The effect of uniform virtual appearance on conformity intention: Social identity model of deindividuation effects and optimal distinctiveness theory

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A B S T R A C T
This study integrates social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) and optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) in investigating the effect of uniform virtual appearance on individuals’ willingness to conform to a majority opinion in computer-mediated groups. SIDE posits that sharing the same visual cue can promote group identification process and eventually induce stronger conformity. Meanwhile, ODT indicates that too much visual similarity rather concerns individuals about their deprived uniqueness, so they would be reluctant to conform to a majority opinion as a way to restore their uniqueness. This study concurs with previous research based on SIDE by showing that group identification induced by uniform appearance increases conformity intention. It also showed that perceived deindividuation, another variable that is induced by a high level of visual similarity relative to others, decreases conformity intention. As a result, the current study shows that the effect of virtual uniform appearance on conformity intention is inconsistently mediated by group identification and perceived deindividuation.

1. Introduction

Much research on social influence has focused on conformity rather than nonconformity, which is contrary to the value of individuals over groups manifested by Western societies (Horney & Jetten, 2004). This can be explained by one of the suppositions of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981): individuals naturally try to be acceptable to others in the same group (Allen, 1965; Santee & Maslach, 1982). Even if individuals are grouped on a random basis, they still adopt norms and values of the group by not expressing their deviant opinions for fear of social sanction (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Postmes, Spears, and Lea (1999) have applied this perspective to computer-mediated communication (CMC) contexts, such as virtual communities, and found that reduced social cues in CMC can accentuate group identification process and adoption of group norms more than in face-to-face interaction.

Intensified group identification might or might not be welcomed depending on virtual communities’ diverse goals or motives. If a goal of a virtual group is to create a space for unrestricted discussions, “conformity to a majority opinion” pressure coming from strong group identification might prevent individuals from expressing themselves freely (Hiltz & Turoff, 1978; Janis, 1982; Nunamaker, Briggs, Mittleman, Vogel, & Balthazard, 1997). On the other hand, if a goal of a virtual community is to promote a specific political opinion or create a congenial group for individuals of diverse demographic backgrounds, strong group identification and conformity to a majority opinion should be encouraged.

Pertaining to virtual communities promoting congeniality, a high level of visual similarity among members is known to be one of the ways to intensify their identification with other members, such as being represented by the same visual cue (Kim, 2009; Lee, 2004). Yet, can a high level of visual similarity (i.e., uniform appearance) also make individuals conform to a majority opinion more than a low level of visual similarity (i.e., different visual cues)? Research investigating the effect of uniform appearance on conformity to a majority opinion in offline settings has produced mixed findings. A group of studies has shown a positive association between similarity in appearance and conformity to a majority opinion (Terry & Hogg, 2001; Turner, 1984). Sharing the same visual cue with others can make one feel that he/she belongs to a majority group, and research on social influence has shown that majority sources are highly influential (Imhoff & Erb, 2009; Mackie, 1987; Wood, Lundgren, Ouellette, Busceme, & Blackstone, 1994). Following the logic of social influence research, one would be likely to agree with a group of others who look like him/her more than with a group of individuals represented by idiosyncratic visual cues, because conforming to the opinion of the former gives a more sense of belonging compared to the latter (Asch, 1956).

On the other hand, another group of studies finds the opposite — individuals who look highly similar to others are hesitant to conform to a majority opinion (Codol, 1984; Cooper & Jones, 1969;
Fromkin, 1970). Being too similar to others can make individuals feel deprived of their distinctiveness as unique individuals, which might hinder them from thinking or saying what others do (Imhoff & Erb, 2009). Perceiving diminished distinctiveness, one might be motivated to do something to compensate his/her reduced uniqueness such as voicing a different opinion from others’.

Instead of arguing which one makes more sense than the other, we presently propose that the two aforementioned effects of high visual similarity (i.e., uniform appearance) on conformity to a majority opinion coexist in computer-mediated group settings. Two theoretical frameworks emerge that can explain these two types of effects of high visual similarity: social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) (Lea & Spears, 1991) and optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) (Brewer, 1991). Following the logic of SIDE, uniform appearance can expedite group identification process by making group members pay less attention to each other’s idiosyncratic qualities while making them focus on the shared visual cue (Kim, 2009; Lee, 2004). This, in turn, leads to members’ attachment to their group and conformity to a majority opinion promoted by the group members (Postmes et al., 1999; Reicher, 1987). On the other hand, ODT posits that individuals want to be moderately similar or unique in any given situations, so too much similarity relative to others would work against their willingness to conform to a majority opinion (Brewer, 1991). In short, the current study investigates whether these two theoretical frameworks can explain the disparate effects of high visual similarity (i.e., uniform appearance) on computer-mediated group members’ willingness to conform to a majority opinion.

1.1. Social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE)

SIDE posits that the paucity of individuating cues (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, or eye contacts) in computer-mediated interactions can make group membership (i.e., social identity) salient and induce adoption of group norms even more compared to face-to-face interactions (Lea & Spears, 1991; Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998; Postmes et al., 1999). Such individuating cue-deprived CMC renders extremely limited information with which individuals make sense of each other. When individuals have little information of their anonymous conversation partners of zero interaction history, any given cues in CMC can be magnified as one of the most important characteristics of one another. For instance, if socio-demographic information such as gender or ethnicity is available without any other individuating information, individuals might perceive and treat each other as a prototypical member of certain gender or ethnic groups (Postmes et al., 1998). Such reduced focus on individual differences (i.e., personal identity) and increased attention to group membership (i.e., social identity) is called “depersonalization” (Postmes et al., 1999).

In that sense, if one is represented by a visual image without any other personal information available, it can serve as the only indicator to which others relate. When the other’s only available visual cue happens to be the same as mine, such uniform appearance serves as a basis for psychological group formation as a cue to a common social category (Turner, 1984). Thus, sharing the same image does not contain any socio-categorical cues (e.g., gender or ethnicity). Uniform appearance has been used to induce a high level of depersonalization in both CMC research (Kim, 2009; Lee, 2004) and face-to-face context-based research (Maslach, 1974; Zimbardo, 1969). Functioning as a cue to a common group membership, uniform appearance fosters identification with other members while diluting individual differences. On the contrary, if individuals are represented by cues that are different from others’, they focus on visual differences without any cue for similarity. Different visual cues interfere with group identification process by highlighting individual differences among group members (Lee & Nass, 2002). In this condition, personal identity would be emphasized more than social identity. As suggested by SIDE, the more individuals identify with their group and group members, the more they are willing to conform to a majority opinion promoted by other group members (Terry & Hogg, 2001).

1.2. Optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT)

Alternatively, some researchers have brought up a possibility that too much similarity can deter individuals’ willingness to conform to a majority opinion. This supposition was supported by earlier experiments by Fromkin (1970) as well as by Cooper and Jones (1969) showing that individuals who were made look highly similar to one another tried to promote their uniqueness rather than giving unusual answers or by changing their opinions into something different from those of others. In CMC contexts, Lee (2004) found that uniform appearance elicited less conformity compared to different visual representations. As a possible account for this result, Lee (2004) suggested optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) (Brewer, 1991, 1993).

ODT posits that individuals always look for equilibrium between extreme similarity to and extreme distinctiveness from others. As a way to explain this propensity, ODT relies on an assumption that individuals have two competing motivations in nature – a motivation to belong to others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1968) and a motivation to be different from others (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Because of such conflicting nature of these two motivations, individuals cannot gratify one motivation much without sacrificing the other. Therefore, the best way of satisfying these two competing motivations at the same time is to maintain both of them at moderate levels.

Following this logic, individuals would not feel comfortable if they perceive that they are too deindividuated, since their motivation to be unique is forsaken. Thus, ODT presumes that individuals want to see themselves moderately unique and do not value a high degree of similarity relative to others (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). This proposition leads to a hidden assumption of ODT and uniqueness theory – individuals have a capability to sense how deindividuated they are in any given situations and are conscious of external factors lessening their individuality. That is, a higher level of visual similarity shared among group members would make them perceive that their uniqueness as distinctive individuals diminished greatly compared to a lower level of visual similarity.

The fact that individuals are conscious of maintaining a moderate level of uniqueness in any given conditions can help us explain an unexplored process connecting uniform appearance and individuals’ reluctance to conform to a majority opinion. Conformity, including conforming to social norms, pleasing others, getting others’ approval and avoiding rejection, can be a reflection of one’s desire to be similar to others. In a state of deprived uniqueness, however, individuals would avoid further deprivation by agreeing with a high consensus opinion and rather agree with a minority position as a way to reduce the feeling of impoverished uniqueness (Imhoff & Erb, 2009). In that sense, voicing different opinions from the majority opinion can be used as one of the behavioral strategies for regaining some distinctiveness from others (Baumeister, 1991; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Nonconformity can be seen as a behavior reflecting one’s desire to be different, because deviating from a majority opinion or a group norm promotes independence and autonomy of self (Simonson & Nowlis, 2000). Thus, if individuals feel that their uniqueness is deprived from assigned (or even unwanted) similarity relative to others, they would feel reluctant to conform to a majority opinion, but rather bring up deviant opinions to restore their uniqueness.
1.3. Inconsistent mediation

Integrating the aforementioned two theoretical frameworks – SIDE and ODT – we presently propose that a high level of visual similarity induced by uniform appearance increases both individuals’ identification with their group members and perceived deindividuation at the same time. Perceived deindividuation is derived from awareness that their individual differences are oppressed by assigned uniform appearance among group members. These two have inconsistent associations with conformity to a majority opinion: while group identification increases individuals’ willingness to conform to a majority opinion raised by other members, perceived deindividuation deters individuals’ willingness to conform to it. Overall, SIDE and ODT provide competing predictions on the effect of uniform appearance on individuals’ willingness to conform to a majority opinion through two different mediators – identification with group members and perceived deindividuation. In other words, the indirect effect of uniform appearance on conformity intention through group identification has an opposite sign (positive) to that of the indirect effect through perceived deindividuation (negative). When there is at least one indirect effect with a different sign from other indirect effects or the direct effect between an independent and a dependent variable, it is called inconsistent mediation (Davis, 1985; MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007; MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). Thus, the current study hypothesizes that the effect of uniform appearance on willingness to conform to a majority opinion is inconsistently mediated by group identification and perceived deindividuation (Fig. 1).

**H1.** Group identification and perceived deindividuation will inconsistently mediate the effect of uniform appearance on individuals’ willingness to conform to a majority opinion.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A total of 345 undergraduate students (61.6% women) ranging from freshmen to seniors from a variety of majors enrolled in an advanced Communication course from a large Midwestern university in the United States of America voluntarily participated in the study. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 39 years ($M = 19.63$, $SD = 1.75$). Participants were required to use the Internet and tend to use a variety of Internet functions.

2.2. Procedure

The experiment was introduced as a research project on a computer-mediated group discussion to participants. All participants were directed to visit an online experiment website and to participate in a discussion resolving a controversial issue with other discussants. Once participants logged into the online discussion website, they were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: the uniform-appearance condition where all participants shared the same visual cue, or the different-appearance condition where each member had a unique visual cue. Of the 345 participants, 173 were assigned to the uniform-appearance condition, and 172 were assigned to the different-appearance condition. Depending on visual cue designs, two computer graphic designers were asked to design images that would not contain any negative cultural or social connotations. This process resulted in a set of images consisting of animals and cartoon characters. A focus group of five students was asked to evaluate these images, and they did not indicate any negative reaction toward those images.

Even though participants were told that they were to participate in a real-time online discussion with four other discussants, those four discussants were programmed ones. This deception was necessary to make sure that all participants were exposed to the same transcript across the two different types of appearance conditions and that they focused on the discussion topic without being distracted by talking about different subjects. Moreover, using the programmed discussion manuscript made it possible to create the same conformity pressure for every participant stemming from all four other discussants’ agreeing on one opinion. In order to increase the reality of the programmed conversations, all the programmed conversation texts were taken from two focus group sessions that had taken place before the online experiment.

Before participants moved to the real-time discussion page, they were asked to choose one image, which would represent them during the discussion, out of four. In the uniform-appearance condition, whatever images were chosen by participants, the other four discussants were programmed to be represented by the same image (Fig. 2). Meanwhile, four other discussants were programmed to have different images from one another’s in the different-appearance condition no matter what images were chosen by participants (Fig. 3). The instruction clearly noted that every discussant was told that they were to participate in a real-time online discussion with four other discussants, and that they focused on the discussion topic without any negative reaction toward those images.

**Fig. 1.** The hypothesized inconsistent mediation model.

also clearly noted that discussants were from diverse ethnicity and age groups, so participants could not assume whether other discussants were students or not, from the same gender group or not, or from the same ethnicity group or not. We intentionally left other discussants' demographic information unknown to participants, so that participants could not pick up any other nuanced similarities or differences than other discussants' visual cues. Seeing the way they were visually represented, participants were asked to indicate how much they felt their uniqueness suppressed (i.e., perceived deindividuation), and how much they could identify with other discussants as members of the same group (i.e., group identification).

After moving into the discussion page, participants were asked to read a hypothetical scenario (Lee, 2004) in which a person faced a dilemma situation and had to choose one option between going to a music school or a medical school (Appendix B). About the time participants were to be finished with reading the scenario (i.e., about one minute), four programmed discussants presented their opinions one after another in order to give an impression that each discussant expressed his/her opinion after reading his/her prior discussant's opinion. Four other discussants were programmed to share the same opinion, which implied the existence of a consensus norm or a majority opinion within the discussion group. Participants were asked to choose how much they agreed with the dominant opinion shared by other discussants. Then, participants were told that the first discussion would be followed by more discussion sessions. Given that all the other discussants were to agree on one opinion in those discussions as in the first one, participants were asked whether they would be willing to conform to their group members in coming discussions (i.e., conformity intention). After the discussion was done, participants were asked to fill out a series of questionnaires.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Perceived deindividuation
Because there has not been any previous research that specifically measured individuals' perception on how much their uniqueness is suppressed by being extremely similar to others, four newly created items were used to measure perceived deindividuation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$, $M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.52$). Items consisted of such statements as "I think members in this group were not represented..."
as unique individuals in this group,” and “I think I was not considered as a distinctive individual in this group.”.

2.3.2. Group identification
Group identification was measured by three items (Cronbach’s \( x = .88, M = 4.58, SD = 1.12 \)) used in Lee’s (2004) study, which were adapted from Cheney’s (1983) organizational identification scale.

2.3.3. Conformity intention
Conformity intention was measured by four items concerning participants’ intentions to agree with any dominant opinion promoted by four other discussants in upcoming discussions (Cronbach’s \( x = .88, M = 4.67, SD = 1.19 \)). Example items were “I am willing to agree with them,” and “I am willing to follow their opinion.” Conformity intention was used as the dependent variable for the data analysis in this study instead of actual conformity decision, since generalizing the conformity decision regarding one scenario to other decision-making cases can threaten external validity of the study.

A total of 11 items were used to measure these three variables on 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to check if these 11 items were indicators of three separate factors. The CFA model was tested using AMOS 6.0 structural equation modeling (SEM) program (Arbuckle, 2005). According to Hu and Bentler’s recommendations on model fit indexes (Hu & Bentler, 1999), .06 or less means a good fit for root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), .95 or more for incremental fit index (IFI), and .95 or more for comparative fit index (CFI). Pertaining to RMSEA, while a value below .06 means a good fit of the model with the data, values between .08 and .10 indicate a mediocre fit and values over .10 a poor fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The CFA result showed a good fit, \( RMSEA = .065, IFI = .980, CFI = .980 \).

3. Results

3.1. Main effects of manipulation
There was a significant main effect of the types of visual appearance conditions on two mediating factors: perceived deindividuation and group identification. Participants in the uniform-appearance condition perceived a higher level of deindividuation \( (M = 4.74, SD = 1.58) \) compared to those in the different-appearance condition \( (M = 2.93, SD = 1.01) \); F(1, 343) = 81.84, p < .001. Visual appearance manipulation also showed a significant main effect on group identification. Participants in the uniform-appearance condition showed a higher level of group identification \( (M = 4.96, SD = 1.13) \) compared to those in the different-appearance condition \( (M = 4.07, SD = 1.08) \); F(1, 343) = 32.67, p < .001. On the other hand, participants in the uniform-appearance condition did not show a significantly different level of conformity intention \( (M = 4.66, SD = 1.32) \) compared to those in the different-appearance condition \( (M = 4.60, SD = 1.13) \); F(1, 343) = .83, p = .44.

3.2. Inconsistent mediation model testing
In order to test the overall fit of the hypothesized inconsistent mediation model in Fig. 1, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used. The hypothesized path model showed a good fit with the data: \( \chi^2 (1, N = 345) = .498, p = .480, RMSEA = .06, IFI = 1.000 \), \( CFI = 1.000 \). Uniform appearance increased group identification \( (\beta = .37, p < .001) \) as well as perceived deindividuation \( (\beta = .56, p < .001) \) more than different appearances. While group identification increased conformity intention \( (\beta = .24, p < .001) \), perceived deindividuation decreased conformity intention \( (\beta = -.24, p < .001) \). These results are consistent with what SIDE and ODT predict (Fig. 4).

AMOS does not allow us to test the significance of indirect effects nor to contrast different indirect effects in their strengths. Thus, the current study chose a multiple mediation analysis (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), an analytic strategy appropriate for testing hypotheses with multiple mediators, to test Hypothesis 1 and Research Question 1. This method was chosen based on the fact that the current study’s hypothesized model might not make a case of the mediation test if following Baron and Kenny’s criteria for mediation. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a significant main effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable is one of the prerequisite criteria for mediation. Following this logic, the current study’s indirect effects through perceived deindividuation and group identification cannot be tested, since there was no significant main effect of the differentiated levels of visual similarity on conformity intention \( (\beta = -.065, p = .624) \). However, the possibility that mediation can exist even without a significant main effect has been recognized by a group of researchers, such as the case of inconsistent mediation (Collins, Graham, & Flaherty, 1998; Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). To detect an inconsistent mediation without any significant main effect, a multiple mediation model can be useful, because it can test more than one mediator at the same time.
time. As suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008), specifying and testing a multiple mediation model might be better than testing separate simple mediation models when there are more than one mediator. Including several mediators in one model increases the practicality of the hypothesized model by testing to what extent one factor mediates the impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable when other mediators are present. Multiple mediation analysis is also useful for theory comparison (i.e., SIDE vs. ODT) by directly contrasting the magnitudes of the same-signed indirect effects associated with different theoretical perspectives.

The aforementioned hypothesized model was tested with SPSS macro program, which was developed and updated by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The indirect effect of uniform appearance on conformity intention through group identification was significantly positive \( (b = 0.22, Z = 3.75, p < .001) \). Meanwhile, the indirect effect of uniform appearance on conformity intention through perceived deindividuation was significantly negative \( (b = -0.33, Z = -3.68, p < .001) \). Such opposite signs of indirect effects support a case of an inconsistent mediation in the data obtained for the current study.

4. Discussion

In this study, we propose that high visual similarity among individuals (i.e., uniform virtual appearance) would have two possible effects on willingness to conform to a majority opinion in computer-mediated group settings. This study concurs with previous research based on SIDE (Lee, 2004) by showing that group identification induced by uniform appearance increases conformity intention. This study also showed that perceived deindividuation, another variable that is induced by a high level of visual similarity relative to others, decreases conformity intention. The existence of these two mediators might provide some explanations for the inconsistency in the association between uniform appearance and conformity to a majority opinion in previous research.

The current study has some theoretical implications for explaining the impact of a high level of visual similarity on conformity or dissent in computer-mediated groups by showing that ODT, in addition to SIDE, can be used as another theoretical framework. Both SIDE and ODT attend to the effect of intensified similarity relative to others (i.e., deprived individuality) on individuals in groups, but focus on different reactions of individuals. While SIDE posits that increased similarity makes individuals identify easily with others and pay less attention to individual differences, ODT suggests that the same attribute rather makes them focus on their impoverished uniqueness as distinctive individuals. The current study showed that a high level of visual similarity induced by uniform appearance makes individuals go through disparate processes at the same time: it intensifies group identification process, but at the same time, makes individuals feel their uniqueness diminished. Subsequently, group identification is positively associated with conformity intention, while perceived deindividuation makes individuals reluctant to agree with others.

While previous studies rely solely on social identity perspective such as SIDE, or uniqueness theory perspective (i.e., ODT), the current study uses both frameworks in explaining individuals’ behaviors in computer-mediated groups. This study predicts that individuals experience two simultaneous, but opposing processes when they decide whether they would conform to a consensus norm in their groups or not (Davis, 1985; MacKinnon et al., 2000, 2007). Such inconsistent processes negates each other’s effect on conformity intention, and this might provide an explanation for why uniform appearance did not have a significant effect on conformity intention in the current study \( (M = 4.59, F = .834, p = .435) \) (MacKinnon et al., 2000; Shroot & Bolger, 2002).

This indicates that too much similarity (i.e., looking exactly like others) might concern individuals about their deprived uniqueness as much as make them perceive similarity as a basis for a common group membership. This explains why some individuals looking exactly like one another tried to voice different opinions from others’ in both face-to-face contexts (Codol, 1984; Cooper & Jones, 1969; Fromkin, 1970) and CMC contexts (Kim, 2009; Lee, 2004). Still, these results lead to more questions: how much similarity is too much similarity that makes individuals feel reluctant to conform to a dominant opinion of others? Future studies should investigate how diverse levels of visual similarity relative to others affect individuals differently in computer-mediated groups, and where is the equilibrium between similarity and uniqueness that makes individuals feel most comfortable.

In addition to the aforementioned theoretical implications, this study also has some practical implications especially for online communities or network games that use virtual self-representations. Following the logic of SIDE, wearing the same visual cue as others can intensify individuals’ identification with others in cyberspace. In that sense, online game players or virtual community members can identify with one another beyond their national, cultural, ethnic, or even gender differences by sharing uniform appearance. This is in line with the early Internet researchers’ optimistic prediction that using the Internet can enable individuals to overcome socio-categorical boundaries and increase equality in society by enhancing their opportunities to participate in social activities (Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & Sethna, 1991; Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984).

However, the current study also shows that sharing the same virtual appearance does not always lead to congeniality in computer-mediated groups. Too much similarity shared among individuals can interfere with group identification process by threatening their individual uniqueness, and even induce deviant behaviors as a way to restore their deprived uniqueness. Such deviant behaviors as a backlash to enforced visual similarity can be a problem if virtual community members have to make an important decision as a group. For instance, a member of an online community that make every member look alike might disagree with others as a way to refurbish his/her uniqueness among community members or receive attention. If the member’s desire to restore his/her uniqueness or stand out overshadows expressing what he/she truly believes right, it will discourage sound and rational decision-making process. In order to reduce such unintended side effects from uniform or standardized visual representation, developers and administrators of virtual communities should be careful in deciding how much space for individuation is allowed for their members even when they want to use uniform appearance as a way to promote congeniality within the communities.

There are some limitations in this study. Although it was a necessary measure for holding consensus norm constant across different conditions and controlling for unexpected interaction among discussants, using a programmed discussion might have reduced ecological validity of the online discussion. In future studies, participants should have actual discussions and be asked to reach a decision within a limited time. Secondly, the present study only looked at the situation in which there is one dominant opinion shared by other discussants. This might have brought a confounding effect in the uniform-appearance condition: a participant could have shown willingness to agree with other discussants, either because he/she wanted to be accepted by a majority group who shared the same image as his hers or because he/she complied with the consensus pressure coming from the majority opinion. In a future study, these two potentially confounding influences should be disentangled.

The findings of the current study – sharing uniform appearance with others can make individuals perceive that their uniqueness as
individuals is threatened and hesitant to conform to a majority opinion – suggests a major assumption on human motivation and behavior: once individuals perceive a discrepancy between a desired state and an existing state, they do something to eliminate the discrepancy (Higgins, 1987; Kruglanski, 1996). Given that “states” are not permanent and that the desired state can be achieved through diverse means (Heider, 1958), it is possible to assume that the negative effect induced by individuals’ perceived deindividuation on majority influence should be weakened if they were given opportunities to regain their uniqueness (Imhoff & Erb, 2009). Based on this preposition, a future study can investigate more dynamic changes of desired and satisfied states of uniqueness after being shorn of uniqueness would be more willing to conform to a majority opinion compared to those who are left deprived of their uniqueness without any remedy.

Appendix A

A.1. Scales

Perceived deindividuation

(1) I think I could be who I am in this group (reversed item).
(2) I think I saw myself predominantly as an individual in this group (reversed item).
(3) I think I was not considered as a distinctive individual in this group.
(4) I think members in this group were not represented as unique individuals in this group.

Group identification

(1) I have a lot in common with other group members.
(2) I find it easy to identify with this group.
(3) I find that my values and the values of other group members are very similar.

Conformity intention

(1) I am willing to agree with them.
(2) I am willing to follow their opinion.
(3) I am willing to join them as the same group member.
(4) I am willing to share the same opinion as the same group member.

Appendix B

B.1. Discussion topic

Ms. E, a college senior, has studied the piano since childhood. She has won amateur prizes and given small recitals, suggesting that she has considerable musical talent. As graduation approaches, she has the choice of taking a medical school scholarship to become a physician, a profession which would bring certain financial rewards, or entering a conservatory of music for advanced training with a well-known pianist. She realizes that even upon completion of her piano studies, success as a concert pianist would not be assured.

A: Ms. E should enter a conservatory of music for advanced training
B: Ms. E should choose to take a medical school scholarship to become a physician

References

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