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Psychological influence of conformism on the formation of students' value orientations in adaptation to social environment

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Abstract

This study examines the psychological impact of conformism on the formation of students' value orientations in the process of social adaptation. An original interpretation of conformism is proposed as a mechanism of value contagiousness, within which norms and attitudes spread in the student environment, similar to cultural viruses. Through rituals, repetition, and group pressure, individual meanings are transformed, often without a conscious choice of the individual. On the basis of the developed V-ConScale scale, a model for quantitative diagnostics of a student's susceptibility to value infection and the level of their reflexive stability is presented. This work combines philosophical and psychological analysis with an applied pedagogical focus and offers tools for monitoring, preventing, and supporting the processes of students' semantic adaptation in the university environment. The concept can be useful for designing educational strategies aimed at developing an authentic, critically thinking subject.

Keywords: Conformism, group influence, psychological pressure, social adaptation, students, value contagiousness, values.

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1. Introduction

On the basis of the experiments and research of Solomon Asch [1], Asch [2], and Asch [3] conformity can be interpreted as the mental adaptation of an individual to a collective belief and behavior under the psychological pressure of group relations. In the classical interpretation, conformity is defined as a sociopsychological phenomenon expressed as a change in the behavior or beliefs of an individual under the influence of real or imaginary group pressure.

In the university environment, conformism can significantly influence the formation of students' value orientations, determining which norms and beliefs they accept. On the one hand, moderate conformity acts as a mechanism of socialization, allowing a young person to assimilate basic group norms and values. On the other hand, excessive conformism is fraught with the loss of personal autonomy and authenticity of values when a student "ceases to be themselves; completely assimilates the personality type offered by the generally accepted template, and becomes exactly the same as everyone else."

In modern society, the dilemma is relevant: to develop in young people the ability to think critically and be authentic, or to encourage adaptation to the dominant values of the group.

We propose the following research problem: how does conformism as a social phenomenon influence the value sphere of a student's personality, and where is the line beyond which personal authenticity is lost? To answer this question, we propose the concept of "Conformism as a Value Virus." This approach considers the assimilation of values through conformism by analogy with memetic infection.

The relevance of this approach is due to the interdisciplinary interest in the problem of transferring values. Obviously, ideas, beliefs, and behavior patterns can spread in society like an infection. Social networks and groups can imperceptibly "infect" individuals with opinions and values through the mechanism of social contagion. Young people, especially students, are subject to group influence during their studies and extracurricular activities. At the same time, interest in the formation of independent value consciousness among students is growing in pedagogy. Thus, considering conformism as a kind of "value virus" is important both for psychology (understanding the dynamics of the group and the individual) and for education (development of critical thinking and moral stability).

The purpose of this theoretical article is to analyze the psychological influence of conformism on students' value orientations through the context of the concept.

2. Literature Review

There are several types of conformist behavior [4, 5]. In some cases, an individual who accepts the correctness of group views agrees with them and sincerely shares them. In other cases, an individual may exhibit conformity with the slightest change in group opinion. Moreover, women demonstrate a higher level of conformity than men do under the influence of social norms and group dynamics [6, 7]. Moreover, women's compliance with feminine norms depends on the groups to which they belong [8, 9].

In conformity, people are more likely to follow others' answers when they have multiple choices available to them and are less likely when there is no inconsistency between the answers [10, 11].

This point is especially relevant for the education system. The success of the learning process clearly depends on the motivation and enthusiasm of students to learn. Conformity also affects the motivation of students [12, 13]. During adolescence, conformity greatly influences decision-making considerations. Higher levels of conformity may protect against self-harm, but excessive conformity may have negative consequences [14, 15]. Moreover, students with anxious and emotional radicals tend to demonstrate a greater degree of conformism [16].

Conformity has a significant effect on the entire society, for example, on small groups within it. Moreover, each group differs in the degree of conformity [17]. In virtual groups, conformity can occur even in the absence of other people, with minimal incentives needed to elicit a conformist response [18], with both the number of antecedents and social proximity mattering in the degree of conformity [19].

In a university environment, a college student will inevitably be influenced by other students and society at large [20]. Conformity can especially affect how young people perceive and accept society's values, norms, and expectations [21]. However, conformity can still benefit students' learning motivation and achievement [22]. At the same time, an individual in a group usually demonstrates conformist behavior at three stages: the level of perception, value and work [23].

In general, conformist mentality is a common social and psychological phenomenon in daily life and work. Guiding university students to have a correct attitude toward conformist mentality is highly important for the development of ideological morality and good individual qualities [24].

3. Methods

This study is conceptual and theoretical in nature.

The methodological basis is as follows:

- Theoretical analysis and synthesis of interdisciplinary sources on the social psychology of conformism, meme theory, philosophy of authenticity and pedagogy of values. A review of classical studies of conformity (Asch experiments, the concept of normative influence) and modern works on the social contagion of ideas is provided.
- A method of analogy and memetic modeling. Values are considered memes (units of cultural information) that spread like viruses do. The concept of value contagiousness is introduced to denote the ability of value attitudes to spread through repetition, imitation and suggestion.
- An analysis of diagnostic instruments: existing questionnaires and scales related to conformity, value orientations and authenticity were studied with the aim of the proposed enrichment with new scales. In particular, the methods of measuring conformity were taken into account: classical experimental paradigms (group pressure according to the type of S. Asch's experiments), questionnaires,

- Conceptualization methods were supplemented by a thought experiment: imagining a situation of group pressure on a student (for example, imposing a certain ideology in a student organization) and predicting his reactions depending on the strength of the ethical buffer and the level of value contagiousness of the environment. Such mental modeling made it possible to break down the complex process into stages and create tables recording the key concepts and stages of this process (presented in the Results section).

Thus, the study combines philosophical and psychological analysis with an applied approach (designation of measurable indicators of conformism and authenticity). This fully meets the goal of the study to form a holistic theoretical model suitable for both further empirical study and application in educational practice.

4. Results

4.1. Conformism as a "Value Virus"

The period of study at the university is not only a time of active acquisition of knowledge and skills. It is also a period of social adaptation at a fairly high level. If psychological archetypes are formed in early childhood, then value orientations are often developed at the university. The values of an individual are naturally formed under the influence of pressure from an active and dynamic social community of students. This natural and artificial pressure often leads to the conformism of certain individuals.

If we proceed from the analogy with viral theories of spread, including social viruses, we can interpret conformism as a kind of "value virus." That is, we can consider conformism as a memetic transmission of values as a process of viral spread, within which individual students "infect" themselves with the norms of the entire student body or the majority without realizing the source of the "value virus" itself.

As a rule, values are transmitted not logically but emotionally and unconsciously. In particular, through repetition, imitation, and rituals. That is, it is a purely memetic process, similar to a viral infection.

The degree of infection of a certain value in the social student environment can be interpreted through value contagiousness. Value contagiousness determines which values are most transmitted and which values are more resistant to infection. A priori, we can also assume that the spread of value depends on the psychological archetypes of the personality. We believe that introverts are less prone to "value contagion" than are extroverts.

In this sense, each student has his own "susceptibility index" and "immune status" to value contamination. These conditional indices clearly depend on the level of self-reflection, self-esteem, value core and internal support.

For further consideration, we introduce some concepts that, in one way or another, interpret the viral spread of values (Table 1).

Table 1.
Typology of value distribution.

Term	Definition
<i>Value virus</i>	A cultural pattern that takes over the psyche without critical processing.
<i>Value immunity</i>	Psychological resistance to external semantic pressure.
<i>Contagious norm</i>	A socially contagious, easily transmitted value or behavioral pattern.

We can visualize this table in the form of a drawing that demonstrates how the "value virus" penetrates the mental perception and behavior of an individual student through social student pressure.

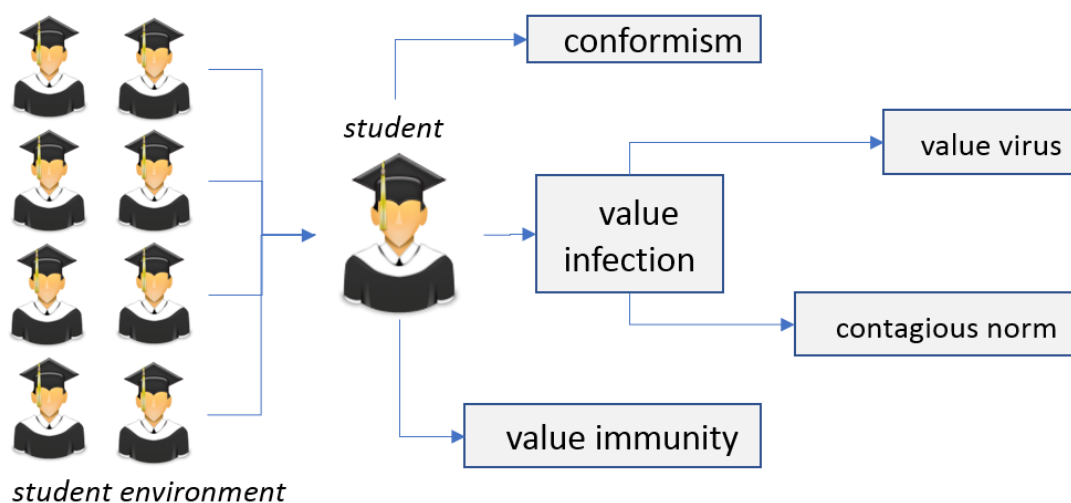


Figure 1.
Scheme of value infection in a student group.

Here, the social environment is the student environment. For example, peers, senior courses, the digital environment (including social networks) and teachers are carriers of dominant norms. The flows of infection visualize the penetration

of external values into the student's psyche. Moreover, the student, as the central subject of processing, is under the influence of the environment.

The group student environment influences a student's individuality through conformism as a primary channel and value infection as a process. This influence is interpreted through three logical nodes: the value virus, the contagious norm and value immunity.

Here, conformism acts as a conductor through which the student unconsciously (spontaneously) accepts group norms. At the same time, acceptance of community is not necessarily rational but, as a rule, has a reactive character (the paradigm of "being like everyone else").

Value contagion can be understood as a metaphor for the transmission of meaning through repetition, empathy and student rituals. That is, the student does not simply hear; he begins to reproduce and accept norms without comprehending their source. Without comprehending the truth of the judgment or its objectivity.

We assign a special role to ontogenic norms (from the Latin *contagiosus* - contagious). By contagious norms, we mean socially, mentally, or culturally active values that dominate in student groups or communities and are perceived by the majority of students at a minimal level of critical perception.

As previously mentioned, the degree of susceptibility to contagious norms depends on many factors the level of education, intelligence, or psychotype of the student. That is, each student has his or her own level of value immunity. For its development, the student must have the ability to recognize external meanings, stop unconscious imitation, and accept only norms that are correlated with the personal value system.

Thus, Figure 1 demonstrates how conformism becomes a channel for cultural infection and how the student himself becomes a battlefield between external and internal values. Of course, not everything external is wrong or harmful, but a low level of value immunity and critical thinking always makes a student vulnerable in a social student environment.

In general, the processing of value infection usually includes several stages and characteristics. Specifically, exposure as impact, infection as external submission, incubation as internal struggle, internalization as complete infection and transmission as the transfer of the perceived opinion to other students (Figure 2) were included.

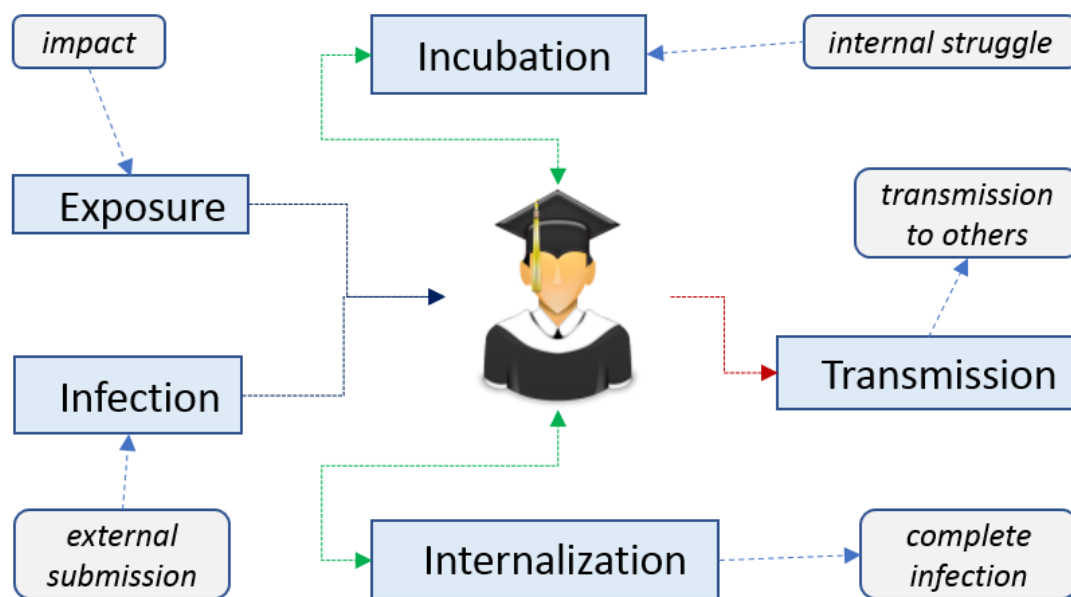


Figure 2.
Stages and characteristics of value "infection" (Memetic contamination of values).

During exposure, an individual student encounters a new value position or norm in a group. Here, primary contact occurs communication with the bearers of value, observation of group behavior, and participation in collective rituals. At the same time, the intensity of exposure naturally determines the probability of "infection".

During "infection", under the pressure of the desire to be accepted, the student demonstrates conformist behavior. He or she purely agrees with the group value externally, even if the internal position is still different. That is, here, we see this stage of compliance. The student, willingly or unwillingly, formally accepts the norm to avoid sanctions or to receive the approval of the majority. In fact, this is the analog of a viral infection, that is, the penetration of an agent into the body without complete assimilation.

During the incubation period, a latent course is possible when internal cognitive dissonance between one's previous beliefs and imposed values is realized. At the same time, the student may experience doubts and stress, but he or she continues to participate in group activities. This phase is similar to the incubation period of infection, when the symptoms (in this case, a change in value attitudes) have not yet fully manifested.

At the stage of internalization, the previously external group value is accepted as one's own. The student as an individual ceases to distinguish externally imposed attitudes from the original attitudes. As a result, the foreign value

becomes part of his value system. That is, the virus metaphorically "hit" all protective barriers. After this, there is a partial or complete loss of the original authenticity of values.

Finally, at the transmission stage, the student and the individual themselves become the bearers and retransmitters of this value. Now, they actively transmit the adopted idea to new members of the group or to those around them, increasing the scope of the "infection." For example, a student convinces first-year students to accept the same ideology, participates in the propaganda of value in the student council, etc. The cycle is closed; that is, the value has spread to a new "bearer."

Thus, conformism does act as a channel for the automatic transmission of values. Unlike a conscious value orientation formed through reflection and choice, with value infection, there is an uncritical assimilation. Conformists lose the ability to think critically and become part of the dominant system of opinion or belief. At the same time, the student may well be convinced that new values were accepted by him voluntarily. However, there was value contagiousness in the student environment.

Different values have different levels of "contagiousness." Conventional, fashionable, and emotionally charged values are usually characterized by high value contagiousness. They are easily reinforced by rituals and group dynamics (e.g., values of group loyalty, patriotic or ideological memes). At the same time, individualistic and critical values (e.g., scientific skepticism, creative originality) are more difficult to spread because they require independent efforts from the individual; they sometimes go against group pressure. Conformist values are indeed more often assimilated through sociocultural pressure (e.g., traditionalism, group solidarity). However, values of originality require internal work. Nevertheless, even complex ideals can, under certain conditions, be transmitted memetically.

4.2. Assessment of Value Contagiousness

On the basis of the above, we propose a tool for assessing value contagiousness as a practice-oriented psychodiagnostic module. With the working title V-ConScale (Value Contagion Scale) or the scale for assessing the contagiousness of values. This module or scale allows us to identify how infectious certain values are in the student environment, to determine which students are susceptible to external semantic pressure, and to identify clusters of risky values that spread uncontrollably.

The general structure of the module can be interpreted as a table (Table 2).

Table 2.
General block structure of the V-ConScale module.

Component	Target
Block A	Evaluation of the prevalence of values in the environment (external "contagion")
Block B	Individual sensitivity to these values
Block C	Level of criticality and reflection of the individual
Block D	Identification of hidden contagious norms in a group

The assessment for the block can be based on a questionnaire about the group student culture. For example, the following examples of statements can be given: "In our group, it is normal to 'pretend that you understand everything,' even if this is not the case; most students are focused on likes and public activity"; "Getting points is more important than understanding the material"; "People with a different style of thinking do not stay with us for long"; and "Like everyone else."

Accordingly, the purpose of block A is to identify the external force of "infection".

Examples of block B, as a self-assessment of readiness to follow the group, include the following statements: "If the majority does this, I am also inclined to do so"; "I easily adopt the fashion, slang, and habits of my group"; "It is important for me to be like other students"; and "I try not to stand out from the background."

Here, the goal of Block B is quite clear: to identify susceptibility to contagious values.

Examples of Block C as a reflective filter might include "I often wonder why I think the way I do," "I distinguish between my values and those imposed on me," "I feel when I am compromising with myself," and "I can abandon a group if it violates my internal norms."

The goal here is to assess value immunity.

For Block D, sample questions include "What norms or beliefs do you consider to be the most 'contagious' in your environment?", "What would you like to change in the culture of your group?", and "What values do you feel are under threat in this environment?"

The purpose of the block is to identify hidden or latent forms of infection.

Accordingly, we characterize the interpretations on the basis of the block assessments. A high score on A and B and a low score on C indicate that the student is at risk of value devaluation. A high score on C with a high A indicates strong immunity in an infected environment. A high B but average A indicates a tendency to mimicry even without pressure. A high D (mention of destructive norms) is an important signal for institutional intervention.

The presented system of assessing value contagiousness can be used to compare faculties by the level of "value temperature" as a preliminary tool for the work of curators and psychologists and as a basis for interfaculty "value monitoring".

For the practical application of the proposed system, we create a complete diagnostic protocol in the following form (Table 3):

Table 3.

V- ConScale Diagnostic Protocol.

No.	Block	Statement	Scale (1-5)
1	A. Wednesday	In a group, it is okay to "pretend you understand everything" even if you do not.	From "Completely disagree" to " I completely agree
2	A. Wednesday	Most students are focused on likes and public activity	Completely disagree – Completely agree
3	A. Wednesday	Getting points is more important than understanding the material	Completely disagree – Completely agree
4	A. Wednesday	People with a different style of thinking do not stay with us for long.	Completely disagree – Completely agree
5	A. Wednesday	"Like everyone else" is a common criterion	Completely disagree – Completely agree
6	B. Susceptibility	If most people do it this way, I am inclined to do it too.	Completely disagree – Completely agree
7	B. Susceptibility	I easily adopt fashion, slang, and habits of my group.	Completely disagree – Completely agree
8	B. Susceptibility	It is important for me to be like other students.	Completely disagree – Completely agree
9	B. Susceptibility	I try not to stand out from the background.	Completely disagree – Completely agree
10	S. Reflection	I often wonder why I think this way.	Completely disagree – Completely agree
11	S. Reflection	I distinguish where my values are and where the imposed ones are.	Completely disagree – Completely agree
12	S. Reflection	I feel when I compromise.	Completely disagree – Completely agree
13	S. Reflection	I can refuse a group if it violates my internal norms.	Completely disagree – Completely agree

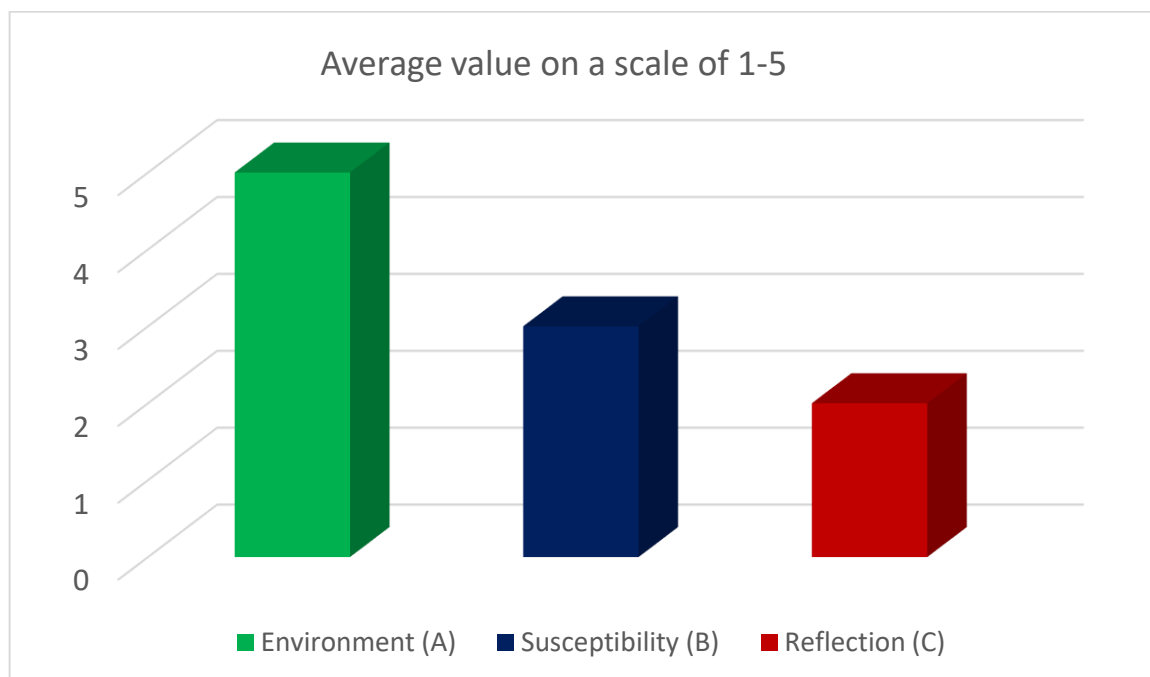
Therefore, the V-ConScale diagnostic protocol interprets the statements and scale for self-assessment.

Let's consider a specific application of the V-ConScale diagnostic protocol using the following example:

"Experimental basis of the study and selection of objects.

The experimental study was conducted among students of the Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science and the Faculty of Law of the Kazakh National University named after Al-Farabi, students of the Taraz Technical University named after M.Kh. Dulati, and students of the Zhetysu University named after I. Zhansugurov. The study involved 685 first-year students.

Using this example, we can create a graph of the Profile of Student Susceptibility to Value Contagion (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.**

Profile of Student Susceptibility to Value Contagion.

Also, for the considered example, we can create an extended Profile of Student Susceptibility by the V-ConScale subscales (Figure 4).

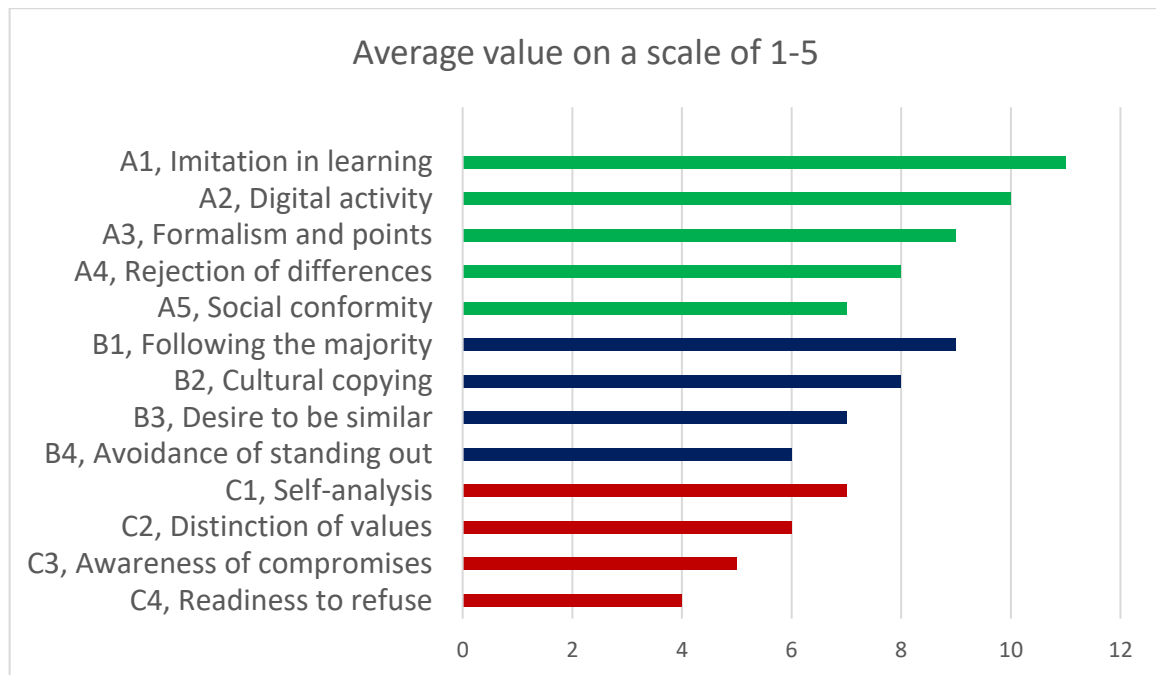


Figure 4.
Expanded Profile of Student Susceptibility to Value Contagion.

Thus, the educational environment has a pronounced influence, forming behavioral and value patterns that students learn through imitation. Moreover, the threshold of authenticity is lower for most students. They usually do not realize that they are losing the authenticity of values and do not know how to constructively refuse external pressure. Additionally, the risk of value contagion is high. In particular, destructive or primitive norms (cynicism, superficiality, formalism) prevail in the group.

5. Discussion

The concepts developed in the article, "value virus", "contagious norm", "value immunity", and the practical tool V-ConScale open a new dimension in the interpretation of conformism not only as social pressure but also as a memetic mechanism for transforming the value identity of a student. This allows us to go beyond the classical interpretations of conformism as behavior in conditions of disagreement with a group and move on to a value-semantic analysis of hidden forms of adaptation in the educational environment.

In contrast to the traditional approach, where conformity is seen as a temporary concession, in this study, it takes on an infectious character: through contagious norms, a new internal value system is formed, which the student no longer perceives as being externally imposed. This brings conformity closer to the idea of deep cultural mutation when the personality is restructured in accordance with the prevailing group norm. Clearly, what is at stake here is a shift in identity, not just a change in behavior.

Our research emphasizes that the modern student environment functions as a meme factory: rituals, social networks, slang, and common norms all of which form a flow of "value viruses" that circulate in the group. A student joins this flow more often than not critically but rather imitatively, especially if he or she has a low level of value immunity. Thus, the university environment becomes a psychosocial incubator of ideologies, values and standards of behavior, where assimilation does not occur as much through dialog as through ritualized repetition.

The proposed V-ConScale reveals not only the susceptibility of a specific student but also the value density of the environment. This makes it possible for the first time to digitize and visualize the risks of value devaluation in faculties, study groups, or even educational institutions as a whole. Moreover, the combination of high values in blocks A and B and low values in block C is a particularly alarming indicator. This means that the student is receptive but not critical and therefore most vulnerable. Such profiles require targeted pedagogical support and, possibly, interventions in the cultural structure of the group.

Although the emphasis is on the "viral" metaphor, the authenticity threshold model (although not fully developed in this version of the article) is an important addition: it allows us to understand at what point a student moves from externally following norms to internally capitulating to them. Combining the value contagion and value threshold models allows us to imagine the dynamics of the transition from copying to internalization and then to relay value to others. Therefore, this essentially describes a value phase transition when a student no longer simply follows the group but becomes its voice.

The obtained results have direct practical significance.

- Monitoring of the group value environment: The V-ConScale scale allows tracking the dynamics of the cultural atmosphere in real time.

- Diagnostics of individual vulnerabilities: The scale can be used to determine which students are more susceptible to semantic pressure.
- Targeted work of curators and psychologists: It is possible to identify risk groups and design training for the development of value immunity (reflection, discrimination, resistance).
- Formation of "value navigators" in the group: Students with high scores in block C (reflection) can be trained to support others, reducing overall value contamination.

Thus, the value of socialization among students occurs not only through conscious forms of education but also through the unconscious, memetic dynamics of infection. Conformism plays the role of a value conductor and not just a form of behavior. The student environment functions as a resonant system of meanings, where rituals and repetitions act as triggers of value contagiousness. The threshold of authenticity is the border beyond which the ability to distinguish between one's own and the external is lost. The V-ConScale is a tool that can make invisible value pressure visible and works purposefully and pedagogically.

6. Conclusion

Thus, the study of the problem of the formation of value orientations of students in the context of psychological conformism allows us to propose and substantiate the concept of "conformism as a value virus." This expands traditional ideas about the socialization of individuals in the educational environment.

In our work, values in a student group are spread not only through direct communication but also through ritualized, automated mechanisms. A kind of "social virus". Conformism in this case becomes a channel for the memetic transmission of norms and not just an adaptation strategy. The introduced concept of value contagiousness allows us to analyze how much a particular group attitude is prone to uncritical reproduction.

Moreover, we have demonstrated that the psychological resistance of an individual to such pressure depends on the level of his or her reflection and the formation of the value core.

The developed diagnostic tool V-ConScale allows visualization and quantitative evaluation of a student's susceptibility to group value contagiousness, identification of risk zones (low reflection, high copyability) and justification of the need for pedagogical intervention.

Thus, the obtained theoretical and applied results contribute to the development of psychological and pedagogical theories of socialization, offering new models for analyzing the hidden influence of the environment on the formation of personality.

Conformism appears not only as a behavioral reaction but also as a deep channel for the transformation of identity under conditions of normative density.

The practical significance of this work lies in the possibility of using the presented concepts.

- For diagnostics of the educational environment.
- Development of programs for students' value stability.
- Critical pedagogy.
- And the formation of mechanisms of conscious resistance to external semantic pressure.

In the future, the developed models can be adapted for empirical research in different types of universities, cultural contexts, and age groups, as well as for the construction of innovative educational strategies aimed not at averaging but at developing personal autonomy and value reflection as key competencies of the 21st century.

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