Research Article

Social Influence in Malaysia and Singapore: Interrelationships between Cultural Orientation, Social Group Identity, Coping Style, and Social Conformity

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Abstract

Social influence is a broad term used to understand how and why the presence of others changes individuals' attitudes, behaviors, or beliefs. It takes a variety of forms and one of them is social conformity. The present study was conducted to clarify the relationships between cultural orientation, social group identity, and coping style as potential predictors of social conformity among adults in Malaysia and Singapore. Participants completed self-report measures of cultural orientation, social group identity, coping style, and social conformity. Preliminary results showed that social conformity was negatively associated with vertical individualism and emotion-based coping. Social group identity was found to be positively associated with various forms of cultural orientation but not with social conformity. In addition, individuals were more likely to report higher group identity when their personal opinions were consistent with majority members in a social group. Finally, emotion-based coping was the most significant predictor of social conformity, with vertical individualism as another significant predictor. In the context of social influence, the current research unravels the relationships between cultural orientation, social group identity, coping style, and social conformity. The findings also illuminate that collectivist cultures are not generally more prone to conform to majority opinions.

Keywords: Collectivist societies; coping; cultural orientation; group identity; social conformity.
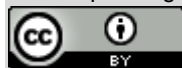
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Discussion
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Social influence is an umbrella term for understanding how and why the presence of others changes the attitudes, behaviors, or beliefs of individuals. It takes a variety of forms, and one of them is social conformity, which occurs when a person changes his or her attitudes and behaviors to conform to the majority opinion (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Previous research has shown that culture is an important factor that determines people's social norms and conformity (Minkov et al., 2017). There are two major types of cultural orientations: Individualism and Collectivism (Triandis, 2001).

Individuals who self-identify as collectivists tend to put the interests of the group above their own (Jasielska et al., 2018). They tend to embed themselves in a group and are more inclined to protect the collective interests. Moon et al. (2018) reported that collectivists tend to be more sensitive in their conversations and prefer indirect communication styles, which promotes the stability and unity of their social groups. In other words, they see themselves as part of the group rather than as individuals and value the group's interests above their own, even to the point of subverting their own opinions to conform to the prevailing ideas among group members. In contrast, individualists tend to value independence and autonomy and have a more direct communication style (Moon et al., 2018).

At a more complex level, Minkov et al. (2017) suggested that collectivism-individualism orientations can be further broken down into a four-dimensional typology, including Horizontal Collectivism (HC), Vertical Collectivism (VC), Horizontal Individualism (HI), and Vertical Individualism (VI). Horizontal patterns refer to preferences for equality among individuals, and vertical patterns refer to preferences for hierarchy, which involves favoring one a group or individual over others. Taken together, HC captures collectivism orientation, which values interdependence, sociability, and identification with members of a social group. VC taps collectivism orientation, which values goals of one's group over personal goals and competes only with individuals who are viewed as out of group. Meanwhile, HI covers the

individualism orientation that values detachment from group members and values self-sufficiency, and VI represents the individualism orientation that values higher status through competition.

Highly individualistic individuals tend to execute their own preferences in decision making more often than individuals with higher collectivism, as collectivists have higher perceived in-group and out-group boundaries and therefore show preference for in-group members (Fischer & Derham, 2016). Thus, collectivist societies will induce higher levels of social conformity, as deviation from social group norms may affect interdependence and lead to possible tension or conflict. Ušto et al. (2019) also argued that social conformity is to some extent a product of cultural conditions. Social bonding between individuals is higher in collectivist cultures, which reduce the occurrence of conflict because collectivists tend to conform to others. That is, there is a tendency for people with collectivism to conform to the majority in order to be accepted by their groups. While it was expected that individuals living in a collectivist society would tend to conform to others, some research has shown that this is not always the case (e.g., Alvarez & Brida, 2019).

In addition to cultural orientation, a person's self-identity, derived from perceived membership in social groups, can be a powerful social force influencing social conformity (Hohman et al., 2017; Masland & Lease, 2013). This is referred to as social group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In essence, the way individuals perceive their membership in a group will affect responses to social conformity. Through the process of social categorization, individuals decide which social group they belong to: "us or in-group" or "them or out-group" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When individuals perceive themselves as belonging to a group, they are likely to conform to the behavior of others in the group (Hohman et al., 2017; Masland & Lease, 2013). The tendency to conform to the group norm is enhanced when individuals feel insecure about their personal attitudes and values (Hogg, 2007). Identifying with the group norm may help reduce feelings of insecurity, thus motivating individuals to see themselves according to the prevailing attitudes and behaviors in their social group. In Kim and Park's (2011) study, similarity between group members induced perceptions of group membership, leading to a willingness to conform to the majority opinion when the individual exhibited higher social conformity.

Notwithstanding, Ušto et al. (2019) argued that social identity processes in collectivist societies are more likely to lead to hegemonies, as collectivists pay more attention to identification with the "in-group". On the other hand, a study in the United States found that individualists who identified more strongly with their social group did not exhibit collectivist

traits (Jetten et al., 2002). Instead, those who had higher recognition of social group identity exhibited more individualistic traits, consistent with the social group norm of individualism. Other studies unanimously found that people living in nations with higher collectivism had even stronger motivation to be distinctly different from their social group compared to nations with higher individualism (Becker et al., 2012; Jasielska et al., 2018). The above reviews prove that social group identity is a dynamic process and can be influenced by several factors, which in turn can affect people's social conformity.

Although previous studies seem to assume that group members always seek consensus in a group, there is a lack of research on situations where consensus has not been reached or individual opinions deviate from group norms (Minkov et al., 2017). Understandably, not every social group is perfectly homogeneous and disagreements between individuals in a group are sometimes inevitable. This raises the question of whether social group identity would change in a close-knit social group (i.e., an individual's opinion agrees with the majority members in a social group) and self-focused social conflict group (i.e., an individual's opinion differs from the majority members of a social group). In line with this, Masland and Lease (2013) drew attention to the fact that the effect of social group identity on social conformity might depend on the level of conflict in social groups, although an individual's social group identity might be high. Therefore, it is of interest to examine how social group identity is manifested in social groups with low and high conflict.

Moreover, previous studies have documented that coping styles can influence individuals' social conformity; however, the relationship between them is not clear (Friesen et al., 2013; Labrague et al., 2017; Nieto et al., 2020). Conflict between group members occurs when two or more actors confront each other in social interaction. During exposure to a social conflict, different individuals under different conditions will use either problem-based or emotion-based coping styles to minimize the unpleasant, stressful feeling associated with the conflict (Nieto et al., 2020). Problem-focused coping strategies refer to the approach of adjusting to and solving a problem. They involve generating options to solve the problem, evaluating alternative options, and implementing the chosen options (Labrague et al., 2017). In contrast, emotion-focused coping strategies refer to efforts to manage emotional distress caused by the problem itself. For problems related to social situations, problem-focused coping strategies may not be more adaptive compared to emotion-focused coping strategies. This is because emotions have social functions that help in interaction.

Chun et al. (2006) suggested that individuals appraise their environmental system in which culture manifests and that this appraisal of their environment influences the type of coping

mechanism used to overcome a threat or challenge. In collectivist societies, collectivists tend to manage conflict by conforming to the opinion of the unanimous majority rather than compromising or avoiding conflict. Collectivists might focus on managing their own emotions to avoid further escalation of conflict, rather than going against the majority when their ideas differ from the prevailing opinions or decisions of their social group. Consequently, individuals who prefer emotion-focused coping mechanisms are likely to be collectivistically oriented and tend to have higher levels of social conformity. Marshburn and Knowles (2018) further suggested that different aspects of collectivism have different effects on coping. An emphasis on competitiveness leads to preferences for competing styles and a lower likelihood of conforming to others, while beliefs about group productivity goals are correlated with more willing to compromise in conflict and higher levels of social conformity. Therefore, the degree of emotion-focused coping tends to be positively related to the degree of social conformity (Ehyakonandeh & Yousefi, 2017).

Furthermore, the emotion-focused coping mechanism has been shown to help individuals maintain culturally related identities (Friesen et al., 2013). It is expected that individuals who identify more with their group to have a higher tendency to adopt emotion-focused coping mechanisms because they see themselves as part of the social group and have a stronger emotional attachment to social groups. Consequently, emotion-focused coping mechanism could be adaptive to maintain social group identity. However, it could also lead individuals to use identity suppression during times of self-focused social conflict when the individual's social identity might be threatened (Marshburn & Knowles, 2018). Therefore, individuals might identify less with their social groups during self-focused social conflict in order to avoid social cognitive dissonance as a coping strategy. This is especially the case in a collectivist culture where there is a strong tendency to perceive oneself as part of the community (Hogg, 2007).

The overall aim of the present study is to examine the relationships between cultural orientation, social group identity, stress-coping style, and social conformity in an adult sample in Malaysia and Singapore. Based on previous literature, it is expected that individuals who rate themselves as higher on HC and VC will have higher social group identity and social conformity. In contrast, social group identity and social conformity ratings will be lower for individuals who report higher VI and HI. It is also predicted that individuals with higher social group identity will have higher social conformity. However, it was hypothesized that individuals would report lower social group identity in self-focused social conflict groups than in close-knit groups. The possibility that individuals who use emotion-coping mechanisms will have higher social conformity was also explored. Finally, it is

important to understand the contribution of each of the above variables in explaining the assessment of social conformity.

Method

Participants

Participants were adults residing in Malaysia and Singapore (*N* = 310) whose ages ranged from 19 to 62 years (*M* = 28.31, *SD* = 6.94). Of the participants, 227 were employed, 54 were students, 27 were self-employed, and 2 were others. The sample consisted of 103 male and 207 female participants. Sixty-eight of the participants lived in Singapore and 242 of them lived in Malaysia. According to Awanis et al. (2016), both countries are inherently collectivist and practice group-centeredness. That is, collective effort and cooperation among group members are seen as the main means of achieving group harmony. In contrast, egocentric behaviors, such as prioritizing individual needs and interests over the interest of the group are strongly discouraged.

Materials

Cultural orientations toward individualism and collectivism were captured by the short form of the Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism Scale (Sivadas et al., 2008). This scale includes 14 items distributed among four typologies- Horizontal Individualism (HI), Vertical Individualism (VI), Horizontal Collectivism (HC), and Vertical Collectivism (VC). Examples of items are: "I enjoy being unique and different from others in many ways." (HI), "I enjoy working in situations involving competition with others." (VI), "My happiness depends very much on the happiness of those around me." (HC), and "I would do what would please my family, even if I detested that activity." (VC). Each item is rated on a 7-Likert scale, with 1 representing "does not describe me at all and 7 representing "describes me very well." Scores for each typology were summed, and higher scores on a domain indicate higher alignment with that typology. Good internal consistency was observed across HC (α = .73; 4 items), VC (α = .73; 4 items), HI (α = .78; 3 items), and VI (α = .78; 3 items).

Social identity was assessed using the Social Group Identification Questionnaire introduced by Grant and Hogg (2012). The questionnaire includes eight items (e.g., "How much do you feel you belong to the group?"). For the purpose of this study, the same questionnaire was used twice in relation to how they generally feel in a close-knit social group (i.e., an individual's opinion agrees with majority members in a social group) and in relation to a self-focused social conflict group (i.e., an individual's opinion differs from majority members in a

social group). Each item is rated on a 9-Likert scale ranging from 1 = "not very" to 9 = "very". A higher score indicates a higher social group identity. Social group identity of a close-knit group (SICK) exhibited strong reliability (α = .92; 8 items), and the reliability of the same scale remains strong for self-focused social conflict (SISSC; α= .95; 8 items).

Coping mechanisms were assessed with the Brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (Brief COPE; Carver, 1997). The scale includes 28 items. Of these 28 items, 6 items measure problem-focused coping strategies, for example, "I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in." The other 22 items measure emotion-focused coping strategies, for example, "I've been getting emotional support from others". Each item is rated on a 4-Likert scale ranging from 1 = "I haven't been doing this a lot" to 4 = "I have been coping this a lot". Higher scores indicate a higher frequency of using a particular coping mechanism. The brief COPE proved to be highly reliable in this study (α = .78 for PBC; 6 items and α = .83 for EBC; 22 items).

Social conformity was measured using the Social Conformity–Autonomy Beliefs Scale (Feldman, 2003). The scale includes four domains: conformity versus autonomy, freedom versus fear of disorder, respect for shared value norms, and social cohesion. These four domains were captured with 12 pairs of alternative items to emphasize the contrast between social conformity and personal autonomy. In each pair, one statement captured conformity beliefs and the other statement captured autonomy beliefs. These items were constructed to represent a single common factor. Scores for all items were summed, with higher scores indicating higher social conformity. In the present study, the scale had an alpha coefficient of .75 (12 items).

Procedure

All participants were provided with an online link to the study survey. Participants were first provided with an information sheet explaining the study objectives, the study background, the right to withdraw from the study, and the potential risks/benefits of the study. Participants were then directed to the questionnaire if they chose to participate. There is no time limit for completing the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire, participants were presented with a debriefing form. The form was intended to remind participants of their right to withdraw their data and the procedure for doing so.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using the IBM software, including AMOS 24.0 and SPSS 26.0. Before proceeding with inferential statistics, confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs)

were calculated for each scale individually. This was to ensure that each scale was validly measuring the constructs of the study (Hair et al., 2014). Exploratory data analysis was conducted using frequencies for categorical variables and means for continuous variables. Pearson correlations were conducted to examine relationships between variables in the study. Differences in group social identity between close-knit and self-focused social conflict groups were tested for significance using the paired samples t-test. To identify the unique contribution of each predictor to social conformity, we conducted hierarchical multiple regression. All analyses were set at a significance level of .05.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to assess how well each indicator measured latent constructs in this study (Hair et al., 2014). As suggested by Hair et al. (2014), the model fit indices are CMIN/ DF ≤ 5, GFI ; CFI; TLI ≥ .90 and RMSEA ≤ .08. Results indicated that all five constructs achieved adequate fit to the data (see Table 1 for fit indices). All items achieved minimum factor loadings of. 40, as suggested by Kline (2010), and ranged from .40 to .89 (p < .001). Table 2 shows the regression weights of each scale item used in this study.

Table 1.

Fit Indices for Individual Scales.

Scale	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	P	GFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
CO (4-factor model)	203.30	71	2.86	.000	.91	.94	.89	.07
SICK	38.08	20	1.90	.000	.91	.95	.91	.06
SISSC	22.62	20	1.13	.000	.92	.95	.91	.05
PBC	23.01	9	2.56	.000	.91	.91	.89	.08
EBC	576.75	209	2.76	.000	.91	.91	.88	.08

* CO= Cultural Orientation; SICK = Social group identity in close-knit groups; SISSC = Social group identity in self-focused social conflict groups; PBC = Problem-focused coping mechanism; EBC = Emotion-focused coping mechanism

Table 2.
Regression Weights and Estimates of Scale Items.

Scale items	Standardized Regression Weight	Unstandardized Regression Weight	S.E.
Cultural Orientation			
HC- Happiness of those around me	.60	1.86	.33
HC- Well-being of others	.59	1.51	.29
HC- Feel proud	.62	1.69	.33
HC- Cooperate with others	.38	1.00	-
VC- Please my family	.66	1.22	.18
VC- Sacrifice my self-interest	.64	1.08	.16
VC- Feel honored	.39	0.69	.14
VC- Sacrifice an activity	.53	1.00	-
VI- Competition with others	.57	0.89	.13
VI- Law of nature	.73	1.15	.16
VI- Without competition	.66	1.00	-
HI- Enjoy being unique	.80	1.22	.19
HI- Do my own thing	.49	0.73	.11
HI- Unique individual	.64	1.00	-
SICK			
Important to be identified	.69	1.05	.09
Fit in as a member	.69	0.93	.08
Like to be in the group	.89	1.18	.08
Feel belong to the group	.83	1.21	.09
Thought about being a member	.71	1.24	.10
Strong ties	.81	1.16	.09
Want to belong	.83	1.17	.08
Want to be accepted	.71	1.00	-
SISSC			
Important to be identified	.77	0.91	.06
Fit in as a member	.74	0.80	.05
Like to be in the group	.86	0.95	.05
Feel belong to the group	.82	0.92	.05
Thought about being a member	.81	0.10	.06
Strong ties	.82	1.01	.06
Want to belong	.89	1.11	.05

Want to be accepted	.85	1.00	-
PBC			
Doing something about the situation	.57	0.87	.11
Taking action to try	.68	1.01	.11
Getting help and advice	.53	0.90	.12
Trying to come up	.59	0.94	.11
Get advice or help	.60	1.02	.12
Thinking hard about what steps	.65	1.00	-
EBC			
Turning to other topics	.66	0.95	.17
This isn't real	.75	1.22	.20
Using alcohol to feel better	.56	0.64	.13
Emotional support	.63	1.04	.19
Giving up trying	.70	1.06	.18
Refusing to believe	.74	1.17	.19
Let unpleasant feelings escape	.75	1.28	.21
Using alcohol to get through	.53	0.54	.12
See it in a different light	.46	0.50	.13
Criticizing myself	.79	1.40	.22
Getting comfort	.58	0.74	.15
Giving up the attempt	.71	1.11	.19
Looking for something good	.41	0.35	.12
Making jokes	.62	0.91	.17
Thing about it less	.73	1.15	.19
Accepting the reality	.40	0.35	.11
Expressing negative feelings	.80	1.24	.20
Find comfort in religion	.40	0.52	.17
Learning to live	.54	0.57	.12
Blaming myself	.77	1.58	.24
Praying or meditating	.41	0.51	.17
Making fun	.62	1.00	-

*S.E.: Standard error; CO= Cultural Orientation; SICK = Social group identity in close-knit groups; SISSC = Social group identity in self-focused social conflict groups; PBC = Problem-focused coping mechanism; EBC = Emotion-focused coping mechanism

Descriptive Statistics

Means and standard deviations for all main study variables are summarised in Table 3. Skewness and kurtosis for all variables were also calculated to assess univariate normality, and the results showed that all variables were within acceptable ranges.

Table 3.

Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
HC	21.25	3.28	-0.53	0.86
VC	18.31	3.94	-0.26	0.02
VI	12.52	3.69	-0.29	-0.14
HI	15.42	3.25	-0.36	-0.19
SICK	56.52	9.49	-0.67	0.28
SISSC	55.25	10.49	-0.66	0.65
PBC	18.22	3.20	-0.51	0.97
EBC	54.81	9.04	-0.36	1.13
Social Conformity	10.39	4.21	-0.26	0.19

Note: M = Mean; HC = Horizontal collectivism; VC = Vertical collectivism; VI = Vertical individualism; HI = Horizontal individualism; SICK = Social group identity in close-knit groups; SISSC = Social group identity in self-focused social conflict groups; PBC = Problem-focused coping mechanism; EBC = Emotion-focused coping mechanism

Pearson Correlations

Of the four typologies, only VI showed a negative moderate correlation with social conformity (r(308) = -.52, p < .01). Significant positive associations were observed between SICK and HC (r(308) = .38, p < .001), VC (r(308) = .18, p < .001), and HI (r(308) = .19, p < .001), respectively. Significant positive associations were also observed for the correlations between SISSC and HC (r(308) = .41, p < .001), and VC (r(308) = .15, p < .01). In addition, there were no significant results between the relationship of SICK or SISSC with social conformity. Furthermore, emotion-focused coping mechanism was found to be negatively correlated with social conformity (r(308) = -.24, p < .001).

Paired Sample t-test

Paired *t*-test showed that the scores for SISSC (*M* = 55.25, *SD* = 10.49) were significantly lower than the scores of SICK (*M* = 56.52, *SD* = 9.49; t(309) = 2.92, p < .01).

Hierarchical Multiple Regression

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to examine whether cultural orientations, social group identity types, and coping mechanisms were predictors of social conformity. To assess their individual contributions, the three groups of predictors were entered sequentially into the

regression equation. The four cultural orientation typologies (HC, VC, VI and HI) were first entered into the equation as a block. The second variables, consisting of SICK and SISSC were entered. The third predictor block was composed of coping mechanisms (i.e., PBC and EBC). The third block was entered after the second block assuming the temporal sequence of events occurred, where coping is a response to psychological stress (Labrague et al., 2017).

As shown in Table 4, only one of the four cultural orientations, VI, was a significant predictor in the first block. The block explained 4.4% of the variance in social conformity, with a significant regression equation ($F_{(4,305)} = 3.49$, $p < .01$). Including SICK and SISSC in the second block did not yield significant results. Nonetheless, VI continued to be a significant predictor of social conformity, so the overall regression equation was also significant ($F_{(6, 303)} = 2.82$, $p < .01$). Adding the coping style variable in the third block produced a significant regression equation that added another 11.1% of variance to social conformity ($F_{(8, 301)} = 4.68$, $p < .001$). The EBC appeared to be the strongest predictor while controlling for other predictors.

Table 4.
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Social Conformity.

Variable		B	t	p	R	R^2	ΔR^2
Block 1	(Constant)		5.10	.000	.209	.044	.044
	HC	.13	1.83	.065			
	VC	-.07	-1.14	.256			
	VI	-.18	-3.09	.002**			
	HI	.02	0.43	.668			
Block 2	(Constant)		4.11	.000	.230	.053	.009
	HC	.13	1.84	.068			
	VC	-.07	-1.14	.254			
	VI	-.18	-3.08	.002**			
	HI	.01	0.16	.877			
	SICK	.12	1.47	.143			
	SISC	-.03	-0.31	.756			
Block 3	(Constant)		5.43	.000	.333	.111	.087
	HC	.11	1.65	.100			
	VC	-.05	-0.73	.440			
	VI	-.14	-2.37	.018*			
	HI	-.01	-0.25	.806			
	SICK	.11	1.40	.161			
	SISSC	-.02	-0.18	.855			
	PBC	.13	1.94	.051			
	EBC	-.29	-4.39	.000***			

Note. ** indicates $p < .001$; * indicates $p < .01$; HC = Horizontal collectivism; VC = Vertical collectivism; VI = Vertical individualism; HI = Horizontal individualism; SICK = Social group identity in close-knit groups; SISSC = Social group identity in self-focused social conflict groups; PBC = Problem-focused coping mechanism; EBC = Emotion-focused coping mechanism.

Discussion

Of the four typologies of cultural orientation, only VI was found to be significantly related to social conformity. VI has an inverse relationship with social conformity. Conceptually, VI refers to the orientation to be competitive and the desire to be ahead of others (Triandis, 2001). Hence, an individual oriented to VI may have a stronger motivation to be outstanding than HI and the other two types of collectivism. This may explain why VI tends to be less socially conforming. None of the collectivist orientations had a significant relationship with social conformity. This is somewhat surprising as many previous studies have consistently linked social conformity to collectivism (Alvarez & Brida, 2019).

Collectivism is a concept that focuses on interdependence, manifested in ideologies and symbolic meaning, such as camaraderie in HC and deference to authority in VC. On the other hand, social conformity refers to behaviors of how an individual should behave in the social order and enforce the norms of the community (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). In light of this, one might suggest that collectivist interdependence may be symbolic but does not manifest itself in behavioral conformity.

Furthermore, Na et al. (2010) suggested that cultural orientation may be valid at the group level, but not at the individual level, as there are individual differences in social conformity despite collectivism at the group level. Future researchers are cautioned not to conflate the concepts of social conformity and collectivism and to treat them with discretion. Results indicated that social group identity in close-knit groups had significant and strong associations with collectivism (HC and VC). When conflict occurs between individuals and their groups, identification with the groups is likely to vary according to cultural orientation.

Collectivists will tend to continue to identify with their social groups under different conditions. Although there was a strong association between HI and social group identity in close-knit groups, the relationship ceased to be significant under self-focused social conflict. This suggests that individuals with HI are likely to stop identifying with their social groups when there is self-focused social conflict. According to Triandis (2001), HI emphasizes being different without preference for a particular status. Although HI may initially see themselves as part of the group, their sense of social group identity would tend to deteriorate in self-focused social conflict. HI would likely shift their social group identity when they encounter conflict in the social environment, as they value independence more.

In contrast, collectivists would still identify with their social groups even if they found themselves in conflict with social groups. However, the results provide strong evidence that

social identity as a whole would be affected by conflict between individuals and their social groups regardless of cultural orientations. Changes in social identity in response to self-focused social conflict could be an adaptive strategy, particularly for individuals who orient to HI. Individuals adopt in-group favoritism when social identities are threatened because the identification process tends to involve affective factors. In short, individuals are emotionally affected by social conflict, and the affective reaction may cause their social group identity to fluctuate.

Overall, social group identity can be viewed as a dynamic rather than a stable trait (Feldman, 2003). The results confirmed that there is no significant relationship between social group identity and social conformity. Unlike social group identity, social conformity is not based on self-categorization. In such cases, social conformity acts independently of the effect of self-categorization to a social group. There is an individual difference on social conformity with the same cultural effect on group social identity at the group level (Becker et al., 2012). Thus, this result contradicts previous findings that individuals who identify more strongly with their social group would be more conformant to group norms.

Although social group identity is not directly related to social conformity, social group identity is more related to a cultural orientation that focuses on in-group and out-group categorization. Among individuals oriented to HI, individuals living in collectivist societies were more likely to identify with their social groups than those in individualist societies. This is consistent with previous research that posited that when the group norm is HI, individuals with stronger social group identities are influenced to orient toward individualism (Jetten et al., 2002). Hence, the self-construct is highly dependent on cultural context, but cannot influence shape an individual's social conformity.

Significantly, no relationship was found between social group identity and VI, but VI was related to lower social conformity. Overall, the in-group and out-group differences that define social group identity did not appear to affect social conformity. Results indicated that individuals with HC tend to adopt problem-focused coping mechanisms during self-focused social conflict. Individuals with HC value interdependence, which is also key to better social support and psychological well-being (Humphrey et al., 2020). Because HC tend to value connectedness with others, they may be more concerned about the well-being of others and show more cooperativeness within their social groups.

The focus on social group well-being is likely to be more problem-focused, as maintaining social ties would improve survival chances when in-group favoritism is strong. HC that promotes in-group favoritism might not be detrimental to individuals experiencing conflict

between themselves and their social group compared to inter-group bias (Jasielska et al., 2018). Individuals oriented to VI would use both problem-focused coping mechanisms and emotion-focused coping mechanisms. A higher score on VI motivates for effective coping during self-focused social conflict.

The combination of problem-focused coping mechanism and emotion-focused coping mechanism can be a very effective and adaptive approach (Nezu & Nezu, 2018). Hence, individuals who adopt VI may be the most adaptive in dealing with conflicts between the self and the social group. Overall, specific typologies of individualism and collectivism may impact coping mechanisms, depending on the focus of the ideology. It was hypothesized that the use of emotion-focused coping mechanisms should positively predict social conformity. However, the relationship between the use of emotion-focused coping mechanisms and social conformity was found to be negative. Emotions have an interpersonal social function of influencing social conformity or deviance in a group (Fischer & Derham, 2016).

Choosing emotion-focused coping mechanisms can be a symptom of distress caused by the need to belong. Individuals may regulate their emotions by dismissing the need for affiliation as a response to distress (Macdonald & Wood, 2018). The focus on emotion regulation may further lead an individual to avoid social conformity rather than allowing emotions to perform their social function. Thus, the coping mechanism an individual employs may impact how the individual interacts with social groups. On the contrary, individuals who use problem-focused coping mechanisms are more likely to identify with their group. Ultimately, the benefits of social group identity are reaped where social group identity guides collective action (Wakefield et al., 2019). Consequently, individuals who function more at the individual level and frequently use emotion-focused coping mechanisms will have a higher tendency to not conform to their social group.

Further analysis showed that the four typologies of cultural orientation can predict social conformity, with even greater predictive power when coping mechanisms are considered in self-focused social conflict. This helps to decipher that individuals with higher VI and a higher tendency to use emotion-focused coping mechanisms when there is social conflict are the least likely to conform to their social group because there is a stronger need to differentiate themselves from their social group. The likelihood of individuals with lower conformity having a higher VI is applicable when it shows an implication to behaviors outside of social norms when individuals with higher VI are also associated with a higher likelihood of committing crimes (Varet et al., 2018).

Hence, the core value of VI in predicting lower conformity is also noticeable in the setting of collectivist societies. Notably, the emotion-focused coping mechanism has the strongest predictive power for social conformity. On the negative side, individuals who tend to use more emotion-focused coping mechanisms in social conflict situations have less social conformity, which could signal a further complication of social behavior as they are focused on their own emotions, which affects social conformity.

Limitations and Further Implications of the Study

There are some limitations that need to be discussed. This study is concerned with the collectivist culture in South East Asia. Hence, there might be differences in other collectivist cultures that can be explored in future research. Because this study focused primarily on collectivism, it was believed that the same study could be replicated in the context of individualistic societies where there is less social pressure for social group identity and social conformity. Furthermore, this study found that social conformity did not occur independently of in-group and out-group differences.

Due to the research method used in the present study, the results are still open to speculation. Future studies can delve into this aspect using a qualitative research design to understand the reasons behind this phenomenon. Furthermore, this study provides only a preliminary exploration of the social conflict between the self and the group and the possible impact on the identity of the social group. There are other variables worth exploring, such as individual decision making, stress, and cognitive functioning. Future research may therefore consider extending these preliminary findings and developing a more holistic understanding of self-concept and self-focused social conflict.

In terms of implications, the present study provides evidence on the relationship between cultural orientation, social group identity, coping style, and social conformity. The results revealed that social conformity cannot simply be viewed as foolproof dependent on cultural orientations that individuals reporting higher collectivist cultural orientations are not generally conforming to the opinions of others in a social group. However, individual differences, such as coping style, appear to play a role in conformity. That is, conformity to social values also depends on the characteristics of the individual. The study also helps to better understand how individuals in a social group identify with their personal opinions and values with or without conflict.

Conclusion

In summary, only vertical individualism and emotionally focused coping mechanisms negatively predicted social conformity. Hence, using a four-typology approach to investigate the two concepts of cultural orientation and social conformity revealed a significant difference between collectivism and social conformity, indicating a divergence from how people view interdependence between people and how people should behave in a social context.

When conflict occurs between the self and the social group, emotion-focused coping mechanisms predicted lower social conformity, indicating that social conformity may operate at the individual level. On the other hand, higher VI showed competitiveness with lower social conformity, suggesting that the decision not to conform to social groups is strongly an individual decision to be more adaptive. Although social group identity has no influence on social conformity, social group identity is influenced by conflict, and higher social group identity tends to adapt through the problem-focused coping mechanism. As such, social conformity is found to be less influenced by group self-categorization. Thus, social conformity tends to conceptualize and operate differently at the individual level and might not be related to the culture of group norms, which is especially true when there is a conflict between self and social group.

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