

# Social media, social pressures and the power of opinion

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An example comparison used in the experiment

(PhysOrg.com) -- New research from HP's Social Computing Research Group [suggests](#) that while social media and the recommendations of others can cause you to change your mind regarding a product or service, it is not in the way you may think. While you may assume that people change their mind when more people disagree with their choice, this study shows people are more likely to change their mind when the amount of people disagreeing is fewer.

The internet is filled with product reviews and rating systems and many [consumers](#) turn to these for information when deciding on a new product. The research team at HP wanted to determine just how effective these reviews were on influencing a person's decision.

The team presented participants with a series of choices when it came to two pieces of furniture. The participants were then asked again after varying amounts of time, but were this time told that other participants had preferred the other item. What they discovered was that when a small number of other participants differed in their [choice](#), the participant was more likely to make a change in their choice as opposed to when a large number disagreed with them.

Two main theories of social influence are represented in this experiment. The first, psychological reactance theory, believes that when a person's beliefs are threatened by opposition, they stand strong in the need for self-preservation. This theory proved to be more powerful in the experiment when the amount of people opposing a participant's beliefs was large.

The second theory, social influence and conformity, believes that people have the need to feel socially connected and when faced with opposition will change to conform to the group. The experiment by HP shows that this theory holds truer when the group opposing is smaller.

The research also revealed that the timing of outside influence is important when it comes to getting someone to change their mind. Influence is more likely to occur when a person is given more time before being approached with different opinions. They also discovered that the more time a person takes to make their initial choice, the more likely they are to be influenced by other opinions.

The researchers now plan to tackle the idea of quality when it comes to

recommendations and test whether a person is more or less likely to change their choice when influenced by friends and family. If sources that they feel connected to choose the opposite item, will they be more or less likely to conform.

**More information:** via [Wired](#)

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