

# [How can minority groups achieve social change?](https://assignbuster.com/how-can-minority-groups-achieve-social-change/)

#### How can minoritygroups achieve social change? Discuss with reference to social psychologicalresearch and theory.

Social change can be defined as when acrosstime social structures and cultural patterns change significantly (Leicht, 2013). Moscovici and Lage (1976) explains a minority as being numericallysmaller than the majority group, however it could also just be a group thinkingand acting outside the norm. So, minority influence is when a minority group iscause of social change. This essay will explore the different theories involvedin minority influence, such as The Genetic Theory (Moscovici & Lage, 1976), and how that can eventually lead to social change. It will also look at factorsthat can influence how effective minority influence is, with a focusconsistency, which is a key behaviour style involved in minority influence, andflexibility, which is shown by Nemeths (1977) mock jury study. Another area itwill explore is Moscovici et als (1969) blue green slide study, a key piece ofresearch within minority influence, as well as some research that contradictsthis.

Early social psychology research generallyneglected the influence minorities can have on majorities, and tended to focuson majority influence (Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, Blackstone &Steinberg, 1993). One of the first theories of minority influence is Moscoviciet als Genetic Theory (Moscovici et al , 1976) which looks at the generation andproduction of social change. Moscovici et al proposed the Genetic Theory as analternative to the functionalist model, which was used in traditionalconformity research. (Tanford & Penrod, 1984). The functionalist modelsuggests that the majority can influence the minority, but the minority can notinfluence the majority.  Moscovici et al (1976) argued that socialconflict would be the result of any attempt on social change, including minority. The Genetic model includes three processes; conformity, normalization andinnovation. Conformity is where the conflict between the group and individualis reduced, and normalization is where conflict is avoided through compromiseand innovation is applied by active and consistent minorities (Moscovici et al1976). The Genetic Theory suggests that the majority shift towards the minorityis as a solution to the conflict and restore social stability. Minorityinfluence does this by disrupting the norm and creating uncertainty by makingpeople aware of this new idea. So, it demonstrates a difference to the normwith a sense of certainty, commitment and confidence, leaving the only solutionbeing to shift towards the minority (Moscovici et al, 1976). Moscovici et al (1976)also argued that majority influence only leads to people changing their viewspublicly whilst maintaining their private views (compliance), so social changeisn’t properly achieved. Whereas minority influence less to people changingtheir views privately, but not necessarily publicly in order to save face(Moscovici et al 1976).

Some of the main factors that affect minorityinfluence are behavioural style (Moscovici, 1969), style of thinking (Smith, Tindale & Dugoni, 1969) and flexibility (Nemeth, 1977) The first isbehavioural style (Moscovici, 1969). Behavioural style involves consistency, confidence, appearing unbiased and resisting social pressure and abuse. Consistency, which is when a minority is consistent in the view they have, wasstated by Moscovici (1969) to be the most important aspect of behaviouralstyle.  The second is style of thinking, which is getting the majority todiscuss and talk about the ideas that the minority are suggesting. This hasbeen shown to give the minority a good chance of influencing the majority(Smith et al 1969) The third is flexibility and compromise, which wasinvestigated by Nemeth (1977). Nemeth (1977) carried out a mock jury experimentand found that when the minority refused to change their position, there was noeffect on the minority. But, when the minority compromised and agreed with someparts of the majority, the majority also compromised, resulting in the majoritychanging their view. However compromising clashes with the consistency theoryas by being flexible and willing to change your view a bit that original viewproposed by the minority is no longer consistent. Furthermore, mock juryexperiments lack ecological validity in the sense that the decision made by thejurors will not actually have an effect on someone else’s life, so they may bemore likely to agree with other people’s suggestions (Bornstein, 1999).

Although consistency has been shown toimprove minority influence (Moscovici, 1969), it can be shown can have theopposite effect if the minority group are viewed to be activists (Bashir, Lockwood, Chasteen, Nadolny & Noyes, 2013). This finding came about inresearch into resistance to social change, specifically into people’sperceptions of the minority group of people/activists attempting to causesocial change. Bashir (2013) refers a lot to the example of feminists being theactivist group trying to bring about social change. Activists are typicallyseen as being unpleasant and hostile, due to their method of bringing aboutsocial change by publicly criticising mainstream practices. These negativestereotypes associated with activists can cause resistance to minorityinfluences trying to bring about social change. However, this doesn’tnecessarily mean they won’t achieve social change, just that it may take a bitlonger, as Wood et al (1993) shows with the example of recycling. Recyclingused to be seen as being promoted by extremist groups and is now a part ofeveryday life. This example of recycling also demonstrates another element ofminority influence, the way people tend to forget that it used to be a minorityview once social change has occurred.

A key study that shows minority influence isMoscovici, Lage and Naffrechoux (1969) blue-green study. The participantsinvolved were split into groups made up of four genuine participants and 2confederates. These participants were then shown 36 slides that were differentshades of green or blue. The participants had to say out loud the colour thatwas on each of the slides they were shown. In the first half of the experimentsthe confederates, who were representative of the minority, were consistent andanswered green every time, even when they were clearly wrong. In the secondhalf they were inconsistent and occasionally answered blue instead of green. Moscovici et al (1969) found that when the minority were consistent it had an8. 42% effect on the majority, whereas when the minority were inconsistent itonly had an effect on 1. 25% of the majority. This shows that although theminority isn’t always successful at influencing the majority it is more likelyto do so when it is consistent. However, Clark and Maass (1990) carried out asimilar study and found that the size of the majority can influence howeffective minority influence. Moscovici et al (1969) used only 4 people in hismajority, but Clark and Maass (1990) found that when they increased themajority to 8 or 12 the minority no longer had an impact on the majority. Clarkand Maass (1990) carried out two experiments and although the results werestronger in the second both still showed that an increased majority reducedminority influence. So, this study contradicts Moscovici et als (1969) findingsas it suggests that had Moscovici et al increased the size of his majorityduring the study then the results may have been different, and he may havefound the minority had less of an influence, which this brings into questionthe internal validity of Moscovici et als study.  However, Moscovici etals blue green study is important as it is one of the first pieces of researchthat demonstrates the influence a minority can have on a majority.

Social change can be achieved by minorityinfluence. Minority influence, as explained by The Genetic Model (Moscovici, 1976), as cited by Wood et al, causes social change as a way of resolving the conflictthe majority has with the minority. For a minority to be more successful atcausing social change their behavioural style (Moscovici, 1979), style ofthinking (Smith, 1969) and ability to be flexible (Nemeth, 1977) are allimportant factors in this process. However, consistency, which comes underbehavioural style, clashes with the idea of flexibility as the minority group cannotbe both of these things at the same time, but despite this clash these arestill important factors in minority influence. Having said that, flexibilityisn’t the only issue with consistency as it has also been found that too muchconsistency can cause people to view the minority group as activists, whichresults in them being seen in a negative light and therefore less likely tocause change (Bashir et al, 2013). But, the same research also shows how minoritygroups that have caused social change were once seen as activists, but it hasjust been forgotten worth society that they were once seen in a negative way(Bashir et al, 2013). So, despite the contradicting research consistency andflexibility both play a role in minority influence. Moscovici et als (1969)green blue slide study further shows how minority groups can achieve socialchange as it shows how a minority can affect the majority.

## References

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