

Article

Habit Formation and Change from a Deweyan Perspective

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Abstract

This paper aims to outline a framework based on John Dewey and his ideas relating to the topic of habit formation and change. The approach utilised in this article can best be described as a semi-systematic reading and is based on 884 extracts taken from his bibliography. Tendencies that were observed in this material include a distinction between flexible and inflexible habits, and how habit formation and change can be explained by central variables like valuation, experience, and conditions.

Keywords: habit; John Dewey; pragmatism; habit formation; habit change; conceptualisation

1. Introduction

The nature of habit has been explained in various ways. Some consider that habitual action only comprises unintelligent and automated responses of humans, where no intelligent functioning is involved [1–3]. The fostering of habit is merely a process whereby the same act is repeated over and over until it has become a routine. Alternative views on habits suggest that even advanced functions can become habituated. Contemporary research on neuroscience suggests that habit is far more than a fixed groove, but rather an adaption to our environment and anticipation of future events [4]. Prepared actions are not limited to primitive responses to stimuli but can also involve habitual behaviour which is dynamic and responsive to the surroundings. A similar perspective can be found in the field of psychology, where some researchers challenge the idea that habits are the product of repeated action [5,6]. Although they do not agree on the details, it is common to perceive habit as more than unconscious routine. In the scientific fields of sports and nutrition, the interest in the topic is clearly rooted in the goal of creating lasting changes in behaviour. Even though many of the existing investigations follow the logic of repeated action, the recent literature suggests that other factors are at play. In the view of Gardner and colleagues [7], attempts to disrupt habits by changing cues or environment will not necessarily succeed, especially when motives and values behind are still present. Various research disciplines are concerned with harnessing stable patterns in the form of, for example, “work habits” [8], “study habits” [9], and “reading habits” [10]. Without listing them all, it is sufficient to note that the concept is found within a broad range of contexts.

Even though there are many ideas about habits and what they are, few address the question of how habits are formed or changed directly. Among the existing approaches to habit formation, some researchers perceive stimulus–response to be a fundamental relation [11] while others see it as a change in brain function and neural activity [12]. Repetition is also a frequently mentioned factor [6], along with the physical environment [13], while bringing knowledge down to a less conscious level is an alternate understanding [14]. In short, the most common explanation is that habits are established through simple processes like repetition of specific acts.



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Thus, the aim of this article is to outline an alternative framework for habit formation and change based on the work of John Dewey. This choice has been made for two reasons. First, even though his theories stem from a different time, his standing and contributions to the field of education are undeniable [15]. With his extraordinary output, it is only reasonable to draw upon his many insights. Secondly, his extensive bibliography provides near optimal material for an analysis. As habit is a central concept for Dewey and other prominent pragmatists [16], his work provides a solid platform on which to base a theoretical approach to the question of its formation and change. Although there is currently no unitary account on the topic, the goal here is therefore to gather, clarify and illuminate his position on the issue. More precisely, the aim is to shed light on definitions, related concepts, and the process of habit formation and change, but also to extend our general Deweyan understanding of habit.

A Review of Previous Literature

Several scholars have already pointed out the centrality of habit as a concept in the work of John Dewey, although their descriptions of the concept vary [17]. For instance, it has been employed as a lens to illuminate questions on such areas of interest as race [18], feminism [19], language [20], law [21], and international relations [22]. His description of the term has been linked to other theorists, for example, Bourdieu [23], Merleau-Ponty [24], and Ravaissou [25].

Dewey's conceptualisation of habit is believed to have great explanatory power and can replace such concepts as cognition in the discourse on learning [26]. In the literature, it is often linked to learning, for instance in such practical environments as vocational education [27] and wilderness learning [28]. Another approach is to use the concept of habit to explain how educational institutions can foster such ideals as hope [29], honesty [30], and sympathy [31].

A change of habit has been seen as similar if not equal to the process of learning [32]. A habit can be perceived as a stable mode of operation, while a disruption of it may force a need for alternative options upon us [33]. In their models of learning trajectories, Östman and Öhman [26] found that a wide range of influential situational factors may lead to change, where both environmental and individual factors are considered vital.

Dewey's various descriptions of habit have been examined by several researchers. They have pointed out its opposite characteristics, labelling them according to the original terms fixed/flexible [34], and alternatively benign/malign [35], or static/dynamic [36]. These dichotomies underscore a perceived duality in the concept. Testa [37] suggested a more dynamic understanding, where the stability of habit is its plasticity. He proposed that we live in dialogue with our environment, which implies that habit is not necessarily a fixed entity. This notion is also found in other research, where the properties of the environment and conditions are of vital importance [38]. The effect of changing conditions can be seen in relation to "nudge theory", where the main idea is to alter environmental properties to inspire a different choice of action [13]. This is also mentioned as a key to the Deweyan understanding of how habits are formed or changed [39]. One particular suggestion is to raise the price of cars to stimulate more eco-friendly lifestyles [40]. There are also potential links to a socio-cultural perspective, for example, Pyysiäinen [41], who used the notion of affordances to explain how the quality of the environment opens for and impedes certain habitual activities.

In addition to conditional factors, such abilities as thoughtfulness and creativity are mentioned as influential in making a static habit more flexible [35]. Bredlau [23] claimed that the development of habits involves a state of "powerlessness" when we shed our established patterns in favour of new ones. These positions rely on the conscious mind,

but Affifi [42] inferred that even the subconscious mind can “twist habits gracefully to the affordances of the new situation” (p. 585).

The Deweyan understanding of habit is seen in relation to other concepts, for instance impulse. Two similar positions can be found, where Stitzlein [43] claimed that habits are the organisation of bodily impulses, while Sullivan [38] saw them as a patterned flow of impulses. They agree on the point that habits can be seen as the organised version of an initial impulse. Kennedy [44–46] also argued that the balance between habit and impulse is important in school. As he wrote, the reconstruction of habit can occur during a “dialogical encounter with impulse” (p. 275), meaning that impulses can inspire change in habits [45]. Vanderstraeten [47] described the transactional nature of John Dewey’s ideas and how habits can be constructed and reconstructed through experience. A final concept is attention, which Stroud [31] exemplifies through the notions of open-mindedness and whole-heartedness.

This rather broad selection of Deweyan scholars illustrates that his ideas on habit are still relevant today, and a substantial number of topics are covered. The field of habit formation and change is, however, discussed only briefly.

2. Results

This section begins with a necessary summary of how habit is understood as a concept in the literature. With this background in mind, the following sections are concerned with the related concepts that are considered important for explaining habit formation and change. It is worth noting that while these represent a selection of concepts that stand out, this does not mean that other concepts are deemed unimportant.

2.1. The Dualistic Nature of Habit

According to Dewey [48], the term “habit” is the best available description of our tendencies to act. He suggested that the concept can be understood as follows: “The essence [of habit] is an acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response—special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli” (p. 42). Described as “conserved modes of action” [49] (p. 29), habits are part of a repertoire of actions we make in response to situations or triggers. They are not conserved in the sense that they remain unchanged throughout life, but instead continually change due to experiences of situations [50] (p. 35). At the same time, they are seen as stable modes of operation that do not change easily [51] (p. 69).

Habits can be perceived as adjustable and flexible resources and Dewey [48] proposed that “each habit operates all the time of waking life; though like a member of a crew taking his turn at the wheel” (p. 37). This places habit near the centre of human action, and Dewey could describe it as an “expression of growth” [52] (p. 37) and a “highly matured intelligent habit” [53] (p. 185), which assumes that both mental and motor abilities can be formed as habitual patterns. Therefore, habits have been described as “the mainspring of human action” [54] (p. 184), suggesting that they are instrumental in explaining human conduct.

Dewey also claimed that there are inflexible habits, and several descriptions substantiate this point:

- Dry and meager mental habit [55] (p. 36)
- Old habits [48] (p. 130)
- Deep-seated [56] (p. 121)
- Rigid [48] (p. 101)
- Routine habit [52] (p. 39)
- Encrusted [48] (p. 105)
- Inert [57] (p. 281)
- Indurated [57] (p. 362)

There is a substantial difference between naming habit as “mainspring” and “en-crusted”, which points to a tension in Dewey’s view on habit. This tension has also been recognised in the previous literature [36], even though most interpreters of Dewey are preoccupied with the flexible format [58]. The different habits have also been labelled benign/malign, most likely to underscore the detrimental effect inflexibility may have on human behaviour [35]. The flexible/inflexible duality is most likely not meant to be seen as two distinct categories but is rather a way to point out habit on different levels of functioning. As Dewey himself quoted quite often, “habits are good servants but poor masters” [59] (p. 299), which means that he recognised the possible negative effects inflexible habits may have. In his literature, there are many examples where habitual behaviour has become too deeply routinised and thus an obstacle to progression. For instance, in a discussion on artistic quality, he wrote that: “Failure to realize the qualitative and artistic nature of formal scientific construction is due to two causes. One is conventional, the habit of associating art and esthetic appreciation with a few popularly recognized forms” [56] (p. 104). Here, habit is seen as a conservative force that upholds the traditional view on art and blocks a potential expanded view on science.

2.2. Forming and Changing Habits

A fundamental assumption in Deweyan transactional theory is that we are all organisms interacting with our environment. By engaging in the present situation, humans are able to gain experiences from the events that unfold and reflect on them [41]. This pattern is the basis for establishing habits, and perhaps also the reason why they hold a prominent place in Dewey’s work.

Regarding the above-mentioned dual nature of habit, Dewey described two main ways to foster habits that can be seen as connected to flexible and inflexible types. Apparently, the inflexible habit is connected to repeated action, for instance when we do something over and over until it becomes a routine. For example, military drills that ultimately will lead to automatic reactions. Although Dewey did not mention the possibility of forming habits in this way very often, he asserted that “undesirable” habits can be acquired in this way [59] (p. 300). He deemed it a “waste of valuable time” to use repetition as a method to foster habits since the result can end in an “inflexible habit which has no mind in it” (p. 302). As demonstrated, Dewey did not value inflexible habits, but he frequently used them to explain the routinised, non-thinking aspects of human conduct.

The formation of flexible habits holds a much more prominent position in Dewey’s writings and will be at the centre of the ensuing presentation. According to his view, successful action is the key to the formation of flexible habits, especially if we are “concentrating our consciousness upon things that bring about our success” [59] (p. 304). The conscious dimension brought to the forefront here is a question of intelligent engagement and meaning-making during habit formation. To determine the success or failure of one’s acts, a person must have the ability to consciously interpret the results [60] (p. 280).

Dewey [59] advocated that the formation of habits often starts with an impulse, which he called a “natural source” (p. 305). As noted by some Dewey scholars [45], impulse is another key concept in Dewey’s work and can be seen as related to habit in the sense that impulses can initiate action without a foreseeable plan [46,48]. Impulses are described as a “disturbing and refracting factor” [56] (p. 44), meaning that they are, to a large degree, chaotic and unruly forces. Their role in building organised habit is either as a starting point for new ones or a challenge for established ones. The following extract sheds light on the relation between them:

...the original or natural impulse is completely transformed; it no longer exists in its first condition; our impulse to locomotion for example is entirely made over

when the reaction of other experiences into it is completed—when we learn to walk; the first babbling impulse is wholly transformed when we learn to talk, etc. This also means that the mediating experiences are completely absorbed into the initiating impulse; the two sides, the immediate and the mediate, no longer have any separate existence. This complete reaction we call habit [51] (p. 240).

Thus, we base habit on some initial urge and gradually bridge the “immediate and mediate” into a complete and meaningful act. Furthermore, Dewey [59] claimed that impulses and habits can “war with each other” (p. 99), especially during childhood when the impulses appear more frequent and are less controllable. The untested impulse represents an exploration of new and exciting alternatives to established habit and will potentially be the start of a new mode of action (p. 102).

Valuation can be seen as intimately connected to habit and habit formation [61]. Success has already been mentioned, and our desires take the form of aims and goals that need some kind of means to be realised. According to Dewey [61], habits are our prime instruments (pp. 312–315). The success of an act is measured against the achieved ends. This connection can be seen when Dewey [52] inferred that “the formation of habits is a purely mechanical thing unless habits are also tastes—habitual modes of preference and esteem, an effective sense of excellence” (p. 166). This could be a matter of personal values, but also values we believe we should have based on the meaning of others. We are often prone to external influence and our tastes might be seen in relation to tradition, culture, or institutions [56] (p. 16). Since habits are the means to our ends, they are also linked to our virtues, [61] (pp. 353–360) perceived obligations, (pp. 311–336) and ethics [62] (pp. 9–10). In cases where the ends are changed or fulfilled, the habit may become obsolete and force a change—unless it just continues to function as an inflexible and unconscious response.

Connected to the notion of valuation, Dewey introduced the expression “end-in-view” to describe the foreseeable outcome of our activities. Dewey [61] explained how ends must be seen in connection with the means used (pp. 226–228). “In-viewness” means that we can foresee the whole process and the probable outcome. Apparently, ends-in-view are built up over time through experience and inquiry. Dewey has explained the concept in the following ways:

In empirical fact, they [ends] are projections of possible consequences; they are ends-in-view [60] (p. 102):

Denote plans of action or purposes [63] (p. 263).

Anticipation of an existential consequence [63] (p. 266).

In sum, the expression appears to denote a plan in combination with an anticipation of consequences. As Dewey [64] wrote, “now an end-in-view, a purpose, is present in experience in the form of an idea” (p. 260). The connection to habits was shown when he inferred that “formation of a habit [...] will of itself guarantee the production of a certain result” (p. 206). This would mean that we have some sort of understanding of it all before we make an action. An end-in-view can be established as a visualisation of achievement through action. For instance, we can hope to get warm by building a bonfire, connecting the appropriate materials and procedure with the goal. If the conditions allow these types of action, we are able to foresee the outcome of an action with a reasonable degree of realism. However, as Dewey pointed out, when the realism of an end-in-view is reduced, it can become a “fancy” rather than a plan [48] (pp. 234–235).

A vital part of habit formation is the experience we draw from lived situations, and the reflections made afterwards. According to Dewey, “this means power to modify actions based on the results of prior experiences, the power to develop dispositions”. Without this capacity, the “acquisition of habits is impossible” [52] (p. 36). Put in another way, habits are modes of efficacious action dependent on the experience continuously acquired throughout

our lives. The experiences are not seen as neutral and objective perceptions of previous situations, but as valuations that are coloured by our attitudes and sensitivities (p. 167). Since we change along with our experiences, the next situation will also be interpreted differently than the previous one [50] (p. 35). This is conceptualised as the “continuity of experience”, described as a constant flux of events where our evaluation of them is believed to be the basis for which habits we form. Another aspect of this is the order of experiences, which will also be a significant part of habit formation [60] (p. 279).

At the same time, experiences are often dependent on the condition under which they are made. Dewey [50] mentioned such things as infrastructure and tools, but other people are also influential factors simply because they may facilitate or impede our ways of living (p. 39). Hence, both physical and social conditions are important for habitual activities, and to illustrate this point he wrote that: “To be able to walk is to have certain properties of nature at our disposal” [52] (p. 37). The link between conditions and the operation of habits is therefore obvious, but it is also claimed that conditions prompt a change of habit. As Dewey [48] claimed: “We cannot change habit directly: that notion is magic. But we can change it indirectly by modifying conditions, by an intelligent selecting and weighing of the objects which engage attention, and which influence the fulfilment of desires” (p. 20). In addition, habits easily can become irrelevant if a change in conditions no longer produces the desired outcome [61] (pp. 219–220). The experience of success will potentially be lost, and the reason for the habit will no longer exist. Therefore, condition is a prominent factor for establishing, changing, and maintaining habits.

It is reasonable to think that a framework for habit formation and change relies on a combination of the various factors listed above. The following extract from Dewey is an example where various factors are at play:

The child cannot get power of judgment excepting as he is continually exercised in forming and testing judgments. He must have an opportunity to select for himself, and to attempt to put his selections into execution, that he may submit them to the final test, that of action. Only thus can he learn to discriminate that which promises success from that which promises failure; only thus can he form the habit of relating his purposes and notions to the conditions that determine their value. [49] (p. 31)

The process of forming a habit involves the need to test and evaluate one’s own approaches under real conditions and to find the ones that lead to success. The trial-and-error approach involves exploring alternatives and carefully examining conditions, collecting experiences, and finally navigating between the possible consequences in light of one’s own values [61] (p. 217). This interpretation points out that the formation and change of habits from a Deweyan perspective relies on the mentioned factors, not separately, but as a dynamic unity. Interdependence and relation between the impulse, valuation, experience, and condition capture the complexity of an organism’s interaction with its environment. ted.

3. Discussion

The intention of this article has been to outline a Deweyan framework of habit formation and change based on his extensive bibliography. In general, it appears that he promotes a progressive view on habit where both intelligent capacities and unconscious actions are included. This normative view on habit builds on several related concepts that together constitute a complex theoretical framework.

One of the concepts which has been illuminated here is impulse, which is also described in earlier research literature [18,43,44]. The role of this unruly force is seen as significant for human development in the sense that impulse represents novelty and experimental action. The unstructured nature of impulse will potentially lead people towards unforeseen consequences if the impulse is acted upon, but it can also present new and

alternative procedures. A Deweyan perspective gives reason to interpret this concept as a driving force that inspires change and renewal of habits rather than something that can cause problems.

Impulsive behaviour has been seen as problematic, especially when taking place where there is no room for experimenting. In a classroom, pupils may disturb the order of things and their uncontrolled impulses can lead to destructive and even harmful outcome if acted upon. A general negative view on impulses, and attempts to control and hinder them are, however, a sabotage of a natural human mode of functioning. Considering the Deweyan perspective on the matter, it would be of some importance to provide an environment where children have opportunities to explore these forces in a controlled fashion instead of trying to subdue them altogether. Impulses can be a source of inspiration which is drawn upon in, e.g., the creative processes of fine arts, but could also be of value for personal development.

Conditions are considered to be vital for habit formation and change [31,33]. Contemporary theories such as “nudge theory” [13] are based on an understanding that conditions more or less determine habits alone, and that change in the environment will lead to a change in habits. This is not the case in the theories of Dewey, in which he described various situations where condition is only one of the involved factors. He frequently mentioned how the surrounding environment could set the stage for our experiences and values, for instance through institutions, customs, and traditions. This type of influence could lead to the mere adoption of habitual patterns, creating unconscious and inflexible habits. In the outlined framework, conditions are mostly described in terms of the social or physical environment. However, it would also be reasonable to include the various individual capacities or limitations, such as memory or agility. Such factors are clearly influential for habit formation as they facilitate or impede the possible transactions of the person. Herein also lies a possible explanation for why there are habitual differences, and why uniform environments do not foster uniform habits.

Valuation is an expression used by Dewey, but not frequently described in research literature, that is important for habit formation or change. This term could potentially cover the more used concepts of emotion and attitude [65], if we consider them to be the result of a valuation process rather than forces on their own. However, the valuation is not always a straightforward matter, especially as we are complex beings filled with various, and sometimes changing and conflicting interests. Situations that we face, and the potential outcomes of our actions, can be vague and indeterminate, or even confusing in the sense that values are at odds with each other. This concept is still emphasised here due to the potential effect it has on forming our goal-oriented actions.

“End-in-view” as an expression has not been given much attention in the previous literature on Dewey but is an interesting notion for understanding the nature of habits. In a sense the idea of an “end-in-view” can be compared to what Mead [66] described as “readiness”, or a prepared response, or Bruner’s [67] notion of mind-building precepts based on previous observations. Indeed, the “professional vision” is based on a similar logic where the perceptual image guides the action before it is made [68]. The ability to make images of a future event and the probable response and outcome is probably the reason why habits are established in the first place. If we are unable to depend on foreseeable aspects of a situation, it would not be sensible to prepare any response in advance. We would then have to navigate step-by-step through each situation we face. An “end-in-view” will probably function as a map for the actions we take, forming both visions and expectations for the forthcoming act. The content and shape of our “end-in-view” can probably range from a detailed blueprint for procedures to a vague sense of the upcoming

events. The expression is clearly oriented towards what ends we have, what we are hoping for, or attempting to avoid.

The formation of “ends-in-view” will depend upon a reasonable degree of certainty that the events unfolds in the future as they have done in the past.

Finally, experience holds a special place in the theories of Dewey and is perhaps the most influential factor when describing how habits are formed and how they change. The sum of our previous experiences and subsequent reflections may guide us through current situations. For instance, Dewey wrote about aesthetic experiences and how they are more potent and influential for our habits. It is likely that habit formation is a process that varies very much between individuals due to the variation in experiences, and the interpretation, valuation, and sequential order of them. The impact of these is hard to determine as it will most likely depend on the nature of the experiences. If we are only exposed to a series of relatively manageable and uniform situations, the result is likely to be habits of minimal variation. In contrast, a single groundbreaking event may disturb one’s habitual functioning and affect the individual on a fundamental level. Defining moments like becoming a parent will for most change their view on life and hence their *modus operandi*.

To sum up, habit has become the core of many types of theories where it sometimes holds the role as an obstructive element standing in the way of development, and at other times, the necessary innovation that makes us more healthy or efficient. The point is often to harness stability, keeping our actions regular and reliable, but also to avoid the inflexible nature of habit. This interesting tension lies at the heart of the topic in focus here. A Deweyan understanding of habit contributes to this discussion in several ways. As this investigation shows, his perspective can be an addition but also a correction to the multitude of existing theories. By acknowledging that there are both flexible and inflexible forms of habits, and by including aspects like experience, conditions, and values in habit formation and change, it offers a more complex view than a simplified cue–response model. It can potentially expand the various understandings found in the previous literature by adding the depth needed. Here, formation and change of habit can occur either through repetition or as an active adaptation, which bridges two opposite ideas about the topic.

4. Materials and Methods

The reported investigation is a product of a long-term process where the general aim is to explore Dewey and his understanding of habit. As the first of several planned investigations, the goal here is to provide a general overview of the topic, where essential factors of habit formation and change are established.

Dewey did not write one, uniform account of his view on habit, it has rather been included as an important concept in much of his work throughout his career. Some of his books included detailed descriptions of the topic, for example, “Human nature and conduct” [48], “Democracy and education” [52], and “How we think” [55], and these works capture much of its essence. However, the search to find even more details and nuances led this investigation into deeper territory than just investigating these volumes. The aim developed into undertaking a deep reading of the literature in general, locating prominent passages where the nature of habit is explained.

The approach chosen here can be seen as a semi-systematic reading of John Dewey’s works. In practice, each text was analysed after locating sections where the keyword “habit” and derived forms (“habits”, “habitual”, “habitude” and similar) are mentioned. The only inclusion criterion was that the extract was relevant for the topic. Initially, the plan was to investigate only key works in his bibliography one by one. However, as the scope of the study changed progressively, so did the approach. At first, examining the seminal volumes was the aim, but later all ordinary publications were included in the process.

Finally, selected parts of the complete collection (edited by Jo Ann Boydston) were added to the studied material. The result can therefore best be described as semi-systematic due to the many steps along the way.

The reading was mostly a manual process with the aim of finding any mention of the keyword which might shed light on the topic. Some articles and books were available digitally, and these online resources made the search for words easier. Both hard-copy and digital text referring to the topic were extracted and organised in a spreadsheet along with any additional information about the context. This work resulted in a total of 844 extracts used as the data material in this study (still in progress). The dataset has been published in the open Dataverse platform and can be utilised by other interested parties (See data availability statement). While most of the published titles by Dewey are included, several texts from the collected works are still to be examined. A basic assumption here is, however, that the most relevant part for understanding habits is covered by the current data.

The analytical process is close to a hermeneutical approach where the focus has been on constructing a representative understanding of habit based on several extracts from Dewey's writings. A potential issue here is then that these extracts from the bibliography may not represent his thoughts on the subject directly. It is likely that the term has been applied as a scientific concept most of the time, whereas it could also have been used as an expression to illustrate other issues. Thus, it is not reasonable to count every occurrence of the term or derived forms as a carrier of meaning. The approach therefore involved finding tendencies across the selection of the extracts. Another point is that extracts often need context to be meaningful. It was observed that many of Dewey's writings consist of long lines of argumentation, sometimes examples of other theories, and even arguments where opposing ideas are presented. Thus, the excerpts had to be checked to see if their context supported the argument presented, or if their intended meaning was pointing in another direction.

Even though the analytical process can be described as a common qualitative procedure, the main results presented here are mainly the fruits of a long-term process. Processing material over time in this manner aids our understanding and has affected the ultimate outcome which is presented here.

5. Conclusions

The formation of habits, either flexible or inflexible, is assumed to be the ability to embody previous experiences and can largely explain our recurring types of behaviour. It is thus interesting for educators, psychologists, sociologists, and similar professionals to understand more about how habits function. This investigation contributes to further understanding on a theoretical level and raises a needed debate about the fundamental nature of habits. The Deweyan perspective on habit formation and change presented here suggests that habits are more complex than assumed in the recent literature, where they sometimes are described as the products of certain methods or procedures. Although it may not be convincing to all, it can at least serve as a starting point to establish more suitable models to explain a central component of human behaviour.

The findings here are based on a relatively large number of extracts from the extensive works of John Dewey, where the outcome can serve as a starting point for further exploration. More research is needed to strengthen and develop the framework. It would also be interesting to test the present theoretical insights against empirical data to see if the content can help in the effort to analyse cases of habitual behaviour.

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