



An Introduction to Social Sciences

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Abstract:

Social Science is a branch of science that deals with the institutions and functioning of human society and with the interpersonal relationships of individuals as members of society and also it's a science (as economics or political science) dealing with a particular phase or aspect of human society. Social science or soft science studies the human aspects of the world. It includes an in-depth study and evaluation of human behavior by using scientific methods in either quantitative or qualitative manner. The subject matter of the soft science can be subjective or objective. In contrast to hard science or natural science, social science reveals subjective, objective, inter-subjective and structural aspects of the society. In simple words, it measures the social developments of the society and finds the emerging drawbacks too. The work of social science is to watch where the society has been heading and what more can be done to benefit the entire race. If we dig out the historical evidences, we will find that social science has been a constant part of the development of the human race. It is interesting to know that great philosophers like Plato and Aristotle were advocates of social science and their philosophies are based on the objectives of social sciences only. So, social science is very much present into our day-to-day life and has a pivotal role in the societal growth and development. In this article, the author wants to introduce some branches of social sciences.

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1. Introduction

"Social science" is commonly used as an umbrella term to refer to anthropology, archaeology, criminology, economics, education, linguistics, law, communication studies, history, political science, sociology, human geography and psychology. The term may however be used in the specific context of referring to the original *science of society* established in 19th century sociology (Latin: *socius*, "companion"; Greek λόγος, *lógos*, "word", "knowledge", "study."). Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber are typically cited as the principal architects of modern social science by this definition.

Positivist social scientists use methods resembling those of the natural sciences as tools for understanding society, and so define science in its stricter modern sense. Interpretivist social scientists, by contrast, may use social critique or symbolic interpretation rather than constructing empirically falsifiable theories, and thus treat science in its broader sense. In modern academic practice, researchers are often eclectic, using multiple methodologies (for instance, by combining the quantitative and qualitative techniques). The term social research has also acquired a degree of autonomy as practitioners from various disciplines share in its aims and methods.

2. History

The history of the social sciences begins in the Age of Enlightenment after 1650, which saw a revolution within natural philosophy, changing the basic framework by which individuals understood what was "scientific". Social sciences came forth from the moral philosophy of the

time and was influenced by the Age of Revolutions, such as the Industrial revolution and the French revolution. The *social sciences* developed from the sciences (experimental and applied), or the systematic knowledge-bases or prescriptive practices, relating to the social improvement of a group of interacting entities.

Around the start of the 20th century, Enlightenment philosophy was challenged in various quarters. After the use of classical theories since the end of the scientific revolution, various fields substituted mathematics studies for experimental studies and examining equations to build a theoretical structure. The development of social science subfields became very quantitative in methodology. The interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary nature of scientific inquiry into human behavior, social and environmental factors affecting it, made many of the natural sciences interested in some aspects of social science methodology. Examples of boundary blurring include emerging disciplines like social research of medicine, sociobiology, neuropsychology, bioeconomics and the history and sociology of science. Increasingly, quantitative research and qualitative methods are being integrated in the study of human action and its implications and consequences. In the first half of the 20th century, statistics became a free-standing discipline of applied mathematics. Statistical methods were used confidently.

3. Communication Studies

Communication studies deals with processes of human communication, commonly defined as the sharing of symbols to create meaning. The discipline encompasses a range of topics, from face-to-face conversation to mass media outlets such as television broadcasting. A communication study also examines how messages are interpreted through the political, cultural, economic, and social dimensions of their contexts. Communication is institutionalized under many different names at different universities, including "communication", "communication studies", "speech communication", "rhetorical studies", "communications science", "media studies", "communication arts", "mass communication", "media ecology," and "communication and media science."

A communication study integrates aspects of both social sciences and the humanities. As a social science, the discipline often overlaps with sociology, psychology, anthropology, biology, political science, economics, and public policy, among others. From a humanities perspective, communication is concerned with rhetoric and persuasion (traditional graduate programs in communication studies trace their history to the rhetoricians of Ancient Greece). The field applies to outside disciplines as well, including engineering, architecture, mathematics, and information science.

4. Economics

Economics is a social science that seeks to analyze and describe the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth. The word "economics" is from the Greek οἶκος [*oikos*], "family, household, estate," and νόμος [*nomos*], "custom, law," and hence means "household management" or "management of the state." An economist is a person using economic concepts and data in the course of employment, or someone who has earned a university degree in the subject. The classic brief definition of economics, set out by Lionel Robbins in 1932, is "the science which studies human behavior as a relation between scarce means having alternative uses." Without scarcity and alternative uses, there is no economic problem. Briefer yet is "the study of how people seek to satisfy needs and wants" and "the study of the financial aspects of human behavior." The expanding domain of economics in the social sciences has been described as economic imperialism.

5. Education

Education encompasses teaching and learning specific skills, and also something less tangible but more profound: the imparting of knowledge, positive judgement and well-developed wisdom. Education has as one of its fundamental aspects the imparting of culture from generation to generation (see socialization). To educate means 'to draw out', from the Latin *educare*, or to facilitate the realization of an individual's potential and talents. It is an application of pedagogy, a body of theoretical and applied research relating to teaching and learning and draws on many disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, computer science, linguistics, neuroscience, sociology and anthropology.

The education of an individual human begins at birth and continues throughout life. (Some believe that education begins even before birth, as evidenced by some parents' playing music or reading to the baby in the womb in the hope it will influence the child's development.) For some, the struggles and triumphs of daily life provide far more instruction than does formal schooling (thus Mark Twain's admonition to "never let school interfere with your education"). Family members may have a profound educational effect—often more profound than they realize—though family teaching may function very informally.

6. Human Geography

Geography as a discipline can be split broadly into two main sub fields: human geography and physical geography. The former focuses largely on the built environment and how space is created, viewed and managed by humans as well as the influence humans have on the space they occupy. The latter examines the natural environment and how the climate, vegetation & life, soil, water and landforms are produced and interact. As a result of the two subfields using different approaches a third field has emerged, which is environmental geography. Environmental geography combines physical and human geography and looks at the interactions between the environment and humans.

Geographers attempt to understand the earth in terms of physical and spatial relationships. The first geographers focused on the science of mapmaking and finding ways to precisely project the surface of the earth. In this sense, geography bridges some gaps between the natural sciences and social sciences. Historical geography is often taught in a college in a unified Department of Geography.

7. Law

Law in common parlance, means a rule which (unlike a rule of ethics) is capable of enforcement through institutions. However, many laws are based on norms accepted by a community and thus have an ethical foundation. The study of law crosses the boundaries between the social sciences and humanities, depending on one's view of research into its objectives and effects. Law is not always enforceable, especially in the international relations context. It has been defined as a "system of rules", as an "interpretive concept" to achieve justice, as an "authority "to mediate people's interests, and even as "the command of a sovereign, backed by the threat of a sanction". However one likes to think of law, it is a completely central social institution. Legal policy incorporates the practical manifestation of thinking from almost every social sciences and humanity. Laws are politics, because politicians create them. Law is philosophy, because moral and ethical persuasions shape their ideas. Law tells many of history's stories, because statutes, case law and codifications build up over time. And law is economics, because any rule about contract, tort, property law, labour law, company law and many more can have long lasting effects on the distribution of wealth. The noun *law* derives from the late Old English *lagu*, meaning something lay down or fixed and the adjective *legal* comes from the Latin word *lex*.

8. Linguistics

Linguistics investigates the cognitive and social aspects of human language. The field is divided into areas that focus on aspects of the linguistic signal, such as syntax (the study of the rules that govern the structure of sentences), semantics (the study of meaning), morphology (the study of the structure of words), phonetics (the study of speech sounds) and phonology (the study of the abstract sound system of a particular language); however, work in areas like evolutionary linguistics (the study of the origins and evolution of language) and psycholinguistics (the study of psychological factors in human language) cut across these divisions.

The overwhelming majority of modern research in linguistics takes a predominantly synchronic perspective (focusing on language at a particular point in time), and a great deal of it-partly owing to the influence of Noam Chomsky-aims at formulating theories of the cognitive processing of language. However, language does not exist in a vacuum, or only in the brain, and approaches like contact linguistics, creole studies, discourse analysis, social interactional linguistics, and sociolinguistics explore language in its social context. Sociolinguistics often makes use of traditional quantitative analysis and statistics in investigating the frequency of features, while some disciplines, like contact linguistics, focus on qualitative analysis. While certain areas of linguistics can thus be understood as clearly falling within the social sciences, other areas, like acoustic phonetics and neurolinguistics, draw on the natural sciences. Linguistics draws only secondarily on the humanities, which played a rather greater role in linguistic inquiry in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Ferdinand Saussure is considered the father of modern linguistics.

9. Political Science

Political science is an academic and research discipline that deals with the theory and practice of politics and the description and analysis of political systems and political behavior. Fields and subfields of political science include political economy, political theory and philosophy, civics and comparative politics, theory of direct democracy, apolitical governance, participatory direct democracy, national systems, cross-national political analysis, political development, international relations, foreign policy, international law, politics, public administration, administrative behavior, public law, judicial behavior, and public policy. Political science also studies power in international relations and the theory of Great powers and Superpowers.

Political science is methodologically diverse, although recent years have witnessed an upsurge in the use of the scientific method. That is the proliferation of formal-deductive model building and quantitative hypothesis testing. Approaches to the discipline include rational choice, classical political philosophy, interpretivism, structuralism, and behavioralism, realism, pluralism, and institutionalism. Political science, as one of the social sciences, uses methods and techniques that relate to the kinds of inquiries sought: primary sources such as historical documents, interviews, and official records, as well as secondary sources such as scholarly journal articles are used in building and testing theories. Empirical methods include survey research, statistical analysis/econometrics, case studies, experiments, and model building. Herbert Baxter Adams is credited with coining the phrase "political science" while teaching history at Johns Hopkins University.

10. Public Administration

One of the main branches of political science, public administration can be broadly described as the development, implementation and study of branches of government policy. The pursuit of the public good by enhancing civil society and social justice is the ultimate goal of the field. Though public administration has historically referred to as government management, it increasingly

encompasses non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that also operate with a similar, primary dedication to the betterment of humanity. It's the government protocol to solve a public problem. According to Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram, policies constitute the discourses, text, regulations and laws. Also the making of public policies includes the enforcement of such and the tools given to the institutions to do so. The multidisciplinary nature of public administration is related to a third defining feature: administrative duties. Public administrators work in public agencies, at all levels of government, and perform a wide range of tasks. Public administrators collect and analyze data (statistics), monitor fiscal operations (budgets, accounts, and cash flow), organize large events and meetings, draft legislation, develop policy, and frequently execute legally mandated, government activities. Regarding this final facet, public administrators find themselves serving as parole officers, secretaries, note takers, paperwork processors, and record keepers, notaries of the public, cashiers, and managers. Indeed, the discipline couples well with many vocational fields such as information technology, finance, law, and engineering. When it comes to the delivery and evaluation of public services, a public administrator is undoubtedly involved.

11. Psychology

Psychology is an academic and applied field involving the study of behavior and mental processes. Psychology also refers to the application of such knowledge to various spheres of human activity, including problems of individuals' daily lives and the treatment of mental illness. The word *psychology* comes from the ancient Greek ψυχή, *psyche* ("soul", "mind") and *logy*, study).

Psychology differs from anthropology, economics, political science, and sociology in seeking to capture explanatory generalizations about the mental function and overt behavior of individuals, while the other disciplines focus on creating descriptive generalizations about the functioning of social groups or situation-specific human behavior. In practice, however, there is quite a lot of cross-fertilization that takes place among the various fields. Psychology differs from biology and neuroscience in that it is primarily concerned with the interaction of mental processes and behavior, and of the overall processes of a system, and not simply the biological or neural processes themselves, though the subfield of neuropsychology combines the study of the actual neural processes with the study of the mental effects they have subjectively produced. Many people associate Psychology with Clinical Psychology which focuses on assessment and treatment of problems in living and psychopathology. In reality, Psychology has myriad specialties including: Social Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Cognitive Psychology, Industrial-Organizational Psychology, Mathematical psychology, Neuropsychology, and Quantitative Analysis of Behavior to name only a few.

12. Sociology

Sociology is the systematic study of society and human social action. The meaning of the word comes from the suffix "-ology" which means "study of," derived from Greek, and the stem "soci-" which is from the Latin word *socius*, meaning "companion", or society in general.

Sociology was originally established by Auguste Comte (1798–1857) in 1838. Comte endeavoured to unify history, psychology and economics through the descriptive understanding of the social realm. He proposed that social ills could be remedied through sociological positivism, an epistemological approach outlined in *The Course in Positive Philosophy* [1830–1842] and *A General View of Positivism* (1844). Though Comte is generally regarded as the "Father of Sociology", the discipline was formally established by another French thinker, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who developed positivism as a foundation to practical social research.

Durkheim set up the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895, publishing his *Rules of the Sociological Method*. In 1896, he established the journal *L'Année Sociologique*. Durkheim's seminal monograph, *Suicide* (1897), a case study of suicide rates amongst Catholic and Protestant populations, distinguished sociological analysis from psychology or philosophy.

Karl Marx rejected Comte's positivism but nevertheless aimed to establish a *science of society* based on historical materialism, becoming recognised as a founding figure of sociology posthumously as the term gained broader meaning. Around the start of the 20th century, the first wave of German sociologists, including Max Weber and Georg Simmel, developed sociological antipositivism. The field may be broadly recognised as an amalgam of three modes of social thought in particular: Durkheimian positivism and structural functionalism; Marxist historical materialism and conflict theory; Weberian antipositivism and verstehen analysis. American sociology broadly arose on a separate trajectory, with little Marxist influence, an emphasis on rigorous experimental methodology, and a closer association with pragmatism and social psychology. In the 1920s, the Chicago school developed symbolic interactionism. Meanwhile in the 1930s, the Frankfurt School pioneered the idea of critical theory, an interdisciplinary form of Marxist sociology drawing upon thinkers as diverse as Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche. Critical theory would take on something of a life of its own after World War II, influencing literary criticism and the Birmingham School establishment of cultural studies.

13. Conclusion

The main branches of social science usually cover a variety of sub-disciplines and this is perhaps the reason why a concise definition of social science is hard to come by. In their study of human society and behavior however, these various disciplines of social sciences collectively make up what is known as social science. The disciplines of social sciences draw from a variety of fields of study and although these different areas of social sciences vary far and wide, they all aim to understand and explain human society and behavior.

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