Assignment 1  
*Brainstorm and pitch ideas for an empirical study to make sense of a cultural domain in context.*

**Project title**: Investigating the significance of social information use: An examination of cross-cultural conformity patterns

**Mission**: Add nuance and generalizability to the dominant, established theories by Asch about social information use and conformity. In order to accomplish this, the original experiment will be digitized, including an addition of mouse tracking, as well as including a broader sample of participants.

**Problem and solution**

Human behavior depends greatly on social information. With the ability to learn from others, the human species evolutionary has been able to adapt rapidly to shifting environments. Across generations, information, practices, and beliefs are developed that would have been impossible to invent within a single lifetime (Boyd, Richerson & Henrich, 2011). In the individual’s interaction with others, social information is essential. Social conformity refers to the idea that one adjusts their opinion or behavior towards a group’s attitude (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Individuals' tendency to use social information and confirm towards others has been well studied by psychologists, among others the prominent and acknowledged figures Sherif (1935) and Asch (1951).

Asch investigated whether people would conform to clearly incorrect information under social pressure. In the experimental setup, one “real” participant and seven pseudo-participants were introduced to a line judgement task containing two cards: one card with one line on it and one card with three lines of different lengths, one being the same length as the one on the first card. It was the participants task to identify which lines were of the same length. All pseudo-participants gave a verbal answer, leaving the final answer to the "real" participant (Asch,1951).

Despite the fact that both Sherif’s (1935) and Asch's (1951) experiments were conducted 70+ years ago, their theories still influence how social conformity is viewed today (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Bond & Smith, 1996). However, the majority of the dominant studies within this field of research only included participants that generally meet the characteristics of the W.E.I.R.D samples (being western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic) (Henrich, Heine & Norenzayan, 2010). The studies by Sheri (1935) and Asch (1951) were both conducted on age-equivalent males from the same university, entailing limited generalizability of the studies. As the current theories are drawn from a sample with very little variation and despite this are generalized to the general population, this may have led to a skewed picture of social information use and conformity patterns in different cultures.

In our highly, interconnected world, it is considered crucial to understand how individuals from various cultures uses social information and conforms. Therefore, this study seeks to conceptually replicate possibly the most used study within the field of conformity research, namely Asch's (1951). It will be denoted a conceptual replica, as the experiment will re-test the same theoretical ideas, nonetheless on a different population and methodology. The study will be digitized and combined with mouse tracking as a measure to gather insights into decision-making processes, reaction times, and cognitive dynamics behind the phenomena. The validity of hand movement as an indicator of the cognitive processes behind evolving decisions has been established by neurophysiological research (Freeman, Dale & Farmer, 2011). Additionally, the study will include a broader sample of participants representing different levels of education, age, nationality, and other significant demographic and cultural characteristics.

Hopefully, the study will contribute to the theoretical framework and add nuances to the existing, prominent theories.

**Methodology**

The following methodology is proposed:

1. Experimental design and procedure: The experiment will follow the pipeline of Asch’s experiment – simply made online. It will be conducted using the program OpenSesame (Mathôt, Schreij & Theeuwes, 2012) with the Mousetrap plugin that collects all mouse movements (Kieslich & Henninger, 2017).
2. Selection of sample: A diverse sample needs to be identified. It should include relevant cultural dimensions as nationally, educational level, age, gender, political beliefs, etc.
3. Data collection: Data will be collected across countries.
4. Analysis: Frequentist analysis of all data using RStudio, such as regression analysis, to infer patterns, variations, and potential predictors. Mouse-tracking trajectories and results in general will be visualized.
5. Discussion: Discussion of the results in relation to the theoretical framework, their implications, and considerations of the experimental design.

**Expected results**

Researchers expect to find cultural differences in social information use and conformity. Furthermore, it is expected that the mouse trajectories will significantly differentiate when the participant conforms towards incorrect information as well as noticeably slower reaction time.

**Conclusion**

Understanding cultural and cognitive aspects of social information use and conformity patterns is crucial. By conducting this empirical study, the researchers aim to contribute beneficial insights to the field of research as well as real-world applications.

**Bibliography**

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