

Dynamic Social Psychology in Group Interaction Patterns and Their Influence on Conformity and Identification

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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received February 06, 2024 Revised April 29, 2024 Accepted June 25, 2024 <i>Keywords:</i> Social Psychology, Conformity Behaviour, Group Identification.	<i>The proposed study explores the relations and interactions of social psychology when applied to groups of people, that is, how people behave conformingly and how they identify with their groups. The aim was to investigate how people are converging with the norms of groups, and how individuals are examining the effect that identification with groups has on convergence. This research was conducted under the form of a quantitative correlational study using a structured questionnaire, which was applied to 320 students in a university actively working on group based academic and extracurricular activities. Verified measures addressed conformity tendency and group identification, and interaction pattern, whereas correlation, regression, and ANOVA tests were used to gauge correlation, difference between demographical and disciplinary groups. The results have indicated the existence of a strong positive correlation between group identification to conductive behavior as well as interaction patterns that also became significant predictors. This set of variables combined contributed to 42 percent of variance in conformity which shows that psychology and group level forces play a significant role in the conformity. Disciplinary differences still indicated that conformity is not universal but it varies depending on the circumstances. It is interesting to note that gender and age were not significant predictors indicating that conformity is more of a social identity process than a demographic factor. These findings have great theoretical and practical implications. They are further sharpening the Social Identity Theory due to the active process of negotiation of belonging and autonomy within modern group dynamics, including in digital and hybrid settings. Practically, the paper provides organizational leaders, educators and policymakers with the information about how they can influence constructive identification and reduce the occurrence risks of over conformity. The positioning of conformity in the context of a changing social and cultural environment develops the body of knowledge in the field of study and also offers applicable information that can be used in managing collective behaviors.</i>

Introduction

Social psychology plays a prominent role in the society in the study of how members of a society act, think, and feel as the members are organized in groups. The human interaction has never been individualistic because other people always influence how a person makes numerous decisions since human beings are not reclusive agents. Social psychology offers the instruments to identify the nature of the social influence, conformity and the group identification and how they mediate individual behavior in individuals and the dynamics of a group. The significance of such processes became rather obvious within the past several decades, when the processes of globalization, digital levels of communication, and alterations in the societal norms have turned the way in which people interact with each other, identify themselves with particular groups, and react to social pressions to the new reality (Granovetter,

2017; Dutton & Ragins, 2017). Conformity is one of the most long-lasting processes in the domain of social psychology. Conformity can be broadly characterized as a change of attitudes or behavior with the aim of adjusting that change to fit group norms. The potential influence of group dynamics in decision-making and thinking has been proved by classic studies, i.e., those that were conducted in the twenties by Asch (the middle of the past century). In the modern setting, conforming has taken new and multifaceted forms as a result of social media, web-based societies, and worldwide systems of interaction (Spears, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2021). With people spending more time in the blurred realities between physical and virtual worlds, the conventions previously understood to maintain tradition and conformity are redesigned and new possibilities of coexistence can be realized, as well as new risks of sterilization.

The theory of group identification is closely linked with conformity since it entails the amalgamation of particular segments of people with certain groups following particular groups of values, goals or characteristics. Group identification is also an effective motivating factor and can have an impact as an attitude and behavioral basis. The Social Identity Theory focuses on views of in-group/out-group relationships by outlining how group membership is enshrined in the self-concept of a person (Albarelo et al., 2018; Shiraev & Levy, 2020). The relationship between conformity and group identification is specifically such that both the individuality and personal autonomy is required to find a place in collective setting, as well as in looking to gain recognition and acceptance in a group.

The importance of study concerning conformity and group identification is reflected in different sectors of the society. Under organizational circumstances, adherence to occupational expectations and adherence to organizational ideals are significant factors of staff involvement, output, and general group functioning. Nevertheless, this very strong conformity can kill creativity and innovation and lead to groupthink and poor decision-making (Tilly et al., 2022; Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). The balance between conformity and individuality in educational institutions affects the way students interact with one another and the teachers and has a direct bearing on the academic performance as well as the development of the critical thinking capability in them (Paul & Elder, 2019). At the community level, conformity and group identification are all critical elements of social cohesion, which can also entrench the concept of exclusionary practices and stereotyping in communities unless, it is subjected to a critical analysis (Marrone & Hazelton, 2019; Nair & Selvaraj, 2021).

Such dynamics are rather more complicated now in the digital age. The use of social media enhances the salience of the group norms and provides uninterrupted opportunities of social comparison. They can satisfy the expectations of the online communities in search of social acceptance but also to prevent social rejection like being ostracized or publicly criticized (Collins & Halverson, 2018). Online interactions are used to strengthen the sense of group identification with the hashtag, online movements, and online identity becoming a symbol of belonging to a group and adherence to particular values (Farrow et al., 2017). The concomitants of these phenomena speak to the need to situate studies of conformity and group identification in the changing environment of technology.

The ethical issues of the study of conformity and group identification concern autonomy and agency and the ability to manipulate. There can be coercion and loss of individual voice to the advantages of group dynamics that can promote strength of unity and collective responsibility. The concept of groupthink is a case in point that shows how overemphasis on adherence encourages a faulty decision-making process of suppressing any views that are opposed to it (Pillai et al., 2017). Appreciating the above ethical aspects is the key to facilitating responsible

leadership, democracy, and informed decision making across various settings in the society (Jamieson et al., 2019).

The modern society of today that is globalized makes these issues that more relevant. In a progressively heterogeneous and interdependent world, persons are exposed to various collective principles and have to live with the problem of cross-cultural agency. Such ways in which conformity and group identification play out depending on the cultural context show us common processes determining how individuals behave as well as location-specific variations due to culture, values, and societal structures (Shirayev & Levy, 2020; Nair & Selvaraj, 2021). The analysis of these dynamics will help scholars to have a better picture in regard to how globalization is transforming identity, belonging, and conformity, which are related to wider debates on cultural integration and social harmony.

Besides, the applied potential of the studying conformity and group identification is high. To leaders, managers, and policymakers, the role that individuals play as individuals in groups is also critical in intervention designs, inclusive community-building efforts, and building firm resilience (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019). Group dynamics can also help educators better understand how to support independent thinking and cooperation by providing them with the necessary means to do so (Paul & Elder, 2019). When considering the larger communities, understanding how conformity and group identification work is key to solving issues like misinformation, polarization, and mass decision-making in the democratic process (Granovetter, 2017; Spears, 2021).

The study of the conformity conducts and group identification in the larger context of dynamic social psychology has theoretical as well as practical value. It deepens academic knowledge on the processes that dictate human interaction at the social level as well as providing practical knowledge that can be implemented at organizational, learning and societal levels. By placing this exploration within the changing realities of globalization and digital transformation, the study will add to the current debate on how individuals can reconcile a sense of autonomy and belonging in a world in which the interaction of groups has become more complex and omnipresent than it ever has before. In the process, it reaffirms the critical importance of social psychology in all it does to understand and then to respond effectively to the complex challenge and opportunity of collective living (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Dutton & Ragins, 2017).

Method

Research Design

The research design of this study was quantitative and correlational and predictive in nature to study the relationship between conformity behavior and group identification in the dynamic group interaction patterns. Quantitative method was selected in order to provide systematic measure of variables and statistical methods should be used to test hypothesis and establishment of strength and direction of relationship. The correlational study design enabled the researcher to examine the relationship between conformity and group identification and regression analysis was used to review predictions of group dynamics on the outcomes of conformity. This design was suitable because it gave both descriptive and inferential information meaning that inferences could be drawn to the general population of the study.

Population and Sampling

The study population was the students of a university who participated in the academic or extracurricular workgroup with each other. This population was chosen due to the fact that students often work in organized group conditions where compliance and identification are very evident. A stratified random sampling method was used in selecting a sample in this

population, to get the representation proportional in the different faculties, across gender and year level. The scaled down sample totaled 320 observations, which was more than the minimum sample size estimated a priori power analysis, and thus, the findings had enough statistical power to detect medium effect at 0.05 significance level. This sampling plan limited the biasness and maximized representativeness of the results allowing one to make valid conclusions about the relationship between conformity behavior and group identification.

Research Instruments

The collected data were based on a structured questionnaire that consists of three major sections. The initial section entailed demographic data, i.e. age, gender, academic year, and faculty, that could act as the control in the analysis. The second was the measure of conformity behavior, adapted to our own conditions, on the basis of the Conformity Scale developed in former valid studies. Items measured the tendency of respondents to direct their attitudes, decisions, and behaviors towards group norms, on a five-point Likert scale graded 1-5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The third part dedicated attention to group identification which is based on a framework by Tajfel and Turner of the Social Identity Scale. This section determined how much the respondents identified with their group, were proud of their group, and felt like they belonged to their group. Moreover, a measure of the interaction patterns of the group dynamics was derived upon the earlier work of small-group communication research, including aspects on participation, cohesion, and leadership dynamics. The pilot-testing of the questionnaire that consisted of the administration on 30 students was conducted to test clarity, reliability, and validity of the instrument.

Validity and Reliability Testing

In order to ascertain the rigor of the instrument, a number of procedures were carried out. Construct validity was tested using exploration factor analysis (EFA) and it was found that the items loaded into the individual constructs of conformity behavior, group identification and patterns of group interaction. Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to calculate levels of internal consistency reliability, with all the subscales having alpha values of 0.80 and above. The validity of content was determined by examining the questionnaire items with the help of three professionals in the field who examined the items in the context of their relevance, clarity and congruence with theoretical concepts. These procedures gave assurance that the tool was appropriate to measure the variables of interest.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was done in a span of four weeks. Institutional approval and informing all the participants about the research were done prior to administering the questionnaire in order to comply to the principles of ethics. The questionnaires were administered during classes in printed form and online using a secure online survey system in order to take into consideration the preferences and timeframes of the participants. The instructions were clear and anonymity was assured in order to limit social desirability bias. The average participant spent time completing questionnaire within 15-20 minutes. Respondents who returned the filled questionnaires were confirmed as having completed the questionnaire and none of the partially completed questionnaires were used in the analysis to uphold data integrity.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed both statistically (descriptive and inferential). Descriptives such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were applied in describing the demographic variables and give an overview of the conformity and group identification levels. To provide inferential statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients were used to analyze the

direction and the strength of relationships between conformity and group identification. To check predictive relationships, multiple regression analysis was done where conformity behavior of the subjects was dependent variables and adoption of group identification and patterns of group interaction as the independent variables. Moreover, one-way ANOVAs were used to investigate the possible significance of demographic background factors comprising of gender and age, and academic disciplines on the levels of conformity. The statistical analyses were done using SPSS software with $p < 0.05$ as the level of significance.

Result and Discussion

By distributing these corroborated measurement scales and deploying sound statistical methodology, these research designs aim not only at determining the existence of relationships among each of these elements, but also the explanatory power of each relationship, or contextual variability. This will present an opportunity to assess in greater detail whether conformity is a by-product of interpersonal processes or social identity processes at a deeper level. The results outlined below are thus put forward with the double objective of explaining the magnitude and direction of these relations as well as shedding light on the degree to which demographic and disciplinary differences affect the variation in conformity behaviour.

Table 1. Correlation between Conformity Behavior, Group Identification, and Group Interaction Patterns

Variables	1	2	3
1. Conformity Behavior	—		
2. Group Identification	0.54	—	
3. Group Interaction Patterns	0.47	0.59	—

The Pearson correlation test reflects an intense positive correlation between the conformity behavior and group identification ($r = 0.54$, $p = 0.0001$). It means that, the stronger a person feels an affiliation to a group, the more likely he or she will conform to the norms of the group. Group interaction patterns were also moderately correlated with conformity ($r = 0.47$, $p = 0.001$), such that more constructively cohesive and participative interaction makes group conformity levels higher. A direct correlation was found with the strongest correlation by group identification and interaction patterns ($r = 0.59$, $p = 0.001$), which means that group identification is closely linked with positive group interactions.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Predicting Conformity Behavior

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Group Identification	0.41	0.05	0.46	8.20	0.0001
Group Interaction Patterns	0.29	0.06	0.31	4.83	0.0001
Gender (control)	-0.05	0.04	-0.04	-1.22	0.23
Age (control)	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.67	0.50

The regression analysis shows that the group identification ($b = 0.46$, $p = 0.0001$) and group interaction patterns ($b = 0.31$, $p = 0.0001$) are predictive variable of conformity behavior. The total variance in the conformity behavior was decreased by these variables by about 42% which is a high percentage in social psychology research. Gender and age were not significant predictors of conformity indicating that adherence to our norm is more highly determined by psychological and group membership variables rather than their individual attributes.

Table 3. ANOVA Results for Conformity Behavior by Academic Discipline

Source	SS	d	MS	F	p
Between Groups	5.62	3	1.87	5.84	0.0001
Within Groups	102.38	316	0.32		
Total	108.00	319			

ANOVA results indicate there is a significant difference in the conformity behavior across different academic disciplines ($F(3, 316) = 5.84, p = 0.0001$). It indicates that the nature of the academic background makes a difference when it comes to the level of conformity among students. A post-hoc analysis (not shown here) would probably have revealed, say, the fact that social science students are more susceptible to group norms than engineering or arts students, an effect of the influence of disciplinary culture on social psychological processes.

Conformity, Identification, and the Negotiated Boundaries of Collective Life

The results of this research are enlightening as they point out to a long-standing paradox of social psychology people being individualistic and belonging at the same time. By showing that group identification and the pattern of group interaction is predictive regarding conformity, the study supports the notion that even an individual role of identity is a negotiated outcome of a collective process (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Albarello et al., 2018). The stake here is not only about whether or not the individuals align themselves with group norms but also how this alignment maintains institutional logics, organizational cultures, as well as digital community structures (Spears, 2021; Charness & Chen, 2020). This highlights that conformity is not so much a submission but a entitative form of relationship although consistency can sometimes inhibit innovativeness because it arises through identification (Pillai et al., 2017; Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019).

The implications are powerful on an organizational practice level. Adherence to environments that recognize unity, establishes a sense of efficiency and predictability, which is central to intricate integration (Steffens et al., 2021; Dutton & Ragins, 2017). Yet, when the values and assumptions turn into blind groupthink, the costs of such conformity are high, and such times of over-conformity are abundant in high-risk industries such as finance, healthcare or policy-making (Janis, 1982; Jamieson et al., 2019). This resonates with Tilly et al. (2022) who show that the lack of reflective opposition to structural coherency can lead to the sourcing of stagnant labor and policies that are not reformable. Rulers thus need to skillfully balance the interaction pattern that fosters commitment but also codifies intra-organizational space to allow principled dissent (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019; Steffens et al., 2021).

Such dynamics are evident in educational systems in a number of enabling and constraining ways. Although conformity may bring a sense of collaborative education and collective responsibility (Paul & Elder, 2019), too much norm-following will eliminate doubt and independent thinking (Collins & Halverson, 2018; Williams, 2019). The study by Fadilla et al. (2020) revealed that the peer group norms were an inordinate influence on students' careers, which begs the question of whether conformity can be considered to meet the developmental needs of individuals or act as a form of disowning their true agency. This complexifies the hypothesis that group identification should be beneficial in all cases; instead, the educators should develop pedagogical interventions combining their concepts with the systematic opportunities of intellectual independence (Ramzan et al., 2023; Marrone & Hazelton, 2019).

The online evolution of the society increases these tensions. These online communities ramp up the social pressure of conformity, given the amplification strategy of the algorithms, such that the influence of social norms spreads far beyond the real-life group (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Collins & Halverson, 2018). Online labeling identifiers (hashtags and other iterations of online

movements and symbolic signaling) are emergent forms of belongingness (Farrow et al., 2017; Soraa et al., 2023). However, at the same time, people are occluded in polarization and echo chambers, leading to the self-confirmation and identity affirmation around self-reinforcing cycles of conformity (Granovetter, 2017; Spears, 2021). Therefore, to determine whether conformity still exists during the digital age, one has to re-theorize the concept of social influence in the technologically mediated situation, rather than referring to classical frameworks.

An additional implication is on the cross-cultural lens. Nair & Selvaraj (2021) indicated that reactions to conformity during the COVID-19 pandemic were polar apart in different nations with collective and individualist cultures. In a similar vein, Shiraev & Levy (2020) recommend that the notion of conformity cannot be approached and seen as a universal mechanism but is part of culturally specific logics of authority, obligation, and selfhood. The findings of the present study, taking place within a student population, are to be understood within the context of disciplinary and cultural backgrounds since the ANOVA results imply that disciplinary culture has measurable effects on conformity. This contextualizes conformity not as a broadly based pattern of action but as an educationally and institutionally mediated practice (Andrew et al., 2019; Conrad & Tucker, 2019).

Ethically, the paper makes scholars and practitioners introspect about the antagonism of conformity. On the one hand, it creates solidarity and shared responsibility that is vital to democratic engagement and taking action jointly (Farrow et al., 2017; Jamieson et al., 2019). On the one hand, it provides AI with the possibility to enforce the relationships and gain access to information paying high prices in terms of manipulation, coercion, and silencing the opponents of views (Pillai et al., 2017). In organizational and political contexts, conformity can be used as a subtle tool of control with compliance seeming to be a free choice of identification (Charness & Chen, 2020). This presents normative questions about the limits of the influence of leadership and the ethical responsibility of their protection of individual agency within collectives of individuals (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019; Steffens et al., 2021).

The findings require the treatment of Social Identity Theory and the related frameworks. The excellent predictive ability of group identification points at the fact that conformity cannot be a mere external pressure because it presupposes self-categorization and internalization of group norms (Spears, 2021; Steffens et al., 2021). We should, however, think twice when assuming stable group boundaries because of the recent rise of digital and hybrid communities (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Marrone & Hazelton, 2019). In these regards, identification can be temporary, pitch-performance-based or can be negotiated, and there is the necessity to provide theoretical frameworks that matters over fluid and conflating group memberships.

Relevance of the study to the society cannot be understated. At a time when misinformation, polarization, and populist mobilization are at the forefront, belonging to a group and following the group has become even more important in order to build resilience of the democratic process (Granovetter, 2017; Spears, 2021). Those policymakers who develop strategies to counter the effects of disinformation, educators who promote critical thinking, and the heads of an organization who establish more inclusive cultures must all contend with the dual nature of conformity: it can bind a collective together, and it can bind it like a shackle. The present scholarship, therefore, serves to advance a larger intellectual agenda of rethinking the concept of conformity out of the context of mid-century psychology into a powerful tool of explaining social behavior in the 21 st century (Dutton & Ragins, 2017; Charness & Chen, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This paper contributes to further understanding of the relationship between conformity behavior and group identification in the ever-changing society especially a structured group setting in a university. The results indicate that the identification with groups and interaction patterns are not extra facultative aspects but are core determinants of conformity since they explain much of its variance. Such evidence helps to attribute the conformity to the psychological investment in the belonging of a group rather than the social pressure. The impacts go beyond academic settings into managers in institutions, schools and even society. Leaders need to be aware that promotion of identification works to strengthen organization cohesion but may as well muzzle criticism and innovation. Conformity is part of the process learning environment in educational settings since it facilitates cooperation at the expense of individual judgment and critical thinking, and therefore educational designs should be crafted with a keen balance. In the wider community, online communities and algorithmic exposure increase conformity pressures with online communities, polarization, echo chambers and the health of democracies becoming areas of major concern. Both conceptually and practically, the research illustrates the continued utility of Social Identity Theory and the need to modulate time-honored systems in regard to hybrid, dynamic, and technology-mediated forms of group membership. The cultural evidence suggests that conformity cannot be universalized but should be discursively placed within disciplinary, institutional or cross-cultural locales. This work will ultimately be relevant in theory and practice as evidence that conformity is not a mere passive adaptation but a self-negotiation of who they are, where they belong, and how they have autonomy. What these dynamics offer is insight and understanding to scholars, educators, leaders, and policymakers who have to navigate through the intrigues of collective life in the 21-set century.

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