People with an internal LOC feel they are in control of the events in their lives and are responsible for their actions. People with external LOC feel the events in their lives are controlled by external forces and they have little control.

Evidence generally shows that those with high internal LOC show more independent behaviour and resist social influence than those with high external LOC. This may be because they have more self-confidence to resist social influence. Those with high external LOC have lower self-esteem and need more social approval, making independent behaviour less likely.

- Elms & Milgram found that disobedient participants in Milgram’s studies had personality test scores showing high internal LOC.
- Avtgis carried out a meta-analysis of conformity studies and found that those who scored higher on external LOC were more likely to conform than those with high internal LOC. The average correlation was +0.37.

Evaluation

- Measuring Locus of Control is difficult e.g. people may give socially desirable answers in personality questionnaires i.e. answer in a way that shows them in a positive light, this would undermine the reliability and validity of the results.
- Research has found that high self-esteem has also been associated with independent behaviour. However individuals high in self-esteem also tend to have an internal locus of control (Sterbin & Rakow, 1996). Therefore it is difficult to know whether it is the high self-esteem or the internal locus of control that leads to them resisting social influence.

Social Support

- More of Milgram’s participants resisted orders if there were other participants present who refused to obey. This suggests people find it easier to stand up to authority if they have support from others because they no longer have to take full responsibility for rebelling.
- This ties in with Asch’s research on conformity. He found that participants were more likely to resist the pressure to conform if one of the confederates agreed with them. It seems that people are more likely to display independent behaviour if they’ve got support from others.
Discuss how social influence research helps us to understand social change (12 Marks)

Essay plan

Intro
Moscovici study about consistency
Social impact theory
Snowball effect- Hogg & Vaughn (acting out of principal)
Research

Answer

Minority influence is important for the introduction of new ideas. A minority can challenge beliefs/views of the majority, causing them to re-think them. Examples in history have been the suffragette movement and Martin Luther King with the civil rights movement. Research suggests that minority influence is most effective when the minority are consistent, committed and flexible in their viewpoint.

E.g. Moscovici see previous page

Social impact theory- Latane and Wolf's social impact theory suggest that social influence occurs when the combined effects of three factors are significant enough:
Strength - how powerful, knowledgeable and consist the group appear to be.
Numbers - significant number of people with the view point.
Immediacy - Near to the people they want to influence.
Compared to a majority a minority need more strength and immediacy to change the views of the majority.

Snowball effect- once a few members of the majority start to move towards the minority position then the influence of the minority begins to gather momentum. Clark carried out a mock jury study and showed how people begin to change their minds when they see others 'changing sides' and adopting the minority viewpoint.
Hogg and Vaughn (1998) claimed that minorities are more likely to bring about social change if they are seen to be acting from principle (not out of self-interest) and have made sacrifices in order to maintain their viewpoint e.g. Nelson Mandela campaigning to abolish apartheid.