Minority Influence, Social Influence and Social Change

M.I. is a form of social influence where a minority (maybe one person) persuades others to adopt beliefs, attitudes, behaviours. Leads to internalisation or conversion, private attitudes changed as well as public behaviours. Consistency is when that minority is consistent in beliefs over time and between all individuals in group, effective, draws attention to the minority view. Commitment, minority is more powerful if they are committed to what they are doing and their position. Example, personal sacrifices. Effective, it shows the minority isn't acting out of self-interest. Flexibility good, relentless consistency may be counter-productive, seen by majority as unbending, unreasonable. Minority more effective if show flexibility, accepting compromise.

Moscovici (1969), groups of six were asked to view set of 36 blue coloured slides that varied in intensity, say if slides were blue or green. 2 confederates consistently said slides were green on two-thirds of trails. Participants gave same wrong answer on 8.42% of trials, 32% gave same answer as minority at least once. Second group of participants with inconsistent minority, agreement fell to 1.25%. 0 confederates for third control group, participants identified colour of each slide. Wrong answer given on just 0.25% of trials.

Deeper processing – this attention meant that many people who simply accepted status quo began to think about the unjustness. The augmentation principle – Individuals risk their lives for the cause. They risked their lives in many ways and people could have been arrested or died/injured. Snowball effect – Starts from something small, gradually gets bigger, therefore getting more attention. Gains more momentum as well. Social cryptomnesia – people know that change has occurred but don’t know how that change occurred. Don’t know the events that took place to allow those changes.

M.I. indirectly effective - Nemeth (1986) effects of minority influence, indirect, delayed. Majority influenced on matters related to current issue, not central issue. Effects not seen for while. Limitation. Effects are fragile, role in social influence is limited.

Methodological issues – explanations for how S.I. leads to S.C. draws heavily on Moscovici, Asch and Milgram. All of these can be evaluated for methodology. Criticisms can be used here, raise doubts on validity of explanations.

Bashir (2013), why people resist social change, when thought necessary. Less likely to be environmentally friendly, don’t want to be associated with stereotypical and minority ‘environmentalists’. Rate environmentalists + feminists negatively. ‘Tree huggers’, ‘man haters’. Advice to minorities, try not to behave like stereotypes, off-putting to majority.

Zimbardo (2007), obedience creates social change, process gradual commitment. Once small instruction is obeyed, hard to resist bigger one. ‘Drift’ into new behaviour.

Role of D.P. – Mackie (1987), majority influence is what creates deeper processing if you don’t share views. We like to think others share our views, and same way as us. When we find majority that doesn’t, we think long and hard about their arguments and reasoning. Casts doubt on M.I. and validity of Moscovici’s study.

R.S. for NSI - Nolan (2008), do social influence processes mean reduction in energy consumption? Hung message on house doors in San Diego every week for a month. Key message, most people trying to save energy. Control, some had message that only asked them to save energy. Large decrease in energy usage, group 1. Conformity can lead to social change through NSI.

Environment + Health campaigns exploit conformity processes through NSI (normative social influence). Give info on what others are doing. ‘Bin it – others do’, telling young people most young people don’t smoke so they shouldn’t. Social change encouraged by drawing attention to what majority are doing.