chapter i

Modalities of Social Influence
Preconditions (Public Sphere) and Demarcations (Non-violence)

In January 2007, Apple Inc. launched the iPhone, and it seems that the world was never the same again. A gadget was devised to do away with stylus pens and keyboards that dominated the design of the earlier Personal Digital Assistant [PDA] aimed at the business market. The iPhone, brain child of Apple tech guru Steve Jobs, was the first device of its kind to target the mass market. Smartphones quickly proliferated and ushered in an era of mobile connectivity over social media platforms. Riding the tech tide, social media became the new way of being in touch. Facebook, originally conceived as a digital book of Harvard University students, quickly expanded to become the world's most used social networking website and was valued at $15 billion just four years after its launch in 2004 – a hefty return on the original $2,000 invested by its start-up founders. Google, Yandex, Facebook, WeChat, Twitter, Weibo and Baidu's impact, on the back of attention-grabbing affordances, enabled by the global proliferation of smartphones, seems unparalleled in history. Social networking ushered in an era of citizen journalism and rapid collective action. Social media is implicated in the mass uprisings that took place against long-standing dictatorships in North African countries in 2010. Citizens coordinated public protests against prevalent regimes over social media. On the other hand, privacy has been jeopardised. In 2016, Facebook data was misused by Cambridge Analytica, a small United Kingdom–based consultancy that became an eponymous scandal: the company had harvested personal data from millions of Facebook users' accounts to fine-tune political propaganda, linking their likes/dislikes to a volunteered personality inventory in order to create more effective micro-targeting of messages. Social media became a new platform for exercising social influence by manipulation in everyday life and globally.

Yet, despite the hyperbole, while many things are different with this new technology, much also stays the same. In this book we take a closer look at nine different modalities of social influence, from crowd behaviour

1

to persuasion, not least to clarify how these social influences are affected by new technology. For instance, we will ask: how did social networking affect crowd behaviour or leadership; how do we conform to peer pressure or obey authorities in everyday life, or how are we persuaded or resistant to these influences in everyday life?

The study of social influence has waxed and waned across the social sciences over the years. Many readers will no doubt be familiar with landmark studies, such as LeBon's crowd psychology, Asch's conformity experiments or Milgram's obedience demonstrations. Whilst scandalously insightful at the time, the focus of social influence research has largely ebbed towards more neutral and less controversial paradigms such as dual-track persuasion. However, the turmoil instigated by a new cycle of political populism worldwide and issues of 'fake news' and cyber-propaganda, brings renewed public interest to the dynamics of social influence in a wider sense. When faced with Mr Trump's presidential election success and the UK Brexit referendum in 2016; the earlier Arab Spring and Russia's meddling in Ukraine and the Baltics; the looming United States–China trade war; and nuclear proliferation in Asia and the Middle East, we seek to answer the question: who influences whom and in what way? For a while, it seemed as if history had set the world on course towards a peaceful and prosperous global village. But once more, this utopian hope has retreated, not least because of the effects of nefarious social influence.

Our aim in this volume is to take stock of the disparate literature on 'social influence' with a programmatic focus on different modes and modalities. We will proceed in three conceptual steps: first, we review different **modalities** of social influence in separate chapters, on crowds, leadership, norm formation, conformity, conversion, obedience and persuasion. Secondly, we examine face-to-face interactions, and amplifications of social influence via mass mediations and designed arte-facts as three different **modes**. Thirdly, we examine the contributions of social influence to three functions: to build, to defend or to shift common sense in the face of challenges. We will call these three functions 'normalisation', 'assimilation' and 'accommodation'. Finally, we bring this mode-modality-functions matrix into our **Periodic Table of Social Influence** (in Chapter 10). We hope that this integrative framework will revive the impetus for social influence research by suggesting new research questions, identifying gaps in traditional paradigms and opening the way to recognise and 'discover' novel modalities (as periodic tables often do).

However, before we delve into discussing the modes and modalities, we want to address some key assumptions of this field of inquiry: for this we need a short history of ideas of social influence which highlights the need to address the question of violence and the constitution of a public sphere. Here we inherit ideas of the Greek Polis: 'among ourselves we debate, with barbarians we fight'. Among themselves the Greeks practised civic rhetoric, across borders they practised warfare; competitive strife being the common theme. We start by elaborating these necessary assumptions of our model.

A Very Schematic History of Social Influence Ideas

A world in turmoil needs a better understanding of social influence as part of an array of conflict resolution strategies. And yet, the academic study of social influence is stagnating while public and popular references are widespread and growing. A cursory review of a number of popular social psychology textbooks (e.g., Aronson et al., 2017; Hogg & Vaughan, 2018) reveals that the treatment of social influence is limited to a rehearsal of classical experiments and no attempts to integrate processes operating at the individual level with those operating at the group level. The diversity of social influence as different modalities is presented disparately in separate chapters neither bridging concepts nor offering integrative theorising.

We can easily recognise that this state of affairs is the legacy of a series of historical 'flavours of the time'; in any period 'social influence is X', and over time the many Xs simply accumulate and gather dust without any systematic comparison nor coherent theoretical ordering of the phenomenon. The past 150 years thus reveal the fashion cycles of social influence (see Figure 1.1). These cycles can be notionally reconstructed by using N-gram keyword searches, a useful Google service. And indeed, past episodes show a recurrent rise and fall of particular paradigms as referenced by specific keywords. This coming and going would clearly call for some in-depth historical investigations (see Paicheler, 1988) which is however beyond our present purpose. We simply note how the history of the past 150 years has accumulated different ways of naming, analysing and talking about social influence see also Box 1.1. We need to sift through these discursive resources and secure the 'truth' of each cycle of what remains insightful for the understanding of social influence at present.

We confess to harbouring a degree of dissatisfaction with this 'empiricist' treatment of social influence and our efforts to write this book are motivated by an aspiration to redress this 'butterfly collection' with a theoretical integration of different modalities. A further aim of the present

modality	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	Ngram keyword
crowds															
contagion															
leadership															
S-R conditioning															
frame of reference															
conformity, majority															
obedience to authority															
minority, conversation															
attitude change															
persuasion															
dissonance															
mass media effects															
artefacts															
nudging boosting															
social media, algorithms															

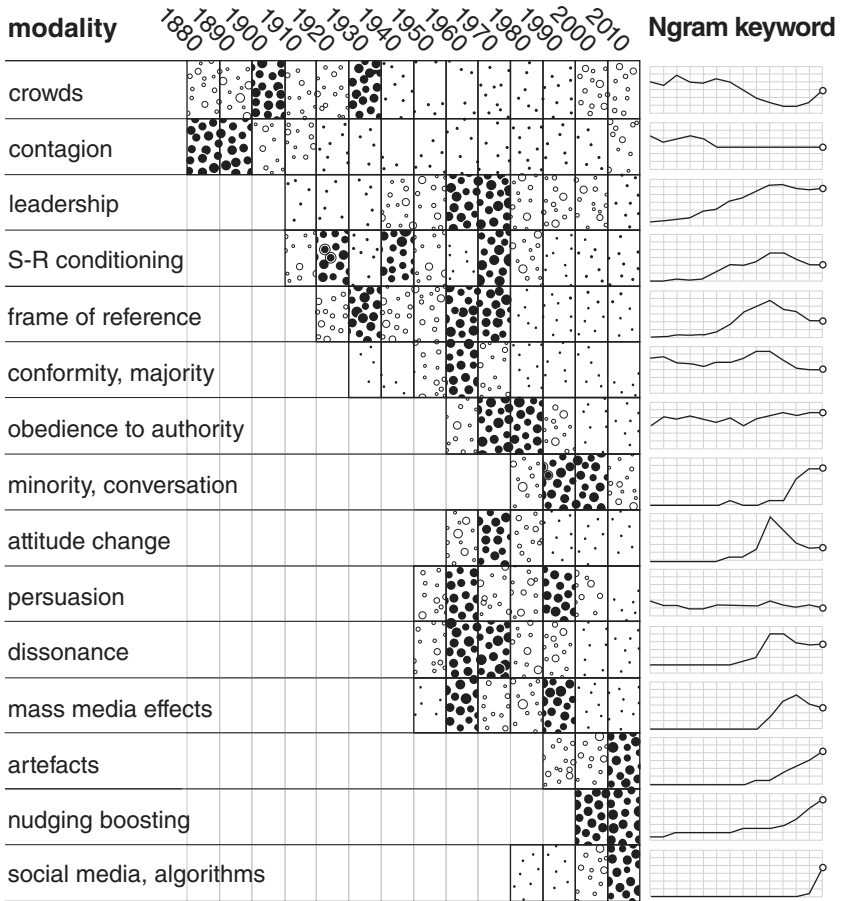low   medium   high

Figure 1.1   'Social influence' has the flavour of time; the word means different things
at different times

book is to take stock of the rich scholarship in the field of social psychol-
ogy, and avoid exaggerated claims to a new theory of 'social influence is X'
which would be little more than presenting 'old wine in new bottles', as
the claim to innovation so often is. What are seemingly novel insights into

human behaviour may be rehearsals of old facts in new language. In summary, we tackle three overarching concerns in this volume: the processes, the structure and the context of social influence, and for this we need to address some key assumptions first.

Power: Hard or Soft – Violence or Non-violence

Nye (1991) famously distinguished between 'hard' and 'soft' power. Hard power refers to the use of force, such as military interventions and law-and-order police forces. Hard power does not demand conversion, only compliance and submission; it observes the overarching rule of 'Might Is Right'. Soft power, on the other hand, refers to a range of strategies and tactics that increase conformity or precipitate conversion, and thus changes minds; it constitutes the 'Politics of Persuasion' or diplomacy. The two combine in strategic thinking although they are conceptually distinct and indeed serve different functions.

It seems that historically the process of 'civilisation' is tied to the containment of violent force in favour of **non-violent forms of life**; the reduction of hard power is compensated by the elevation of soft power, whilst their sum total might be a constant in any society [$Power_{const} =$ Hard + Soft]. Elias (2000 [1939]) reconstructs this process of 'civilisation' as the progressive control of affect and violent behaviour, which required the centralisation of violent force, initially at the King's Court and later in the state authorities. The psychological and the social sphere interlink in this process of 'taking control', so that the diffusion of manners of hygiene, napkin use and eating with implements such as forks and spoons correlate with this monopolising of power (at least in European history). Violence as a form of life is progressively sectioned and relegated to the preserve of professionals in the armed forces and police services – and this state monopoly for the use of violence is strictly regulated (Howard, 2001).

As a form of life (Reemtsma, 2016), violence is an immediate relation between bodies. Violence treats other bodies as mere obstacle-objects; it is harmful to bodies for sexual motives; or it gratuitously kills because a body is a nuisance; or it is fun to demonstrate that you simply can (exercise absolute power): 'I am God', says the torturer, 'no salvation from anybody … I call the shots here'. This communicative potential of gratuitous violence, indeed a natural capacity, is progressively reduced and contained in the process of civilisation by *delegitimating*. For civic communication violence is the exception, and this is buttressed by recorded memories of survivors of violence, who speak with authority of

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Box 1.1 'Social influence' beyond social psychology

Clearly, social psychology has no monopoly over the phenomenon or the term 'social influence'. The term is also popular in other fields of the social sciences. A brief glance into neighbouring fields reveals different vocabulary and foci of analysis.

Political science recognises social influence as constraints on public opinion and on voting behaviour (e.g., Kinder, 1998; Zaller, 1992). The processes of public opinion and of voting are seen to be variously constrained and the research examines and seeks to control these constraints. Generally, public opinion is defined as those streams of beliefs, ideas and preferences which governments might be prudent to heed in order to avoid the risk of losing support; hence public opinion itself is a lever of influencing governments.

According to the **strategic theory** of international relations, military force is the 'continuation of politics by other means' (Clausewitz); hence politics includes violent force as a form of influence and thus distinguishes between hard and soft powers. Military strategy is the logic of imposing one's will on an opponent, therefore influencing them by mobilising military means of conflict engagement.

Sociological theory considers social influence arising mainly from authority and prestige, thereby distinguishing different sources of authority: traditional, charismatic or rule-based (Weber, 1922). Authoritative influence defines a middle way between violence on the one hand and argumentative deliberation on the other. Social influence becomes one of several GSCM (generalised symbolic communication media) which disambiguate social situations and make the acceptance of claims more likely (Luhmann, 1990; Parsons, 1963); language, technology and GSCM are crutches to turn communication from a highly improbable to a more probable event. Influence is the general medium of persuasion, leading to actions for good reasons, which are based neither on deontic obligation (ethics), sanction (power) nor incentive (economic). GSCM are modelled on the legal system which operates on a binary code (legal–illegal; an action is concordant with the code of law or not) and regulates all matters accordingly; this is guaranteed by an institutional backstop (the constitution of the country). Social influence is similarly coded as persuasion based on prestige and reputation (high/low–good/bad) and supposedly guaranteed by a prestige hierarchy in society (social influence needs A-lists of celebrities). However, whether social influence can be guaranteed by a unique hierarchy is challenged by Habermas in his theory of communicative action (1994). Systems guarantee the playing field of strategic communication on a specific code. By contrast, social influence is tied to the sphere of communicative action oriented towards a common understanding. Communicative action serves multiple functions and not just one single code, 'famous or not'.

what has happened; but also buttressed by collective denial of the violent origins of 'civilisation' (Girard, 2008) and the sublimation of aggression into more acceptable activities such as sports or cinema (Lorenz, 2005).

On the other hand, soft power is permissible by rules of engagement within a secured field: *among ourselves we talk, with the Barbarians we fight.* History traces the ways in which humans have tried to extend this secured playing field of rules. For instance, in the United Nations General Assembly (since 1946), national representatives meet to discuss issues and forge solutions with the explicit intention of setting a global common ground that avoids or reduces armed conflict. Literally speaking, the guns are left at the door and do not feature at the negotiating table. In this way, soft power may curb the need for hard power; it becomes part of the effort of civilising even warfare in the context of an international search for stability or eternal peace (Howard, 2001). That said, allusions to the ability to use force may also mean that some actors strive to combine soft power *with* hard power in a dual strategy, leaving interlocutors with the sole option of learning who is 'ultimately' right: the soft way and/or the hard way.

In modern societies, hard power is relegated to a resting state, kept in reserve. In other words, it can be revived and utilised if needed but unless actively resorted to, its potential remains at rest when interacting agents commit to resolve discordances through soft power alone. Contemporary modern societies have centralised the use of force and the 'rule of law' designates the aspiration to make violence an exception, not a norm of the game. In most modern societies, only the armed forces and police services carry arms, under extensive training and close regulation. Any use of force requires justification in line with rules and regulations. 'Wild West' gun slinging is a characteristic of only war-torn societies dominated by armed militias in 'failing states'.

Thus, we need to address how we can neatly categorise any strategy of influence as either a soft or hard power exercise (see Box 1.2). For the purpose of this book, we equate soft power with the exercise of a mix of modalities of social influence at the expense of violence, but with the inclusion of authority.

Needless to say, establishing an agreement to relinquish hard power does not mean that discordances will not arise. It only means that when they do, the parties are committed to restraining from using violence to resolve discordances in an effort to reconcile disparate perspectives and concerns in communication. In doing so, different parties engage social influence that convinces other parties about the legitimacy of their own issues. Social influence furthers the cause without bloodshed.

Box 1.2 *Charlie Hebdo* and the question of terrorist propaganda

On the 7th January 2015, masked gunmen attacked the offices of Charlie Hebdo, a weekly newspaper in Paris, killing twelve people and injuring eleven others. The gunmen singled out editor Stephane Charbonnier and his crew in the attack. Charbonnier was held responsible for publishing controversial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. Reports claim that upon leaving the scene, the gunmen declared they had avenged the Prophet. Both gunmen were killed in a stand-off with police officers two days after the Charlie Hebdo attack.

Whilst the attack itself seems to be a direct retaliation to the newspaper's provocative cartoons, terrorist attacks have an intended target beyond punishing the perpetrators themselves. Terrorist attacks involve the use of hard power to achieve material outcomes in eliminating a specific target, such as editor Charbonnier. They are also intended as a warning to others who are similarly inclined as the victim. The message imparted by a terrorist act is 'if you do the same thing, you will suffer the same fate'. The fear associated with the outcome is intended to alter hearts and minds in a determined direction. Consequently, terrorism can be argued to be a hard power tactic with social influence ramifications, otherwise known as the 'propaganda of the act'. However, we contend that terrorism cannot be treated as a modality of social influence, due to the fact that it has a clear violence dimension. As we argue in this chapter, hard power may serve to secure the playing field. In this way, actors may go on to negotiate the playing field with those commanding the might. Terrorism is however 'outlawed' when parties have committed to 'leave guns at the door'. Social influence proper starts when political actors have put hard power aside.

On the other hand, social influence is part of competitive scenarios where alternatives are appraised and preferable options selected over others. In other words, social influence is competitive and serves for some perspectives to prevail at the expense of others. Social influence settles the competition score by securing collaboration from like-minded others that, in itself, becomes the mechanism to compete. There would be no need for social influence in a gathering of 'perfectly enlightened' Buddhas as no work is needed to achieve common sense; the common mindset is already in place.

Grey Areas of Social Influence – Manipulation and Symbolic Violence

If soft power makes exclusive use of social influence, this does not mean that all social influence is always soft power. The exercise of social

influence often involves some dubious strategies that raise questions regarding their morality and how their usage may 'corrupt' the playing field. For instance, in trying to be persuasive, one may opt for a positive self-presentation to stimulate agreeableness (see Cialdini, 1984). This practice is quite common, for instance, when dressing up for an important meeting or for a job interview. In such a managed situation, an individual may present a somewhat different version of their true self, one that they think a prospective employer might prefer. Similarly, presenting one's operational results during a 'business breakfast' helps put critics in a positive mood that should help them accept one's output more readily.

These anecdotal examples may be multiplied along a sliding scale of ever more dubious strategies that may involve 'dinners' with complimentary wine and entertainment. If this is still licit social influence, then how about spiking an opponent's drink to amplify the powers of the wine? Or what about having a vicious dog showing teeth, while 'suading' some behaviour? Our sliding scale is anchored on convincing by unending conversation on the one hand and by use of the gun on the other extreme, with a grey area for the middle ground (see Figure 1.2). The question we want to pose is: at which point does an attempt to influence become illicit, that is, become equivalent to a threat of violence? We contend that this depends on the established rules of engagement, but it also involves perception and
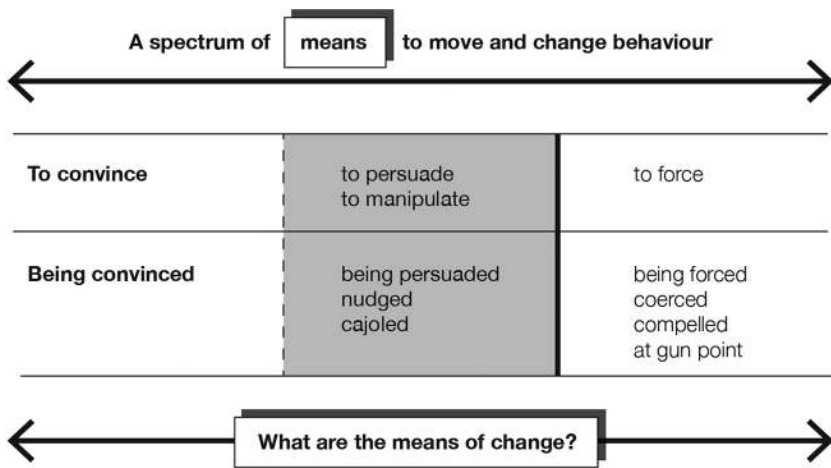

A spectrum of	means	to move and change behaviour		
To convince		to persuade to manipulate		to force
Being convinced		being persuaded nudged cajoled		being forced coerced compelled at gun point

What are the means of change?

Figure 1.2   The continuum of 'means of influence' with a grey area between licit methods to persuade another person and illicit methods of forcing their will

judgement. In other words, it is part of local norms of acceptability. For instance, whilst racial 'symbolic violence' is explicitly outlawed as 'violence' in many countries, questions remain as to whether freedom of expression can be invoked to 'incite hate' and whether such incitement is 'violence', therefore something outside freedom of expression. This became the downfall of the famous international PR firm *Bell-Pottinger* in 2017 when it became public notice that, far from being illegal, they suggested 'inciting racism' in Africa as their client advice on how to campaign. Other clients distanced themselves wanting to avoid being associated with such 'illicit tactics'.

The *dubiousness of social influence* lies in its fuzzy demarcation from manipulation and symbolic violence. This calls for ethical considerations of licit and illicit social influence. Indeed, Fischer (2017) analyses the **ethics of manipulation** which recently is highlighted with the wide propagation of 'nudges', 'decision-preserving decision architectures' or 'non-fiscal policy interventions' (see Chapter 9). Because manipulation can have long-term collateral consequences affecting the self-respect and sense of agency of the manipulated persons, Fischer develops four criteria to justify such grey-area interventions in social life:

- the persons manipulated need to be respected as persons; the manipulation must be confined to and focussed on a particular aspect of their lives;
- manipulation must be for benevolent purposes; it must be in the interest of the manipulated person or the common good; this calls upon the ethics of paternalism (or maternalism as it may be) modelled on a caring parent–child relationship;
- the intervention must be transparent, recognisable and stoppable; there must be an opt-out clause;
- manipulation can only be a temporary measure, never a permanent installation.

These ethical concerns make it clear that we need to assess social influence not only on its **effectiveness**, but also on it being **morally sound**. The latter is, however, not a primary characteristic of social influence, but depending on the context and its rules of engagement, we might call this the **'culture of social influence'**. These boundary norms of what is admissible into the tool box of 'social influence' might itself be subject to social influence by agents seeking to secure influence opportunities. Thus, in understanding social influence, we need to consider each tool but also the tool box: what is included, and what's better left out.