. It describes the way people behave when they cross paths with someone else. Any interaction where an individual or a group does something to receive a reward is called social exchange (Nisbet, 1970, p. 56).

### **III. Types of Social Interaction in Sociology**

#### **I. Exchange**

Exchange is a type of social interaction where an individual or a group act in a certain way toward acts in a certain way toward another individual or group to receive a reward. The most common type of exchange relationship is between an employer and an employee. The employee has to behave according to the wishes of the employer if they want to receive a reward. The reward doesn't need to be monetary or even material. The reward may be subjective and emotional. another individual or group to receive a reward.

#### **❖ Exchange Interaction Examples:**

- ***An example of an exchange interaction is when an individual acts a certain way towards another to receive gratitude:*** Prominent social exchange theorists emphasize the importance of gratitude in social interactions (Homans, 1961 & Blau, 1964). Helping an elderly person cross the street or giving money to a beggar might not seem like examples of social exchange, but in many cases, they could be. The person might be acting in this way to receive gratitude (Popenoe, 1977, p. 50).
- ***Relationships between lovers or friends often have an element of social exchange:*** This doesn't mean that one person loves another merely to receive their love back, but rather that there are times when a person in such a relationship acts to receive an emotional reward. This reward could be as simple as an expression of love, gratitude, or recognition (Nisbet, 1970, p. 56)

## **2. Cooperation**

Cooperation is interaction in which individuals or groups act together to promote common interests or achieve common goals. These goals might be difficult or impossible to achieve individually. The group, therefore, finds that it is in everyone's interest to cooperate. Cooperation can be divided into four types: **Spontaneous, Directed, Traditional, and Contractual**. All social life is based on this type of social interaction. People work together to adapt to the environment and combat environmental threats such as global warming. People work together to effectively meet individual needs. They work together to provide mutual protection from external threats. All societies largely rely on the existence of cooperation.

### **❖ Cooperation Interaction Examples**

***Cooperation occurs within in-groups when working together can help develop greater rewards for the individuals than competition:*** For example, team members in a basketball team need to cooperate to achieve their common goal – to win the game. This may mean that one team member doesn't get to shoot the hoop, and instead assist the goal shooter with the aim of getting the overall greater benefit of winning the game as a team. Similarly, teachers may cooperate by sharing resources or teaching time (i.e., peer teaching). Each cooperating teacher gets benefits by having to do less preparation, so working together has a clear benefit.

## **3. Competition**

Cooperation is the direct opposite of competition. Competition is a type of social interaction that is recognized by some sociologists as belonging to its separate category. It occurs when the same limited object or goal is desired by several individuals or groups. The groups, instead of uniting, struggle against one another for the possession of some object or goal. According to Nisbet,

cooperation and competition are more interrelated than we might realize. In actual practice, it is rare to see one without the elements of another (Nisbet, 1970, p. 60). In the example of a classroom given above, the pupils are still likely to compete within the group, even if what they want is in their common interest. Conversely, competing pupils might try to cooperate in solving some parts of the math problem to get to the final answer more quickly

❖ **Competition Interaction Examples**

*An example of competition is when a teacher may present a math problem to a classroom:* If the teacher declares that the first person to solve the equation will receive a reward, the pupils are likely to start competing with each other. If the teacher declares that the entire classroom should work together to solve that problem and if they succeed each of them will receive a reward, the pupils are likely to start cooperating.

**4. Conformity**

Conformity is all behavior that is in accord with the social norms and values of a given social group. All social organizations rely in part on the existence of this type of social interaction. We often hear the adjectives “conformist” and “nonconformist” applied to individuals. An individual might seem nonconformist only because that individual conforms to the norms and values of a different social group rather than the one the observer is thinking of. For example, a child that dresses in a special way might not seem to be conforming to the norms and standards of the society they are a part of, but they might be conforming to the norms and standards of their subcultural group.

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❖ **Conformity Examples**

*The most common example of conformity might be in politics. It is common to see an individual stop believing in something only because the political party they are affiliated with does not approve of that belief:* a similar process takes place in friend groups, romantic relationships, family relationships, and so on. Although some nonconformity can be explained as conformity to some other norm, experimental and historical evidence suggests that some people are generally less conformist than others, irrespective of what the norm is.

**5. Coercion**

Coercion is behavior that is produced by compulsion of any form, which restricts the agency of one or more social actors. It might seem strange to classify coercion as a form of interaction since it seems like only one side is acting. Coercion is, nevertheless, nothing without the person or group being coerced. Coercion manifests in different ways as an element of almost all social interaction. The threat of force is not a necessary component of all coercive interaction. So, for example, coercion may be imposed when the penalty for failure is ridicule, denial of love, denial of gratitude, denial of recognition, or something similar. Coercion is a common part of parenting and education

❖ **Coercion Examples**

*An example of a coercive relationship is that between a police officer and a member of the public who is being arrested:* The member of the public is coerced – potentially by force – into complying with the police officer, who is granted the authority to use coercive force by the state. Even in this extreme, there is an element of association, so it is an interaction rather than simply an instance of one person acting.

**6. Conflict**

Conflict is a behavior where persons or groups struggle with each other for some scarce and commonly desired reward. Conflict seems to be, unfortunately, a form of social interaction that will never leave us. The existence of this type of social interaction often explains group cohesion. A common problem is quite often a uniting force. Populations, for example, seem to unify under the threat of an external invasion. There is no long-lasting relationship in which conflict does not take place. The conflict might be serious or small, tacit or acknowledged, but some forms of conflict are inevitable in virtually all human relationships

❖ **Conflict Examples**

Examples of conflict include interpersonal argument, workplace disagreements, and even peaceful protests. At a larger scale, we can see extreme conflicts emerging that lead to wars, sanctions, and armed insurgencies.

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