

Social Conformity and Universal across cultures

Zimo Xue

Abstract

The development of social psychology presents a complex situation, and behind many current social phenomena, there are shadows of basic sociological concepts and theories. This article is based on understanding the basic concepts of sociology, starting with research experiments on social conformity psychology by multiple sociologists. In response to existing social phenomena in life, it analyzes the underlying sociological principles: the main factors that affect social conformity and the possible consequences of conformity. And the cross-cultural research on the phenomenon of social conformity. This article better reveals the development causes of social conformity and the degree of conformity in different cultures, providing a theoretical basis for us to better understand certain social phenomena.

Keywords: conformity, concept phenomena, classic experiments normative, informational social influence, social learning, cross-cultural studies, cultural factors

Social conformity is the degree to which people adjust their behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs to match those of their group or the majority around them. The phenomenon has been studied extensively, with the most influential research being conducted by Solomon Asch in the 1950s. His series of classic experiments demonstrated the power of group influence in shaping individual judgments and behaviors. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, individuals often conform to the erroneous judgments of a group in order to avoid social rejection or being different from the group. These experiments provided us with important insights into the dynamics of group influence and how social norms shape individual behavior. In this essay, I will define social conformity and explore its universality across cultures. I will draw on empirical evidence and research from different studies to support my arguments.

What is social conformity?

Let us first look at some examples around us. We often see such situations in our lives.

Scene one: All of a sudden, a guy runs. Maybe he realizes that he has a date with his girlfriend, he is late, and he runs down the street later; within 10 minutes, all the people on the street are running, and a horrible sound comes out: "Hurry up! The fire," and nobody knows who say it.

Scene two: In ancient China, there's a famous saying, 三人成虎. The story goes that during the Warring States period, three people say a tiger is running in the street, and someone believes it without proof. The metaphor is used to express that a rumor will become true when repeated more than twice.

Scene three: There's a famous Herd Effect in the stock

market. The stock exchange dominates the "sheep-flock effect" psychology. The shadow of herding can be seen in every aspect of social and economic life.

Scene four: After the "networked point," where everyone fights to punch the card, the ordinary food you usually eat has become a hot cake after the network recommendation. People continue to chase hot spots and pay attention to network red; it is a kind of herd psychology, and they expect to be better accepted, supported, and recognized by the group through such behavior. Due to the security of herd mentality, online group violence is often unconscious.

In China, we call it, people follow what they say or drift with the stream. That's what everybody thinks or does; that's what I think or do.

Social conformity is a phenomenon that has been studied extensively in social psychology. It refers to the tendency of individuals to conform to group norms, rules, and expectations, even if these norms or rules contradict their own beliefs or values. In the context of the Asch conformity experiments, participants were asked to match the length of a standard line to one of three comparison lines. The experiment was designed so that one participant was tested alongside several confederates who deliberately gave incorrect answers to see if the participant would conform to their answers. Asch found that participants conformed to the majority's response in 37% of trials despite knowing the correct answer.

Asch's experiments demonstrated that people can be influenced to conform to the majority's opinions and beliefs, even when they know they are wrong. Social psychologists have explained the phenomenon of social conformity as a result of normative and informational social influence. That means there are two kinds of causes

of conformity. Normative social conformity occurs when individuals conform to the group's norms or expectations to fit in or avoid social rejection or criticism. The others create pressure, so we have to obey the force and do something we don't want to do. (Asch experiment) Informational social conformity occurs when individuals conform to the group's opinions and beliefs because they believe the group is more knowledgeable or informed than they are. In a famous light spot experiment conducted by Muzafer Sherif, We can easily find that, in many cases, people determine their knowledge and judgment through the actions of others. It makes me think something happened at an early age. Starting very early, we often watch and follow others' behavior. Some random rules have quickly become the social norm for everyone. Let's use the theory of social psychology to explain what's going on in our brains. The sort of internalized form of our behavior is part of what we call social learning; when we see group members perform a task, our brain will reward us for following others' footsteps. Otherwise, we feel excluded. Once we decided to go with it, we felt much more comfortable. Conformity is how we become socialized, but it can also cause us to develop bad habits or repeat past wrongs.

So, we must think through many psychological experiments to determine the factors influencing conformity. First, the size or scale of the group. Second, the importance of community. Third, the influence of cultural background. Among these three factors, one of the critical questions is whether the phenomenon is universal across cultures or whether it varies depending on cultural factors. Several cross-cultural studies have attempted to replicate Asch's experiments in different cultural contexts, with mixed results. While some studies have found high levels of conformity across different cultures, others have reported cultural variations in the manifestation and degree of conformity.

One of the earliest and most influential cross-cultural studies of social conformity was conducted by Bond and Smith (1996), who conducted a meta-analysis of studies using Asch's line-judgment task in different cultures. The meta-analysis included studies conducted in 17 countries and regions, representing a range of cultural values and norms. The results showed that overall levels of conformity were higher in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures.

Collectivistic cultures emphasize social harmony and conformity to group norms, whereas individualistic cultures value independence, autonomy, and self-expression. The findings of the meta-analysis suggested that cultural factors play an essential role in shaping the degree and manifestation of social conformity.

Other studies have further supported the idea that cultural values and norms influence social conformity. For example, Kim and Markus (1999) conducted a study in which they compared the responses of American and Korean participants to a set of hypothetical scenarios involving social norms and deviance. The results showed that Korean participants were more likely to endorse conformity to social norms than American participants, who were more likely to support individuality and uniqueness. Similarly, Bond (2004) conducted a study investigating the relationship between social hypotheses (i.e., fundamental beliefs about social life) and social behaviors in different cultural contexts. The results showed that social axioms related to conformity and tradition were positively related to social behaviors in collectivistic cultures but not in individualistic cultures.

While these studies provide important insights into the role of culture in shaping social conformity, there is also evidence to suggest that social conformity may be a universal phenomenon found across all human societies. For example, a study by Klucharev et al. (2009) used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to investigate the neural basis of social conformity. The study found that social conformity was associated with increased activity in the ventral striatum, a brain region associated with reward processing. Moreover, the study found that the neural reward system associated with social conformity was present across all human cultures, suggesting that the primary mechanism underlying social conformity may be universal.

The debate over the universality of social conformity highlights the phenomenon's complexity and the need for further research in different cultural contexts. Social conformity is likely influenced by various cultural, social, and cognitive factors, which complexly shape individual behavior. Nonetheless, the fact that social conformity has been observed in a wide range of cultures and contexts suggests that it is a fundamental aspect of human social behavior that has evolved to serve essential social functions.

I also want to raise real-life examples of people conforming more when there is a unanimous or confident group consensus or when they live in cultures where cooperation, collectivism, and harmony are highly valued, for example, in East Asia. We can combine those examples with Michele Gelfand's analysis of social influence across cultures (looseness vs. tightness) and compare other theories in this field.

One example of the role of unanimous or confident group consensus in shaping social conformity can be seen in the phenomenon of group thinking. Group thinking is a term used to describe how a group of individuals reach

a consensus decision without considering alternative perspectives or critical evaluation of evidence. This phenomenon can be seen in many real-life examples, such as the decision-making process of the Bay of Pigs invasion during the Kennedy administration, in which group members were hesitant to speak out against the dominant consensus.

Let's look at some of the social conformity theories in the great work 《The Crowd: A Study of Popular Mind》. It is undoubtedly the most excellent social psychology book in human history. And it is devoted to an account of the characteristics of the crowd. In the book, Le Bon claims that crowd psychology has several features: "impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgment of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of sentiments, and others..." Le Bon claimed that "an individual immersed for some length of time in a crowd soon finds himself – either in consequence of magnetic influence given out by the crowd or from some other cause of which we are ignorant – in a special state, which much resembles the state of fascination in which the hypnotized individual finds himself in the hands of the hypnotizer."

BLUE FACE is a non-leading role in the novel 《Tiring Life and Death》 by Chinese writer MOYAN. His face has a scar or birthmark, so he has this unique name. The main part of his story was based on the 'great leap forward' champion launched in 1950- 60s, which was a very special period in Chinese current history. As an ordinary peasant, he refused to join the people's communes but insisted on being isolated from the group throughout the time. However, people put various pressures on him, and he never changed his mind or surrendered to others. Blue Face struck me most about him was that he stood up for himself and did not follow the crowd. He did so simply from a blind and ignorant insistence rather than an irrational or logical observation. It may be paranoia or arrogance, but it holds its bottom line. In front of the group, the individual is small and fragile.

Observation proves that when a certain number of these individuals are gathered together in a group for purposes of action, from the mere fact of their being assembled, there result in specific new psychological characteristics, which are added to the racial elements and differ from at times to a very considerable degree. So organized crowds have always played an essential part in people's lives. In the group, people's IQ will be reduced, resulting in unconscious conformity behavior. To gain recognition, individuals would instead abandon right and wrong in exchange for the sense of belonging that makes people feel safe. Group blindness will overwhelm individual

rationality, and independence will be overwhelmed by the group's ignorance and madness. Due to the number of people, the individual will have the illusion that he can do anything. Although many factors influence conformity behavior, their essence is obedience, listening to the will of others, and instinctively obeying others. At a certain point, we stop remembering the unrepeated claim, lose our judgment, and end up trusting him, which is why advertising has surprising power. Most of the time, people need discernment and can not judge the truth of things, so the general public easily approves many opinions and actions that can not be debated.

Another example of social conformity in cultures that value cooperation and collectivism can be seen in East Asian cultures. Studies have shown that East Asian cultures tend to be more conformist than Western cultures, which has been attributed to the emphasis on group harmony and social connectedness in these cultures. For instance, a study by Bond and Smith (1996) found that Chinese participants were more likely to conform to their peers' opinions than American participants.

Michele Gelfand's analysis of social influence across cultures, distinguishing between "tight" and "loose" cultures, also sheds light on cultural variations in social conformity. Tight cultures are characterized by strong social norms and high social control, while loose cultures are more tolerant of deviation from social norms. Studies have shown that close cultures tend to be more conformist than loose cultures, suggesting that social conformity is influenced by cultural factors related to social norms and control. For example, in a study by Gelfand and colleagues (2011), participants from tight cultures were more likely to conform to group norms than participants from loose cultures.

Other theories in this field, such as social identity theory and self-categorization theory, also provide different perspectives on the mechanisms underlying social conformity. Social identity theory proposes that individuals are motivated to conform to group norms to maintain a positive social identity and avoid rejection from the group. Self-categorization theory, on the other hand, suggests that individuals categorize themselves into social groups to reduce uncertainty and enhance their sense of identity and that conformity to group norms maintains this identity.

In conclusion, social conformity is a complex phenomenon influenced by various cultural, social, historical, era, and cognitive factors. Real-life examples of social conformity in different cultural contexts illustrate the importance of these factors in shaping individual behavior. Michele Gelfand's analysis of social influence across cultures highlights the role of cultural factors

related to social norms and control, while other theories, such as social identity theory and self-categorization theory, provide different perspectives on the mechanisms underlying social conformity. These perspectives deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between individual and cultural factors in shaping social behavior.

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