

SELF CONFIDENCE, AND THE ABILITY TO INFLUENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines whether individuals achieve greater interpersonal influence in peer groups, particularly related to purchasing, when they have greater social self confidence. Literature in this area has only considered the negative effects of low social self confidence on interpersonal influence, neglecting potential positive effects of positive self confidence. In our first study we survey a general US sample and find that greater perceived interpersonal influence is felt by those with greater social self confidence. In our second study we demonstrate through a field experiment that those with greater social self confidence influence the actual purchase decisions of their peers to a much greater extent than those with less social self confidence. The results demonstrate that greater levels of social self confidence lead a person to act as a de-facto leader, with peers following their purchasing behaviour as a consequence of the influence they exert.

Keywords: self confidence, self efficacy, influence, perception, experiment

Self confidence and its role in allowing people to persuade others to undertake actions, including purchase decisions, has been an area of research interest for several decades in the social psychology, marketing and management literatures (Bandura, 1977; Chemers *et al.*, 2000). Research has found that leaders in organizations tend to be more self confident, having stronger beliefs in their own abilities and opinions, allowing them to more effectively guide and manage employees (Bandura, 1988; Luthans and Peterson, 2002; Schyns and Sczesny, 2010). This paper explores whether self confidence plays such an important role outside of formal organizational contexts. We propose that people with social self confidence will emerge as natural leaders within any social context, directly influencing the purchasing behaviour of those around them.

SELF CONFIDENCE

Self confidence has been defined in a number of ways throughout the literature. These definitions generally involve belief in one's own abilities to perform (Bandura, 1977; Chemers, *et al.*, 2000; Clark *et al.*, 2008). The more generalised form of self confidence, where there is a generalised belief in one's ability, is theoretically distinct from the specific form of self confidence as used in this research; general self confidence is better defined as self esteem. Self esteem is an emotions-based assessment about one's self worth or value (Erol and Orth, 2011). The value judgement is self directed, that is, one feels oneself is of value, but the personal judgement is often externally driven (Park and Crocker, 2005). Self esteem is believed to have a basis in genetics and experiences during key phases of personal and physical development (Bandura, 1993; Erol and Orth, 2011).

The self confidence of interest to this study is task specific; with self confidence being a belief in one's ability to undertake a *specific* action to achieve an outcome (Bandura, 1977; Chemers, *et al.*, 2000). For example, having the belief that one can search for information to support a purchase decision would be described as information search self confidence. This specific form of self confidence is believed to have a relationship with self esteem, but can develop independently as a consequence of experiences related to that specific task (Bandura, 1977, 1988; Park and Crocker, 2005). As people learn and undertake decisions they gain specific feedback about their abilities and thus develop the beliefs in those abilities, with those beliefs described as self confidence (Park *et al.*, 2007).

Task specific definitions of self confidence often arise from the need to address a particular research context, in the example given, a purchase decision. In all cases the definition addresses the belief in one's ability (Bandura, 1988, 1993). As this research is examining specifically interpersonal influence for purchase decisions the self confidence of interest for this research is *social* self confidence.

SOCIAL SELF CONFIDENCE AND INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE

Social self confidence, sometimes termed social self efficacy, is a strong belief in one's ability to interact in social settings to build and/or maintain interpersonal ties (Bandura, 1993; Gecas, 1989; Paridon *et al.*, 2006; Wright, 1975). People with low social self confidence tend to be more susceptible to the influence of others (Gecas, 1989; Pool *et al.*, 1998). This suggests low levels of confidence place a person into a subordinate position to others, and hence follow the behaviour of others in an attempt to be socially accepted. The reverse has received little attention (Chelminski and Coulter, 2007; Soyeon, 1996). How higher levels of social self confidence may lead a person to emerge as natural leader with an ability to influence the decisions of others remains unexplored.

Organizational literature has examined the role of self confidence in supporting leadership ability in formal management roles. It has been found that good managers tend to have leadership ability as a consequence of strong self efficacy (Beefink, Van Eerde, Rutte, and Bertrand, 2012; Schyns and Sczesny, 2010). Further, such good managers tend to exert stronger influence over subordinates, with them being more effective at coordinating and delegating to others (Luthans and Peterson, 2002). This provides strong evidence for an indirect effect of self confidence on the ability to influence others. These findings are inherently linked to the formalized organizational structures in which the research was undertaken (Bandura, 1988). Organizations come with additional layers of power dynamics beyond the occurrence of self confidence, which will likely play a critical role in the ability to influence others (Chemers, *et al.*, 2000; Luthans and Peterson, 2002). It has not been established that the relationship between self confidence and influence emerges organically in more natural social settings, and particularly with regard to peers.

Social self confidence would be expected to play an important role in the emergence of natural opinion leaders who are able to influence the decisions of peers. Individuals with greater self confidence are generally more motivated to undertake the behaviour in which they are confident. This arises from the belief that they are able to handle the full range of challenges that undertaking that behaviour can manifest (Chemers, *et al.*, 2000; Schunk, 1990). In this case, social self confidence will lead people to be more sociable with those around them. They will have the belief that they can manage their social interactions, effectively dealing with the good and bad experiences that normally arise during social exchanges. A more sociable person will naturally create more social bonds in a peer group relative to others in the group, increasing their ability to influence all the members of the group through social contact (Berndt, 2002). This will lead their purchase behaviour to be more visible, and potentially more attractive to mimic among those around them, as it is a indicator of a higher social position in the group.

Not only can higher self confidence motivate a person to engage in a behaviour more often, research has found they more effectively manage their behaviour through time (Sanna and Pusecker, 1994; Zimmerman *et al.*, 1992). A person with greater social self confidence would be able to assess a social setting and understand their position within it. This assessment may not necessarily be directed towards achieving influence, but is likely to result in it. A person with greater social self confidence tends to spend more time and mental resources understanding the wider implications of their actions and managing external factors that can influence their

personal social success (Bandura, 1990; Sanna and Pusecker, 1994). Self confidence leads them to focus less on their own abilities, as they believe they have those abilities and don't need to develop them (Bandura, 1990). Self confidence thus provides the opportunity for people to properly assess their social setting, leading them to engage in social behaviour that is more acceptable and appealing to peers, and also to make more socially acceptable decisions that are likely to then be subsequently copied by others.

The counter-effects of low self confidence also likely affect how much a person can influence their peers. People experiencing low self confidence with a task have been found to perform that task more erratically (Bandura, 1993; Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990). A person with low *social* self confidence, and the associated erratic social behaviour, would be far less predictable to those around them. An unpredictable and erratic person is unlikely to build or sustain great levels of interpersonal influence. Successful ongoing social relations require consistency; relationships need continuous and consistent maintenance for them to be retained (Carstensen, 1993; Gaine and Guardia, 2009; Peirce *et al.*, 2000). Without successful peer relations, a consequence of lower social self esteem, little opportunity is available for peers to be influenced or for purchase decisions to be observed and mimicked.

Another counter-effect of lower self confidence arises from its relationship with one's sense of control over one's life. Those with lower self confidence tend to see their lives as subject to external forces, with these external forces being of greater impact than their own decisions (Coffee *et al.*, 2009; Gilbert and Malone, 1995). It is those external forces that determine how successful their undertakings are and not their own ability (Gist and Mitchell, 1992). Within social settings those with lower self confidence could see themselves as more subject to the decisions of others, and thus they would be less likely to attempt to influence those around them. While this does not provide direct evidence that those with higher self confidence will exert that control over their social setting it suggests that a relationship between higher self confidence and greater interpersonal influence is likely.

To examine the organic relationship between social self confidence and interpersonal influence in purchase decision this paper reports two studies. The first study examines perceptions of influence through the construct of opinion leadership and its relationship to social self confidence. The second study presents an experiment where people with high and low self confidence are used as seeds for a purchase behaviour among a group of peers. It is then observed whether the members of the group are influenced to a greater extent and mimic the act of purchase when the seed is high in social self confidence.

STUDY 1

DOES SELF CONFIDENCE LEAD TO PERCEPTIONS OF GREATER PEER INFLUENCE?

In this first study we examine whether there is a greater (lesser) perceived level of influence among those with greater (lesser) social self confidence. A perception of self confidence should be formed in line with the belief system underlying a person's self confidence

(Bandura, 1977, 1993). Any formation of belief in the existence of a phenomenon, in this case social self confidence, will result in the perception of its presence (Smith, 2001). This reflects the emotional root of self confidence and posits a causal structure in line with theory about the relationship between beliefs and perceptions (Bandura, 1993; Chelminski and Coulter, 2007).

It is expected that the perception of self confidence will be *positively related* to perceptions of interpersonal influence. Perceived interpersonal influence is likely to arise as a consequence of the sense of control associated with increased self confidence (Chelminski and Coulter, 2007). It is important to note though that perceived influence is not a guarantee of the presence of actual influence; but, perceptions are more likely to arise in the presence of actual influence. This allows us to test for the presence of the psychological states that would arise should social self confidence lead to greater interpersonal influence.

METHOD

Participants

A sample of 221 people were sourced from a panel provider based in the United States. Participants were provided with a small financial incentive for their participation in this survey. Of the sample, 53% reported their gender as male and the average age was 36.2 years ($SD = 12.7$). Forty-five percent of the sample reported having completed at least a bachelor's degree level qualification.

Measures

The survey instrument consisted of several multi-item measures along with demographic questions intended to allow the assessment of sample quality. Perceptions of social self confidence was measured using the Generalised Social Confidence scale developed by Wright (1975). Perceptions of interpersonal influence were measured using an Opinion Leadership scale developed by Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman (Flynn *et al.*, 1996). Previous research has found that *susceptibility* to interpersonal influence has a relationship with social self confidence. As susceptibility is likely to correlate with the ability to *exert* interpersonal influence on others (i.e. opinion leadership) a measure of susceptibility has been included to act as a control variable. Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence is measured using the scale developed by Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989). All items are measured on a seven point likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7).

Procedure

Participants were approached through the interface of an online panel provider. Once they had accepted the invitation to participate they completed an ethics declaration. Participants then completed the multi-item measures and demographic questions. Upon completing the

survey they received a small payment for their participation. Participants were prohibited from completing the survey more than once.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As the multi-item measures were used as per literature their validity was not in question. However, to confirm validity principle component analysis was performed ($KMO = 0.866$; $Bartlett's\ Chi = 3800.377$, $p < 0.000$). No cross loadings were identified, however one item in the Social Self Confidence scale loaded onto a unique construct. Similarly three items from the Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence scale loaded onto a unique construct. Because of the strong reports of validity from previous studies and the fact that no cross-loading was present to indicate poor *discriminate* validity it was elected to retain all items in all measures for the analysis. The reliability of each measure was also more than satisfactory for this research. The Cronbach's alpha for Perceptions of Social Self Confidence was .876; for Perceptions of Interpersonal Influence it was .895; and for Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence it was .902. These results indicate good validity and reliability of the measures used.

The partial correlation of Perceptions of Interpersonal Influence and Perceptions of Social Self Confidence controlling for Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence was found to be moderate and positive ($r = .409$, $p < .000$). This is in line with expectations; those with a greater perception of social self confidence generally perceive they have a greater ability to influence those around them.

STUDY 2

DOES SELF CONFIDENCE LEAD TO GREATER INFLUENCE?

The results of Study 1 indicate that perceptions of self confidence are related to perceptions of interpersonal influence. While perceptions are more likely to arise in the presence of actual confidence and influence they do not necessarily have to. In Study 2, we wanted to confirm these findings with actual confidence and actual influence. Research indicates that people with greater social self confidence are likely to be able to exert greater influence over peers' behaviour (Gecas, 1989; Pool, et al., 1998). For this study we undertook a field experiment in which we observed the spread of a purchase behaviour among peers when the behaviour was seeded with high versus low socially self confident people.

METHOD

Participants

Eighty adult males across four local European football teams were recruited to participate in this experiment. After seeking consent from all participants 66 of the team members were retained in the final analysis. The final sample sizes for each football team was 14, 14, 20 and 18. Two of the teams had members that were predominantly of Vietnamese ethnicity, and the other

two teams had members that were predominantly of Anglo-European ethnicity. The ethnicity of the team was used as a blocking factor when the seeds were selected to control for its effect.

Procedure

Participants completed an initial survey where their social self confidence was measured using a modified version of the Generalised Social Confidence scale developed by Wright (1975). The modifications were to make the scale specific to the football context; the modified items are documented in Appendix A. Responses were in the form of a five point likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The results of the survey were used to find the two people with the most and the two with the least social self confidence to act as confederate seeds in the subsequent experiment. Consent from participants was obtained for this survey and also for a vaguely described experiment that was to follow in the subsequent weeks. The experimental phase treated each football team as a separate experimental unit. Two members of each football team were asked to be confederates. In two teams the confederates were the two members scoring highest in social self confidence in the initial survey, and for the other two teams the confederates were two members scoring the lowest in social self confidence. The seeding of confederates provided the main manipulation in the experiment.

All confederates were asked to publicly buy and wear a rubber charity wrist band when they first went on sale to the team. These rubber bands then continued to be sold at matches and/or training through a separate confederate who was unknown to the team for a two week period; the teams met for a match or training only once per week during this period. The number of players that purchased the wrist bands was monitored during this period; this spread of purchase behaviour is the measure of interpersonal influence of the confederates. Two confederates were used for each team to ensure that the purchase behaviour was highly visible to all players but no more were used to ensure that social norms did not play a role, at least initially, in the experiment.

A final survey phase was also undertaken. This survey confirmed the observations regarding the purchase of the rubber wrist bands and asked additional questions about group behaviour. The main purpose of this final survey was to debrief the participants in the experiment and obtain full consent for their prior participation. Only participants from whom consent was obtained at all stages were retained in the analysis here. As a part of the ethics procedure all money spent by participants was refunded and a charitable donation of equivalent value to the purchase costs was made.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Cronbach's alpha for the adapted Perceptions of Social Self Confidence was .7657 ($M_{sum} = 25.85$, $SD = 4.10$). The reliability was satisfactory for this research. The validity cannot be assessed due to the limited sample size but strong validity results from previous studies suggest that validity would be present. The confederates in the high social self confidence

manipulations all scored 33 apart from one who scored 29; and the low social self confidence confederates scored 17, 19, 21 and 22. This discrimination among participants provided a suitable basis for confederate selection for the experiment and establishes a reasonable basis for the manipulation.

Table 1 Purchase incidence by team/manipulation in Study 2			
Confederate	Team	Size	Purchased
High Confidence	1	14	14
	2	20	19
Low Confidence	3	14	9
	4	18	11

There is a clear relationship between the social self confidence of the confederates employed and the subsequent purchase behaviour of the football teams. The confederates with greater social self confidence had much greater influence over the subsequent purchases of the team. The size of each team and subsequent number of players that purchased, including the confederates, can be seen in table 1. The teams seeded by highly confident confederates saw a purchase incidence of 96.7% among the remaining team members, compared to a purchase rate of only 57.1% among the teams seeded by a confederate with lower social self confidence. This relationship between purchase incidence (excluding the confederates) and the manipulation is highly significant, $\chi^2(1, n = 58) = 13.01, p < .00$.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across the two studies we found support for the hypothesis that there is an organic relationship between social self confidence and interpersonal influence with regard to purchase decisions. These studies are the first to demonstrate that higher levels of social self confidence lead a person to emerge as natural leader with an ability to influence the purchases of others. Previous literature has only explored how people become more susceptible to influence as a result of lower levels of social self confidence (Gecas, 1989; Pool, et al., 1998). While organizational literature has suggested that self confidence may play a role in the emergence of leaders this study demonstrates that this occurs and that it occurs outside the structured organizational contexts (Beefink, et al., 2012; Schyns and Szesny, 2010).

The results of Study 1 demonstrate that increases in social self confidence leads to greater perceptions of interpersonal influence. While Study 1 is limited by its measurement of perceived influence instead of actual influence, perceptions are more likely to arise in the presence of actual influence. Study 2 provides a more direct test, showing experimentally that people with more social self confidence influence the decisions of others to a greater extent than those with

less social self confidence. They emerge as a social leader with others following their decisions, in this case, their decision to purchase a product.

Social self confidence was theorised to play an important role in the emergence of natural opinion leaders capable of influencing the behaviour of others. Literature recognises that greater confidence in one's social ability motivates people to be more social (Chelminski and Coulter, 2007; Chemers, et al., 2000; Schunk, 1990). They feel capable of dealing with the challenges that being more social present, dealing with difficult people and social settings. Through greater sociability they will likely have more social ties naturally increasing their ability to influence others (Berndt, 2002).

Greater social self confidence can also lead people to more effectively manage their social relations. This management of social relations does not imply that they are managed towards a specific objective, but more effective management would build trust and foster greater influence compared to those who mismanage their social relations. Confidence gives people the ability to examine the wider implications of their behaviour as they need to dedicate fewer mental resources to assessing their own abilities, as they believe those abilities exist (Sanna and Pusecker, 1994; Wright, 1975). More social ties and the more effective management of them would be expected to lead those with greater social self confidence to achieve greater interpersonal influence, a theory supported by the researching findings here.

This research examined the relationship between increased social self confidence and interpersonal influence through a survey of a general population and through an experiment within established social groups. What has not been addressed is how interpersonal influence, as a consequence of social self confidence, may evolve in social groups that are still forming. Social groups that are still forming will have considerably more dynamic relations as individuals learn about each other assess how they fit into the broader social group (Bizumic et al., 2012; Hogg and Turner, 1985). Examining how such group formation and learning processes may influence the relationship between social self confidence and interpersonal influence could be undertaken in future research. Such research could involve replicating the experiment conducted here within social groups as various stages of development giving valuable insight into how social leaders develop within social groups that are still in their formative stages.

One limitation of the research conducted in this paper is linked to this area for future research. By examining existing social groups, mechanisms in addition social self confidence may also be playing a part in determining the extent to which they can influence the decision making of peers. The main focus on this research was on the external validity of the studies, hence real social groups were employed rather than artificial social groups that may have resulted in a higher level of internal validity. However, the validity of this role of self confidence in achieving influence has been amply demonstrated in previous research in organisational settings (e.g. Beeftink et al., 2012; Schyns and Sczesny, 2010). Future researchers wishing to examine social self confidence in isolation of its natural covariates could use statistical measures or laboratory based experiments to achieve this.

These findings have implications for the management of behavioural change in groups. Behavioural change in a group can be more effectively achieved by targeting those more likely

to subsequently influence the purchase decisions of others (Clark et al., 2008). In this case, these individuals are those with greater social self confidence. The efforts of those managers attempting to change group behaviour will thus be re-enforced by the natural relationship between social self confidence and interpersonal influence (Bandura, 1988). Such management approaches would be useful when trying to reduce anti-social behaviour among target demographic groups, or promoting positive health behaviours among those groups.

Previous research had only considered people's susceptibility to interpersonal influence in social groups as a result of low self confidence (Gecas, 1989; Pool, et al., 1998). This research has shown that greater social self confidence leads to greater ability to exert social self influence over purchase decisions.

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APPENDIX A. ADAPTED GENERAL SOCIAL CONFIDENCE SCALE

This scale was adapted from the original scale by Wright (1975) for use in a football context. Responses were recorded on a five point likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

1. I feel that I have a number of good qualities
2. I am sure that someday my teammates will respect me more
3. I do not worry about whether people judge me
4. I am not able to think as quickly as the others on the field
5. I often fear my actions will make others look down on me
6. I am capable of handling myself in most situations
7. In a team discussion, I am always fear that my opinions are inferior

