

Social Influence Processes in Social Change

AQA A-Level Psychology – Social Influence

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What is Social Change?

Social change refers to how society's attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours shift over time.

Women's Suffrage

Women gaining the right to vote

Marriage Equality

The legalisation of same-sex marriage

Environmental Awareness

Increased concern about climate change

Minority Influence & Social Change

According to Moscovici, minority influence is often the first step in social change.



Drawing Attention

The minority raises awareness through protests and campaigns. If the views are different to the majority's, it can create conflict, which they feel motivated to reduce e.g., the suffragettes used educational and political tactics to draw attention to their cause.



Consistency

They stick to their message over time and across individuals. For example, the suffragettes were consistent in their arguments, and over time they convinced society they were ready to vote.



The Augmentation Principle

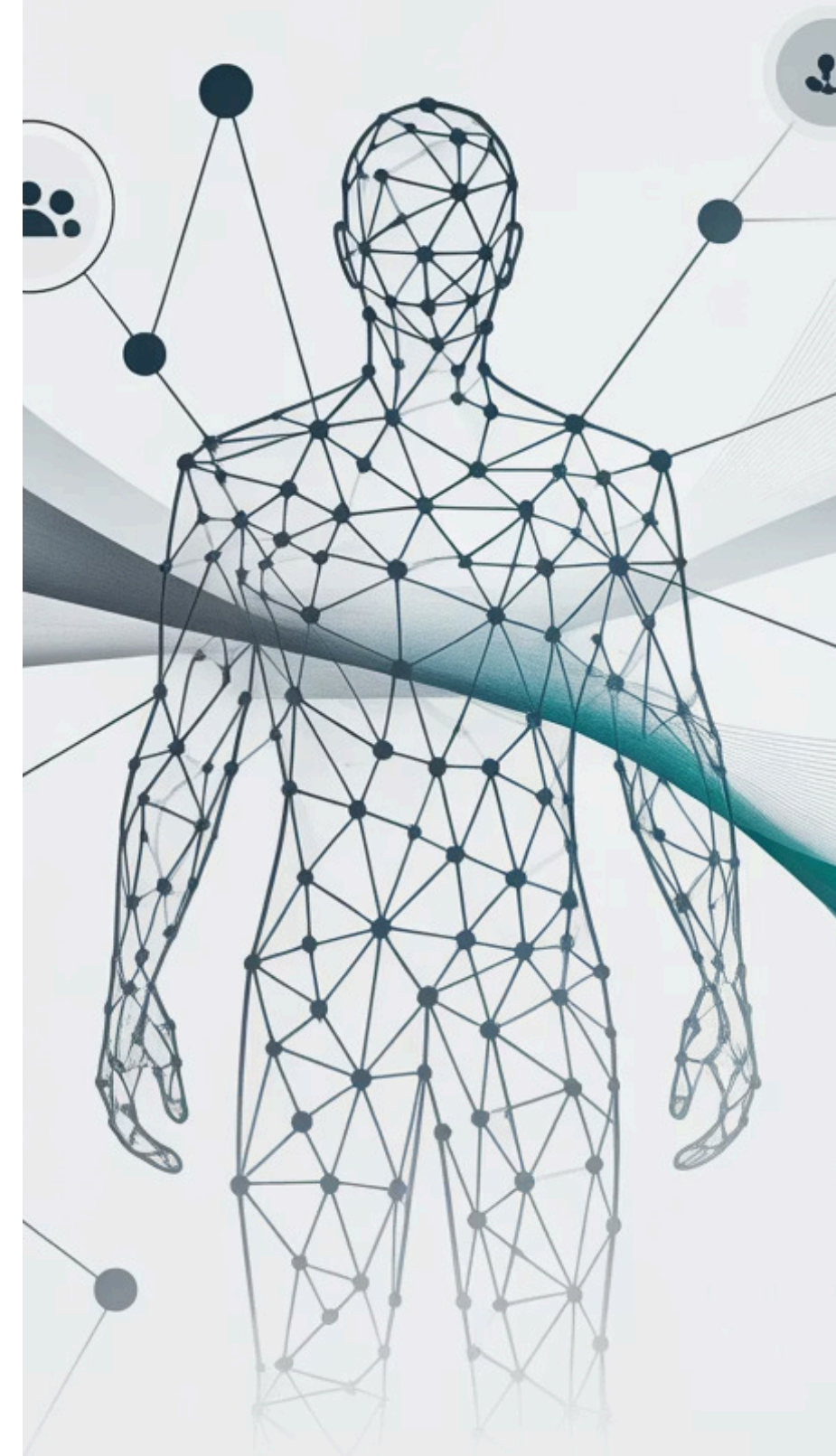
If a minority is willing to suffer for their views, it gives the impression they are more committed. The suffragettes were willing to go to prison and even risk death due to hunger strikes.



Snowball Effect

Gradually, more people adopt the minority view as the minority influence spreads. More people start to consider the issue until it reaches a 'tipping point', resulting in large scale social change.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL CHANGE



Social Change Through Majority Influence

The Social Norms Approach

If people believe something to be the norm, they change their behaviour to fit that norm. For example, if university students think the norm is to get drunk every night, then more students would get drunk. Conversely, if they think not drinking so much is the norm, then they would drink less (conforming) as argued by Perkins and Berkowitz (1986).

Perception Correction Strategies

An example of misperception is where young adults misperceive their alcohol consumption (amount and frequency). This results in the social norm of drinking too much and too often.

Media campaigns can be driven to help change this perception and to advertise the actual norms of this behaviour, with the aim to change the young adults' drinking behaviour.

Conformity & Social Norms in Social Change

Correcting Misperceptions

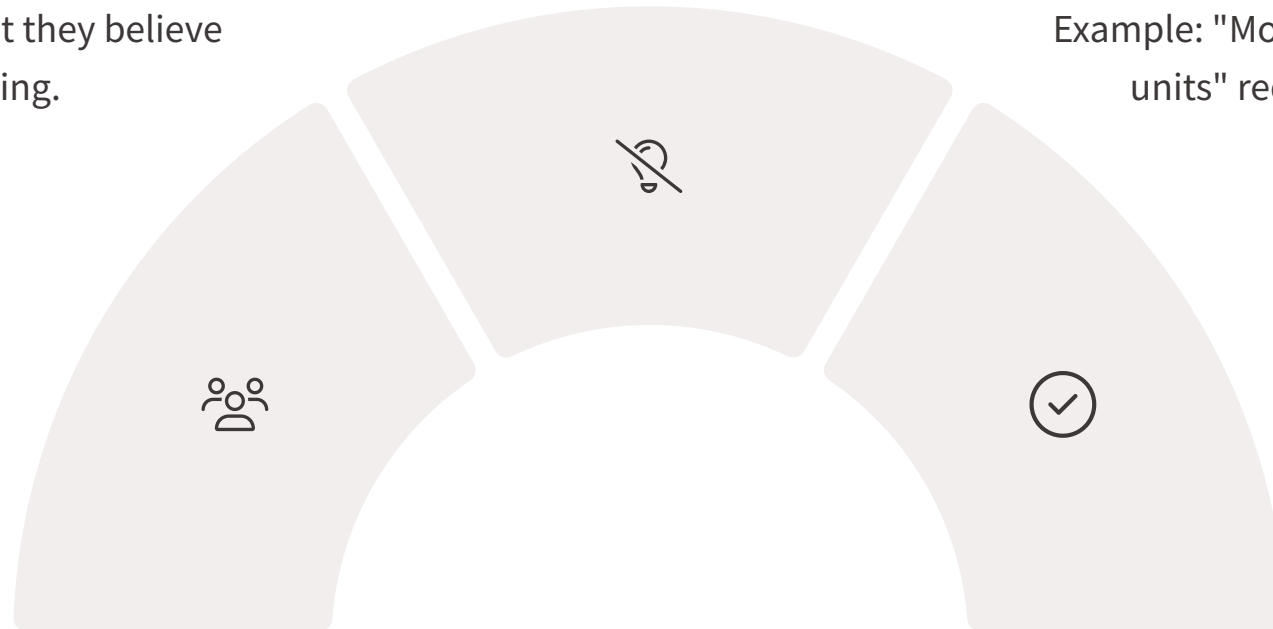
Social norms interventions work by showing actual behaviors.

Perceived Norms

People conform to what they believe others are doing.

Positive Outcomes

Example: "Most students drink only 1–2 units" reduces binge drinking.



Montana USA

A social norms intervention aimed at reducing drink driving in young adults aged 21-34 years. Research found that 92% of respondents to a survey thought their peers had consumed alcohol before driving (compared to 20.4% in the initial survey). The message in the advert was corrected to 'Most Montana young adults don't drink and drive', and results showed a reduction in drink driving by 13.7% compared to counties not running the campaign.

This campaign led to a positive change in behaviour due to a change in perception and attitudes.

However, Dejong et al. (2009) found that a social norm marketing campaign to drive down alcohol consumption from 14 college sites did not reduce drinking behaviour, despite the misperception changes.



**Montana:
most young adults
don't drink and drive.**



Evaluation/Discussion

Gradual Change

A minority can take a long time to create social change, and the suffragettes is an example. Human beings like to conform to the majority position and maintain the status quo. This suggests that minority influence is not direct but rather latent (creating a potential for social change).

Animal Rights

Animal rights supporters argue that animals have inherent worth, and are not just for human research. Animals should have the right to exist without pain and suffering. This challenges the view that eating animals or testing on them for research is morally wrong.

Boomerang Effect

Schultz et al. (2007) argued that social norms interventions run the risk of actually increasing the problem behaviours in those who didn't have an issue in the first place. The media interventions are aimed at problem people who it would benefit to reduce their consumption. However, in the case of energy users, high energy users might reduce their usage of electricity, however low energy users might increase theirs to fit in with the norms.



Further points



Real-world Application

NSI used in anti-smoking and environmental campaigns with measurable success.



Research Support

Moscovici's studies provide evidence for minority influence processes.



Slow and Complex

Social change often takes decades and involves multiple factors.



Resistance Barriers

Stereotypes, fear, and costs can prevent people from changing.



SOCIAL INFLUENCE PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Questions

Explain how social influence may lead to social change. (6)

Using examples, explain how social influence has led to social change. (6)

Outline and discuss the role of social influence processes in social change. (16)