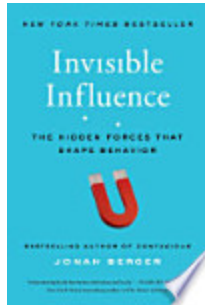


# Invisible Influence

## - Jonah Berger



### ▼ Introduction

- 1.  
Without our realizing it, others have a huge influence on almost every aspect of life.
- 2.  
We took the responses and compared people's perceptions of themselves with their perceptions of others.
- 3.  
People could see social influence affecting other's behavior, but not their own.
- 4.  
These split humans were miserable. Even when their wound healed, they cast about, longing for their other half. Forever searching for the piece that would make them whole.
- 5.  
But even with everyone's idiosyncratic opinions, there was a distinct pattern.
- 6.  
Just the atoms bouncing off each other, our social interactions are constantly shaping who we are and what we do.
- 7.  
Through understanding social influence, we can improve our own lives, and the lives of others.

### ▼ 1. Monkey see, monkey do

- ▼ 1.  
The situation was ripe with uncertainty, And when people feel uncertain, relying on others makes sense.

- 4.  
When we're not sure about the right thing to do, we look to others to help us figure it out
- 5.  
Using others as information sources saves us time and effort.
- 2.  
Even when the answer is clear, people still imitate others.
- 3.  
Where we grow up, and the norms and practices of people around us, shape everything from the language we use to the behaviors we engage in.
- 6.  
Part of this similarity is driven by assortative mating. People tend to marry others of similar ages, nationalities, and racial backgrounds.
- 7.  
Partners don't just share space and food, they share emotions.
- ▼ 8.  
Watching someone else engage in an action activates the same cortical region as engaging in the action. - Mirror neurons.
  - 9.  
Others can thus prime us for action.
- ▼ 10.  
How could Susan get Jake to trust her? That trick? Mimicking their negotiation partner.
  - 11.  
People who mimicked their partner were five times as likely to find a successful outcome.
- 11.  
Mimicry facilitates social interactions because it generates rapport. Like a social glue.
- 12.  
In fact, the only time we don't mimic others is when we don't want to affiliate with them.
- 13.  
Why was success so variable? The reason was social influence.
- ▼ 14.  
The best songs never did terribly, and the worst songs never did extremely well.
  - 15.  
Quality alone is not always enough.

- 16.  
People talk about the wisdom of crowds, but crowds are only wise when the group has access to everyone's individual information.
- 17.  
If people can't see, or observe what others are doing, there is no way for those others to influence them.
- 18.  
Going first is also an easy way to shape the discussion. While not everyone may agree, it provides a gravitational attraction, encouraging neutral others to glom on.
- ▼ 19.  
Nothing draws a crowd like a crowd.
  - 20.  
From the food we pick to the language we use to the products that become popular, others have a surprising impact.
- 20.  
If we want to avoid people influencing our decisions, keeping them private helps,

## ▼ 2. A Horse of a different color

- 1.  
Environmental factors have a big impact on personality.
- 2.  
Whether to stand out to their parents, or themselves, younger siblings try to create their own niche.
- 3.  
People should pick whatever is popular. We should be more likely to do something when others are already doing it.
- 4.  
"Snob effect" describe cases in which an individual's demand for goods or services is negatively correlated with market demand. The more other people who own or use something, the less interested new people are in buying or using it.
- 5.  
Instead of mindlessly following authority, people were encouraged to think and feel for themselves. To be independent.
- 6.  
People were free to pursue their own ends, independently of others. To make their own path and go their own way.

- 7.  
Distinction even helps explain the adoption of niche high-tech gadgets. For high-tech innovators, the newest gadget isn't just a productivity tool, it's a tool for differentiation.
- 8.  
While no one likes being categorized, objects and even people gain meaning in relation to other things. By evoking the category to which an apple belongs (a fruit), meaning is communicated.
- 9.  
Meaning comes not only from what it is, but also from what it isn't. Without some sense of distinction, meaning is unclear.
- 10.  
Distinction is valuable, then, because it provides definition. If everyone were identical, it would be hard to have any sense of self.
- 11.  
Some differences are real. But we also satisfy our thirst for difference using our minds alone. By focusing on ways we're similar to everyone else or ways we're different.
- 12.  
While many Americans see uniqueness as signifying freedom and independence, in East Asian culture, harmony and connectedness are valued more.
- 13.  
Rather than being different, working-class contexts tend to encourage interdependence. Being a team player rather than being a star.
- 14.  
Starbucks isn't just selling coffee, it's selling a personalized experience.
- 15.  
Among the middle and upper classes, one's job is considered a defining element of who you are. People pick their jobs because it is something they are interested in and passionate about, and they see those choices as expressing them as a person. It's a signal of their identity.
- 16.  
But in working-class contexts, "What do you do?" would likely not be one of the first things you'd ask someone. Or if you did, it might offend people. Because, for many working-class individuals, their occupation is a means to an end rather than a signal of identity. It's what they do to pay the bills.

### ▼ 3. Not if they're doing it

- 1.  
Cars and clothes serve more than just a functional purpose. They act as a silent communication system, signaling information to others.
- 2.  
People's attitudes weren't just slightly nudged one way or another depending on group endorsement, their attitudes completely changed based on which party supported or opposed them.
- 3.  
People diverge to avoid being misidentified or communicating undesired identities.
- 4.  
The greater the dissimilarity, then, the greater the cost of misidentification. The further the mistaken identity, the higher the cost.
- ▼ 5.  
They noticed that identity signaling played a pivotal role.
  - 6.  
Blacks and Hispanics who got all As in school tended to be less popular than their peers.
  - 7.  
Choices are also seen as more identity relevant the less they are based on function.
- 8.  
A functionality thus induces a cost or barrier to entry
- 9.  
These costs reduce the likelihood of widespread adoption.
- 10.  
The more costly something is, the more likely it is to retain its value as a clear and accurate signal.
- ▼ 11.  
Wealth is often private. No one but your (and maybe your spouse) knows how much money you have in your bank account. Status, however, is social. It is attained in the eyes of others. The respect of one's peers.
  - 12.  
Buying goods and services not only for their personal value, but as a way of acquiring status and prestige.
- 13.  
Visible signals facilitate identification.

- 14.  
The lack of logos made the items (and their prices) harder for observers to identify. They didn't get the prices exactly right.
- 15.  
Insiders, or people who know a lot about a given domain, prefer subtle signals. They aren't as widely observable, but they help distinguish insiders from wannabes.
- 16.  
Identity-signaling drives things to both catch on and die out.
- 17.  
Fashion cycles happen often, but counterfeiting helps speed the process.
- 18.  
Similar identity-based interventions can be beneficial in a variety of contexts.

#### ▼ 4. Similar but different

- 1.  
Our names not only follow us our entire lives, they also influence the lives we lead.
- 2.  
Similarity increases evaluations (and sales) for the same reason that mere exposure works. Just as the more we see something, the more we like it, the more we see something, the more we like other things that share similar features.
- 3.  
These ease of processing, in turn, is coded positively. It's the warm glow of familiarity.
- 4.  
Novelty was the spice of love.
- 5.  
Novelty, at least at first, often evokes a mildly negative reaction. Through repeated exposure, things that were once novel start to become more familiar. They've become part of our routine.
- 6.  
Too many exposures to the same thing, through, and we start to get bored. But the more complex the stimulus, the less likely the habituation.
- 7.  
How concentrated the interactions are also matters. Hearing the same song ten times in a row gets quite tedious, but hear it once a week over ten weeks and it doesn't get as tiresome. The more time there is between interactions, the more novel the experience seems, and the more we like it.

- 8.  
Too novel and it's unfamiliar. Too familiar and it's boring. But in between and it's just right.
- 9.  
The right blend of familiarity and novelty also drives what becomes popular.
- 10.  
Similarity shapes popularity because it makes novel things feel familiar.
- 11.  
Students with higher needs for uniqueness still looked enough like their peers that others could guess which club they belong to, but also dressed in ways that differentiated them from the pack. Similar but different. Consistent but unique.
- 12.  
We want to be part of something. Being similar to, or doing the same thing as, other gives us confidence that we are doing something right.
- 13.  
Brand is an identity-relevant attribute.
- 14.  
A new product or technology can be light-years ahead of the competition, but its success hinges on consumer perception. If the product seems too similar to what's already out there, people aren't compelled to purchase.
- 15.  
More generally, successfully introducing radical innovations often involves cloaking technology in a skin of familiarity.
- 16.  
Technology is never evaluated alone. Design and technology combine to shape consumer perceptions, and the combination is more effective when it makes innovations seem optimally distinct.
- 17.  
They feel familiar, but people can't immediately tell why.

## ▼ 5. Come on baby, light my fire

- 1.  
People who biked with others cycled twenty to thirty seconds faster per mile. Racing together seemed to improve performance.
- 2.  
People tend to do better when others are around. Even if people aren't collaborating, or competing, the mere fact that others are present changes behavior.

- 3.  
If the task was easy, or something participants had done many times before, spectators would facilitate performance. But if the task was difficult, or involved learning something new, spectators would inhibit performance.
- 4.  
Whether others help or hurt performance depends on the complexity of the task.
- 5.  
Skilled pool players make more shots when others are watching, but unskilled players miss more. Having an audience makes us faster at taking notes, unless we're taking notes with our non-dominant hand.
- 6.  
Teams that are winning tend to win and this tendency gets stronger as the lead gets larger. This tendency should come as no surprise. Teams that are winning tend to be better teams. That's partially why they're ahead.
- 7.  
Winning leads to winning.
- 8.  
In fact, teams that were losing by a point were actually more likely to win.
- 9.  
Competition influences motivation by shaping people's reference points, or the yardstick they use to measure how well they are doing.
- 10.  
The motivating effect of being behind happens not only for the overall goal, it also happens for progress along the way.
- 11.  
The reward is just the feeling of achievement. Winning is more satisfying than losing. Using less energy than your neighbor feels better than using more. Consequently, being behind others can motivate us to perform better.
- 12.  
People get motivated as they get closer to their goal. In competition, then, it's not just about being behind. It's about how far behind someone is. Being down by a little is often more motivating than being down by a lot because people are closer to achieving their goal of winning.
- 13.  
Consequently, competitors may search for a way to self-handicap. An excuse in the event of poor performance.



- 14.  
Quitting serves a similar function. Rather than sticking it out and losing, quitting allows competitors to preserve the notion that if they had just kept going, they would have won. That they were actually the stronger competitor, even though it didn't play out that way in the end.
- 15.  
Particularly if we're competitive, working out with friends can push us to go further, faster and harder than we would otherwise. Even if you're not competitive, simply having others around will encourage you to stick to what you planned.
- 16.  
If anything, the data shows that the biggest energy hogs are the ones who conserve the most. People who used much more energy than others show the biggest decrease once the program is introduced.
- 17.  
Social comparisons can be a powerful motivating force. Giving people a sense of how they stack up against their peers can encourage them to work harder and be more likely to achieve their goals. At the same time, though, if not carefully designed, social comparisons can lead people to get disheartened, give up and quit.
- 18.  
Social facilitation can also help people reach their personal best. Whether training for a half marathon or just trying to lose a couple pounds, peers are a useful tool to help increase success.
- 20.  
If it's hard to find a workout partner, run, or go to the gym when others are around. Pick the treadmill next to another runner rather than one that is far away. Their mere presence should encourage us to give it 110 percent.
- 21.  
Two caveats. First, avoid direct comparison with others who are of much higher ability. Picking someone who is a little bit better or a little bit worse is a better idea. Second, be careful involving others when just getting started. If someone has never shot a baseball before, other people can provide pointers, but they may also increase anxiety.

## ▼ **Conclusion: Putting social influence to work**

- 1.  
Moving to better neighborhoods improved people's lives, and the longer they lived in those better neighborhoods, the more their lives improved. Where we live has a big impact on how our lives unfold.

- 2.  
Sometimes social influence leads to imitation. We use other's behavior as information, simplifying choice and allowing us to pick better things than we might have our own. We mimic the choices and actions of peers, and such imitation determines everything from how we look to the products and ideas that catch on.
- 3.  
We avoid the extremes. We like things that are moderately similar, blending the allure of novelty with the comfort of the familiar until it feels just right.
- 4.  
We prefer to think that we were attracted to our partner because they are charming or have a nice smile, not because we happened to have the same work schedules.
- 5.  
Other people have a subtle and surprising impact on almost everything we do. When it comes to our own lives, social influence is as silent as it is powerful. Just because we can't see it, it doesn't mean it's not there.
- 6.  
By itself, social influence is neither bad or good. If people follow others who are evil, it will lead to more evil in the world. If people follow others that are good, it will lead to more good. We can also choose our influence. Social influence has a huge impact on behavior. By understanding how it works, we can harness its power.
- 7.  
By understanding when social influence is beneficial, we can decide when to resist influence and when to embrace it.
- 8.  
Influence is a tool, like any other. If we understand it, we don't have to stand passively by and just watch it happen. We can use it. We can design environments, shape situations, and build programs that harness the power of social influence to make the world a better place.