

# Social Axioms: A Traditional Literature Review

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## Abstract

*The study was conducted to perform a comprehensive overview of the available documented studies on social axioms to identify the relevant literature and research gaps in the field of social axioms. The empirical studies carried out in the different countries that have been classified by publication years, research designs, and methods of studies. The paper presents a review of 72 published articles in journals of the different countries during 2002 to date, thus, an exploration reveals that social axioms play a considerable role in social behaviors and health of individuals, and they function differently in different cultures. This review would be helpful for the future researchers to direct their work towards the significance of social axioms in the different domains of life. Implications of this review have been discussed.*

**Keyword:** Social Axioms; Social Behaviors; Health; Literature Review.

## 1. Introduction

Social axioms are viewed as the generalized beliefs about people, physical and social surroundings, and the spiritual world. These generalized beliefs are derived from personal experiences and process of socialization such as educational system and family. Individuals use these beliefs in order to direct their actions, as they are helpful in dealing with effective functioning and survival problems (Bond et al., 2004). The study of general beliefs as proposed by Leung et al. (2002) and the Social Axioms Survey has been developed to measure such beliefs.

Leung and Bond (2004) have identified five-factor structure of social axioms, as based on participants' data gathered from the different nations. These five factors are social cynicism, social complexity, reward for application; fate control and religiosity. Social cynicism denotes to a cynical perception of human nature, a lack of faith in social institutions, and a lack of ethical means to accomplish a goal. Social complexity relates to the idea that there are no strict laws, but rather several ways to achieve the given result and that variation in human actions are common. Reward for application denotes the idea that investment of human resources (such as careful planning, expertise and knowledge) will lead to positive consequences. Fate control belief denotes that there are predetermined life outcomes and that there are certain ways to affect these outcomes. Religiosity denotes to the belief in the existence of Supreme Being and the roles of religious practice.

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Social axioms have four major functions which assist the existence of humans: i) value-expression: expressing one's values, ii) knowledge: assisting individuals to understand the world around them, iii) instrumentality: promoting the achievement of significant objectives, and iv) ego-defense: assist individuals to defend their self-worth (Leung et al., 2002). Social axioms act as universal knowledge about the universe so that in the specific domains they work as guiding principles for beliefs. In view of that, social axioms predict attitudinal variables in many fields of psychological inquiry including the political attitudes (Keung & Bond, 2002), paranormal beliefs (Singelis et al., 2003), vocational interest (Bond et al., 2004), and attitudes towards help-seeking (Kuo et al., 2006). Social axioms still have usefulness for adaptation and survival. A study conducted by Kurman and Ronen-Eilon (2004) indicated that if immigrants had correct knowledge of social axioms that described their host cultures, and they would adapt better.

Social axioms act as guiding principles to guide progress towards achieving the essential life goals. This belief reflects how a means is linked to a specific end and the subjective opinion of the likelihood in which a particular means in a given situation that leads to a particular end (Vroom, 1964). In view of that, the various social axioms may combine to the given end with the various prescribed means. For instance, reward for application describes the contingency between expended efforts and earned reward, however; social cynicism describes the contingency between one's social power and likely reward. More precisely, in a conflict situation, reward for application predicts the preference for collaborative and compromise tactics to make a better decision, whereas social cynicism predicts a competitive orientation involving the exercise of control or protection by a collaborator against its possible use (Bond et al., 2004; Chen & Zhang, 2004). Likewise, reward for application predicts preference for the use of persuasive influence techniques, whereas social cynicism predicts assertive and relationship based strategies, which are again power and status advantage exercises (Fu et al., 2004).

Social axioms thus, direct selections, their generation and choices, leading to the achievement of situational ally-based objectives as chosen by the belief-holder. Social axioms have the profound consequences for our subjective well-being and self-worth. Social axioms illustrate the instrumentality of multiple means to achieve a given goal, and they can predict how people deal with life's difficulties and accomplish well-being and self-worth. For instance, the use of a problem-solving coping style is predicted by reward for application, while passive modes of coping, such as wishful thinking and distancing is predicted by fate control (Bond et al., 2004). While self-worth and well-being are common goals: it is an essential fact to remember that discrepancies between individuals exist when evaluating the efficacy of the different tactics. The people high in social cynicism, for instance, displayed the more negative attitudes towards finding out the support through professional services (Kuo et al., 2006). This outcome can serve as

one of the reasons that accounts for the robust, and finding that social cynicism is constantly correlated with a more pessimistic psychological state including low satisfaction with life (Chen et al., 2006; Lai et al., 2007), psychological distress (Kuo et al., 2006), and death ideation (Hui et al., 2007).

### **1.1 Objective of the Study**

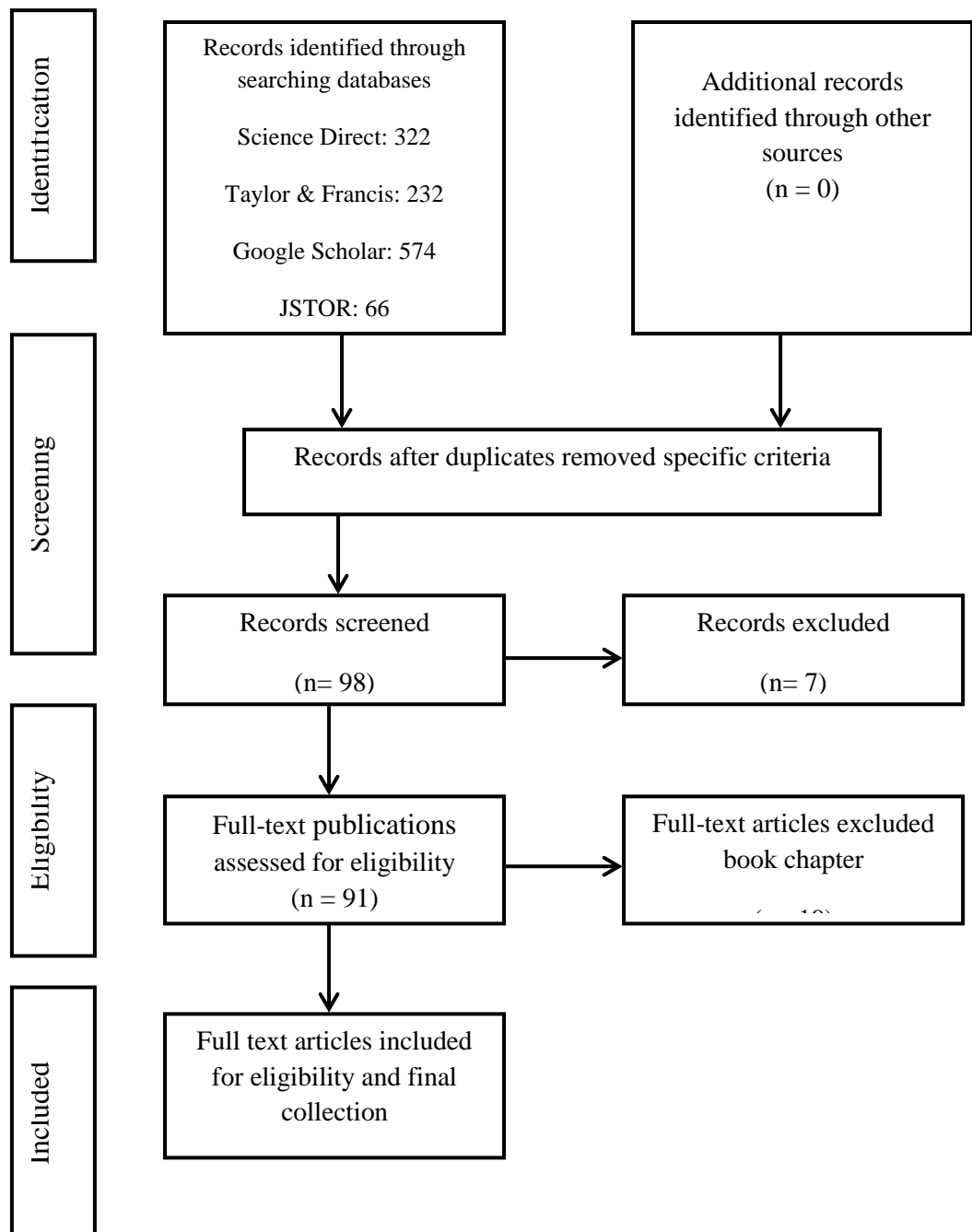
The objective of this article was to review maximum the published empirical studies which have examined social axioms in the different contexts around the globe, and the gap in literature that exists to identify directions for the future studies.

## **2. Methodology**

To analyze the relevant research work; the present study utilized the traditional literature review approach (Jesson et al., 2011). The template of PRISMA flowchart (Moher et al., 2009) was used to describe the procedure of collection and rejection of studies for the literature review on the social axioms.

### **2.1 Literature Search**

The keywords employed to find out the literature in Science Direct, Taylor & Francis, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Elsevier and APA PsycNet databases were “social axioms”, “social axioms in psychology” and “general beliefs”. Initially, 1382 research publications were found through these databases. Then, we confined our search to the subject Psychology, and 98 research publications were selected. Among such the publications, only 91 were published in English language. Thus, the present paper aimed to cover only research articles whereas dissertations, conference papers and book publications were excluded and, finally 72 articles as selected for the review (see figure 1).

**Figure 1:** PRISMA flowchart

## 2.2 Quality Assessment

To ensure the quality and relevance of the scholarly literature included in the review process, any kind of duplication, abstracts and conclusions of the papers were carefully reviewed for analysis.

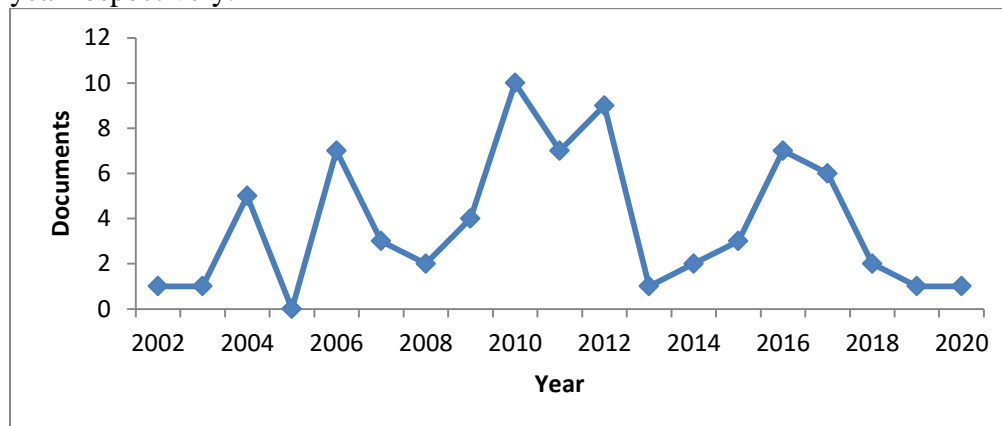
## 2.3 Articles Included for Analysis

The final 72 full text articles were utilized for the analysis process which included year-wise distribution of articles and distribution of articles by research methodologies.

## 2.4 Year-wise Distribution of Articles

This review article includes the empirical studies in Psychology on the social axioms conducted around the globe since 2002, to date. However, such the term social axioms were first defined by Leung et al. (2002). For organizing the data, we divided total period into two decades. Out of 72 articles, 40 articles were published in the first decade during 2002 to 2011, whereas 32 articles were published in the second decade during 2012 to date.

The figure 2 shows the year base graph of publications that the year 2010 and 2012 points out the highest number with the 10 and 9 articles each year respectively.



**Figure 2:** Year-wise Publications

## 2.5 Distribution of Publications by Research Methodologies

Out of 72 articles, 69 articles employed to the quantitative methods (such as cross-sectional, longitudinal, comparative, correlational, cross-cultural and experimental designs). Three articles having the mixed methods (both quantitative and qualitative). These results figured out that research on the social axioms is dominated by the quantitative method.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The review of literature resulted that the decade from 2002 to 2011 included research papers on the social axioms dominated by quantitative studies with major focus on industrial, positive and social psychology. The second decade

included the research papers from 2012 to date and, this decade as dominated through the cross-cultural studies with greater emphasis on social psychology.

### **3.1 Research Trends in the First Decade (from 2002 to 2011)**

Research on the social axioms in the first decade initiated with the development and validation of Social Axioms Survey (Leung et al., 2002) by (Singelis et al., 2003). Bond et al. (2004) further, as explored cultural level dimensions of social axioms, and found two dimensions - societal cynicism and dynamic externality. Another cross-cultural study indicated that at the individual level structure, equivalence of social axioms was well supported, however; the cross level equivalence was partially supported (Cheung et al., 2006). Social axioms survey was further replicated in South Africa. Thus, the results of exploratory factor analysis showed four interpretable factors - social cynicism, fate control, reward for application and religiosity (Barnard et al., 2008). Gari et al. (2009) conducted a cross-cultural study and found that nearly maximum equivalence as reached with the overall factor structure, but some in equivalence remained still present for specific factors among the clusters of countries.

With reference to industrial psychology, studies found that the different dimensions of social axioms predicted the perceived effectiveness of the three types of influence strategy (Fu et al., 2004), conscientiousness significantly having moderate the negative association of social cynicism with interpersonal justice (Peng & Zhou, 2009), inverse relationship between social cynicism and satisfaction with job was significantly moderated by perceived well-being only when perceived well-being was low (Leung et al., 2010), participants high in social cynicism felt less guilty when they violated a work regulation norm (Ersoy et al., 2011).

With regard to the field of social psychology, such the studies found that social axioms contributed moderate predictive power, in conflict resolution, vocational choices and coping styles (Bond et al., 2004). Age, gender, perceived stress, ethnicity and two social axiom factors (interpersonal harmony and social cynicism) were the significant predictors of help-seeking attitudes (Kuo et al., 2006); social axioms were associated with value types in interpretable and meaningful way (Leung et al., 2007); social cynicism was negatively predicted by self-esteem whereas reward for application was positively predicted by relationship harmony (Wong et al., 2010); meanwhile the significant indirect effects of fate control belief was reported on negative mood and problem gambling through gambling expectancy bias and gambling self-efficacy (Tang & Wu, 2010); and the positive association between intention to quit and relationship conflict found the insignificant when social cynicism was high (Li et al., 2011); thus, the significant contribution of social axioms to personal characteristics in behavior prediction was found (Kurman, 2011); while the higher level of children's acceptance, reward for application belief, religiosity belief and better relationships with their partner were found

in HIV infected children's mothers as compared to mothers of healthy children (Tartakovsky & Hamama, 2011).

With respect to the area of positive psychology; it was resulted that social axioms were significantly associated with satisfaction of social life (Chen et al., 2006; Burgess, 2011). Another study found the impact of social cynicism on satisfaction with life through the mediating role of self-esteem (Li et al., 2007); gratitude was predicted by reward for application, social complexity and religiosity whereas, perspective taking was predicted by social cynicism and social complexity (Joshani et al., 2010); social cynicism was linked to less adaptive self-regulatory orientations, which sequentially put at risk subjective well-being, however reward for application was linked to more adaptive self-regulatory orientations that improved subjective well-being (Hui & Bond, 2010); the impact of weight esteem on self-esteem was moderated by social cynicism (Lam et al., 2010); and relationship of insecure attachment style with life satisfaction was mediated by social cynicism and reward for application (Mak et al., 2011).

In relation to cultural psychology, the prevalent studies have found that social axioms were the significant descriptors of a culture (Kurman & Ronen-Eilon, 2004), cultural values as well as social beliefs predicted individual's choice of conflict resolution strategy (Safdar et al., 2006); social axioms predicted acculturation orientations of English Canadians towards British and Arab Muslim immigrants (Safdar et al., 2008). As educational psychology concerns and these studies found the relationship of dimensions of social axioms with achievement goals and learning strategies (Bernardo, 2004), academic achievement (Zhou et al., 2009; Leung et al., 2010). In the field of personality psychology, relationship as found between social axioms and personality (Chen et al., 2006; Chen et al., 2006). As the field of abnormal psychology concerns, it was found that people higher in fate control belief and lower in religiosity belief scored higher on death anxiety (Hui et al., 2007), and social cynicism positively and reward for application negatively predict suicidal ideation (Chen et al., 2009).

### **3.2 Research Trends in the Second Decade (from 2012 to Date)**

Some validation studies were conducted in the second decade. In relation to development of social axioms survey II, indicating that SAS II was more reliable than the original SAS (Leung et al., 2012), it was further validated in South African context (Barnard et al., 2017).

With reference to the domain of social psychology ; these studies found that fate control was inversely associated with implicit attitudes (Ma et al., 2012); self-effacement was significantly predicted by reward for application whereas enhancement of others and avoiding attention was significantly predicted by social cynicism (Bond et al., 2012) ,the relationships of perceived causes to remedies were greater than those of social axioms and values (Chen & Bond, 2012); for the values of self-direction, absolute reciprocity had been shown with the absence of contemporary

associations between values and beliefs (Goodwin et al., 2012); and work–family conflict was found to be a significant forerunner of distress, but it put forth little influence on social cynicism (Li & Leung, 2012). Furthermore, reward for application and social cynicism was positively and social complexity was negatively associated to hierarchic self-interest i.e., personal value preferences (Dragolov & Boehnke, 2015), self-views as a proximal force and world views as a distal force appeared to matter in subjective evaluation of people’s lives (Chen et al., 2016); social axioms significantly predicted modest behavior (Chen et al., 2017), religiosity, reward for application, and fate control were related to dyadic adjustment (Iliescu et al., 2017); and relation between need frustration and social cynicism was moderated by implicit affiliation-intimacy motive (Hofer et al., 2017).

With regard to Abnormal psychology, positive association was found between social cynicism and emotional weariness (Tartakovsky et al., 2012). Regarding educational psychology, it was found that university teachers had demonstrated considerably higher scores of power-distance, social cynicism, religiosity and reward for application than the secondary school teachers (Gavreliuc & Gavreliuc, 2012); predictors for flourishing appeared as reward for applications, social cynicism and school belonging (Li et al., 2020). With respect to positive psychology, studies found that social cynicism was negatively and reward for application was positively associated with hope (Bernardo, 2013), social axioms predicted locus-of-hope (Bernardo & Nalipay, 2016), relationship of religiosity and reward for application with posttraumatic growth was mediated by adaptive cognitive processing of trauma (Nalipay et al., 2016).

In industrial psychology, it was found that fate control, social cynicism and religiosity have moderating effects on firm reputation (West et al., 2016). Additionally, in the area of intelligence, studies showed that social complexity belief positively linked with cultural intelligence development and this association was mediated by the perception of disconfirmation (Alexandra, 2018).

### **3.3 Implications of Study**

The systematic review helps us to draw accurate conclusions and reduce biasness. The findings from different researches make it easier for the user to access the information and understand it in a comprehensive way. All the available research directions are mentioned, so it gives a better idea to articulate future work. The research gaps can easily be identified and future researchers can design studies focusing on the neglected areas of the phenomenon social axioms. The findings of the empirical studies highlighted the favorable and harmful effects of social axioms.

### **3.4 Limitations**

The scientific papers obtained from JSTOR, Taylor and Francis, Google Scholar, Elsevier, APA PsycNet and Science Direct is included in this



literature review article. Yet some research paper may have been left out due to the journals' accessibility. We could not discuss some significant work because sources including eBooks, dissertations and conference proceedings were excluded to maintain the homogeneity of the data.

### **3.5 Future Recommendations**

In the light of literature review, we provide following recommendations for the future studies:

- The previous studies mainly relied on non-probability sampling technique, so it is suggested to incorporate probability samples in future studies as well;
- A small number of studies have reported the role of demographic variables in association with social axioms, hence, we recommend to assess the significance of demographic variables along with psychosocial variables in future studies;
- In order to exhibit causal directionality, experimental and longitudinal studies should be carried out in future;
- Literature review displays leaning towards the quantitative research, as out of 72 studies, only three used the mixed method designs and the rest of them relied on a quantitative design. Hence, it is recommended to utilize the qualitative research designs too.
- The sample selection relied heavily on university students; thus, the results could not be mapped on the general population. Therefore, it is recommended to carry out the future research on diverse samples;
- The focus of the majority of studies was on industrial, social and positive areas of psychology further, a renewed focus on areas like, clinical and developmental psychology would change the prevailed trend.

### **4. Conclusion**

Literature review of empirical studies published in the different journals from 2002, to date in the field of social axioms reveals the significance of this attribute in different fields of life. Most of the reviewed studies were the quantitative in nature which indicates that the research on social axioms is dominated by the quantitative methods. The literature review provides an ample evidence to conclude that social axioms play an important role in our functioning in the numerous areas and contexts of life. For instance, social cynicism appeared to be negatively correlated with lower self-esteem, lower interpersonal trust, and higher social anxiety. Social cynicism in many studies positively correlated with a pessimistic psychological state, such as lower life satisfaction, psychological distress, and death ideation. Whereas, social complexity appeared to be positively correlated with cognitive flexibility, intelligence, coping and adjustment. Empirical studies also show that social axioms function differently in different cultures. We may conclude that major

work on social axioms has been done in the fields of positive, industrial and social psychology and it would be a good contribution if the further work is directed towards other fields such as clinical psychology and health psychology.

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