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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE

This volume brings together the full range of modalities of social influence – from crowding, leadership and norm formation to resistance and mass mediation and designed objects – to set out a challenge-and-response 'cyclone' model. The authors use real-world examples to ground this model and review each modality of social influence in depth. A 'periodic table of social influence' is constructed that characterises and compares exercises of influence in practical terms. The wider implications of social influence are considered, such as how each exercise of a single modality stimulates responses from other modalities and how any everyday process is likely to arise from a mix of influences. The book demonstrates that different modalities of social influence are tactics that defend, question and develop 'common sense' over time and offers advice to those studying political and social movements, social change and management.

GORDON SAMMUT is Associate Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Malta. He has served as chief editor for *Methods of Psychological Intervention*, *The Cambridge Handbook of Social Representations* and *Understanding Self and Others: Explorations in Intersubjectivity and Interobjectivity.*

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Modes and Modalities of Shifting Common Sense

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We write this book in the memory of our late teachers and their lasting inspirations; those still among us are too many to list:

Rob Farr (1936–2013, LSE, London)
Serge Moscovici (1925–2014, EHESS, Paris)
Rom Harré (1927–2019, University of Oxford)

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Foreword 1

Of the plethora of topics that social psychology addresses, none is more fundamental and ubiquitous than that of social influence. It forms the very essence of human interaction, the way we impact others and they impact us in return. It underlies the phenomenon of human sociality, and illuminates the processes of group formation, intergroup interaction, and the creation of culture. Small wonder then, that the theme of social influence reverberated across a broad spectrum of social science disciplines (including psychology, political science, economics, sociology, and anthropology among others) and was approached on multiple levels of analysis. A great achievement of Sammut and Bauer's *The Psychology of Social Influence: Modes and Modalities of Shifting Common Sense* is its ability to discuss in a coherent fashion the panoply of phenomena, approaches, and methodologies that populate the sprawling universe of concepts and effects known as the domain of social influence. The book weaves its narrative smoothly among epochs, paradigms, and findings, without taking sides and manages to pay equal respect and appreciation to the work of scholars of diametrically opposed methodological persuasions and contrasting philosophical predilections: Social representations are given equal consideration as the conceptions of social experimentalists; Freud's dynamic speculations are treated on par with models of quantitative economists; the observational work of developmentalists; and so on.

In that regard, this book is a distinctly postmodern, and constructivist work. It allows a "thousand flowers to bloom" and implicitly suggests that the different insights and results are but "ways of talking." There is no one Truth to be revealed but rather different narratives to be constructed, each with its own illuminations and insights. It is that perspective that allows the book to succeed in its mission, and spread before its readers the rich smorgasbord of concepts, findings, and observations that it manages to offer: The realization that the science of social influence isn't progressing linearly, nor is it necessarily getting "better and better" as the work goes

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on. Hence, any insight or perspective merits a respectful consideration no matter when it was articulated, from what disciplinary vantage point, or at what level of analysis. In that regard, too, *The Psychology of Social Influence* contrasts starkly with mainstream social psychological research in that its implicit assumption of scientific progress pays scant attention to the history of ideas and limits its researchers' attention to a relatively narrow band of findings and concepts defining the "here and now." In contrast, the book is wonderfully erudite and scholarly allowing the reader to appreciate the variety of perspectives and intellectual traditions that over time were brought to bear on social influence as a realm of phenomena.

The Psychology of Social Influence has an appealing organizing structure encompassed in the authors *cyclone model* and including its components of normalization, assimilation, and adaptation. Like pieces in a kaleidoscope, individual opinions and attitudes coalesce into broader patterns of beliefs forming normalized social representations, belief systems, and worldviews. These too may change under the impact of innovations often introduced by opinion minorities, if not by lone thinkers who defy the received views and convince the majorities to follow. Concepts of intersubjectivity and inter-objectivity elucidate the crucial importance of shared reality and culture as frameworks from which intelligible behaviours can be launched that afford actors meaning and significance. The concept of public sphere defines the arena where societal debate and discussion embody the shaping of social representations and collective worldviews. Coherence of the book is further imposed by the authors' helpful distinctions between modalities and modes of social influence and by partitioning of the book into self-contained sections that package together approaches and contents that share elements in common.

An aspect of the work that I found particularly valuable is its consistent ties to real-world examples and events. Figures like Adolf Hitler and Julius Caesar are invoked to illustrate leadership styles; Brexit is brought up to show how public debate is the platform for peaceful deliberation as are the examples from entirely different times and places such as ancient India and China. The *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris is brought up to argue that material violence should not be classed together with social influence phenomena. Above all, the diverse references to known situations and characters demonstrate the relevance of social influence research to occurrences of broad public interest, and demonstrate the utility of the social sciences in advancing a deeper understanding of history as well as politics.

The Psychology of Social Influence is a work with a definite point of view. In this sense it is often intriguing and thought-provoking. Though

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Professors Sammut and Bauer accept the utility of the experimental method in illuminating specific effects, they eschew the controlled experiment as a paradigm for social influence phenomena writ large. As they put it plainly: "In everyday life, social influence attempts do not follow the serial and mechanistic conceptions of the laboratory experiment." In fact, it appears that Sammut and Bauer shun the very possibility of a unified theory of social influence that would treat it as a general phenomenon (X) with knowable antecedents and consequences. Instead, they propose to recognize the inherent variability of influence instances and to parse them according to their sources, modes, and modalities. Whether one ultimately resonates to the "splitter" philosophy of science implicit in this recommendation or believes, instead, that our task is to "lump" surface diversity and reveal its unifying deep structure, *The Psychology of Social Influence* does a wonderful job of characterizing the heterogeneity that, this way or that, must be taken into account. I can't think of a more comprehensive introduction to this fundamental topic of crucial importance to science and society.

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Foreword 2

We have entered a new era – it is not 'business as usual' in the realm of social influence. In this new era, traditional beliefs such as 'the truth matters', 'facts should guide decisions', and 'might does not make right' have been seriously undermined. Of course, such beliefs have always been attacked by small numbers of critics, but now they are openly dismissed by populist, authoritarian national leaders in major societies, as well as the massive crowds that follow them. On climate change, human rights, sexism, minority–majority relations, wealth inequality, and some other enormously important issues, the influence of science and facts have diminished. Moreover, this trend is not limited to any one or a few countries, but sweeps across the populations of numerous societies. Those who look in amusement at Donald Trump in the United States and assume that it is only in America that social influence has been transformed are making a profound mistake. This change is global, associated with rising insecurity and uncertainty, and represents the most serious threat to democracy since the Second World War (Moghaddam, 2019). Nor will this change and its consequences disappear in the next decade or two, if Trump is defeated in the 2020 US presidential elections.

Sammut and Bauer have written a book that is at the forefront of efforts by social psychologists to respond to the foundational global transformations taking place in social influence in all its different manifestations. Their very well-structured book is broad and to some degree multidisciplinary, but its main contribution is to social psychology. Social influence has been a central topic of research throughout the history of social psychology. Sammut and Bauer provide a critical discussion of this history, with insightful coverage of research on conformity, leadership, obedience, and other key topics, but they also provide provocative new ideas for pushing research forward to grapple with social influence in the twenty-first century.

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Changes in social influence have to be understood in the context of enormous shifts across the globe: the rise of populist movements, the emergence of 'strongman' authoritarian leaders, and the increasing threat to democracy underway in our age of uncertainty. Research evidence suggests that when people experience uncertainty and threat, they are less inclined to support human rights and more inclined to support authoritarian leadership and punitive measures against minorities (Moghaddam, 2019). Of course, historical case studies also demonstrate the same trend, in an even more concrete fashion. For example, consider the forced relocation and internment in 'camps' of about 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II, through an executive order issued in 1942 by President Franklin Roosevelt. Most of those interned were United States citizens. In 2008 the US government apologized for this action, which clearly had been based on racist motives. How could President Roosevelt, known for his progressive social policies, have ordered the mass internment of more than 100,000 US citizens without trial and without evidence of wrongdoing? Research evidence suggests that the serious threats experienced by Americans, particularly after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor (1941), resulted in lower support for human rights and increased attacks on minorities.

Globalization in the twenty-first century is leading to increased perceived threat because of a number of large-scale changes, the most visible being massive and rapid migrations of human populations across national borders and entire regions. In addition to formal migration, hundreds of thousands of refugees (often deemed 'illegals') are on the move around the world at any one time. These population movements now take place rapidly, so that, for example, in a single year millions of people from Syria and other parts of the Near and Middle East move to Germany and other European countries. The resulting 'sudden contact' between incoming 'invaders' and host communities leads to a perceived threat among the populations of host societies, with a resulting backlash from extremist and sometimes violent nationalists. Consequently, anti-immigrant and anti-refugee populist movements are on the rise in societies as diverse as the United States, South Africa, Germany, and Poland, and attempts are made to construct stronger walls, including Brexit and 'Donald's wall,' to keep out the 'invaders'. In this new climate of rising ethnocentrism, some of the established tenets of social influence have been trodden underfoot.

For example, consider the principle that the influence a bit of information has on people is determined by the status and legitimacy of the information source. This principle has come to acquire the status of 'fact'

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in the post–World War II period. However, what is the validity of this 'established fact' now? Consider the case of climate change. The vast majority of legitimate scientists report that human activity is a major contributor to climate change and global warming. Second, scientific models of climate change predict that unless we alter our use of fossil fuels and adopt more green technology, human-induced global warming will result in rising sea levels and other changes that will bring catastrophic damage to planet earth and human societies. Our traditional models of social influence tell us that as the legitimate source of scientific information, scientists should have enormous social influence and our attitudes and behavior should be changing as a result of messages from scientists. But Donald Trump and other populist leaders, who have no scientific training, status, or legitimacy, have dismissed the message of thousands of scientists on climate change as 'fake news'. They have decided that in the domain of climate change, scientific facts do not matter.

In response to clear evidence that Donald Trump repeatedly lies and has behaved in racist and sexist ways, one group of his followers stood behind a placard announcing 'We Don't Care!' The same pattern of behaviour has been witnessed in other societies with populist 'strongman' leadership (Moghaddam, 2019). This is the new reality of social influence in the twenty-first century, and this is what social psychologists must confront and try to explain (and find solutions for!). How can we be moving into an anti-science, anti-fact era when electronic communications and the World Wide Web provide us with vast access to information? In answering such questions, we find that in some respects we have entered a new and different world, but in other respects some of the basic principles of social psychology continue to be valid.

Consider the vast and complex role of the Internet in social influence around the world. On the one hand, supporters of democracy have been disappointed in the development of 'echo chambers', with the strong tendency for internet users to communicate mainly with others who hold the same values and opinions as themselves, and to almost exclusively take notice of information that endorses their own perspectives. In practice, instead of seeking new information and opinions that we might learn from but that might challenge our own worldviews, we tend to interact with people and sources that endorse our worldviews and legitimize our biases. This trend in internet communications is new in as far as the technology is concerned, but it is 'old' in the sense that it is based on the principles of similarity–attraction well known to social psychologists. We prefer to interact with similar others, both at individual and collective levels.

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Our patterns of internet use follow the same similarity-attraction paths as found in friendships, marriage choices, and inter–group relations.

Sammut and Bauer have rightly called for a new generation of social psychologists to give priority to research in social influence; the urgency and timeliness of this call is most evident in the domain of leadership. Advances in electronic communications mean that decision-making could become more bottom-up, with the general population more involved in deciding policies. Research on social influence among animals clearly shows that collective decision-making does work effectively among some life forms (e.g., honey-bee democracy). However, the rise of authoritarian 'strongmen' around the world, backed by populist, ethnocentric populations intent on building walls around their societies, suggests that human groups are moving in a different direction, one that reflects the values of fascism in the 1930s. There is an urgent need for social psychologists to refocus efforts to better understand social influence processes, and to help strengthen and preserve open societies. Sammut and Bauer have provided a highly timely work that in important ways contributes to this historic effort.[1]

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[1] Moghaddam, F. M. (2019). *Threat to Democracy: The Appeal of Authoritarianism in an Age of Uncertainty*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press.

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