Are You Certain You Really Like Those Jeans You Are Wearing?: The Influence of Social Proof and Authority on a Product Evaluation

Kuši, Dejana

Are You Certain You Really Like Those Jeans You Are Wearing?: The Influence of Social Proof and Authority on a Product Evaluation

Dejana Kusic

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT Croatia)

HTSP.490 Senior Capstone Project

Mentor: Professor Vanda Bazdan, PhD

May 3rd, 2021

Abstract

The purchasing decisions of consumers have been reshaping rapidly, therefore, businesses need to implement a transitional approach to marketing and sales of the products and utilize the advantage of knowing what influences those purchasing decisions in order to achieve competitive advantage. This paper investigates the influence of social proof and authority on consumers' evaluation of the product. A research was conducted in the form of an experiment in which three groups of participants were required to evaluate three glasses of identical wine. One group was a control group with no exerted influence while two other groups were experimental groups exposed to manipulation of social proof and authority. Results suggest that social proof and authority are positively correlated with the evaluation of the product while there is no significant influence of socio-demographic variables. The findings of the study can be applied in marketing and sales sectors and used as a tool to successfully influence decisions consumers make when buying the products.

Keywords: social proof, authority, marketing, sales, conformity, peer pressure

Are You Certain You Really Like Those Jeans You Are Wearing?: The Influence of Social Proof and Authority on a Product Evaluation

Aristotle argued that all *homo sapiens* are preordained with the social instincts. He stated that an individual who is unable to function in society or is overly self-sufficient is considered to be a beast or a god (Jowett, 1885). Unlike other animals, humans are not ultra-social as a consequence of genetic interrelatedness but rather as the product of the evolution of unique cognitive and motivational psychological mechanisms (Tomasello, 2014). If a person has never had the contact with the rest of society he or she would not know what happiness, sadness, or joy is. That person would not be able to perform as a functional human being because he or she would not have a language to think, plan, and wonder. With this being said, humans are highly prone to fall under social influence. Social influence can be defined as the modification of an individual's thoughts, behaviors, and feelings affected by the social surrounding as well as willingness to conform to others, follow social rules, and obey authority in order to be accepted (Heizen, 2018).

Types of social influence

There are two types of social influence, informative and normative.

Informative social influence derives from the desire to be correct or accurate. In the informative environment, individuals accept the influence because they believe it comes from a credible source ("Informational Social Influence," 2016). It is usually present when the information can be seen as the solution to the obstacles that the individual needs to overcome. It is also identified that the appearance of the informative influence will occur if the information supports already established opinion or enhance the knowledge of the individual about his or her

environment (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). The example of the informative social influence can be represented through the patient's acceptance of conformity seen through the application of healthy eating habits due to the belief that its validity comes from the evidence offered by the nutritionist who is the expert in that field. Social scientists also studied informative social influence through people's willingness to persuade the actions performed by the majority even though their private information suggests otherwise, such behavior is defined as the bandwagon effect. When evaluating two restaurants with the similar offer, people would rather choose to dine in the restaurant that has higher occupancy (Kuan, Zhong, & Chau, 2014).

The normative social influence appears when the individual expects the punishment, reward, rejection or to be admired by others as the results of the conformity. According to Cooley (1962) immediate families, as well as other primary reference groups, have the greatest normative influence (as cited in Lord & Lee, 2001). Normative influence is divided into two types, descriptive and injunctive norms (Heinzen, 2018). Injunctive norms define what an individual is not supposed to do and what is socially sanctioned while descriptive norms define what is commonly done. The differentiation of those two norms can be shown through the example of littering. Littering in a certain area is forbidden which refers to the injunctive norms because society stated that it is not supposed to be done, however, people do it anyway because it became the common behavior for the people who occupied that area which is a result of a descriptive norm that refers to the commonly done things.

Processes of social influence

Social influence is commonly expressed through three dissimilar processes: internalization, identification, and compliance. Internalization is the process that arises in the

informative social influence environment. The individual accepts the influence because it is aligned with his or her values. People who induced the act of conformity are perceived as mediators of facts. The example of internalization lies in the persuasions of the lockdown during the pandemic because scientists expressed the belief that it needs to be done in order to diminish the pandemic. Identification can be seen as the indicator of normative social influence. Individuals go through the process of identification when the goal is to be liked and accepted by the group. The example can be express through the students following the same trends as their peers follow. Besides the identification, compliance is the process that represents the tool for the accomplishment of the normative social influence. It appears when the individual accepts the influence in order to receive the reward or to avoid the punishment. An example would be respecting the professor's requirements during classes in order to earn points or to avoid being expelled (Burnkrant and Cousineau,1975).

Forms of social influence

In addition to the various types and processes, there are two forms of social influence defined as implicit and explicit expectations (Heinzen, 2018). Implicit expectations are non-written norms that are followed and practiced by society. It is well-known that believers would go to the church dressed in formal clothes and to the gym by wearing sports attire. There are two subgroups of the implicit expectations. The first one is conformity that happens when people adjust their behavior to match the behavior of their peers. When the student attended college he or she followed fashion trends that differed from ones that he or she followed in elementary school. The second subdivision is social rules which are the non-formalized expectations from a group about how certain people are supposed to look and behave. Explicit expectations refer to clearly and formally stated rules. They can be seen expressed through

compliance which occurs when the individual acts according to a certain direct or indirect request. There will be no punishment if disobedience arises. On the other hand, obedience is the performance of the act that results from the order. If a person refuses to accept the order some kind of social punishment will happen.

Principles of social influence

In this day and age when everything moves and develops at a rapid pace, people do not consciously analyze every behavior that is being directed towards them. That is why social influence emerges commonly and people are not aware that they are being objects of the influence. As a doctor Robert Caildini (2009) stated, the utilization of social influence appears mostly when copious businesses try to make their products appealing to customers and induce a sale. According to him, some actions are simply influenced while others are not and the difference between them lies in the proper application of the compliance tactics that can be divided into six different categories: consistency, reciprocation, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity. The indicator of these categories is a fundamental psychological principle that governs human behavior.

Reciprocation

Reciprocation is the rule that implies that people are obligated to return a favor and provide future repayments of the things they received (Cialdini, 2009). By practicing reciprocation people make sure to never actually give up their belongings completely but rather wait for their future repayments. Individuals who do not participate in the transactions of giving back recourses they received are often perceived as ones with ignominious reputations. The

example that reflects the rule of reciprocity is seen through the practice of sending party invitations only to those people who previously invited us to their parties.

Scarcity

Scarcity refers to the lack of availability of certain things. It ensues because people are more afraid of losing something than excited about gaining something of the same value (Cialdini, 2009). The power of scarcity influence comes from two sources. The first source is the deficiency of the product and its connection to the quality. The better the quality of the product, the lower are chances of its possession. The second source is the thought of losing freedom. If people know that free choice is limited, they will desire it more. For example, people have a desire to go to restaurants more during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Consistency

When it comes to the principle of consistency, the motive for acceptance of social influence arises from one's previous actions (Cialdini et al., 1999). The future behavior paths are more likely to be similar to the past behavior paths because they already happened. The consistency principle is highly conspicuous in the cultures that encourage individualism. An example would be going to the gym more frequently if the monthly membership is paid. Another reason why the consistency principle has a high impact is the belief that inconsistency is considered to be a flaw while a consistent person is often seen as a stable, intellectual, and strong individual (Cialdini, 2009).

Liking

People are more likely to pursue an action if encouragement for it comes from someone they like. There are three crucial factors that influence liking: similarity, compliments, and cooperation ("Liking: The Fifth Principle," 2018). Similarity occurs when people share similar experiences, professions, and interests. A study among MBA students was conducted in order to discover the percentage of agreement based on the similarity approach. The professor of the negotiation class instructed them to share some personal information and similarities before negotiating. 90% of students reach agreement in comparison to 55% of students who didn't share their similarities previously. Abreast from being similar, receiving compliments from someone will result in a higher likeness (Martin, 2008). People tend to be closer to the colleagues who praise them and give compliment them commonly. Individuals like other individuals who easily cooperate with them on perusing mutual goals. The patient will more likely accept the treatment if a doctor developed it jointly with the patient.

Authority

Weber described power as the ability of an individual to impose his will even though resistance occurs (as cited in Blau, 1963). He stated that power can be reflected through the domination of authority that is the power to command and duty to obey. The criterion for the existence of authority is the minimum presence of voluntary submission. Weber (1968) argued that there are three types of authority, traditional authority, charismatic authority, and legal or rational authority (as cited in Coombs-Hoar, 2020). Traditional authority is inherited or imposed by divine choice. Legal authority comes from the law. The least stable type of authority is the charismatic authority that results either from a person's heroic acts, sanctity, charisma, or the normative pattern ordained by that person.

On the other hand, Paterson identified five types of authority (as cited in Coombs-Hoar, 2020). People who uphold superior knowledge and experience manifest Sapiential Authority. Moral authority arises when a person tries to improve a situation. Personal Authority occurs because the person possesses the unique set of qualities admired by the rest. Structural authority comes from a role or a position of a person in the organization and Charismatic Authority is given by God.

According to Cialdini (2009), the principle of authority transpires because people are more likely to listen to a suggestion or obey a request coming from someone with power. He distinguished three symbols of authority: titles, clothes, and trapping. Titles are generally earned through hard work and achievements, although, someone can easily attain them through their status. Clothes are a tangible symbol and people will usually consider the opinions of people who wear white doctor's coats or policeman uniforms. The word of someone who possesses tapping such as expensive car or jewelry will also have a high impact on the people's perceptions.

Another example of the high obedience to authority and neglecting of the peer's pain can be found in the real-life situation that occurred in Rwanda (Zimbardo, 2007). People who were the least-expected ones to commit genocide participated in it. The social worker who fought for women's rights and acquirement of the right to educations promised the Tutsi citizens who were suffering the genocide that they would be taken to a safe place. Instead, she took them to the soldiers and suggested them to rape the Tutsi woman and girls before they kill them.

Many studies on this topic have been conducted. The well-known is the Milligram experiment performed in 1961 (Coombs-Hoar, 2020). Subjects were given electrical machine to shock respondents every time he or she would give the wrong answer. Each wrong answer

required higher electricity voltage to be applied to the respondents on the order of the individual who represented the expert wearing a white coat, gadgets, and having a certain professional attitude. The shocks weren't real and the respondents were actors. The results of the experiment indicate that people's obedience toward the authority is significantly higher than a pity toward the 'victims'. Dr. Miligram's experiment was recreated in the research by Sheridan and King (1972) in order to examine the obedience of different genders to the authority**.** The authority variable instructed 13 females and 13 to electrify a puppy. Participants were able to see the puppy who was actually shocked just enough to feel the pain and start yelping. 100% of the female subjects were fully obedient compering to 54% of the males.

Social proof

Cialdini defined social proof as people's tendency to evaluate appropriate behavior for themselves by inspecting the behavior of others (R. B. Cialdini et al., 1999). As a consequence, people tend to imitate various behaviors of their peers such as littering, engaging in sexual activity, committing suicide, returning the lost wallet, etc.

It is impossible to express certain feelings without interaction with others. People are unable to tickle themselves, therefore, tickling is the product of human interaction. The important indicator of the social proof is human interaction manifested through communication. People communicate on a daily basis by exchanging comments and talking about social abstractions (Shibutani, 1961). When a certain service or a product becomes popular, it doesn't happen by accident where each individual makes their own independent choice. It happens because that product was admired by the majority and people have a tendency to like what others like (Watts, 2007).

The effect of social proof in everyday life can be seen through the study conducted on eating. People will eat at the peace of their companion. It is proven that 35% more food will be eaten when having dinner with a friend, while 75% more when eating with multiple people. According to this data, there is a high probability that a person will become obese if his or her close friend is (DeCastro, 1994).

Beside its influence in the offline environment, there is a robust presence of social proof within the online environment. According to the results of the research conducted by Park and Feinberg (2010) social proof and normative conformity, which are impacted by self-esteem and involvement, play an important role in virtual communities when it comes to making purchasing decisions.

In order to measure the probability of social proof influence, a pioneer in social psychology, Dr. Solomon Asch conducted an experiment where he tested the conformity of the participants. The participants thought that they were signing up for a psychology experiment where their visibility would be examined. There were 18 groups present out of which 12 were trial groups that included confederates who were instructed to influence participants into choosing the wrong answer by stating their opinion first. Participants were led to believe that other confederates were also real participants even though everything was staged and the scenario agreed with confederates before the realization. Each group was given the task to match the length of the stick to the length of one of three different sticks from the photo, A, B, and C. The stick matched the answer C, however, confederates provided the wrong answer in 12 trials. The results of the experiments stated that 75% of participants agreed with the rest of the group at least once. The presence of three or more confederates has significant influence unlike the presence of only one. What is also interesting is the fact that conformity was manifested less

when one confederate gave the right answer which shows the importance of social support when it comes to denying conformity. It is important to mention that study included a control group that counted 37 participants. More than 99% of participants of the control group provided correct answers which indicate that the average person could guess the right answers The experiment results provided Asch with the following findings: conformity tends to increase when more people are present, conformity also increases when the task becomes more difficult, conformity increases when other members of the group are of a higher social status, and conformity tends to decrease, however, when people are able to respond privately (Cherry, 2020).

Aside from Dr. Asch's research on social proof influence, another study on this topic that took into consideration genders sensitivity to influence of social proof was performed by Vincent and McCabe (2000). The results indicated that girls report higher susceptibility to peer pressure especially when it comes to the influence on one's appearance. The researches stated that the consequence of high beauty standards imposed on women might be the reason for the higher conformity of girls.

The presence of social proof can have a positive and negative impact (Cialdini, 2009). The positive side is the easier determination of how to properly behave and what actions to pursue. However, if someone solely relies on that, he or she might be the victim of profit-seekers who are prone to twisting the truth.

Utilization of social proof and authority use in everyday life and the business world

Social proof and authority are two principles that are commonly used in everyday life and business.

The influence of social proof is highly expressed among students through peer pressure. According to Foundation for a Drug-Free World International, 55% of secondary school students stated that they tried drugs because they were pressured by their friends("Foundation for a Drug-Free World'', n.d.).

As it was mentioned in the research paper from Gulati (2017), students' purchasing decisions were affected as well. The research presented the example of possession of the Apple products among students referring to those products as a manifestation of coolness and the richness of the students' backgrounds. They also conducted a survey which showed that students "wish to buy an iPhone/MacBook for it is now considered a luxury that they wish to possess once they start earning." Students believe that if they own apple products that they have higher chances to be accepted among 'cool' peers. The Apple Company enhances the social proof effect by using the slogan "If you don't have an iPhone, you don't have an iPhone".

The reason why social proof is successfully used in marketing when influencing purchasing decision is because social proof integrates effortlessly which makes it exponentially more effective (Alton, 2016). Another great example of its effectiveness can be seen through the operations of Gogobot, a leading hotel search engine that offers the feature "Tribes: Who likes this place?" There are five types of travelers listed in this section and next to each group is the percentage of group likeness of certain hotels which triggers consumers to use Gogobot services because they want to feel like they belong to the group of travelers they identify themselves with as well as to learn how to achieve that.

Even though there is a noticeable pattern of a great social proof influence on making the purchasing decisions, the conformity of the consumers will not always occur. There is a higher

possibility of the individual resisting the group pressure if the consumers' choices are restricted. Even though consumers are pressured into adopting a new style majority of them are more likely to maintain independence when choosing the brand of the certain product or service (Venkatesan, 1966).

In regards to authority, its utilization in everyday life can be noticed through the example of having healthy eating habits. People would more likely engage in eating healthy if it is suggested by a nutritionist who is considered to be an expert in that field rather than to practice them on their own (Peachman, 2021). Also, if the driver has information that a policeman who represents the authority is present at a certain place he or she will lower the driving speed. At work, employees would commonly be engaged in unethical behavior if it is supported by their managers. Famous consultant, Dean Rieck, described the practice of authority in his post about the principle of authority. He described the situation in which the person dressed like security was standing in front of the ATM on which it was glued "out of order, give deposits to a security guard" managed to trick people into giving him money and their personal details (Hum, 2020).

The authority principle is applied in business by using an expert or the person with high influence of a target market as the representative of their company in order to motivate customers to make a purchasing decision. The expert is presented as a spoke person or displayed on the company's online platforms.

Method

The present study aspires to evaluate the significance of the influence of social proof and authority on customers' appraisal of the product. The importance of the research lies in the fact that in this rapidly changing era consumers make various efficient or inefficient consumption

choices, and it is of a high value for the corporations as well as for the small businesses to discover how those choices are made and what has the influence on them in order to create the competitive advantage in the market and differentiate themselves. The purpose of the experiment is to measure to which extent people are governed by peers and experts when making purchasing decisions. The recreated experiment tested the following hypotheses that were conducted based on the previous research conducted on the topic of authority and social proof effect on the consumers' behavior:

H1: *A direct relationship between the product evaluation and the social proof will be obtained.*
H2: *A direct relationship between the product evaluation and the social proof will be obtained.*
H3: *Females are affected more than males by the social proof when evaluating the product.*

H4: *Females are affected more than males by authority when evaluating the product*.

Procedure

The experiment is a recreation of the examination conducted in the School of Business Administration, the University of Minnesota by Dr. Venkatesan where 144 college juniors and seniors were asked to evaluate 3 identical men's suits labeled A, B, and C. Each subject was informed that the suits are from different retailers, that there were differences in quality, that the previous studies conducted at the Center for Experimental Studies in Business had indicated that experienced tailors were able to pick the best suit and that the current study is done in order to see if the consumers are able to pick the best one. The subjects were divided into three groups based on the conditions they were put in; control condition, condition (Conformity) II, and condition (Resistance) III. Each subject had the same task and two minutes to evaluate the suits. In the control condition, the subject evaluated the suits without the influence of the group, while

in condition II and III the subjects were affected by the group opinions given by confederates who were told to choose suit B as the best one (Venkatesan, 1966).

A similar procedure was implemented in the present study with the addition of the new group of experimenters influenced by the authority variable together with the change of the type of the product that was being evaluated in all three conditions. The participants of the experiment were 58 RIT Croatia freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior students. They were divided into three groups; one control, one social proof experiment group, and one authority experiment group. The product that was being evaluated was chosen in accordance with the subjects' familiarity with it.

The average age of control group participants that consisted of 12 females and 9 males was 22.14 (SD=0.854). The price range of wine participants consumed the most ranged from 61-100kn, 38.95 %. The frequency of wine consumption was several times a year 33.3%. The average knowledgeability of wine on the 1 to 7 scale where one stated for not knowledgeable at all and 7 highly knowledgeable was 3.43 (SD=0.978). 76% of control group participants stated that they were not oenophiles as shown in Table 1.

There were 6 males and 15 females in the authority group with an average age of 19.57 (SD=0.978). The majority of participants noted that they drink wine within the price range 61-100kn, 33.3%. The experimenters stated that they consumed wine several times a year 27.1%. The knowledgeability of wine on average was 3.3 (SD=1.426) on a 1-7 points scale. The majority of participants, 68.2%, said that they were not oenophiles as shown in Table 2.

The social proof group counted 9 females and 6 males. The average age was 20.50 (SD=0.855). 53.3% participants consumed wine within the price range of 61-100kn. The

frequency of wine consumption was 26.7% about once a month. The average knowledgeability of wine was 3.40 (SD=1,298) on a 1-7 points scale. 53.3% confirmed they were not oenophiles as shown in Table 3.

The task of each group was to evaluate the quality and chose the most favorable one among three identical classes of wine labeled as A, B, and C. Each glass was filled with the same wine and positioned next to others. The subjects were told that (1) the research was about brand quality recognition, (2) that glasses were filled with the wine of different brands but same in taste, color and, smell (3) that similar research was done, where experts like sommeliers were able to find differences among them, and (4) that experimenter wants to see if subjects can find the one of the highest quality. Subjects were remarked that (5) there are quality differences and (6) that evaluation is based on student's perception and there is no wrong answer. The participants in the experimental groups were manipulated by social proof and authority. Each group had the same task of evaluating the quality of the wine.

The participants of the control group recorded their answers individually without any influence. The participants of the social proof experiment group were influenced by confederates who favored the B glass. The participants of the authority experimental group were influenced by the authority of the professor who teaches Wines of the World course and possesses a great knowledge of wine.

In the social proof experimental group, three students were confederates and the fourth participant was the subject of the experiment. To achieve the effect of the peer pressure, all the participants were positions in a way that would allow confederates to loudly say first their preference of the wine in the glass B after everyone tried wine. Everything that confederates did

was arranged before the actual experiment began. In order to avoid suspicion of the subject, confederates came from different places in the building and after the experiment, spread around the building. This was done in order to make the subject believe that confederates had the same role in the experiment as he/she did. Confederates went through the same process as each subject did. Their seating arrangement was given before the experiment. The first confederate was instructed to say: "I am not sure. All three wines taste very similar to me, but if I had to choose, I would choose B'. Confederate 2: 'Yes, I actually think so as well, for me wine in the glass B is the best one'. Confederate 3: ''I mean, I am not sure. Maybe the second one is a bit better, but now that you said B, I am thinking it might actually be B.'' In addition, all of them were given a form that asked them to write down reasons why they chose a certain answer. After filling out the form, the experimenter thanked the participants and asked them to send the next participant from the class.

The same procedure was practiced within the authority experiment group but with the change of the independent variable which was the professor's opinion of the quality of presented wines. The groups of three students were invited to the classroom to evaluate the wine. After each participant tried wine, the professor said: 'If anyone, I know my wines, so I am certain that the glass B is filled with the best wine.''

Results

In order to measure the effect of peer pressure and authority variables on the evaluation of the product and decision that led participants into choosing the superior wine, the data collected from the experiment were analyzed with the assistance of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences computer program. The frequencies of the choice together with progression

analyzes were performed in order to examine the extent of influence and the probability of the events occurring again.

The results indicated that 20% of social proof experimental group participants recognized glass A as being the superior one in comparison to 80% of control group participants. In terms of wine in the glass C being defined as the best one, only 23.5% of participants in the social proof group chose C compering to 76.5% of participants in the control group. When it comes to the frequency of stipulating the superiority of glass B wine in the social proof experimental group, 76.9% of participants chose B while being induced into making that choice by confederates in order to stimulate subjecting to conformity while 23.1% of participants of the control group who were not manipulated into choosing any particular wine indicated their favoritism towards wine in glass B as shown in Table 4. There is a significant relationship between the two variables, social proof, and choice of the superior wine. Participants are more likely to choose wine B when influenced by confederates $\chi 2$ (3, N=58) =10.409, $p < .05$.

When discussing the authority group, 55.6 % of participants chose wine distributed in glass A in contrast to 44.4% participants of the control group. Regarding the wine in glass C, 27.8% of participants stated that they preferred wine C compering to 72.2% of control group participants who chose C wine. 78.6% of the authority group participants selected the B sample while being indirectly encouraged to do so by a professor who is known as an expert in the wine field in comparison to 21.4% participants of the control group who were not influenced by anyone as shown in Table 5. There is a significant relationship between the two variables, authority, and choice of the superior wine. Participants are more likely to choose wine B when influenced by authority $\chi 2$ (3, N=58) = 9.238, $p < .05$.

Binary logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of gender, age, knowledgeability of wine, and frequency of wine consumption on the likelihood of choosing B wine under the social proof and authority influence. No significant effect was recorded for any of the mentioned socio-demographic variables within the social proof experimental group. When taken into consideration the authority group, there was not a significant association between gender, age, and frequency of consumption, and choice of wine. However, knowledgeability of wine had an effect on the wine choice and was a significant indicator, $\chi 2(1) = 3.953$, $p < .05$.

In terms of reasoning for choosing the wine superior wine, 22.41% of participants said it is because the chosen wine had the best smell while 70.8% of participants said the indicator was the taste. The rest of the comments included scent, flavor, after taste, and no specific reasons for the choice.

Discussion

The purpose of the research paper was to measure the influence of social proof and authority on the people's evaluation of the product. Based on the previous research studies that were conducted on the mentioned topic by Dr. Zimbardo (2007), Dr. Miligram (1974), and Dr. Asch (1950), the first two hypotheses were derived: a direct relationship between the product evaluation and the social proof will be obtained and a direct relationship between the product evaluation and the authority will be obtained. Both hypotheses were supported by the results of the experiment performed within this study. A high percentage of the social proof experimental group participants conformed to the group influence when stating the superior wine similarly to Asch's experiment where the significant number of participants who were influenced by the confederates provided the wrong answer to a question even though the correct answer was

visibly evident. Regarding the authority group, the large portion of experimenters chose the wine that the professor who has the reputation of being highly knowledgeable of wines declared as the best one which is similar to the behavior that was noted in the Dr. Miligram (1974) experiment where the majority of the participants persuade harmful action just because the knowledgeable individual in the uniform asked them so.

The third hypothesis that indicated higher conformity of females than males to social proof was conducted in accordance with the research done by Vincent and McCabe (2000) which results showed that girls reported higher susceptibility to peer pressure when it comes to the influence on one's appearance. The present hypothesis was refuted since the present results shows that there is not a significant effect of any gender on the evaluation of the product. This data leads to new findings that suggest that consumers' choices are reshaping due to the progression of society and a decrease in stereotypical views of genders. The new approaches to marketing and sales of a certain product in a less stereotypical and more liquid society, that can be taken in order to reach both genders, should be examined for more successful advertising.

The final hypothesis that states that females would be more influenced by authority than males was conducted according to the results from the research done by Sheridan and King (1972). The present results show that a gender of a person affected by authority when making a purchasing decision isn't significant, therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

The findings about the high intensity of social proof influence can be linked to the study conducted by Park, J., & Feinberg, R. (2010) the states that informative normative conformity could be used as a marketing and sales tool, especially within the digital marketing sector. With that being said, it is recommended to specialists to direct their budget towards encouraging their

consumers into leaving reviews as well as exhibiting those reviews on their websites. Not only reviews but testimonials as well, especially not the paid ones because as it was noticed during the experiment that people trust greatly their peers when making the choices that include evaluation of the product. Besides engaging the consumers in the promotional practices, the marketing department needs to consider utilization of the 'bandwagon effect' which is the thought that if everyone is doing something why shouldn't you. This implies that the companies should produce commercials that focus on the number of people resembling the targeted group enjoying the product or pointing out that everyone thinks so. Lastly, the money should be invested into methods that will allow companies to reach more followers rather than on traditional marketing methods to be presentable as a trustworthy organization.

The second part of the research which is based on the influence of authority as well contains valued data that includes patterns of behavior presented in previous studies and can be highly utilized in marketing when promoting the items. If the company hires someone who is seen as a knowledgeable individual in the product niche, there will be higher chances of increased revenues and sales since it is proven that people fall under the conformity of authority. So when promoting the product or inducing the sale the organization needs to put effort into finding experts, or someone who has a huge following and trust of the people in order to achieve bigger sales and increase profits Sport apparel companies are doing so by hiring successful athletes as the face of their brand, high-fashion companies employ trendy fashion bloggers to promote the new clothing lines, healthy-food businesses post testimonials and advice from a nutritionist about the consumption of their products, and the companies that produce toothpaste engage dentists in white coat uniforms to vouch for the quality of their products. The reason why these businesses' activities increase the revenue is because ''strength of tendency to obey comes

from systematic socialization of society members that obedience constitutes correct conduct. Frequently adaptive to obey dictates of genuine authorities because such individuals usually possess high levels of knowledge, wisdom, and power'' (Zimbardo, 2007).

Even though it is proven that there is the influence of both conditions when it comes to evaluation of the product, and suggested that higher investments into techniques that include social proof and authority variables need to be made for the greater success of the company, this research paper caught sight of the interesting finding. The experiment has proved that people's senses tend to look for non-existent difference just because they were told that it is there which shows the lack of critical thinking skills as well as a strict following of the rules and high presence of conformity when it comes to evaluation of the products.

There are at least two potential limitations concerning the results of this study. The first limitation concerns the number of participants. Due to COVID-19, the number of experiment participants was significantly reduced which could influence the probability of events repetition. Second, there was the issue time during which the experiment was conducted. Since the students were obligated to attend their classes, it wasn't possible to devote an equal amount of time to each evaluation of the product. In terms of future research, it would be useful to extend the current findings by examining the influence of age, gender as well as knowledgeability of the product on the customers' evaluation of it by conducting the experiment with a larger group of participants.

Although the generality of the current results must be established by future research, the present study has provided clear support for showing the importance of social proof and authority when making a purchasing decision. Not only was it proven by the literature that

people's opinion is affected by the experts and people who surround them in their everyday life but it was also supported with the results of the experiment conducted for the purpose of providing statistical data for this research paper.

Furthermore, marketing and sales companies, need to take into consideration the findings of the study 'The Influence of Social Proof and Authority on a Product Evaluation' when promoting or selling a new product in order to increase profit and make mountainous sales.

References:

Alton, L. (2016). 5 incredibly creative uses of social proof in marketing. *Cio*, https://ezproxy.rit.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.rit.edu/trade-journals/5-incredibly-creative-uses-social-proof-marketing/docview/1821426359/se-2?accountid=108

Blau, P. (1963). Critical Remarks on Weber's Theory of Authority. *American Political Science Review, 57*(2), 305-316. doi:10.2307/1952824

Burnkrant, R., & Cousineau, A. (1975). Informational and Normative Social Influence in Buyer Behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 206–215.

Cherry, K. (2020, April 30). Asch'S Seminal Experiments Showed the Power of Conformity. Verywell Mind. https://www.verywellmind.com/the-asch-conformity-experiments-2794996

Cialdini, R. (2009). *Influence* (The Psychology of Persuasion ed.). HarperCollins.

Cialdini, R. B., Wosinska, W., Barrett, D. W., Butner, J., & Gornik-Durose, M. (1999). Compliance with a Request in Two Cultures: The Differential Influence of Social Proof and Commitment/Consistency on Collectivists and Individualists. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 25*(10), 1242–1253

Coombs-Hoar, K. (2020). Effect Of Cultural Differences on the Principle of Authority Introduced By Robert Cialdini. *Humanities and Social Sciences, 27*, 7–18.

Foundation for a Drug-Free World International. (n.d.). *Crack Cocaine & Peer Pressure - Teen Usage - What Dealers Say - Drug-Free World*. Foundation for a Drug-Free World. https://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/crackcocaine/what-dealers-will-tell-you.html

Goodfriend, W., & Heinz, T. (2018). *Social Psychology*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Gulati, S. (2017). Impact of Peer Pressure on Buying Behaviour. *International Journal of Research - Granthaalayah*, *5*(6), 280–291.

Helfert, S., & Warschburger, P. (2013). The face of appearance-related social pressure: gender, age and body mass variations in peer and parental pressure during adolescence. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, *7*(1), 16. https://doi.org/10.1186/1753-2000-7-16

Hum, S. (2020, November 6). *7 Examples of the Authority Principle Used In Marketing*. Word-of-Mouth and Referral Marketing Blog. https://www.referralcandy.com/blog/authority-marketing/

Informational Social Influence: Conforming to Be Accurate. (2016, January 15). Open Textbooks for Hong Kong. http://www.opentextbooks.org.hk/ditatopic/16631

Jowett, B. (1885). *The Politics of Aristotle* (Vol. 1). Clarendon Press. https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/files/Politics_1.pdf

Kuan, K., Zhong, Y., & Chau, P. (2014). Informational and Normative Social Influence in Group-Buying: Evidence from Self-Reported and EEG Data. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *30*, 151–178. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167208316691

Liking: the fifth principle of persuasion. (2018, July 11). DocCentrics. Retrieved Feb 18, 2021, from https://doccentrics.com/news/liking-the-fifth-principle-of-persuasion/.

Lord, K., & Lee, M. (2001). Differences in Normative and Informational Social Influence. *Advances in Consumer Research Volume*, *28*, 280–285.

Martin, S. (2008). The science of compliance: the principle of liking. *Practice Nurse*, *35*, 43.

Park, J., & Feinberg, R. (2010). E-formity: Consumer conformity behaviour in virtual communities: An international journal. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *4*(3), 197-213.

Peachman, R. (2021, January 6). *Eat Healthier, Even During a Pandemic*. Consumer Reports. https://www.consumerreports.org/nutrition-healthy-eating/eat-healthier-even-during-a-pandemic

Sheridan, C. L., & King, R. G. (1972). Obedience to authority with an authentic victim. *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association*, *7* (Pt. 1), 165–166.

Tomasello, M. (2014). The ultra-social animal. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *44*(3), 187-194.

Vincent, M. A., & McCabe, M. P. (2000). Gender Differences Among Adolescents in Family, and Peer Influences on Body Dissatisfaction, Weight Loss, and Binge Eating Behaviors. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *29*(2), 205–221.

Venkatesan, M., (1966). Experimental study of human behavior – Conformity and independence. *JMR, Journal of Marketing Research, 3*, 384-387.

Zimbardo, P. (2007). *The Lucifer Effect by Philip Zimbardo*. The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil. http://web.archive.org/web/20160311204940/http://lucifereffect.com/guide_cialdini-e.htm

Table captions

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics for control group participants*

Demographics	%	Sample M (SD)
Female	57.1%	
Male	42.8%	
Age		22.14 (.854)
Knowledgeability of wine		3.43 (.978)
More than 3 times a week	4.7%	
Consumed wine 2-3 times a week	14.2%	
Consumed once a week	9.5%	
Consumed wine several times a month	19.0%	
Consumed wine once a month	19.0%	
Consumed wine several times a year	33,3%	
Price 101-150HRK	14.2%	
Price 61-100HRK	38.9%	
Price 151-300HRK	33.3%	
Price 20-60HRK	14.2%	
Pearson is an Oenophile	24.0%	
Pearson is not an Oenophile	76.0%	

Table 2: *Descriptive statistics for authority group participants*

Demographics	%	Sample M (SD)
Female	71.4%	
Male	28.5%	
Age		19.57 (.978)
Knowledgeability of wine		3.33 (1.426)
Consumed wine about once a week	28.5%	
Consumed wine several times a month	19.0%	
Consumed wine once a month	9.5%	
Consumed wine several times a year	28.5%	
Consumed wine once a year	4,7%	
Doesn't drink wine	9.5%	
Price 101-150HRK	23.8%	
Price 61-100HRK	33.3%	
Price 151-300HRK	23.8%	
Don't spend money on wine	9.5%	
Price 20-60HRK	9.5%	
Pearson is an Oenophile	31.8%	
Pearson is not an Oenophile	68.2%	

Table 3: *Descriptive statistics for social proof group participants*

Demographics	%	Sample M (SD)
Female	60.0%	
Male	40.0%	
Age		20.50 (.855)
Knowledgeability of wine		4.13 (1.767)
Consumed wine about 2-3 times a week	13.3%	
Consumed wine once a week	6.6%	
Consumed wine several times a month	20.0%	
Consumed wine once a month	26.6%	
Consumed several times a year	13.3%	
Consumed wine once a year	13.3%	
Doesn't drink wine	6.6%	
Price 101-150HRK	20.0%	
Price 61-100HRK	53.3%	
Price 151-300HRK	6.6%	
Price 301-500HRK	6.6%	
Price 20-60HRK	13.3%	
Pearson is an Oenophile	46.7%	
Pearson is not an Oenophile	53.3%	

Table 4.*The influence of social proof condition on the choice of wine in glass B.*

Condition	A	B	C	None	Total	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance
Social proof group	20.0%	76.9%	23.5%	0.0%	41.47%			
Control group	80.0%	23.1%	76.5%	100.0%	58.3%			
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%			
Pearson Chi-Square						10.629	3	.014

Table 5. *The influence of authority condition on the choice of wine in glass B*

Condition		A	B	C	None	Total	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance
	Authority group	55.6%	78.6%	27.8%	0.0%	50.0%			
	Control group	44.4%	21.4%	72.2%	100.0%	50.0%			
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%			
Pearson Chi-Square							9.238	3	.026

Appendix A-The questionnaire

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant's signature_____ Date:_____

1. Gender:

☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Please state your age. _____

3. How often do you drink wine?

☐ Never ☐about once a year ☐several times a year ☐about once a month ☐several times a month ☐about once a week ☐ 2-3 times a week ☐ more than 3 times a week

4. Please specify the price range of the bottle wine you usually drink?

☐20-60KN ☐61-100KN ☐101-150KN ☐151-300KN ☐ 301-500KN

☐other, please specify:_____

5. Please rate your knowledgeability of wine on a 7-point scale in which 1 stands for "not knowledgeable at all" and 7 stands for "extremely knowledgeable".

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely

6. Do you consider yourself an oenophile? (An oenophile is a person who greatly enjoys wine and knows a lot about it; a wine lover.)

☐ Yes ☐ No

***PLEASE TURN THE PAGE AFTER TASTING WINE**

7. Which wine would you rate as having superior quality?

1. A
2. B
3. C

8. Please, specify the reasons why did you think that option A, B or C has superior quality?

9. Please rate this focus group experience on a 7-point scale in which 1 stands for “not pleasurable at all” and 7 stands for “I enjoyed it”.

Not pleasurable at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 Enjoyable

Appendix B- Procedure

The experiment will be based on the experiment conducted by M. Venkatesan, presented in the Experimental Study of Consumer Behavior Conformity and Independence research paper published in the Journal of Marketing Research, Nov. 1966.

There will be:

- 5 control group sessions consist of 4 people per group
- 5 authority group sessions consist of 4 people per group including professor Domagoj Nikolic who will present the authority variable in all groups.
- 20 social proof sessions consist of 4 people per group, 3 of which are confederates

The whole experiment will last up to maximum of 360 minutes (7 minutes per session and 5 minutes of break in between the groups to disinfect the classroom).

CONTROL GROUP:

Before entering the experiment room, everything will be disinfected according to Covid-19 requirements as well as after each group leaves the room. Upon entering the room, participants will be guided to their seating arrangement and will be given further instruction on the experiment by an experiment moderator –Dejana Kusic.

Introduction(2 minutes)

Moderator: “Hello everyone! My name is Dejana Kusic and I would like to thank you for participating in this experiment. Your contribution will be useful in recording the results needed for my senior project.

First, I would like to go through some guidelines that need to be followed during this experiment.

1. This experiment will last exactly 7 minutes.

2. There are 3 glasses of wine in front of you A, B, and C which I would kindly like to ask you to try after the instructions. Each glass is filled with wine from different distributor. All of them have the similar taste, quality, and price. Sommeliers were able to tell the difference and chose the best wine.

3. Please fill out the first page of questionnaire before tasting the wine and the second page after tasting wine.

4. Please lower down your mask while tasting it and put it right back after.

5. Usage of mobile phones is not permitted during the experiment.

6. Please take in consideration that no interaction of any kind is allowed between the experiment participants.

7. After you fill out the questionnaire, please remain seated and wait for further instructions by the moderator.

8. After you leave the room you are not allowed to comment on the experiment with the next group of participants.

Lastly, I would like to thank you once again for participating in the experiment. After finishing the experiment, my next step is to analyze the data. Thank you again!

During the experiment, experiment moderator will be seated in the back of the room monitoring experiment protocol. The moderator will make sure that all participants are following the given guidelines and will monitor experiment protocol and time.

5 minutes break for disinfecting the classroom and changing the glasses before the entrance of the second group

EXPERIMENTAL SOCIAL PROOF GROUPS:

Before entering the experiment room, everything will be disinfected according to Covid-19 requirements as well as after each group leaves the room. Prior to the participants entering the room, confederates will be asked to express their favoritism for the glass B during the experiment.

Confederate no. 1 will be asked to say 'I am not sure. All three wines taste very similar to me, but if I had to choose, I would choose B'.

Confederate no.2 will be asked to say 'Yes, I actually think so as well, for me wine in the glass B is the best one'.

Confederate no.3 will be asked to add ''I mean, I am not sure. Maybe the second one is a bit better, but now that you said B, I am thinking it might actually be B.''

Upon entering the room, participants will be guided to their seating arrangement which will be staged in a way that would allow confederates to speak first. After everyone is seated, they will be given further instruction on the experiment by an experiment moderator –Dejana Kusic.

Introduction (2 minutes)

Moderator: “Hello everyone! My name is Dejana Kusic and I would like to thank you for participating in this experiment. Your contribution will be useful in recording the results needed for my senior project.

First, I would like to go through some guidelines that need to be followed during this experiment.

1. This experiment will last exactly 7 minutes.

2. There are 3 glasses of wine in front of you A, B, and C which I would kindly like to ask you to try after the instructions. Each glass is filled with wine from different distributor. All of them have the similar taste, quality, and price. Sommeliers were able to tell the difference and chose the best wine.

3. Please fill out the first page of questionnaire before tasting the wine and the second page after tasting wine

4. Please lower down your mask while tasting it and put it right back after.

5. Usage of mobile phones is not permitted during the experiment.

6. Please take in consideration that the interaction among the participants is allowed.

7. After you fill out the questionnaire, please remain seated and wait for further instructions by the moderator.

8. After you leave the room you are not allowed to comment on the experiment with the next group of participants.

During the experiment, experiment moderator will be seated in the back of the room monitoring experiment protocol. The moderator will make sure that all participants are following the given guidelines and will monitor experiment protocol and time.

5 minutes break for disinfecting the classroom and changing the glasses before the entrance of the second group

EXPERIMENTAL AUTHORITY GROUPS:

Before entering the experiment room, everything will be disinfected according to Covid-19 requirements as well as after each group leaves the room. Prior to the participants entering the room, moderator will ask authority variable professor Domagoj Nikolic to express his favoritism for the glass B during the experiment by saying 'If anyone, I know my wines, so I am certain that the glass B is filled with the best wine'. Professor Nikolic will be in the classroom the whole time during the experiment. Upon entering the room, participants will be guided to their seating arrangement and will be given further instruction on the experiment by an experiment moderator –Dejana Kusic.

Introduction (2 minutes)

Moderator: "Hello everyone! My name is Dejana Kusic and I would like to thank you for participating in this experiment. Your contribution will be useful in recording the results needed for my senior project.

First, I would like to go through some guidelines that need to be followed during this experiment.

1. This experiment will last exactly 7 minutes.

2. There are 3 glasses of wine in front of you A, B, and C which I would kindly like to ask you to try after the instructions. Each glass is filled with wine from different distributor. All of them have the similar taste, quality, and price. Sommeliers were able to tell the difference and chose the best wine.

3. Please fill out the first page of questionnaire before tasting the wine and the second page after tasting wine.

4. Please lower down your mask while tasting it and put it right back after.

5. Usage of mobile phones is not permitted during the experiment.

6. Please take in consideration that the interaction among the participants is allowed.

7. After you fill out the questionnaire, please remain seated and wait for further instructions by the moderator.

8. After you leave the room you are not allowed to comment on the experiment with the next group of participants.

Experiment with the first experimental group (5 minutes)

During the experiment, experiment moderator will be seated in the back of the room monitoring experiment protocol. The moderator will make sure that all participants are following the given guidelines and will monitor experiment protocol and time.

5 minutes break for disinfecting up the classroom before the entrance of the second group