

# Behavior, Societal Influence and Belief Systems

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**Abstract:** The relationship between behavior, society and belief systems have been extensively studied. However, the influence of external behavior, or rather societal influence extends this discussion to another level. Out of basic observation, it is evident that external the society bears some influence on the individual. This paper reviews existing literature and outlines what various authors have to say about the relationship between these three factors. Additionally, some areas of controversy are identified for further research or reclassification.

**Keywords:** Belief systems



## 1. Introduction

Human beings are motivated to keep their beliefs, their attitudes and their values consistent. In any social setting, people hold belief systems that are effective to themselves as individuals. Naturally, people also hold beliefs about other members of society. These beliefs can be focused on giving an individual advantage in a competitive society or they just might be altruistic [31]. Ideally, beliefs and behavior are correlated in a social setting; there must be a continuous reassessment of social parameters either through education or experience to estimate trust and compliance [15], [34]. Behavior becomes a social expression of personal and communal belief, which undergoes continuous scrutiny to realign it with the current state of mind and social affairs [13].

## 2. Literature Survey

Belief systems are varied in importance; they follow a theoretical framework which sets an order of preferences. All belief systems adhere to a preferential order that separates central belief systems with other preconceptions of lesser importance. An individual or a social group establishes differentiate beliefs based on their systematic importance and personal assessment of their correctness and certainty [13]. Preferential separations of beliefs are influenced by personal

paradigms, religious conception and varied assumptions about human nature[20],[5].

Beliefs are acquired 'self-theories' that determine a person's social output. In other words, they are fundamental in internalizing social experience and functionality. Experience becomes a key variable that shapes personal beliefs through a responsive accumulation of social knowledge [13]. While beliefs mould personality, the intervention of knowledge determines belief outcomes. Whether a small or large intervention, it has been observed that input from friends, family and the society does not necessarily produce consistent changes to belief systems. Dweck describes two 'self-theories', one of which is fixated while the other dynamic. People with a malleable belief system are adaptive to change, open to education and resilient to difficulties [33],[19], [9]. The principle behind malleable personal or individual beliefs is an evolution that promotes self-efficacy not necessary conformity [13], [10], [21].

The formation of belief can be a result of conscious or unconscious response to social stimuli [10].Chai discusses a consumption-based formation of beliefs. In light of this model, belief can be examined through rational or irrational choices to fulfil needs. In this sense, individuals choose actions to obtain

favourable results. Though there might exist prior belief systems, the effect of such conscious or unconscious actions against individual norms can well reinforce or break down beliefs. Bilateral interactions of physical or emotional utilities between individual is purposely intended to evoke change in status, acceptance and elicit affection among existing social groups.

The malleability of a belief system to obtain better outcomes is not merely dependent on the cognitive or academic abilities of an individual. Successful, adaptation lies in the power of the individual to align personal beliefs and resultant behavior to the objectives of any social or individual problem[39]. It is debatable whether any belief system is subjective to personal control. However, Richter points out that even passive behavioral response to control uncontrollable situations is an effort to reduce negative outcomes [33]. It implies that the metamorphosis of belief is a universal construct of nature [30].

Nevertheless, volatility of personal belief system is dependent on the need to change one's personality. Psychologists have for a long time hypothesised the importance of self-initiated change in triggering personality change [26]. At the very least, people need only change aspects of their personality. Even in the presence of external intervention, studies show that some belief systems resist change to new circumstances. Yet again, a deviation of behavior gradually contributes to a goal-oriented change in belief. Evidently, a motivation to change exerts a strong effect to shift's one identity in realisation of new [29]. Consequently, research shows that identity change affects patterns of feelings, thought and behavior [18],[26].

Research further identifies a causal relationship between beliefs and happiness [18]. The pursuit of goal-oriented happiness and the attainment of such targets strengthens initial belief systems. A deeper analysis of the relationship between belief and happiness suggests that any input is a reaction towards initial 'self-theories' rather than action against them [37]. Maladaptive behavior and emotive responses are a result

of a belief or a set of beliefs held by an individual. In the pursuit of happiness, some responses can be overtly irrational since at most any search for happiness is an avant-garde, perfect illusion [1],[14], [6], [7]. While individuals tend to overreact to failure to affirm their beliefs through action; reaction might be influenced by group intervention which contravenes personal belief systems. People with attitudes that suggest self-criticism are likely to reconstruct their beliefs in view of others way of life[22].

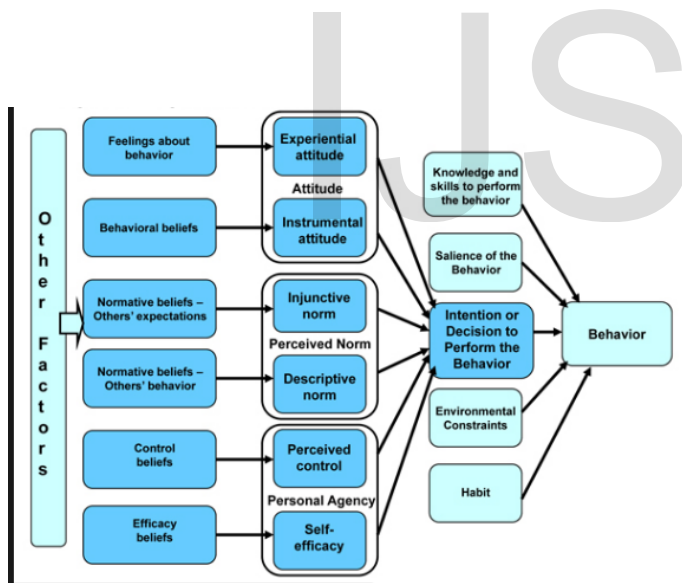
Even though human beings universally consider the cost-benefits rationale in making effective utility choices, morality can override the need for personal comfort in favour of an objective purpose [28], [27]. Moral norms are antecedent of intention. Furthermore, intention is a determinant of behavior. Gradually, as the individual gets exposed to the inputs of opportunity and time he develops a sense of [8]. Consequently, an individual develops an attitude to evaluate certain outcomes and predicts the certainty of these outcomes. Thus, the theory of planned behavior can be affected by subjective moral norms. In addition, belief can be altered through the same set of moral norms that regulate behavior [3], [4]. In such a case, beliefs and attitudes can be considered as spontaneous reactions to the effects of each other [17].

In a social setting, trustworthiness influences the willingness of an individual to believe and change [11]. Behavioral studies on trustworthiness indicate that facial trustworthiness reinforces the personal belief that another person can reciprocate action by positive action [13], [32]. Frequency of interaction from other social parameters changes individual attitude towards another person or a social group[2]. Dunn and Schweitzer suggest that trust is a cognitive response to stimuli [12], [35][40]. It implies that people believe only when they can interact with physical characteristics, moods and emotions. In first instances, individuals rely on heuristic information processing to make judgments on other people [23], [36]. Incidental emotions between individuals or social groups play a role in the formation of new beliefs; especially when these individuals are not acquainted. New interactions rely on what

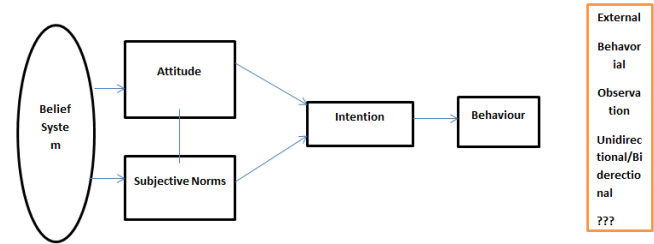
each of the partners feel about the other. Therefore, societal belief systems are interplay of response to emotional stimuli and corresponding judgments.

### 3. Conclusion

Beliefs can be an explicit and implicit reaction to social factors. Innate beliefs cannot occur unless there is consistent interaction with an existing belief system. Therefore, it is emergent that both individual perceptions on human nature, self, and the society are influenced by a set of uncontrollable external factors. While beliefs might mutate to enhance self-efficacy, some might manifest as irrational behaviors. All the same, any reaction to external social stimuli depends on a social awareness rather than intellectual abilities. Persons with malleable belief systems tend to attain happiness and personal satisfaction even though it might be illogical to other individuals.



**Figure 1: The Scheme above shows an integrated Belief Model, an unidirectional model of controlled behavior as a result of a number of belief systems.**



**Figure 2: A unidirectional schemes showing a causal link between behavior, attitudes and beliefs. The introduction of external behavioral influence as a factor in the relationship leaves a research area that need to be studied.**

### 4. Implications for Future Research

This study identifies a problematic area in the study of beliefs model. Though, behaviors, social intervention and belief systems exhibit a mutual relationship, the efficacy of each parameter over the other is not clearly researched. There is need for future research to identify how initial belief systems are formed and how they are modified upon continuous interaction with social parameters. Furthermore, there is need to identify the intrinsic value of modified belief systems in enhancing self-efficacy and the effect of behavioral observations on 'self-theories'. Whether modified social beliefs results into improved social integration of individuals within social frameworks, remains a topic of further discussion.

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