

The Relationship Between Conformity and Comprehensive Thinking Styles Among Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

Conformity, a pervasive social phenomenon, refers to the tendency of individuals to adjust their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours to match those of a majority or authoritative group. It is a type of social influence that involves altering one's beliefs or actions in order to blend in with the group. On the other hand, comprehensive thinking styles involve analytical and integrative cognitive approaches that prioritise thorough examination and independent evaluation of information. The primary objective of this study is to explore whether there exists a connection between an individual's propensity to conform and their preference for comprehensive thinking styles. It seeks to identify the underlying cognitive mechanisms that drive conformity behaviour and determine whether these mechanisms are compatible with comprehensive thinking patterns or in tension with them. This study examines the relationship between comprehensive thinking style and conformity. The sample data consisted of 145 emerging and budding adults who fall between the age of 18 to 25. These participants were from different colleges. The tools used in the study are Conformity Scale (CS) and Comprehensive Thinking Style Questionnaire (CTSQ). Data were analysed using SPSS. Spearman Rho correlation was used to find the correlation. The findings showed that there is a significant positive relationship between comprehensive thinking styles and conformity ($p < 0.01$). The result also showed a positive correlation between conformity and one of the subscales of comprehensive thinking styles, i.e. preference for effortful thinking.

Keywords: Conformity, Comprehensive Thinking Style, Emerging adults, Actively Open-Minded Thinking, Closed-Minded Thinking, Intuitive Thinking, Effortful Thinking

INTRODUCTION

Conformity and comprehensive thinking styles are two intriguing psychological concepts that have significant implications for individuals aged 18 to 25. This stage of life is marked by various challenges and opportunities as young adults transition from adolescence to adulthood. During this critical period, individuals face increased pressures to conform to social norms, expectations, and peer influences, while also developing their cognitive abilities to process information in a more comprehensive and sophisticated manner.

Conformity is the pressure to behave as wanted by a group or following the group (Dewi et al.). It is a fundamental aspect of human social behaviour, and its influence is particularly pronounced during

the late adolescence and early adulthood years when young individuals strive for acceptance and belonging in their social groups. Even when it seems to have little to do with achieving a stated goal, we display startling levels of conformity to other people's beliefs and frequently over-imitate their conduct. The desire to conform can lead to both positive outcomes, such as fostering social cohesion, and negative consequences, such as stifling creativity and independent thinking.

Comprehensive thinking styles, on the other hand, involve the ability to approach problems, decisions, and situations. It consists of open-minded thinking, close-minded thinking, preference for intuitive thinking and preference for effortful thinking. These cognitive traits allow young adults to gather information, consider multiple perspectives, and critically evaluate various options before arriving at well-informed conclusions. Comprehensive thinkers are more likely to resist conforming blindly and are more receptive to questioning established norms and exploring new ideas.

In this age group, the interplay between conformity and comprehensive thinking can significantly impact personal development, decision-making, and the formation of identity. Peer pressure and societal expectations can pose challenges to the development of independent thinking, potentially hindering the emergence of a diverse range of viewpoints among young adults. Conversely, those who embrace comprehensive thinking styles are more likely to resist the pressure to conform and chart their own paths, fostering personal growth and unique perspectives.

Throughout this exploration, we will delve deeper into the dynamics of conformity and comprehensive thinking styles among individuals aged 18 to 25. By understanding these psychological phenomena better, we can gain valuable insights into the cognitive and social processes that shape the experiences and behaviours of young adults as they navigate the complexities of this transformative stage of life.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Newton C, Feeney J, and Pennycook G (2023) conducted research on the topic "On the disposition to think analytically: Four distinct intuitive-analytic thinking styles". They discuss the development of measures to index intuitive versus analytic thinking and whether people vary along a single dimension or if there are genuinely different types of thinking styles. The authors distinguish between four distinct types of thinking styles: Actively Open-minded Thinking, Close-minded Thinking, Preference for Intuitive Thinking, and Preference for Effortful Thinking. They discovered strong predictive validity across several outcome measures (e.g., epistemically suspect beliefs, bullshit receptivity, empathy, moral judgments), with some subscales having stronger predictive validity for some outcomes but not others. Furthermore, Actively Open-minded Thinking, in particular, strongly outperformed the Cognitive Reflection Test in predicting misperceptions about COVID-19 and the ability to discern between vaccination-related true and false news.

Kerry S. Walters (1987) conducted a study on 'Critical Thinking and the Danger of Intellectual Conformity'. This study highlights the growing popularity of critical thinking as a pedagogical technique in higher education, with many colleges and universities incorporating it into their core curricula. The emphasis on critical thinking is driven by concerns about declining reading comprehension and a desire to develop students' abilities in logical analysis and verbal expression. The advocates of critical thinking hope that it will foster the skills of conceptual analysis, argument clarification, and critical evaluation, ultimately leading to informed, rational, and tolerant decision-making in a democratic society. However, the study warns that an excessive focus on critical thinking may inadvertently lead to a lopsided approach, where students come to believe that it is the only valid method of understanding reality. This absolutism can stifle creativity, discourage speculative thinking, and foster an intolerant attitude towards alternative modes of expression and knowledge acquisition. To avoid these pitfalls, the study suggests the need for a balanced approach that includes exposure to diverse learning strategies, encouraging students to explore various methodologies and viewpoints, and fostering both critical thinking and open-mindedness.

METHOD

3.1 Objective

The objective of this study is to explore whether there exists a connection between conformity and Comprehensive Thinking Styles(CTS) among emerging adults.

3.2 Hypothesis

3.2.1 There will be a significant relationship between Conformity and Comprehensive Thinking Styles among emerging adults.

3.2.2 There is a significant relationship between Conformity and Actively Open-Minded Thinking among emerging adults.

3.2.3 There is a significant relationship between conformity and Closed-Minded Thinking among emerging adults.

3.2.4 There is a significant relationship between conformity and Preference for Intuitive Thinking among emerging adults.

3.2.5 There is a significant relationship between conformity and Preference for Effortful Thinking among emerging adults.

3.3 Variables and Operational Definition

3.3.1 Conformity

Conformity refers to the tendency of individuals to adjust their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to match those of a majority or authoritative group.

3.3.2 Comprehensive thinking styles(CTS)

Comprehensive thinking styles refer to various approaches and patterns of thought that individuals use to process information, make decisions and solve problems. It consists of open-minded thinking, close-minded thinking, preference for intuitive thinking and preference for effortful thinking.

3.4

Sample

3.4.1 Sample Size of the Study

The sample data consisted of 145 emerging and budding adults who fall between the age of 18 to 25. These participants were from different colleges.

3.3.2 Inclusion criteria

Emerging adults, males and females belonging to the age range 18 to 25 were only included in the study.

3.3.3 Exclusion criteria

Emerging adults, males and females belonging to other than the age range 18 to 25 were excluded.

3.5 Assessment tools

3.5.1 Conformity Scale

The Conformity Scale was developed by Albert Mehrabian and Carol A. Stefl in 1995. The scale was designed to measure individual differences in conformity, which is the tendency to change one's beliefs or behaviours to align with those of others. The scale consists of several items that assess an individual's tendency to conform to social norms and expectations. Participants are asked to rate their agreement with each item on a scale from 1 (Not At All True of Me) to 7 (Extremely True of Me).

3.5.2 Comprehensive Thinking Style Questionnaire (CTSQ)

The Comprehensive Thinking Style Questionnaire (CTSQ) is a concept that measures how individuals think, perceive and remember information. The CTSQ asks participants to rate how much they agree or disagree with each item on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree).

3.6 Research Design

A descriptive research design was used to study the relationship between CTS and Conformity.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

Tools for data collection are finalized for the collection of data from the target population and taken from different individuals. A Google form was sent to participants for the research. After taking the consent of the participant, clear instruction was given to fill out the questionnaire and the participants were assured that the data collected will be confidential. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS.

3.8 Statistical Techniques

The data was analyzed using SPSS. Spearman Rho test was used to find out the strength of the connection between the variables. It's a non-parametric test which was developed by Charles Spearman. This test is also known as Spearman's rank correlation coefficient.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Result

Table 4.1 Spearman's Correlation Coefficient and Sig (2- tailed) p-value of Conformity and Comprehensive Thinking Styles among adults.

Variables	CTS	Open Minded Thinking	Close Minded Thinking	Intuitive Thinking	Effortful Thinking	
	r-value	.241**	0.002	0.064	-0.052	.347**
Conformity	p-value	0.003	0.977	0.442	0.533	0

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The data presented above shows the correlation coefficients between six variables: CTS, Actively Open-Minded thinking, Close-Minded thinking, Preference for Intuitive thinking, Preference for Effortful thinking, and Conformity. The correlations were analyzed using Spearman's rho, and the significance levels (p-values) are provided for each correlation coefficient. The Spearman's correlation coefficient between the variables Conformity and Comprehensive Thinking Styles(CTS) is 0.241 and the corresponding p-value is 0.003.

The Spearman's correlation coefficient between the variables Conformity and Open Minded Thinking is 0.002 and the corresponding p-value is 0.977. The Spearman's correlation coefficient between the variables Conformity and Closed Minded Thinking is 0.064 and the corresponding p-value is 0.442. The Spearman's correlation coefficient between the variables Conformity and Preference for Intuitive Thinking is -0.052 and the corresponding p-value is 0.533. The Spearman's correlation coefficient between the variables Conformity and Preference for Effortful Thinking is 0.347 and the corresponding p-value is 0.

4.2 Discussion

The aim of the study is to measure the relationship between conformity and comprehensive thinking styles. The variables used in this study are Actively Open-Minded thinking, Close-Minded thinking, Preference for Intuitive thinking, Preference for Effortful thinking, and Conformity.

Conformity is defined as a type of social influence involving a change in belief or behaviour in order to fit in with a group. CTS refers to a broad and inclusive approach to understanding the different ways in which individuals think, perceive, and remember information. It includes Actively Open-Minded thinking, Close-Minded thinking, Preference for Intuitive thinking and Preference for Effortful thinking.

Table 4.1 shows the Spearman's Correlation Coefficient and Sig (2) p-value of conformity, CTS and its subscales, i.e Actively Open-Minded thinking, Close-Minded thinking, Preference for Intuitive thinking and Preference for Effortful thinking. The correlation data provides valuable insights into their relationships.

It is evident that conformity is positively associated with CTS with a level of significance of 0.01, which suggests that individuals who actively engage in deeper and more thorough cognitive

processes are more likely to conform to social pressures and group norms. Since our main variable(CTS) has a significant correlation, we look at their subscales to see what determines the correlation with conformity.

From Table 4.1, it can be inferred that there is a positive correlation with conformity between both Open Minded thinking and Close Minded thinking, but it is not statistically significant. Therefore our second and third hypotheses are rejected. This indicates that there is no strong linear relationship between these traits, meaning that being open or close-minded does not necessarily lead to higher or lower levels of conformity.

Table 4.1 also shows the correlation between Preference for Intuitive Thinking And Conformity is negative but is not statistically significant. Therefore our fourth hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is no significant linear relationship between these two variables. Hence, relying on intuition does not appear to be directly related to higher or lower levels of conformity.

From Table 4.1, Effortful and Conformity have a positive and significant correlation (level of significance at 0.01). Therefore our last hypothesis is accepted. It indicates that individuals who actively engage in effortful cognitive processing, which involves critically analyzing information and thinking deeply about decisions, can indeed lead individuals to be more influenced by conformity and societal norms. When people invest substantial mental effort into understanding complex issues and evaluating various perspectives, they may be more inclined to seek validation from others or conform to the prevailing social norms. This tendency arises partly because the cognitive effort invested in decision-making may create a desire for certainty and acceptance, leading individuals to align their beliefs and behaviours with those of their social groups. Moreover, the process of cognitive elaboration can also expose individuals to a broader range of viewpoints and arguments, making them more susceptible to persuasive influences from the prevailing majority opinion. Thus, those who engage in more critical thinking may find themselves more dependent on the approval of others and more likely to conform to societal pressures.

However, it is essential to remember that correlation does not imply causation. While these relationships provide valuable associations between conformity and thinking styles, they do not indicate the direction or cause of these connections. Additional research would be necessary to determine the causative factors behind these relationships and how they may manifest in emerging adults' cognitive processes and decision-making.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of correlations between various thinking styles and conformity among emerging adults yielded significant findings. First, it was observed that conformity had a moderate positive relationship with CTS and had a significant relationship with each other ($r = 0.241$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that the higher the CTS, the higher the tendency to conform to societal norms. Secondly, there was no significant correlation between conformity and actively open-minded thinking ($r = 0.002$, $p > 0.05$), implying that there is no substantial relationship between conforming behaviour and being open-minded in processing information or considering different perspectives. Third, there was again, no significant correlation between conformity and preference for intuitive thinking ($r = 0.064$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting that there is no significant connection between conforming behaviour and closed-minded thinking. The correlation between conformity and intuitive thinking ($r = -0.052$, $p > 0.05$) revealed a weak negative relationship but has no significance. implying that there is no meaningful link between acting in a conformist manner and a preference for relying on gut feelings and instincts. Lastly, the most significant finding was the strong positive correlation between conformity and preference for effortful thinking ($r = 0.347$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that individuals who engage in more effortful, systematic, and analytical thinking processes tend to conform more to societal norms.

Despite these intriguing results, there are some limitations to consider. Firstly, the study's cross-sectional design restricts our ability to establish causality between conformity and thinking styles. Future research using longitudinal designs would provide more insights into the direction of

causality and potential changes over time. Secondly, the study's reliance on self-reported measures for thinking styles and conformity might introduce response bias and social desirability effects. Using objective measures or combining self-report with other assessment methods could enhance the study's validity. Finally, the sample consisted of emerging adults, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other age groups or cultural contexts. A more diverse and representative sample would strengthen the external validity of the study.

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