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Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption: Evidence from Secondary Data and Scale Development

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Abstract

This research explores a dimension of experiential consumption that stems not from hedonic pursuit but from social conformity motives. In this study, social conformity is conceptualized as a behavioral tendency in which consumers align their experiential choices, participation, or evaluations with those of others in a group-based consumption context, and it functions as a socially embedded behavioral process through which consumers pursue psychological need fulfillment. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which identifies competence, relatedness, and autonomy as fundamental psychological needs, the current research contends that conformity in experiential contexts arises from the desire to feel effective (competence) and socially connected (relatedness), while the need for autonomy is relatively diminished. A two-study mixed-method design was implemented. Study 1 utilized secondary data from Airbnb virtual experiences and found that group-based conformity was positively associated with competence and relatedness, but not with autonomy. Study 2, composed of three sub-studies using primary survey data and validated scales, further confirmed that competence and relatedness were positive predictors of social conformity in experiential consumption, whereas autonomy was not significant. Collectively, the studies advance theoretical understanding of experiential consumption by highlighting conformity as a need-driven process rooted in competence and relatedness, with implications for consumer motivation and social influence research.

Key Words: Experiential Consumption, Social Conformity, Virtual Experiences, Self-Determination

INTRODUCTION

Individuals often participate in experiential consumption not solely from intrinsic enjoyment, but as a means of adhering to social expectations. For instance, a person might purchase a costly ticket to a music festival to avoid social exclusion when all of their friends are attending, or participate in a highly visible wine-tasting event to signal social prestige, or join a collaborative workplace retreat to fulfill expectations

of teamwork. Experiences, unlike material goods, are typically consumed and communicated within social contexts, which intensifies individuals' awareness of social norms through the whole consumption process (Caprariello and Reis 2013). Recent research further supports this view by showing that experiential purchases promote stronger feelings of social connection than material purchases (Kumar et al., 2024). At its core, the motivation to engage in shared experiential consumption frequently extends beyond the pursuit of individual pleasure, a dynamic that underscores the influential role of conformity in shaping human behavior when choosing and consuming experiences.

Indeed, social conformity is a pervasive phenomenon of social behavior, where individuals often yield to group norms or majority opinions. Such behavior is viewed as an adaptive mechanism that allows individuals to maintain social connectedness and foster cooperation (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004). More recent work on social motivation similarly suggests that individuals' responses to social environments are shaped by core motives such as belonging, control, and self-enhancement (Geiger and Brick, 2023). Social conformity can be particularly salient in experiential consumption settings, as many experiential purchases occur in group settings involving family, friends, or colleagues with the shared goal of reinforcing social connection through joint leisure activities. Studies consistently find that social cues, such as crowd cues, peer reviews, trending status, and others, strongly influence conformity-based choices (e.g., Ali et al., 2021, Bikhchandani et al., 1992, Guan et al., 2023). For example, restaurant diners and tourists often conform to group preferences, favoring popular and highly rated venues. Furthermore, Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) argue that the social conformity phenomenon can be understood as an adaptive response to fulfill key motivational goals, particularly the affiliation goal and the self-enhancement goal. These two motives are frequently realized through experiential consumption, as prior research shows that experiential consumption can satisfy not only social connection needs, but also self-focused goals related to expression, identity and personal enhancement (Carter and Gilovich, 2012, Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003). Thus, the current research focuses on experiential consumption as the research context to examine social conformity behavior and to explore the motivational underpinnings, particularly self-determination motives, that explain why individuals conform in shared consumption experiences. It is proposed that social conformity in experiential consumption arises mainly from competence (a self-enhancement motive) and relatedness (a social motive), rather than autonomy. To substantiate this proposition, two studies were conducted employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates secondary Airbnb data with primary data collected for scale validation and nomological testing. This research contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it extends experiential consumption research by shifting attention from hedonic value and personal enjoyment to conformity as a socially embedded behavioral process. Second, it contributes to social influence research by identifying competence and relatedness as key motivational mechanisms underlying conformity in experiential consumption contexts. Third, it advances the application of Self-Determination Theory in consumer research by showing that conformity is not necessarily driven by autonomy, but instead

reflects a need-asymmetric process in which consumers align with group expectations to strengthen social connection and maintain a positive self-image.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Social conformity refers to the psychologically motivated adjustment of one's behavior or opinions in response to the influence of group pressure, typically because the pressure of the majority shapes the individual's judgments and beliefs toward group norms (Asch, 1955, Asch, 2016). In the present research, conformity is conceptualized primarily through its behavioral core: the adjustment or alignment of experiential choices, preferences, and evaluations in response to perceived group expectations. Thus, conformity is not treated as the final outcome variable, but as a socially embedded behavioral tendency whose occurrence can be explained by underlying psychological motives. Social conformity can be categorized into two forms: normative influence, which arises when individuals adhere to group expectations to obtain social approval or avoid social disapproval, and informational influence, which arises when individuals perceive others as accurate sources of information in uncertainty (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). Experiential consumption typically takes place in close social settings where its social nature becomes a key driver of behavior (e.g., Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982, Kumar et al., 2024), social conformity in experiential consumption context is both attributed to normative influence, such as the desire to strengthen social inclusion, and to informational influence, such as when individuals interpret group consensus or reviews as cues to infer quality and appropriateness.

An important line of research on social conformity frames it as a component of a broader motivational system, through which individuals seek to achieve diverse goals or fulfill underlying needs (e.g., Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). The above underscores its relevance to experiential consumption, where consumers seek social meaning, a sense of belonging, and the reinforcement of social relationships (Van Boven and Gilovich, 2003). On the other hand, according to Carter and Gilovich (2012), experiential consumption is more closely tied to one's sense of self than material purchases. Consequently, conformity operates as identity-based alignment rather than mere compliance whereby individuals gravitate toward experiences that reinforce their self-identities. This suggests that conformity in experiential consumption should be understood analytically as a mechanism through which consumers manage both social belonging and self-presentation. The above dynamic provides a rationale for applying Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985, Deci and Ryan, 2013, Ryan and Deci, 2000), which positions the need for social relatedness as the core psychological motive driving individuals to internalize and integrate values into their sense of self (Ryan, 1995), and explains why experiential consumption is especially susceptible to conformity-driven motivations. Thus, drawing from Self Determination Theory, social conformity in experiential consumption is defined as the behavioral tendency to align one's experiential choices with group expectations to fulfill the basic psychological need for belonging. It embodies an identity-based form

of conformity in which consumers relinquish their experiential preferences in pursuit of social affirmation to elevate their image and strengthen their self-identities within the group.

Furthermore, building on Cialdini and Goldstein's (2004) synthesis of social influence processes, social conformity can be viewed as an adaptive response to achieve three broad motivational goals: accuracy, affiliation, and positive self-concept. When examined through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), these goals also correspond to the basic psychological needs. Conformity in experiential consumption settings, such as group travel or shared dining, primarily satisfies the needs for relatedness, as individuals conform to maintain social connectedness with others, and competence, as individuals strive to demonstrate capability and value within the group. Meanwhile, the autonomy need is attenuated in conformity processes, as acting autonomously implies self-governance, whereas conforming entails accommodating others' expectations. Because experiential consumption often unfolds in social environments, where individuals must coordinate choices under social pressure, the experiential consumption settings naturally restrict individual choice which makes autonomy difficult to uphold. This does create a form of need asymmetry: while autonomy is restricted, the experiential consumption setting supports relatedness as individuals can strengthen social bonds through experiential purchases. Meanwhile, conformity in experiential contexts reinforces competence as individuals select socially valued experiences to demonstrate capability, effectiveness, and good self-image within the group. As a result, conformity becomes a motivated strategy for satisfying relatedness and competence needs, but not autonomy needs. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Autonomy has no significant association with social conformity in experiential consumption contexts.

H2: Competence has a positive association with social conformity in experiential consumption contexts.

H3: Relatedness has a positive association with social conformity in experiential consumption contexts.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDIES

To clarify the methodological design, the current research was organized into two phases. Study 1 served as an initial test of the proposed theoretical relationships using secondary textual data from Airbnb virtual experiences, a naturally occurring group-based experiential consumption context. This phase used dictionary-based text analysis and correlation analysis to examine whether conformity-related language was associated with autonomy, competence, and relatedness indicators. Study 2 then used primary survey data across three sub-studies to further validate the Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption scale. Specifically, Study 2a examined the scale's factor structure and convergent validity, Study 2b tested discriminant validity against FoMO, and Study 2c assessed nomological validity by examining the construct's relationship with self-determination variables. Thus, the two-phase design was necessary because Study 1 provided initial evidence from naturally occurring consumer language, whereas Study 2 provided psychometric validation using survey-based measures.

STUDY 1

The purpose of this study is to use secondary data to test the hypotheses by examining individuals' conformity behaviors during experiential consumption settings that are typically designed for groups, such as company gatherings or family get-togethers. To achieve this, data were extracted from Airbnb's virtual experiences. Specifically, the selected experiences were group-oriented activities, including mystery games, interactive challenges, bingo, and game nights, which are commonly designed for shared participation among groups such as coworkers, friends, or family members. Airbnb also explicitly positions its experiences as suitable for team-based participation and private group activities, which supports the selection of this context as one that naturally facilitates social interaction and, therefore, a setting in which conformity can occur. A total of 4,265 comments were ultimately extracted, covering the period from May 2020 to May 2024.

Drawing from the theoretical development above, it is aimed to establish a connection between conformity and the key dimensions of self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Consistent with the conceptual definition of social conformity provided earlier in the literature review, the conformity variable in Study 1 was operationalized using the Personal Values Dictionary (Ponizovskiy et al., 2020). In this dictionary, conformity reflects an emphasis on restraining actions and impulses that violate social expectations or norms, and it involves regulating one's behavior to align with social standards and avoid negative social outcomes, such as disapproval. The other variable that measures relatedness corresponds to the "social ties" construct defined in the Social Ties Dictionary developed by Pressman and Cohen (2007), where the construct reflects the extent to which individuals embed social relationships into their self-narratives. Competence, which refers to feeling capable within one's environment, can be reflected by several related constructs from the Behavioral Activation Dictionary (Burkhardt et al., 2022), including decision, accomplishment, and long-term orientation. Decisions, accomplishment, and long-term orientation, which are facets of competence (e.g., Deci and Ryan, 2000), capture individuals' capability of making effective judgment, attaining desired goals, and sustaining goal pursuit. Autonomy, characterized by a sense of volition and self-directed behavior, corresponds to the autonomous and controlling categories (the latter serving as the inverse of autonomy) from Self Determination Dictionary (Oliver et al., 2008).

Subsequently, the text was parsed according to the relevant dictionaries mentioned above, after which the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC, Pennebaker et al., 2007) program was applied to quantify the frequency of words associated with each variable. Once the outputs were obtained, the resulting word frequency scores for each construct were entered into a correlation matrix. Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the strength and direction of the associations between the self-determination variables and conformity.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that social conformity behavior would not be associated with autonomy, as autonomy represents volitional behavior guided by internal values rather than external factors. The results showed that, as hypothesized, autonomy was not significantly correlated with social conformity ($p = .524$). In contrast, the controlling variable, conceptualized as the inverse of autonomy, showed a strong positive

correlation with social conformity ($r = 0.50$, $p < .001$), which further supports that conformity behavior emerges under externally motivational conditions where individuals act to meet external pressures rather than self-endorsed goals. This result is consistent with Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) well-established distinction between normative and informational influence: the controlled motivation reflects can both reflects normative influence in which individuals comply to gain social approval and informational influence in which individuals defer to group opinions when they feel pressured. Likewise, Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) argue that social influence operates through motives for accuracy, affiliation, and positive self-concept; controlled motivation amplifies all three by making individuals more dependent on group cues to maintain a socially desirable image. In Self Determination Theory terms, because control functions as the opposite of autonomy, it thwarts psychological needs and shift behavior toward pressure-based compliance, consistent with both Deutsch and Gerard (1955) and Cialdini and Goldstein (2004).

Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive association between social conformity and competence, as conformity may enhance one's sense of effectiveness and decisional confidence within social environments. The results partially supported this hypothesis: the conformity variable was positively correlated with decision ($r = .146$, $p < .001$), reflecting the decisional and problem-solving aspect of competence. A similar positive correlation was observed between conformity and long-term orientation ($r = .123$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals who conform to social norms value sustained goal pursuit. However, accomplishment was not significantly correlated with conformity ($p = .202$). One plausible explanation for the non-significant relationship between accomplishment and conformity is that accomplishments arise from internal, self-endorsed goals whereas conformity is driven by external pressures and social norms. Given that this study is situated in social settings, conformity behaviors may be influenced more by interpersonal dynamics than by individual accomplishments. The variables tested, such as decision, long-term orientation, and accomplishment, also map onto Cialdini and Goldstein's (2004) three fundamental motivational goals of accuracy, affiliation, and positive self-concept, as these variables reflect individuals' desire to act wisely and effectively, sustain goal pursuit, and demonstrate competence in socially meaningful ways.

Hypothesis 3 proposed a positive relationship between social conformity and relatedness, as both constructs are inherently grounded in the social nature of human interaction. Hypothesis 3 proposed a positive relationship between social conformity and relatedness, as both constructs are grounded in the social nature of human interaction. The findings provided statistical support for this hypothesis: conformity correlated positively with social ties ($r = .065$, $p < .001$). This result suggests a modest association between conformity behavior and relatedness needs, indicating that individuals who exhibit stronger conformity behaviors may be somewhat more likely to express or maintain social relationships that reflect the need for relatedness. This pattern is theoretically consistent with Self-Determination Theory's assumption that relatedness functions as a core psychological need and with Cialdini and Goldstein's (2004) framework in which affiliation is a fundamental driver of social influence. The table below summarizes the Study 1 results.

Table 1. Correlations of Social Conformity with Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness Variables

Hypothesis	Constructs Examined	Key Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value	Interpretation
H1	Social Conformity, Autonomy	Autonomy	n.s.	> .05	No significant relationship between conformity and autonomy, consistent with the idea that autonomous behavior is self-endorsed and not socially driven.
		Controlling (inverse of autonomy)	.50	<.001	Strong positive correlation, indicating that conformity aligns with externally regulated or controlling motivation.
H2	Social Conformity, Competence	Decision	.146	<.001	Positive relationship; conformity may relate to the decisional/problem-solving aspect of competence in social contexts.
		Long-Term Orientation	.123	<.001	Positive relationship; suggests conformity aligns with goal-directed planning
		Accomplishment	n.s.	> .05	No significant correlation; accomplishment reflects intrinsic mastery, which contrasts with socially regulated conformity.
H3	Social Conformity, Relatedness	Social Ties	.065	<.001	Positive relationship; individuals high in conformity tend to have stronger social connections, reflecting the socially connected nature of relatedness

STUDY 2

Building on the initial evidence from Study 1, Study 2 used primary survey data and validated psychometric scales to further validate the Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption construct. Specifically, Study 2 comprises three sub-studies, each utilizing a distinct sample: Study 2a assessed the factorial structure, model fit, and convergent validity of the scale; Study 2b evaluated discriminant validity; and Study 2c examined nomological validity by testing relationships with self-determination variables. Building on the initial evidence from Study 1, Study 2 used primary survey data and validated psychometric scales to further validate the Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption construct. Specifically, Study 2 comprises three sub-studies, each utilizing a distinct sample: Study 2a assessed the factorial structure, model fit, and convergent validity of the scale; Study 2b evaluated discriminant validity; and Study 2c examined nomological validity by testing relationships with self-determination variables.

Study 2a

Study 2a aims to evaluate the factor structure and model fit of the Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption scale using EFA and CFA procedures. To achieve the above objectives, a sample of 163 adults from the United States was recruited through the Qualtrics panel, consisting of 83 females and 80 males, with a mean age of 23.83. Participants were asked to evaluate a series of scale items related to experiential consumption in social setting by responding to the statements such as “When my friends are consuming experiences, I would like to have the same experiences as they do” and “My social groups are

consuming the same experiences as I do”, among others. Participants then rated how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree).

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed to explore the dimensionality of the construct, using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) extraction method. PCA was considered appropriate at this stage because the purpose of the analysis was to assess whether the proposed items formed a coherent empirical structure and could be retained as a parsimonious measure of social conformity in experiential consumption. The analysis identified the latent dimension underlying five items that measure individuals' tendencies to align their experiential consumption behaviors with their social groups. The EFA results revealed a single underlying factor with factor loadings ranging from .663 to .869 (Cronbach's Alpha = .854). The extracted factor explained 63.471% of the cumulative variance, indicating a coherent and internally consistent construct. The results of the EFA and the corresponding scale items are presented in Table 2.

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was then performed to evaluate the one-factor structure of the construct. The model exhibited excellent incremental fit indices (CFI = .986, TLI = .966, NFI = .976), all exceeding the .90 criterion for acceptable fit. Although the RMSEA value of .087 is slightly above the conventional cutoff of .08, it remains within an acceptable range for model adequacy (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Taken together, the results yield strong empirical support for the construct validity and unidimensionality.

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption Items

Item	Factor Loading
When my friends are consuming experiences, I would like to have the same experiences as they do.	.841
My social groups are consuming the same experiences as I do.	.663
I don't want to be left out of consuming experiences.	.869
When I consume experiences, I may present a positive self-image within my social groups.	.808
I would like to accumulate experiential capital to gain prestige within my social groups.	.787

Furthermore, to assess the convergent validity of the construct, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) were calculated using the standardized factor loadings derived from CFA. The construct achieved an AVE of 0.61 and a CR of 0.88, both surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.50 and 0.70, respectively (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), providing evidence that the construct demonstrates adequate convergence and internal reliability. Table 3 presented the results of convergent validity for the Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption construct.

Table 3 Convergent Validity Results for the Construct of Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption

Item	Standardized Regression Weight (λ)	Squared Loading (λ^2)
When my friends are consuming experiences, I would like to have the same experiences as they do.	0.84	0.7056
My social groups are consuming the same experiences as I do.	0.75	0.5625

Item	Standardized Regression Weight (λ)	Squared Loading (λ^2)
I don't want to be left out of consuming experiences.	0.72	0.5184
When I consume experiences, I may present a positive self-image within my social groups.	0.84	0.7056
I would like to accumulate experiential capital to gain prestige within my social groups.	0.73	0.5329
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	—	0.61
Composite Reliability (CR)	—	0.88

Study 2b

The purpose of Study 2b was to examine the discriminant validity of the construct. To establish discriminant validity, social conformity was compared with FoMO to determine whether the two constructs are conceptually and empirically distinct. Although both the constructs reflect certain sensitivity to social contexts, social conformity reflects the adjustment of one's behavior to match group expectations, whereas FoMO is an affective state that encompasses both personal dimension (e.g., fear of missing individually meaningful opportunities) and social dimension (e.g., fear of being excluded from socially rewarding activities) (Zhang et al., 2020). To achieve the research goal, a new sample of 136 U.S. participants was recruited through the Qualtrics panel, consisting of 80 females and 56 males, with the mean average of 24.44. Participants were asked to assess the same scale items used in Study 2a, along with items from the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) construct (Zhang et al., 2020). The personal dimension of FoMO captured individuals' internal emotional reactions related to missing experiences, whereas the social dimension reflected perceived threats to social belonging resulting from missed events. All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, with endpoints of 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree).

Table 4 Pattern Matrix for Discriminant Validity Among Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption and FoMO Constructs

Items	Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption (Component 1)	FoMO – Social Dimension (Component 2)	FoMO – Personal Dimension (Component 3)
When my friends are consuming experiences, I would like to have the same experiences as they do.	.856	-.064	.011
My social groups are consuming the same experiences as I do.	.722	.106	-.040
I don't want to be left out of consuming experiences.	.703	-.139	-.142
When I consume experiences, I may present a positive self-image within my social groups.	.829	.057	.000
I would like to accumulate experiential capital to gain prestige within my social groups.	.686	-.250	.029
I feel anxious when I do not experience events/opportunities.	.207	.133	-.743
I believe I am falling behind compared with others when I miss events/opportunities.	-.062	-.212	-.719
I feel anxious because I know something important or fun must have happened when I miss events/opportunities.	.103	-.063	-.815
I feel sad if I am not capable of participating in events due to other constraints.	-.039	-.027	-.886

Items	Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption (Component 1)	FOMO – Social Dimension (Component 2)	FOMO – Personal Dimension (Component 3)
I feel regretful when I miss events/opportunities.	-.062	.027	-.896
I think my social groups view me as unimportant when I miss events/opportunities.	-.072	-.854	-.082
I think I do not fit in social groups when I miss events/opportunities.	.007	-.929	.010
I think I am excluded by my social groups when I miss events/opportunities.	.124	-.860	.000
I feel ignored/forgotten by my social groups when I miss events/opportunities.	.067	-.896	-.045

Study 2c

Study 2c aimed to test the nomological validity of the construct using data from a new sample of 144 undergraduate students at a southern U.S. university. The sample included 69 females and 74 males, with an average age of 24.70 years. Participants completed the social conformity scale along with items assessing self-determination (Vlachopoulos and Michailidou, 2006, Zhang, 2023). The autonomy items focused on personal alignment of chosen experiences, competence items captured perceptions of advancement in achieving desired experiential goals, and relatedness items assessed feelings of interpersonal connection when engaging in experiences with others. Each dimension comprised four items rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), and mean scores were calculated for each construct.

A multiple regression analysis was performed to test the nomological validity of the Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption construct by examining its associations with the three dimensions of Self-Determination Theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The overall model was significant, $F(3, 139) = 20.278$, $p < .001$, accounting for 30.4% of the variance in social conformity ($R^2 = .304$, Adjusted $R^2 = .289$). This level of explained variance suggests that the model provides meaningful, though not exhaustive, insight into the motivational factors associated with conformity behavior in experiential consumption contexts. As presented in Table 5, competence ($\beta = .319$, $p = .001$) and relatedness ($\beta = .314$, $p = .001$) were significant positive predictors of social conformity, indicating that individuals who feel more capable and socially connected may be more inclined to align their experiential consumption behaviors with others. In contrast, autonomy ($\beta = .007$, $p = .951$) was not a significant predictor, suggesting that self-endorsed and volitional behavior functions independently from conformity tendencies. These findings provide nomological support for the construct and are consistent with SDT's proposition that conformity in this context is more closely associated with competence and relatedness needs than with autonomous motivation.

TABLE 5 Regression Results for the Nomological Validity of Social Conformity in Experiential Consumption

Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (β)	t	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	0.796	0.504	—	1.580	0.116
Autonomy	0.009	0.140	0.007	0.061	0.951
Competence	0.359	0.111	0.319	3.248	0.001
Relatedness	0.361	0.111	0.314	3.256	0.001

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across the two studies, the findings provide consistent evidence that social conformity in experiential consumption is more closely associated with competence and relatedness than autonomy. Study 1, using secondary textual data from Airbnb virtual experiences, showed that conformity-related language was positively associated with competence-related indicators, particularly decision and long-term orientation, as well as relatedness through social ties, whereas autonomy was not significantly associated with conformity. Study 2 extended these findings using primary survey data and validated scales. The results again showed that competence and relatedness were positive predictors of social conformity in experiential consumption, while autonomy was not a significant predictor. Taken together, the findings suggest that conformity in group-based experiential consumption is not primarily driven by autonomous or self-directed motivation. Rather, it appears to reflect consumers' desire to feel capable, socially connected, and aligned with group expectations in shared experiential settings. This pattern supports the proposed need-asymmetric interpretation, in which conformity may support competence and relatedness while remaining less connected to autonomy.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The current research positions conformity as a core social regulation mechanism in which one functions to maintain normative alignment and shared meaning through experiential purchases. Yet such alignment often comes at the expense of perceived autonomy, as individuals suppress personal preferences to comply with social norms. This dynamic extends Self-Determination Theory by arguing that controlling social environment undermines autonomy while reinforcing relatedness-based motives for normative alignment. Furthermore, the results support and extend Cialdini and Goldstein's (2004) framework by reinforcing the idea that conformity is motivated by the desire to uphold a positive self-concept and works as a social regulation strategy through which individuals navigate the basic psychological needs (e.g., acting effectively, securing social belonging, enhancing self-image, among others.). The results support how the motivational goals are expressed through competence- and relatedness-driven conformity in experiential consumption contexts where social identity expression is salient. Thus the findings advance both Self-Determination Theory and Cialdini and Goldstein's (2004) social influence framework by highlighting how conformity operates at the intersection of basic psychological need fulfillment and social influence goals. A further theoretical implication emerges when considering more recent perspectives on social motivation, such as studies by Geiger and Brick (2023) that individuals' responses to collective actions are guided by core social motives (e.g., control, belonging, self-enhancement), which support that conformity functions not only as a response to normative influence but also as a behavioral expression of the social motives and maintenance of a positive self-concept. In this way, the findings extend existing theories by showing that conformity unites the motivational perspectives in social environments by linking basic psychological needs, influence goals, and core social motives into a coherent regulatory process.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The results offer several important implications for managers operating in experiential consumption contexts. First, the finding that autonomy is not a significant driver of social conformity suggests that consumers participating in group-based experiential purchases are more willing to adapt to shared plans, and designing experiences with structured options or guided recommendations will not necessarily reduce perceived value particularly when groups are involved. This suggests that managers do not always need to maximize individual choice in group-based experiential settings; instead, they can provide structured options that make group coordination easier.

Secondly, consumers conform more when experiences allow them to feel capable and effective, and highlighting group experiences through clear information, social proof cues, guided expertise, and others, can help consumers feel confident about participating in group activities and promote normative alignment. For example, managers can reduce uncertainty by providing clear participation instructions, examples of prior group participation, or expert guidance that helps consumers feel prepared before joining the experience.

Thirdly, the results underscore that, within group-based experiential consumption contexts, social interaction can encourage consumers to align their choices in ways that strengthen social relationships and foster shared meaning. Experiences can thus be designed to support connection and shared accomplishment through co-creation features, group learning activities, shared milestones, and others to increase group satisfaction and cohesion. For example, managers can reduce uncertainty by providing clear participation instructions, examples of prior group participation, or expert guidance that helps consumers feel prepared before joining the experience.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

This study has several limitations that should inform directions for future research. First, the secondary data were collected within a specific experiential consumption context, Airbnb digital experiences, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings. Future research should examine whether the motivational patterns observed extend to offline experiential environments, such as group travel, dining, entertainment, adventure experiences, etc.

Second, this study relied on dictionary-based text analysis to measure psychological constructs. Although LIWC provides a systematic and widely used approach for quantifying linguistic patterns, its measures are indirect linguistic indicators rather than direct assessments of consumers' psychological states. Because LIWC relies on word-frequency counts, it may not fully capture the contextual meaning, nuance, or intention underlying a given expression. Therefore, the LIWC-based measures in this study should be interpreted as linguistic proxies for the focal constructs rather than conclusive evidence of the psychological states themselves. Future research could complement dictionary-based measures with alternative approaches, such as manual coding, contextual text analysis, interviews, or survey-based measures, to further strengthen construct validity.

Third, the study did not further employ experimental designs to validate the results, as the primary objective was to follow a scale development approach grounded in theory. While this provides conceptual clarity, it limits the ability to draw causal inferences about how psychological needs shape conformity in experiential settings. Future studies could implement experimental manipulations to test causal pathways and identify situational triggers of conformity behavior.

Fourth, although the study conceptually supports the role of identity-related motives and briefly links conformity to identity expression and self-image enhancement, identity constructs were not empirically examined within the model. Future research should incorporate identity motives, self-presentation motives, identity congruence, etc., to fully understand how conformity functions as an identity management strategy.

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