Describing and Explaining the Transformations of Social Knowledge

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction
This article seeks to clarify how the social knowledge transforms into the other theoretical constructs, and what factors affect the emergence of such transformations.

2. Theoretical Framework
There is considerable literature in regard to the subject of this research. In general, from the perspective of many sociologists of knowledge, social knowledge has important links with its historical and sociological contexts as well as with its function. However, it seems that with regard to how and why social knowledge departs from the above characteristics and how its relation with its historical, social, and functional conditions is decreased, the issue is still a debate. Karl Mannheim (1976), C. Wright Mills (2015), Alvin Gouldner (1988), Abdulkarim Soroush (1996b), Michael Burawoy (2008), Mohammad Mujtahid Shabestari (1996), P. L. Berger & T. Luckmann (1966) and other thinkers and sociologists have mentioned the effects of certain variables in this regard. What matters in relation to the question of this research is that it seems that through the creation of convergence between these theories, one can outline the processes of social knowledge transformations while identifying its underlying factors.

3. Methodology
Using the library data, the study is conducted within the framework of the meta-analysis of the existing theories. Inspired by existing theoretical literature, three main pathways for the transformations of social knowledge have been drawn. Then, in order to evaluate the factors influencing the formation of these transformations, the variables involved are analyzed within the two groups of objective and subjective factors.

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4. Results & Discussion

4-1. The process of transforming social knowledge into dogmatism
Whenever the cognitive and motivational foundations of Social knowledge evolve over time, but the statements of such knowledge remain unchanged, social knowledge transforms into dogmatism. It seems that the major causes of dogmatism are first the objective, and second the subjective ones. Objective factors include: 1) The entry of the dogmatist people into the circle of bearers of Social knowledge 2) Effect of power relations 3) Inattention of bearers of ideology to the changes of external environment. The subjective factors are: 1) Lack of verifying the correctness or the effectiveness of social knowledge during the time via rational-scientific methods 2) Mental desire toward stability and avoidance of any change.

4-2. The process of transforming social knowledge into alienation
Alienation occurs when the cognitive and motivational foundations of the social knowledge evolve in terms of the sociological status, but knowledge tends to conform to the former status rather than to a change in accordance with the changes of motivational and cognitive foundations. The contributing factors in this regard are very similar to those of the transformation of social knowledge into the dogmatism. The objective causes of this phenomenon are: 1) The effect of alienated people among the bearers of social knowledge, in regard to the reproduction of alienation 2) the impact of power relations 3) Relative disconnection of the companions of ideology from the external environment. The subjective factors include: 1) lack of a systematic and rational-scientific investigation of correctness or efficiency of social knowledge regarding new sociological status 2) Mental tendency toward stability and avoidance of probable mistakes.

4-3. The process of transforming social knowledge into instrumentalism
It seems that the purpose and function of social knowledge is the transcendence of mankind. If such an attribute of social knowledge is eliminated, this knowledge will not have one of the main and necessary indicators of its validity. It is clear, however, that at many times the goals of social knowledge are determined by the owners of power, and in the same way, in many cases, social knowledge is under the control of the interests and demands of the powerful elite. In that case, social knowledge is transformed into instrumental knowledge. The main causes of this phenomenon are the entry of the instrumentalists into the circle of the bearers of knowledge, the reproduction of instrumentalist relations in epistemological frames, the overall effect of the linkage of power and knowledge, and the irrational socialization of the scholars in the field of the ultimate purpose of knowledge production, especially in the contemporary society. Besides, the
subjective causes of such phenomenon are the lack of rational judgment in the field of the ends of knowledge and the fear of the powerful elites’ reaction.

5. Suggestions
According to the findings of the research, the continuous assessment of historical validity, sociological validity, and functional validity of social knowledge to prevent its inadvisable transformation into dogmatism, alienation, and instrumentalism is recommended. Also, the researcher suggests doing some appropriate empirical research to measure the abovementioned theoretical results.

Keywords: Social knowledge, Dogmatism, Epistemic alienation, Instrumentalism

Reference (In Persian)

Reference (In English)