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# UNIT 1 THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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Social influence is defined as change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviours that results from interaction with another individual or group. It refers to the change in behaviour that one person causes in another, intentionally or unintentionally. As a result, the changed person perceives himself in relationship

to the influencer, other people and society in general. In this unit we will be dealing with Current research on social influence, such as minority influence etc., areas of social influence such as conformity with related experiments, compliance and its factors, obedience and the related factors and experimental studies on human obedience.

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## 1.1 OBJECTIVES

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After completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- 1 Define Social influence;
- 1 Differentiate between various types of Social influence;
- 1 Analyse various factors associated with Conformity;
- 1 Explain various factors affecting Compliance; and
- 1 Describe the factors affecting Obedience.

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## 1.2 CURRENT RESEARCH ON SOCIAL INFLUENCE

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Social influence can also be defined as the process by which individuals make real changes to their feelings and behaviours as a result of interaction with others who are perceived to be similar, desirable, or expert. People adjust their beliefs with respect to others to whom they feel similar in accordance with psychological principles such as balance. Individuals are also influenced by the majority: when a large portion of an individual's referent social group holds a particular attitude, it is likely that the individual will adopt it as well. Additionally, individuals may change an opinion under the influence of another who is perceived to be an expert in the matter at hand. French and Raven (1959) provided an early formalisation of the concept of social influence in their discussion of the bases of social power. For French and Raven, agents of change included not just individuals and groups, but also norms and roles. They viewed social influence as the outcome of the exertion of social power from one of five bases: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, expert power, or referent power. A change in opinion or attitude was considered an instance of social influence.

Since 1959, scholars have distinguished true social influence from forced public acceptance and from changes based on reward or coercive power. Social researchers are still concerned with public compliance, reward power, and coercive power, but those concerns are differentiated from social influence studies.

Current research on social influence generally uses experimental methodology and tends to fall into five main areas: (1) minority influence in group settings, (2) research on persuasion, (3) dynamic social impact theory, (4) a structural approach to social influence, and (5) social influence in expectation states theory. Each is discussed below.

### 1.2.1 Minority Influence

Minority influence is said to occur when a minority subgroup attempts to change the majority. For example, teachers often influence their students' beliefs, and political and religious leaders frequently influence the behaviour of their followers.

While some previous research has characterised the process of social influence as the majority riding over the minority, many scholars interested in minority influence believe that every member of a group can influence others, at least to some degree. Studies have found this to be particularly true when the minority group is consistent in what it presents to the majority. In addition, the presence of minority groups within a larger group often leads to more creative thinking and better overall solutions on group tasks. Nemeth and Kwan (1987) demonstrated this in a study of four-person groups working on a creativity task. Individuals were given information that a majority 3 of 3 or a minority 1 of 3 of the other group members had come up with a novel response to the task at hand. Those who were in the minority condition actually produced more correct solutions to the task, indicating the strong effect of minority viewpoints.

### **1.2.2 Persuasion**

Current research on persuasion, broadly defined as change in attitudes or beliefs based on information received from others, focuses on written or spoken messages sent from source to recipient. This research operates on the assumption that individuals process messages carefully whenever they are motivated and able to do so. Two types of theories dominate modern persuasion research: the elaboration likelihood model and heuristic-systemic models.

### **1.2.3 Elaboration Likelihood Model**

The elaboration likelihood model developed by Cacioppo, Petty, and Stoltenberg (1985) has been used most frequently in therapeutic and counseling settings. It states that the amount and nature of thinking that a person does about a message will affect the kind of persuasion that the message produces. Aspects of the persuasion situation that have been shown to be important for this model include source, message, recipient, affect, channel, and context. Of particular importance is the degree to which the recipient views the message's issue as relevant to himself. This model has demonstrated its utility in persuading various people to make various types of healthier choices e.g., cancer patients, teens at risk from tobacco use.

### **1.2.4 Heuristic-systemic Models**

Heuristic-systemic models propose that argument strength will be most effective in persuading an individual when he is motivated and able to attend to the message, the "systemic" route. When the target individual is not motivated or is unable to attend carefully, persuasion will take place through more indirect means, the "heuristic" route, such as nonverbal cues or source credibility. Persuasion that takes place via the systemic route will be relatively permanent and enduring; persuasion through the heuristic route is more likely to be temporary.

### **1.2.5 Social Impact Theory**

Broader than persuasion, social impact theory, as developed primarily by Bibb Latane (1981), forms the basis for an active line of inquiry today called dynamic social impact theory. Social impact means any of the number of changes that might occur in an individual (physiological, cognitive, emotional, or behavioural) due to the presence or action of others, who are real, imagined, or implied.

## Process of Social Influence

Social impact theory proposes that the impact of any information source is a function of three factors: (i) the number of others who make up that source, (ii) their immediacy i.e., closeness, and their strength and (iii) salience or power.

Dynamic social impact theory uses ideas about social impact to describe and predict the diffusion of beliefs through social systems. In this view, social structure is the result of individuals influencing each other in a dynamic way. The likelihood of being influenced by someone nearby, rather than far away, (the immediacy factor) produces localised cultures of beliefs within communication networks.

This process can lead initially randomly distributed attitudes and beliefs to become clustered or correlated, less popular beliefs become consolidated into minority subcultures. Dynamic social impact theory views society as a self-organising complex system in which individuals interact and impact each others' beliefs.

Like dynamic social impact theory, the structural approach to social influence examines interpersonal influence that occurs within a larger network of influences. In this larger network, attitudes and opinions of individuals are reflections of the attitudes and opinions of their referent others.

Interpersonal influence is seen as a basis of individuals' socialisation and identity. Social influence is seen as the process by which a group of actors will weigh and then integrate the opinions of significant others within the context of social structural constraints. The structure determines the initial positions of group members and the network and weight of interpersonal influences within the group.

### 1.2.6 Social Influence Network Theory

Social influence network theory, as described by Friedkin (1998), has its roots in work by social psychologists and mathematicians. The formal theory involves a two-weighted averaging of influential opinions. Actors start out with their own initial opinions on some matter. At each stage, then, actors form a "norm" opinion which is a weighted average of the other opinions in the group. Actors then modify their own opinion in response to this norm, forming a new opinion which is a weighted average of their initial opinion and the network norm. This theory utilises mathematical models and quantifications to measure the process of social influence.

### 1.2.7 Expectation States Theory

Expectation states theory provides another formal treatment of social influence. Rooted in the work of Bales (1950), which found inequalities in the amount of influence group members had over one another. Researchers in this tradition have developed systematic models predicting the relative influence of task-oriented actors in group settings. Bales discovered that even when group members were equal on status at the beginning of the group session, some members would end up being more influential than others.

The group would develop a hierarchy based on the behaviour of the group members. When group members were initially unequal in status, inequalities would be imported to the group from the larger society such that, for example, age or sex or race would structure a hierarchy of influence.

Expectation states theory, as described in Berger et al. (1980), was originally

proposed as an explanation for Bales's finding that groups of status equals would develop inequalities in influence. According to the theory, group members develop expectations about the future task performance of all group members, including themselves. Once developed, these expectations guide the group interaction. In fact, expectations both guide and are maintained by the interaction. Those group members for whom the highest expectations are held will be the most influential in the group's interactions.. Scholars are continuing to expand the theory both theoretically and substantively.

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## 1.3 AREAS OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE

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Three areas of social influence are conformity, compliance and obedience. *Conformity* is changing how you behave to be more like others. This plays to belonging and esteem needs as we seek the approval and friendship of others. Conformity can run very deep, as we will even change our beliefs and values to be like those of our peers and admired superiors.

*Compliance* is where a person does something that they are asked to do by another. They may choose to comply or not to comply, although the thoughts of social reward and punishment may lead them to compliance when they really do not want to comply. *Obedience* is different from compliance in that it is obeying an order from someone that you accept as an authority figure. In compliance, you have some choice. In obedience, you believe that you do not have a choice. Many military officers and commercial managers are interested only in obedience.

### 1.3.1 Conformity

Conformity is the process by which an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours are conditioned by what is conceived to be what other people might perceive. This influence occurs in both small groups and society as a whole, and it may be the result of subtle unconscious influences, or direct and overt social pressure. Conformity also occurs by the "implied presence" of others, or when other people are not actually present. For example, people tend to follow the norms of society when eating or watching television, even when they are at home by themselves. People often conform from a desire to achieve a sense of security within a group—typically a group that is of a similar age, culture, religion, or educational status.

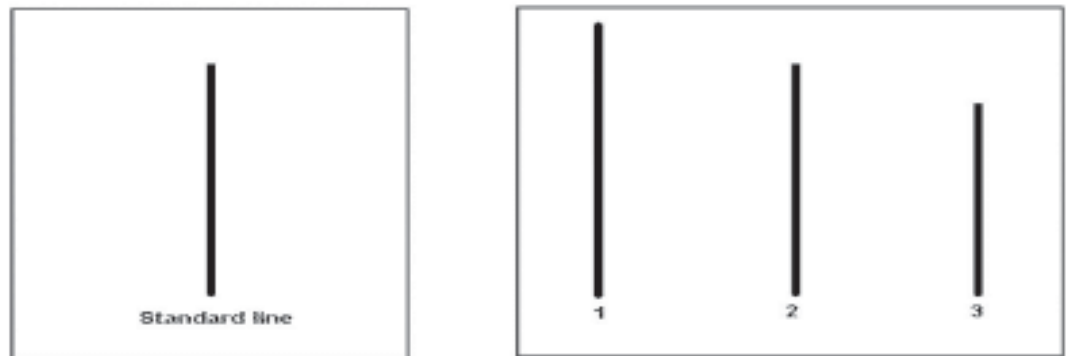
Any unwillingness to conform carries with it the very real risk of social rejection. In this respect, conformity can be seen as a safe means of avoiding bullying or deflecting criticism from peers. Conformity is often associated with adolescence and youth culture, but it affects humans of all ages. Although peer pressure may be viewed as a negative trait, conformity can have either good or bad effects depending on the situation. Driving safely on the correct side of the road is a beneficial example of conformity. Conformity influences the formation and maintenance of social norms and allows society to function smoothly and predictably. Because conformity is a group phenomenon, such factors as group size, unanimity, cohesion, status, prior commitment, and public opinion all help to determine the level of conformity an individual will display (Aronson, et.al. (2007).

#### 1.3.1.1 Asch's (1951) Experiment on Conformity

Perhaps the most influential study of conformity came from Solomon E. Asch

## Process of Social Influence

(1951). Asch gave groups of seven or nine college students what appeared to be a test of perceptual judgment: matching the length of a line segment to comparison lines. Each subject saw a pair of cards set up in front of the room, similar to the ones that follow.



*Stimuli like those used by Asch*

Subjects received the following instructions:

This is a task involving the discrimination of lengths of lines. Before you is a pair of cards. On the left is a card with one line. The card at the right has three lines different in length; they are numbered 1, 2 and 3, in order. One of the three lines at the right is equal to the standard line at the left—you will decide in each case which is the equal line. You will state your judgment in terms of the number of the line. There will be 18 such comparisons in all... As the number of comparisons is few and the group small, I will call upon each of you in turn to announce your judgments.

In a group of nine, eight subjects were actually confederates of the experimenter. The experiment was designed so that the genuine subject was called upon next-to-last in the group. The experimenter's confederates had been instructed, in advance, to make deliberately ridiculous judgments on many of the trials, but to agree unanimously with one another. On 12 of the 18 trials, they said in loud voices (for example) that the 4½" line was exactly equal to 3" standard line. The pressure of the group had a dramatic effect. Although people could pick the correct line 99% of the time when making the judgments by themselves, they went along with the erroneous group judgment 75% of the time, even when it was plainly wrong.

The conforming subjects did not fool themselves into thinking the wrong line was equal to the standard line. They could see the difference. However, they were influenced by eight people in a row making the "wrong" decision. Asked later why they had made such obviously incorrect judgments, subjects reported, "They must have been looking at line widths" or "I assumed it was an optical illusion" or "If eight out of nine people made the same choice, I must have missed something in the instructions."

Asch obtained the conformity effect even when the confederate declared an eleven-inch line to be equivalent to a four-inch standard. He found that small groups—even groups of three, containing two confederates and one naïve subject—were sufficient to induce the effect.

About a quarter of the subjects remained independent throughout the testing and never changed their judgments to fit those of the group. One could argue that Asch's experiment showed stubborn independence in some people, just as it showed conformity in others. A subject who did *not* conform reported to Asch later:

I've never had any feeling that there was any virtue in being like others. I'm used to being different. I often come out well by being different. I don't like easy group opinions.

Asch later tested the effect of having a *dissenter* in the group. He found that if only one of seven confederates disagreed with the group decision, this was enough to free most subjects from the conformity effect. However, if the dissenter defected later, joining the majority after the first five trials, rates of conformity increased again. The public nature of the judgment also seemed to have an effect. If subjects were invited to write their responses in private, while the majority made oral responses, this destroyed the conformity effect.

### 1.3.1.2 Factors Found to Increase Conformity

Asch's experiment inspired a lot of follow-up research by other experimenters. Factors found to increase conformity included the following:

- 1) Attractiveness of other members in the group . People tended to go along with a group of attractive people.
- 2) Complexity or difficulty of the task . People were more likely to conform if the judgment was difficult.
- 3) Group cohesiveness. People conformed more if friendships or mutual dependencies were set up beforehand .

To appreciate further the nature of this dilemma, let us imagine an introductory lecture in psychology. The instructor is describing the Asch study and has just shown a picture of the experimental stimuli. Suddenly he is interrupted by a student who remarks, "But line A *is* the correct answer..." Predictably, the class would laugh aloud and thereby communicate their enjoyment of their peer's joke. Suppose, however, that the dissenter failed to smile or to otherwise confirm that he was trying to be funny. Suppose, instead, that he insisted, "Why are you all laughing at me? I can see perfectly, and line A *is* correct." Once convinced of the dissenter's sincerity, the class response almost certainly would be a mixture of discomfort, bewilderment, concern, and doubt about the dissenter's mental and perceptual competence. It is *this* response that the Asch dissenters risked and, accordingly, it is not surprising that many chose to avoid it through conformity.

Was the Asch conformity effect possibly due to the era in which it was carried out? After all, the early 1950s were famous for emphasising conformity, such as the "corporate man" who did everything possible to eliminate his individuality and fit into a business setting. To see if the same experiment would work with a later generation of subjects, NBC news had social psychologist Anthony Pratkanis replicate the Asch experiment in front of a hidden camera for its *Dateline* show in 1997. Sure enough, the experiment still worked, and the percentage of conformists was almost identical to what Asch found. Most students, even some who looked creative or rebellious on the outside, went along with obviously

incorrect group judgments. Later they explained that they did not want to look foolish, so they just “caved in.”

Research in has focused primarily on two main varieties of conformity. These are *informational* conformity, or informational social influence, and *normative* conformity, otherwise known as normative social influence.

### 1.3.1.3 Informational Social Influence

Informational social influence occurs when one turns to the members of one’s group to obtain accurate information. A person is most likely to use informational social influence in three situations: When a situation is ambiguous, people become uncertain about what to do. They are more likely to depend on others for the answer. During a crisis when immediate action is necessary, in spite of panic. Looking to other people can help ease fears, but unfortunately they are not always right. The more knowledgeable a person is, the more valuable they are as a resource. Thus people often turn to experts for help. But once again people must be careful, as experts can make mistakes too. Informational social influence often results in *internalisation* or *private acceptance*, where a person genuinely believes that the information is right. Informational social influence was first documented in Muzafer Sherif’s autokinetic experiment (Sherif, M., 1936). He was interested in how many people change their opinions to bring them in line with the opinion of a group. Participants were placed in a dark room and asked to stare at a small dot of light 15 feet away. They were then asked to estimate the amount it moved. The trick was there was no movement, it was caused by a visual illusion known as the autokinetic effect. Every person perceived different amounts of movement. Over time, the same estimate was agreed on and others conformed to it. Sherif suggested that this was a simulation for how social norms develop in a society, providing a common frame of reference for people.

Subsequent experiments were based on more realistic situations. In an eyewitness identification task, participants were shown a suspect individually and then in a lineup of other suspects. They were given one second to identify him, making it a difficult task.

One group was told that their input was very important and would be used by the legal community. To the other it was simply a trial. Being more motivated to get the right answer increased the tendency to conform.

Those who wanted to be most accurate conformed 51% of the time as opposed to 35% in the other group (Baron, 1996). Economists have suggested that fads and trends in society form as the result of individuals making rational choices based on information received from others. These information form quickly as people decide to ignore their internal signals and go along with what other people are doing.

### 1.3.1.4 Normative social influence

Normative social influence occurs when one conforms to be liked or accepted by the members of the group. It usually results in *public compliance*, doing or saying something without believing in it. Asch was the first psychologist to study this phenomenon in the laboratory. As mentioned earlier, He conducted a modification of Sherif’s study, assuming that when the situation was very clear, conformity would be drastically reduced. He exposed people in a group to a series of lines, and the participants were asked to match one line with a standard line.



All participants except one were secretly told to give the wrong answer in 12 of the 18 trials. The results showed a surprisingly high degree of conformity. 76% of the participants conformed on at least one trial. On average people conformed one third of the time.

However, in a reinterpretation of the original data from these experiments Hodges and Geyer (2006) found that Asch's subjects were not so conformist after all. The experiments provide powerful evidence for people's tendency to tell the truth even when others do not. Also, there are multiple moral claims which include the need for participants to care for the integrity and well-being of other participants, the experimenter, themselves, and the worth of scientific research.

Normative influence is a function of social impact theory which has three components. The *number of people* in the group has a surprising effect. As the number increases, each person has less of an impact. A group's *strength* is how important the group is to a person. Groups we value generally have more social influence. *Immediacy* is how close the group is in time and space when the influence is taking place. Psychologists have constructed a mathematical model using these three factors and are able to predict the amount of conformity that occurs with some degree of accuracy.

Baron and his colleagues conducted a second "eyewitness study", this time focusing on normative influence (Baron, 1996). In this version, the task was made easier. Each participant was given five seconds to look at a slide, instead of just one second. Once again there were both high and low motives to be accurate, but the results were the reverse of the first study. The low motivation group conformed 33% of the time (similar to Asch's findings). The high motivation group conformed less at 16%.

These results show that when accuracy is not very important, it is better to get the wrong answer than to risk social disapproval.

An experiment using procedures similar to Asch's found that there was significantly less conformity in six-person groups of friends as compared to six-person groups of strangers. Because friends already know and accept each other, there may be less normative pressure to conform in some situations. Field studies on cigarette and alcohol abuse, however, generally demonstrate evidence of friends exerting normative social influence on each other.

### 1.3.1.5 Minority Influence and Conformity

Although conformity generally leads individuals to think and act more like groups, individuals are occasionally able to reverse this tendency and change the people around them. This is known as *minority influence*, a special case of informational influence.

Minority influence is most likely when people are able to make a clear and consistent case for their point of view. If the minority fluctuates and shows uncertainty, the chance of influence is small. However, if the minority makes a strong, convincing case, it will increase the probability of changing the beliefs and behaviour of the majority.

Minority members who are perceived as experts, are high in status, or have benefited the group in the past are also more likely to succeed. Another form of

minority influence can sometimes override conformity effects and lead to unhealthy group dynamics. By creating negative emotional climate that interferes with healthy group functioning. They can be avoided by careful selection procedures and managed by reassigning them to positions that require less social interaction.

### 1.3.1.6 Gender and Conformity

Societal norms often establish gender differences. In general, this is the case for social conformity, as females are more likely to conform than males (Reitan & Shaw, 1964).

There are differences in the way men and women conform to social influence. Social psychologists, Alice Eagly and Linda Carli performed a meta-analysis of 148 studies of influenceability. They found that women are more persuasible and more conforming than men in group pressure situations that involve surveillance. In situations not involving surveillance, women are less likely to conform.

In a study by Sistrunk and McDavid at a private university, a public junior college, and at a high school, overall, females were more susceptible to social pressures than males. In fact, females conformed more than males 3 out of 4 times when they were presented masculine questions. Males conformed more than females 2 out of 4 times when they were presented feminine questions.

The composition of the group plays a role in conformity as well. In a study by Reitan and Shaw, it was found that men and women conformed more when there were participants of both sexes involved versus participants of the same sex. Subjects in the groups with both sexes were more apprehensive when there was a discrepancy amongst group members, and thus the subjects reported that they doubted their own judgments. (Reitan & Shaw, 1964).

Normative social influence explains women’s attempt to create the ideal body through dieting, and also by eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Men, in contrast, are likely to pursue their ideal body image through dieting, steroids, and overworking their bodies, rather than developing eating disorders. Both men and women probably learn what kind of body is considered attractive by their culture through the process of informational social influence.

<p><b>Self Assessment Questions</b></p> <p>1) What are the current research in social influence?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>2) What kind of studies have been conducted to understand minority influence?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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3) Give with suitable examples some of the studies conducted in persuasion.

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4) Discuss elaboration likelihood and heuristic systemic models in regard to social influence.

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5) What do you understand by social impact theory and how it has contributed to understanding social influence?

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6) Discuss social influence network theory and the expectation states theory of social influence.

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7) Discuss the various areas of social influence .

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8) Put forward the experiment by Asch on conformity and indicate its significance for social influence.

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## 1.3.2 Compliance

In psychology, compliance refers to the act of responding favourably to an explicit or implicit request offered by others. The request may be explicit, such as a direct request for donations, or implicit, such as an advertisement promoting its products without directly asking for purchase. In all cases, the target recognises that he or she is being urged to respond in a desired way. To study the compliance professions from the inside, Cialdini (2001) joined training programs of a different compliance professions (sales, advertising, public relations, etc.) and started the participant observation. He found that some principles are commonly used to increase the probability of successful compliance, including reciprocation, credibility, liking/friendship, scarcity and social validation.

### 1.3.2.1 Principles Observed by Robert Cialdini

The principles observed by Cialdini include (i) reciprocation, (ii) credibility (iii) Liking / friendship (iv) Scarcity (v) Social validation and (vi) Commitment.

#### 1.3.2.1.1 Reciprocation

Based on the social norm “treat others as you would expect to be treated”, when someone does us a favour, it creates an obligation to accept any reasonable requests he or she might make in return. We feel a motivation to reciprocate. For instance if someone does something for you (such as giving you a compliment), then you feel more obligated to do something for them (buy a product they may be offering). Failing to respond leads to violation of our obligation to reciprocate and bears the risk of social sanction. Guilt arousal produces an increase in compliance. People who are induced to guilt are more likely to comply with a request such as making a phone call to save native trees or donating blood (Darlington, & Macker, 1966).

Research findings supports in that this can be demonstrated by experiment. Participants acted as subjects to answer questions under two conditions. When they answered wrongly, participants acted as shock administrator and delivered shock in condition A . When participants acted as witness, witnessing subjects being shocked in condition B. After a few trials, requests for making calls were made. Results showed that participants in condition A were more likely to comply with the requests by making many more calls (39 calls) than those in condition B (6.5 calls). It is because participants in condition A comply with the requests in order to ward off their guilty feeling.

#### 1.3.2.1.2 Credibility

The source of requests will also affect whether we comply or not. If the source is an expert, with knowledge, abilities or skills, i.e. more credible, we would respect the request more and would be more likely to comply. This principle is used as a marketing strategy, where they put on white lab coats which, from a consumer’s point of view, will symbolise authority.

One of the experiments conducted in this regard invited five hundred university students to join the study about their opinion of sleep. In the first stage, students gave their opinion on the optimum length of sleep and the average result was about eight hours. Then, students received advice from two sources, one was a physiologist who had won a Nobel Prize before and was a specialist on sleep research; the other one was a YMCA instructor.

Clearly, the former one represented a more credible source while the latter one represented a less credible source. Two experts varied their answer about the number of sleeping hours needed every day from eight to zero. Therefore, the discrepancy between the student's answer and the expert's answer increased from zero to eight.

After consulting the experts, students were asked to give their opinion again about the number of sleeping hours. When the experts' opinion was different from that of students, students were more likely to change their own answers after they got the advice from the physiologist (more credible source) than from the YMCA instructor (less credible source). Therefore, a high credibility source makes people more likely to comply. This may explain why advertisements nowadays always quote experts' opinion or construct a sense of expertise by showing a professional figure.

### **1.3.2.1.3 Liking/Friendship**

People are more likely to say yes to those they know and like because of the Social Exchange Theory, which states that human relationships are formed by using a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. Thus, complying with a person we like certainly is more favourable. This principle is used by salesmen all over the world. The principle of liking is common within neighbourhoods, neighbours selling and buying things from each other. When you feel that you trust a person you feel more obliged to buy the thing that they're selling.

In an experiment conducted by Dennis (2006), 115 female and 94 male undergraduate students were requested to complete a questionnaire asking them the degree of intimacy with their partners. Besides, participants were also asked to consider 32 behavioural change messages e.g. smoking cessation, safe sex practice, etc. as if these were delivered to them by their partners and to estimate their effectiveness on a 5-point scale.

The result showed that higher levels of intimacy within romantic relationships are significantly and positively correlated with the estimated success of appeals targeted at health-related behavioural motivations.

### **1.3.2.1.4 Scarcity**

The scarcity effect refers to the influence of perceived scarcity on the subjective desirability of an object. Individuals do not want to be left alone without an item. A consumer often infers value in a product that has limited availability or is promoted as being scarce. The idea of "Limited edition" which can be seen all over the world is based on the principle of scarcity. When we see that an object is limited we feel the urge to buy them in order to not be left out. This also relates to the key explanation to one of the fundamental concepts in economics "Supply and Demand".

A classical experiment was done by Worchel et al. (1975). Jars of chocolate chip cookies were shown to the subjects who were then asked to rate 'how much do you like the cookies', 'how attractive the cookies are' and 'how much would you pay for the cookies'.

Results found that the rating of liking, attractiveness and cost paid were significantly

higher in the scarcity condition in which there were only 2 cookies in the jar than in the abundant condition with 10 cookies in the jar. Therefore, suggesting that the product is scarce or in limited supply is an effective selling method. People are more likely to comply with the salesmen's persuasion and buy the limited edition products as they value more on scarce products.

### 1.3.2.1.5 Social Validation

Social Validation, also called "Principle of Conformity and Consensus", in compliance is a phenomenon in which people are more willing to take a recommended step if they see evidence that many others, especially similar others, are taking it. The human need to fit in is very strong and tends to make us comply in order to be a part of the majority.

Schultz (1999) had conducted a "Field Experiment on Curbside Recycling" to observe participants' curbside recycling behaviours for 17 weeks with different interventions. In the experiment, 5 conditions namely, 'plea', 'plea plus information', 'plea plus neighbourhood feedback', 'plea plus individual household feedback', or the control condition are observed.

Among these conditions, the 'Plea plus neighborhood feedback' condition in which subjects receive the total amount of each material collected for the duration of the study and the percentage of households participated that week, shows the most long lasting participation during post-intervention. This unveils the underlying strong influence of social validation in compliance.

On business front, manufacturers often persuade purchase by claiming that their products are the fastest growing or best selling in the market. Cialdini (2001) has pointed out that this strategy of enhancing compliance by providing information of others who had already complied was the most widely used principle he encountered.

### 1.3.2.1.6 Commitment

Commitment to a store or a company induced by loyalty cards or bonuses can make it harder for a person to change where they shop or what they purchase.

### 1.3.2.2 Four Compliance Strategies

Compliance is known to be enhanced by a number of situational manipulations such as:

- 1 Foot-in-the-door technique
- 1 Door-in-the-face technique
- 1 Low-Ball
- 1 Ingratiation

#### 1.3.2.2.1 Foot-in-the-door technique

Foot-in-the-door technique (FITD) is a compliance tactic that involves getting a person to agree to a large request by first setting them up by having that person agreeing to a modest request.

In a study, a team of psychologists telephoned housewives in California and asked

if the women would answer a few questions about the household products they used. Three days later, the psychologists called again. This time, they asked if they could send five or six men into the house to go through cupboards and storage places as part of a 2-hr enumeration of household products. The investigators found these women were more than twice as likely to agree to the 2-hr request as a group of housewives asked only the larger request. Numerous experiments have shown that foot-in-the-door tactics work well in persuading people to comply, especially if the request is a pro-social request. Research has shown that FITD techniques work over the computer via email, in addition to face-to-face requests.

### **Examples**

*“Can I go over to Sita’s house for an hour?”* followed by *“Can I stay the night?”*

*“Can I borrow the car for 1 day?”* followed by *“Can I borrow the car for the weekend?”*

*“Would you sign this petition for our cause?”* followed by *“Would you donate to our cause?”*

*“May I return the magazine a few hours late?”* followed by *“May I return it in next week?”*

#### **1.3.2.2.2 Door-in-the-face technique**

The door-in-the-face (DITF) technique is a persuasion method. Compliance with the request of concern is enhanced by first making an extremely large request that the respondent will obviously turn down, with a metaphorical slamming of a door in the persuader’s face. The respondent is then more likely to accede to a second, more reasonable request than if this second request were made without the first, extreme request. Cialdini (Cialdini, 2001) suggests that this is a form of reciprocity, e.g. the [induced] sharp negative response to the first request creates a sense of debt or guilt that the second request offers to clear. Alternately, a reference point (or framing) construal may explain this phenomenon, as the initial bad offer sets a reference point from which the second offer looks like an improvement.

One of the classic experiments to test the door in the face technique is where Cialdini asked students to volunteer to counsel juvenile delinquents for two hours a week for two years. After their refusal, they were asked to chaperone juvenile delinquents on a one-day trip to the zoo. 50% agreed to chaperone the trip to the zoo as compared to 17% of participants who only received the zoo request.

### **Examples**

Other examples of the door-in-the-face technique include:

*“Will you donate Rs.1000 to our organization?” [Response is no].  
“Oh. Well, could you donate Rs.10 ?”*

*“Can you help me do all this work?”*

*“Well, can you help me with this bit?”*

#### **1.3.2.2.3 Low-Ball Technique**

**Process of Social Influence**

The low-ball is a persuasion and selling technique in which an item or service is offered at a lower price than is actually intended to be charged, after which the price is raised to increase profits.

A successful low-ball relies on the balance of making the initial request attractive enough to gain agreement, whilst not making the second request so outrageous that the customer refuses.

First propose an attractive price on an idea/item which you are confident that the other person/buyer will accept.

Maximise their buy-in, in particular by getting both verbal and public commitment to this, e.g. down payment or hand-shaking. Make it clear that the decision to purchase is from their own free will.

Change the agreement to what you really want. The person/buyer may complain, but they should agree to the change if the low-ball is managed correctly.

The experimenters asked students to participate in an experiment. 56% agreed, before being told that the experiment started at 7am. They then told the volunteers that the study was scheduled at 7am, and the volunteers could withdraw if they wished. None did so, and 95% turned up at the scheduled time (the Low-Ball group). When a control group were asked to participate and were told the unsocial timing of the experiment up front, only 24% agreed to participate.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1) In regard to Compliance, what are principles observed by Cialdini? Support your arguments with research findings.

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2) What is credibility? Discuss credibility factor as influencing compliance. Give evidence in terms of research findings.

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3) How does liking or friendship affect a person's compliance? Give suitable evidences and examples.

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4) What is meant by scarcity factor? How does it contribute to compliance?

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5) Describe and discuss each of the four compliance strategies. FIDT, DIFT, LBT

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### 1.3.3 Obedience

Obedience is a form of social influence where an individual acts in response to a direct order from another individual, who is usually an authority figure. It is assumed that without such an order the person would not have acted in this way. Obedience occurs when you are told to do something (authority), whereas conformity happens through social pressure (the norms of the majority). Obedience involves a hierarchy of power/status.

Therefore, the person giving the order has a higher status than the person receiving the order. Obedience is the act of obeying orders from others.

As humans we are indoctrinated to obey authority figures. This training begins from the moment of birth as we are reliant on our parents to take care of our every need, in turn being subservient to our authority figure or parents. As we begin to mature and are thrust into society we obtain more influential authority figures from outside the household.

Schools have a system of order and authority. Teachers give us guidance and direction academically and even socially because we begin to learn how to act in a group or societal setting. The school environment is all a preparation for careers.

When we begin working most of us work for a company or organisation with all levels of management who we must be obedient to. As we mature we are given more and more responsibility over our actions and judgments, thus making it more beneficial to our societal advancement to be obedient. Stanley Milgram, a famous social psychologist, performs a number of experiments on human obedience in the 1960's.

Obedience, in human behaviour, is the quality of being obedient, which describes the act of carrying out commands, or being actuated. Obedience differs from compliance, which is behaviour influenced by peers, and from conformity, which is behaviour intended to match that of the majority. Humans have been shown to be surprisingly obedient in the presence of perceived legitimate authority figures, as demonstrated by the Milgram experiment in the 1960s, which was carried out by Stanley Milgram to discover how the Nazis managed to get ordinary people

to take part in the mass murders of the Holocaust. The experiment showed that obedience to authority was the norm, not the exception

### **1.3.3.1 Forms of Obedience**

Obedience is the tendency to follow orders given by an authority figure. This can be explained by Milgram's Agency Theory, which states that we are in either one of two states. Forms of human obedience include:

- 1 obedience to laws;
- 1 obedience to social norms;
- 1 obedience to a monarch, government, organisation, religion, or church;
- 1 obedience to God;
- 1 obedience to self-imposed constraints, such as a vow of chastity;
- 1 obedience of a spouse or child to a husband/wife or parent respectively;
- 1 obedience to management in the workplace.

### **1.3.3.2 Cultural Attitudes to Obedience**

Obedience is regarded as a virtue in many traditional cultures; historically, children have been expected to be obedient to their elders, slaves to their owners, serfs to their lords in feudal society, lords to their king, and everyone to God. Even long after slavery ended in the United States, the Black codes required black people to obey and submit to whites, on pain of lynching.

In some Christian weddings, obedience was formally included along with honor and love as part of a conventional bride's (but not the bridegroom's) wedding vow. This came under attack with women's suffrage and the feminist movement. Today its inclusion in marriage vows is optional in some denominations.

As the middle classes have gained political power, the power of authority has been progressively eroded, with the introduction of democracy as a major turning point in attitudes to obedience and authority.

Since the democides and genocides of the First World War and Second World War periods, obedience has come to be regarded as a far less desirable quality in Western cultures. The civil rights and protest movements in the second half of the twentieth century marked a remarkable reduction in respect for authority in Western cultures, and greater respect for individual ethical judgment as a basis for moral decisions.

### **1.3.3.3 Obedience Training of Human Beings**

Some animals can easily be trained to be obedient by employing operant conditioning, for example obedience schools exist to condition dogs into obeying the orders of human owners. Obedience training seems to be particularly effective on social animals a category that includes human beings; other animals do not respond well to such training.

Learning to obey adult rules is a major part of the socialisation process in childhood, and many techniques are used by adults to modify the behaviour of children. Additionally, extensive training is given in armies to make soldiers capable of

obeying orders in situations where an untrained person would not be willing to follow orders. Soldiers are initially ordered to do seemingly trivial things, such as picking up the sergeant's hat off the floor, marching in just the right position, or marching and standing in formation. The orders gradually become more demanding, until an order to the soldiers to place themselves into the midst of gunfire gets a knee-jerk obedient response.

#### 1.3.3.4 Experimental Studies of Human Obedience

Obedience has been extensively studied by psychologists since the Second World War — the Milgram Experiment and the Stanford Prison Experiment are the most commonly cited experimental studies of human obedience, while the Hofling hospital experiment was an early field experiment (Hofling CK et al., 1966)

The Milgram experiments, the first of which was carried out in 1961, were the earliest investigations of the power of authority figures as well as the lengths to which participants would go as a result of their influence. Milgram's results showed that, contrary to expectations, a majority of civilian volunteers would obey orders to apply electric shocks to another person until they were unconscious or dead. Prior to these experiments, most of Milgram's colleagues had predicted that only sadists would be willing to follow the experiment to their conclusion.

Obedience is a basic human trait and is a deeply ingrained behaviour. Some form of obedience is a requirement for function in modern society. The Milgram shock experiment proves these characteristics. The experiments first took place at Yale University and eventually involved over one thousand participants from all walks of life.

Two individuals were to enter a psychology laboratory and take part in a study of memory and learning. One of them was to be the teacher and the other the student. The student was instructed to learn a list of word pairs and whenever the student made a mistake would receive an electric shock of increasing intensity. However the focus of the experiment is the teacher. The teacher watches the student being strapped into place and then taken to a shock generator. The shock generator features switches ranging from 15 to 450 volts in 15 volt increments. If the student gets the answer correct the teacher is to move on to the next problem. If the answer is wrong the teacher is to shock the student beginning with 15 volts.

The teacher, being the focus of the experiment, does not know that the student is not really being shocked and that the student is really an actor. Each time the student answers incorrectly and is shocked, he pretends to be shocked. As the teacher watches the student being tortured by the electric shocks, he continues to follow the orders he was instructed. The experiment proves that obedience is something humans teach one another and follow through with.

Milgram thinks the problems lies in the structure of society, people are just following orders of superiors and are not directly responsible for his or her actions.

Also, Milgram himself had already conducted several studies, which had shown that obedience tended to increase with the prestige of the authority figure. In these studies, an undergraduate research assistant posing as a Yale professor had a much greater influence than did someone of lesser status, regardless of the prestige of the institution in which the study was based.

### 1.3.3.4.1 The Stanford Prison Experiment

Unlike the Milgram experiment, which studied the obedience of individuals, the 1971 Stanford prison experiment studied the behaviour of people in groups, and in particular the willingness of people to obey orders and adopt abusive roles in a situation where they were placed in the position of being submissive or dominant by a higher authority.

In the experiment, a group of volunteers was divided into two groups and placed in a “prison,” with one group in the position of playing prison guards, and other group in the position of “prisoners”.

In this case, the experimenters acted as authority figures at the start of the experiment, but then delegated responsibility to the “guards,” who enthusiastically followed the experimenters’ instructions, and in turn assumed the roles of abusive authority figures, eventually going far beyond the experimenters’ original instruction in their efforts to dominate and brutalize the “prisoners.” At the same time, the prisoners adopted a submissive role with regard to their tormentors, even though they knew that they were in an experiment, and that their «captors» were other volunteers, with no actual authority other than that being role-played in the experiment.

The Stanford experiment demonstrated not only obedience (of the “guards” to the experimenters, and the “prisoners” to both the guards and experimenters), but also high levels of compliance and conformity.

### 1.3.3.4.2 The Hofling Hospital Experiment

Both the Milgram and Stanford experiments were conducted in experimental circumstances. In 1966, psychiatrist Charles K. Hofling published the results of a field experiment on obedience in the nurse-physician relationship in its natural hospital setting. Nurses, unaware they were taking part in an experiment, were ordered by unknown doctors to administer dangerous doses of a (fictional) drug to their patients. Although several hospital rules disallowed administering the drug under the circumstances, 21 out of the 22 nurses would have given the patient an overdose of medicine.

### 1.3.3.4.3 Factors that Increase Obedience

Milgram found that subjects were more likely to obey in some circumstances than others. Obedience was highest when:

- 1 Commands were given by an authority figure rather than another volunteer
- 1 The experiments were done at a prestigious institution
- 1 The authority figure was present in the room with the subject
- 1 The learner was in another room
- 1 The subject did not see other subjects disobeying commands

In everyday situations, people obey orders because they want to get rewards, because they want to avoid the negative consequences of disobeying, and because they believe an authority is legitimate. In more extreme situations, people obey even when they are required to violate their own values or commit crimes. Researchers think several factors cause people to carry obedience to extremes:

People justify their behaviour by assigning responsibility to the authority rather than themselves.

People define the behaviour that's expected of them as routine.

People don't want to be rude or offend the authority.

People obey easy commands first and then feel compelled to obey more and more difficult commands. This process is called entrapment, and it illustrates the foot-in-the-door phenomenon.

Stanley Milgram has pointed out a human characteristic that may very well be in each and every one of us. These experiments show us that ordinary people will go to any length to be subservient to an authority figure, no matter the moral dilemma. Only when we can differentiate between being a good subject and having good morals will we be able to make a distinction between being obedient and committing crimes by our own individual actions.

**Self Assessment Questions**

1) What are the various forms of obedience?

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2) How are humans trained to obey?

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3) What factors influence obedience? Put forward experimental studies on humans in regard to obedience.

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4) Describe the Milgram experiment . What did you learn from it in regard to obedience?

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5) What factors increase obedience?

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## 1.4 LET US SUM UP

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Social influence is the change in behaviour that one person causes in another, intentionally or unintentionally, as a result of the way the changed person perceives themselves in relationship to the influencer, other people and society in general. Social influence can also be defined as the process by which individuals make real changes to their feelings and behaviours as a result of interaction with others who are perceived to be similar, desirable, or expert. Three areas of social influence are conformity, compliance and obedience. *Conformity* is changing how you behave to be more like others. This plays to belonging and esteem needs as we seek the approval and friendship of others. Conformity can run very deep, as we will even change our beliefs and values to be like those of our peers and admired superiors. *Compliance* is where a person does something that they are asked to do by another. They may choose to comply or not to comply, although the thoughts of social reward and punishment may lead them to compliance when they really do not want to comply. *Obedience* is different from compliance in that it is obeying an order from someone that you accept as an authority figure. In compliance, you have some choice. In obedience, you believe that you do not have a choice. Many military officers and commercial managers are interested only in obedience.

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## 1.5 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) Define the term Social Influence and discuss its various types.
- 2) Describe the factors associated with conformity.
- 3) describe in detail the Asch's study on conformity.
- 4) What do you mean by compliance? Discuss various factors leading to compliance.
- 5) Describe the Stanford Prison experiment and indicate its contribution in understanding obedience.
- 6) What is the significance of Hofling Hospital experiment? Discuss the same in the context of obedience.

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