REVIEW ARTICLE

A Systematic Analysis of Conformity, Compliance, and Obedience in Patient Behavior and Medical Decision-Making



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Abstract: Social influence is a fundamental aspect of human behavior that significantly impacts healthcare outcomes and medical decision-making processes. The conformity, compliance, and obedience shapes patient-provider relationships, treatment adherence, and health-seeking behaviors. Conformity manifests in patient choices influenced by peer experiences and social norms, affecting everything from medication adherence to lifestyle modifications. Compliance emanates through direct healthcare provider recommendations and public health campaigns, while obedience relates to institutional protocols and medical authority. Contemporary healthcare settings present unique challenges, particularly with the rise of social media influence on health information dissemination and treatment choices. Digital platforms have transformed traditional social influence mechanisms, creating new paradigms in healthcare delivery and patient engagement. This review work discusses about these three dimensions of social influence within healthcare contexts, drawing from empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks. The evidence indicate that social influence significantly affects treatment outcomes, medication adherence, and healthcare utilization patterns. Cultural factors, socioeconomic status, and digital literacy emerge as the main moderators of these effects. The effects extend to clinical practice, public health interventions, and healthcare policy, suggesting the need for personalized methods that account for social influence mechanisms in medical settings.

Keywords: Healthcare behavior; Patient compliance; Medical decision-making; Social influence; Treatment adherence.

1. Introduction

The healthcare environment constitutes a distinctive setting where social influence mechanisms fundamentally shape patient outcomes and medical decision-making processes [1]. Research shows that the relationship between healthcare behaviors and social forces extends far beyond individual autonomous choices, particularly affecting critical aspects such as medication adherence and lifestyle modifications [2]. Within clinical environments, specific manifestations of social influence mechanisms - namely conformity, compliance, and obedience - play crucial roles in determining healthcare outcomes, from vaccination acceptance rates to the management of chronic conditions [3].

Historical investigations into medical settings have provided substantial evidence regarding the profound impact of social influence on healthcare decisions and behaviors. Studies have documented numerous instances where patients significantly altered their health behaviors based on peer experiences, demonstrated conformity to treatment protocols due to institutional pressures, and exhibited improved compliance with medication regimens primarily due to healthcare provider authority [4]. These observed behavioral patterns carry substantial implications for both broad public health outcomes and individualized patient care [5].

The evolution of healthcare delivery models has paralleled technological advancement, introducing novel dimensions of social influence through various channels. Research demonstrates how telemedicine platforms, digital health applications, and online health communities have transformed the traditional healthcare landscape [6]. In the contemporary healthcare environment, patients must navigate increasingly complex medical decisions while being subjected to diverse social pressures, ranging from immediate family influences to widespread social media health trends [7]. The technology has not only expanded the channels through which social influence operates but has also created new paradigms for patient-provider relationships and health information dissemination. Healthcare professionals and researchers investigate how these evolving dynamics affect treatment adherence, health literacy, and overall patient engagement in their medical care.

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Table 1. Core Dimensions of Social Influence in Healthcare Settings

Dimension	Characteristics	Impact on Healthcare	Examples
Normative Influence	Community standards	Shapes preventive health	Vaccination decisions
	adherence	behaviours	Exercise habits
	Social expectations	Affects treatment adherence	Dietary choices
	Peer pressure	Influences lifestyle choices	
Informational	Expert guidance	Guides treatment choices	Treatment selection
Influence	Peer experiences	Affects decision-making	Medication choices
	Digital health information	Shapes health beliefs	Healthcare provider
			selection
Direct Authority	Provider instructions	Determines treatment compliance	Medication adherence
·	Institutional protocols	Affects procedural adherence	Surgery protocols
	Medical guidelines	Influences emergency responses	Emergency procedures

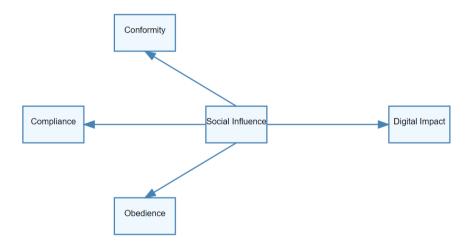


Figure 1. Social Influence Mechanisms in Healthcare

2. Definitions

2.1. Social Influence in Healthcare

Social influence in healthcare manifests through multiple channels, affecting both providers and patients in complex and interrelated ways. The healthcare setting creates unique power dynamics where professional expertise, institutional authority, and peer influence converge to shape health-related decisions and behaviors [8].

Table 2. Clinical Applications of Principles of Social Influence

Clinical Area	Influence Mechanisms	Implementation Methods	Expected Outcomes
Preventive Care	Peer modeling	Group interventions	Increased screening rates
	Social norms Community programs		Better preventive behaviors
	Community influence	Social support networks	Higher vaccination rates
Chronic Disease Management	Support groups	Regular monitoring	Improved adherence
	Behavioral reinforcement	Group education	Better self-management
	Authority guidance	Family involvement	Reduced complications
Mental Health	Group therapy	Support groups	Better engagement
	Social support	Community programs	Reduced stigma
	Peer counseling	Digital platforms	Improved outcomes
Emergency Care	Clear authority	Standard protocols	Faster response times
	Protocol adherence	Clear hierarchies	Better coordination
	Team coordination	Communication systems	Improved outcomes

Two primary forms of influence emerge in medical contexts: direct influence through healthcare provider instructions and indirect influence through social norms and peer experiences [9]. These influences operate simultaneously across various healthcare

scenarios, from routine check-ups to critical care decisions, creating a multifaceted environment where social dynamics significantly impact health outcomes. The intersection of professional authority and patient autonomy creates distinctive patterns of influence unique to healthcare settings. Healthcare providers serve as both authoritative sources of medical knowledge and facilitators of patient decision-making, while institutional frameworks establish structured environments that guide behavioral expectations and treatment protocols. Additionally, peer networks, both in-person and digital, contribute to forming collective health beliefs and practices that influence individual healthcare choices.

2.2. Core Components of Social Influence

2.2.1. Normative Influence

In healthcare settings, normative influence appears when patients modify health behaviors to align with perceived social expectations and community standards [10]. This form of influence manifests particularly strongly in preventive health measures, lifestyle modifications, and treatment adherence patterns. Patients often adjust their health-related behaviors based on what they perceive as socially acceptable or expected within their community or healthcare environment. The impact of normative influence extends beyond individual health decisions to shape broader public health behaviors and community health standards. For instance, vaccination rates, dietary choices, and exercise habits are significantly influenced by social norms and community expectations. Healthcare institutions often exploit this type of influence through public health campaigns and community health initiatives that establish and reinforce positive health norms.

2.2.2. Informational Influence

Medical decisions often involve considerable uncertainty, leading patients to actively seek information from multiple sources, including peers, healthcare providers, and social networks [11]. This information-seeking behavior fundamentally shapes treatment choices and health management strategies. The complexity of medical information and the high stakes involved in health decisions make patients particularly susceptible to informational influence from both professional and social sources. The digital age has dramatically expanded the scope and impact of informational influence in healthcare settings. Patients now obtain vast health information, from professional medical resources to peer experiences shared on social media platforms. This information pool creates both opportunities and challenges for healthcare providers and patients, as they must evaluate and integrate information from diverse sources to make informed health decisions. The quality and reliability of health information sources significantly impact the effectiveness of treatment plans and overall health outcomes.

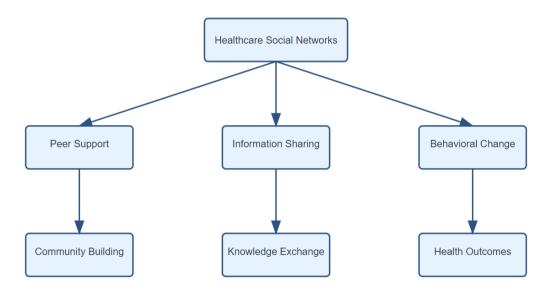


Figure 2. Impact of Healthcare Social Network

3. Conformity in Healthcare

3.1. Manifestations of Medical Conformity

Healthcare conformity emerges in various contexts, from treatment selection to lifestyle modifications, manifesting across different healthcare settings and patient populations. Patients often align their health decisions with perceived social norms, affecting choices in preventive care, medication adherence, and health-promoting behaviors [12]. The influence of conformity extends throughout

the healthcare journey, from initial symptom recognition to long-term treatment adherence. For example, studies have shown that patients' decisions about vaccination are significantly influenced by community vaccination rates and peer attitudes [13]. These conformity patterns also appear in chronic disease management, where patient behaviors are substantially shaped by the perceived actions and attitudes of their social reference groups. The manifestation of conformity in healthcare settings demonstrates unique characteristics compared to other social contexts, primarily due to the critical nature of health-related decisions and their long-term implications. Healthcare conformity can be observed in various settings, from primary care clinics to specialized treatment centers, influencing both routine health maintenance behaviors and critical medical decisions

3.2. Factors Affecting Medical Conformity

Multiple variables influence conformity in healthcare settings, creating a complex interplay of factors that shape patient behavior and decision-making [14]. Clinical environment characteristics play a fundamental role, with the physical layout, organizational culture, and institutional policies significantly impacting patient conformity patterns. Healthcare provider communication styles create the foundation for patient understanding and compliance, with effective communication strategies enhancing conformity to beneficial health behaviors. Peer support networks serve as crucial channels for information sharing and behavioral reinforcement, often determining the strength and direction of conformity influences. Cultural health beliefs form the underlying framework through which patients interpret and respond to medical information and recommendations. Access to health information, both through traditional medical channels and modern digital platforms, shapes patients' understanding and adherence to medical advice.

The interaction between these factors creates unique conformity patterns in different healthcare contexts. For instance, the combination of strong peer support networks and effective provider communication can significantly enhance treatment adherence, while cultural beliefs may either facilitate or impede conformity to medical recommendations:

3.3. Clinical Evidence of Conformity

Research in clinical settings has revealed significant conformity effects in patient behavior, providing substantial evidence for the impact of social influence on health outcomes. Studies conducted in chronic disease management programs demonstrate that patients' adherence to treatment regimens increases when they perceive high compliance rates among peer groups [15]. These findings show the powerful role of social comparison and group norms in shaping individual health behaviors. Similarly, dietary modification programs show greater success rates when participants operate within supportive social environments that reinforce healthy eating norms [16]. The evidence extends across various health contexts, from smoking cessation programs to exercise interventions, consistently demonstrating the impact of social conformity on health behavior modification. Clinical research has also identified specific mechanisms through which conformity influences health outcomes, including social learning, peer modeling, and group reinforcement. These mechanisms operate across different healthcare settings and patient populations, suggesting universal patterns in how social influence shapes health behaviors.

4. Compliance in Healthcare Settings

4.1. Medical Compliance Fundamentals

Healthcare compliance encompasses a complex array of behaviors, including patient adherence to prescribed treatments, medication regimens, and lifestyle modifications recommended by healthcare providers [17]. The relationship between healthcare providers and patients forms the fundamental foundation of compliance, where professional authority and trust interact dynamically with patient autonomy [18]. This relationship operates within multiple contexts, from routine preventive care to complex treatment protocols for chronic conditions. The concept of medical compliance extends beyond simple adherence to medical instructions, incorporating patient understanding, motivation, and ability to follow healthcare recommendations.

4.2. Compliance Enhancement

Healthcare systems employ various sophisticated psychological approaches to enhance patient compliance, drawing from established behavioral science principles and emerging healthcare communication strategies. The foot-in-the-door technique manifests when clinicians initially recommend simple lifestyle changes before introducing more complex treatment regimens [19]. This gradual approach builds patient confidence and establishes behavioral patterns that support long-term compliance. Additionally, reciprocity principles operate when healthcare providers invest time in patient education, leading to increased treatment adherence [20]. This investment creates a sense of mutual commitment and responsibility, strengthening the therapeutic alliance between provider and patient.

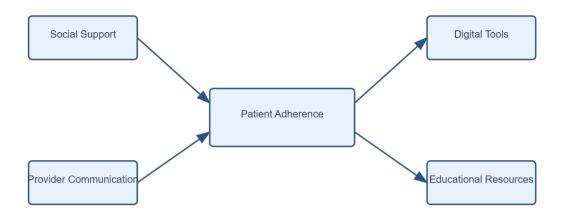


Figure 3: Patient Adherence

4.3. Barriers to Medical Compliance

Socioeconomic factors significantly influence healthcare compliance patterns, creating complex challenges that require multifaceted solutions. Financial constraints, access to healthcare facilities, and health literacy levels create varying compliance challenges across different patient populations [21]. These barriers manifest differently across communities and healthcare settings, requiring tailored approaches to overcome specific obstacles to compliance. Cultural beliefs and traditional medicine practices also substantially affect compliance with conventional medical treatments, necessitating culturally sensitive healthcare approaches [22]. Healthcare providers must develop cultural competency to effectively address these barriers and create treatment plans that acknowledge and respect diverse cultural perspectives while maintaining medical efficacy. The interaction between various compliance barriers creates unique challenges in different healthcare contexts. For instance, patients facing both financial constraints and cultural barriers may require specially designed intervention strategies that address multiple obstacles simultaneously.

Barrier Category	Specific Barriers	Impact	Potential Solutions
Socioeconomic	Financial constraints	High treatment dropout rates	Payment plans
	Transportation issues	Delayed care	Transportation assistance
	Time limitations	Incomplete treatment	Flexible scheduling
Cultural	Traditional beliefs	Reduced treatment acceptance	Cultural competency training
	Language barriers	Communication issues	Translation services
	Religious practices	Treatment conflicts	Cultural adaptation of treatments
Educational	Health literacy limitations	Misunderstanding of instructions	Simplified materials
	Complex medical information	Poor self-management	Patient education programs
	Technical terminology	Medication errors	Visual aids
Technological	Digital divide	Reduced telehealth access	Tech training
	Limited tech access	Limited monitoring capability	Device provision
	Poor digital literacy	Communication barriers	Alternative communication methods

Table 3. Barriers to Healthcare Compliance

5. Obedience in Healthcare

5.1. Authority in Healthcare

The hierarchical nature of healthcare systems creates distinct obedience patterns that permeate through multiple levels of healthcare delivery and patient interactions. Medical institutions establish comprehensive protocols and guidelines that both healthcare providers and patients must follow, creating structured frameworks for medical decision-making and treatment implementation [23]. This authority structure becomes particularly evident in emergency medical situations, surgical procedures, and intensive care settings, where rapid decision-making and strict protocol adherence are crucial for patient outcomes [24]. The manifestation of authority in healthcare settings extends beyond direct patient care to encompass administrative procedures, quality control measures, and risk management protocols. This hierarchical structure serves to ensure standardized care delivery, maintain quality control across medical procedures, establish clear lines of responsibility and accountability, create consistent treatment protocols, and facilitate efficient emergency response systems. Healthcare institutions must carefully balance the need for hierarchical authority with flexibility to cater to the individual patient needs and unique medical situations.

5.2. Patient-Provider Power

The relationship between healthcare providers and patients involves complex power dynamics that significantly influence treatment outcomes and healthcare experiences. While modern healthcare emphasizes patient autonomy and shared decision-making, medical expertise and institutional authority continue to shape decision-making processes in fundamental ways [25]. Research indicates that patients often defer to medical authority, particularly in high-stakes clinical situations where technical expertise and experience play crucial roles in treatment success [26]. This power dynamic manifests differently across various healthcare contexts, from primary care settings where long-term relationships develop to emergency situations requiring immediate decision-making. In chronic disease management, ongoing collaboration becomes essential, while specialized treatment scenarios involving complex medical procedures require different approaches to power sharing. Preventive care settings emphasize patient education and engagement while maintaining professional authority. The evolution of healthcare delivery models has introduced new dimensions to these power relationships, particularly with the rise of telemedicine and digital health platforms.

5.3. Ethical Factors

Medical obedience raises significant ethical considerations regarding patient autonomy and informed consent, creating complex scenarios that healthcare providers must navigate carefully. Healthcare providers must balance professional authority with respect for patient rights and preferences, ensuring that medical decisions reflect both clinical expertise and patient values [27]. This balance becomes particularly crucial in situations involving terminal illness, experimental treatments, or controversial medical procedures [28]. The ethical dimensions of medical obedience encompass the boundaries of patient autonomy in medical decision-making, the role of family members and caregivers in treatment decisions, and the balance between institutional protocols and individual patient needs. Healthcare providers must also consider the implications of cultural and religious beliefs in medical care, along with managing conflicting opinions between providers and patients. Modern healthcare ethics increasingly emphasizes shared decision-making models that maintain professional authority while respecting patient autonomy. This approach requires healthcare providers to develop sophisticated communication skills and cultural competency while maintaining their professional expertise and authority. The ethical obligations in medical practice continues to change, reflecting changing societal values and advancing medical capabilities.

6. Contemporary Applications in Healthcare

6.1. Digital Health

Digital platforms have fundamentally transformed healthcare delivery and patient behavior, introducing novel dimensions of social influence in medical care. Telemedicine platforms create new dimensions of social influence, where virtual interactions reshape traditional patient-provider relationships in profound ways [29]. The virtual healthcare environment introduces unique dynamics that affect patient trust, communication patterns, and treatment adherence. These digital interactions create both opportunities and challenges for maintaining therapeutic relationships and ensuring effective healthcare delivery. Health-related mobile applications and wearable devices generate powerful social comparison effects, influencing patient adherence to health goals and treatment protocols [30]. These technologies create continuous feedback loops that encourage behavioral modification through real-time monitoring and social reinforcement. The gamification of health behaviors through digital platforms introduces competitive and collaborative elements that enhance motivation and engagement in health management activities.

Platform Type	Features	Benefits	Challenges
Telemedicine	Remote consultations	Increased access	Technology barriers
	Digital prescriptions	Convenience	Limited physical examination
	Virtual monitoring	Continuous care	Connection issues
Health Apps	Activity tracking	Real-time tracking	Privacy concerns
	Medication reminders	Behavioral reinforcement	Accuracy issues
	Health monitoring	Data collection	User engagement
Social Media	Health communities	Peer support	Misinformation
	Information sharing	Experience sharing	Unverified advice
	Support networks	Quick information access	Privacy risks
Wearables	Biometric monitoring	Continuous monitoring	Cost barriers
	Activity tracking	Early detection	Data accuracy
	Health alerts	Behavioral motivation	User compliance

Table 4. Mechanisms of Digital Healthcare Influence

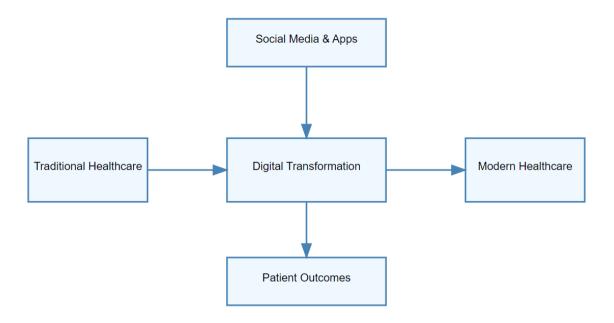


Figure 4. Healthcare Digital Transformation Flow

6.2. Social Media Impact

Social media platforms have emerged as significant influencers of health-related decisions and behaviors, creating vast networks of health information sharing and support. Patient communities on these platforms actively share experiences, treatment outcomes, and healthcare recommendations, creating informal support networks that substantially affect treatment adherence [31]. These digital communities provide emotional support, practical advice, and experiential knowledge that complement traditional medical care. The immediate accessibility and personal nature of shared experiences on social media platforms create powerful influence mechanisms that shape health behaviors and treatment decisions. However, the proliferation of health misinformation through social media presents significant challenges for healthcare providers and public health initiatives [32]. The rapid spread of unverified medical information and alternative treatment claims requires healthcare systems to develop robust strategies for counteracting misinformation while maintaining patient trust. Healthcare providers must navigate the complex landscape of social media influence while ensuring patients receive accurate, evidence-based medical guidance.

6.3. Algorithmic Healthcare Interventions

Healthcare systems increasingly utilize sophisticated algorithmic interventions to modify patient behavior and improve health outcomes. Personalized health recommendations, automated medication reminders, and digital health coaching programs leverage social influence principles to promote positive health outcomes [33]. These technological interventions create new forms of healthcare compliance and conformity patterns, introducing automated yet personalized approaches to health behavior modification [34].

7. Theoretical Implications for Healthcare

7.1. Behavioral Health Models

Traditional health behavior models require substantial modification to account for emerging digital influence mechanisms and changing social dynamics. The integration of social influence theories with established health belief models provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding and predicting patient behavior [35]. These theoretical adaptations help explain emerging patterns in medication adherence, preventive care utilization, and health-promoting behaviors [36]. Modern behavioral health frameworks must incorporate the complex interplay between digital technologies, social networks, and traditional healthcare structures.

7.2. Clinical Practice Applications

Healthcare providers must continuously adapt their approaches to account for evolving social influence mechanisms in the modern healthcare landscape. Evidence-based strategies incorporating social support networks and peer influence can significantly enhance

treatment outcomes and patient engagement [37]. Clinical protocols increasingly recognize the fundamental role of social factors in patient care, leading to more holistic treatment approaches that consider the patient's social context and support systems [38]. The integration of social influence principles into clinical practice requires ongoing professional development and adaptation of traditional medical protocols.

7.3. Public Health Implications

Public health initiatives significantly benefit from the strategic application of social influence principles in promoting population health outcomes. Vaccination campaigns, disease prevention programs, and health promotion efforts effectively utilize social norms and community influence to achieve public health objectives [39]. The success of public health initiatives increasingly depends on understanding and utilizing social influence mechanisms across diverse populations and healthcare contexts. Modern public health approaches must consider the complex interplay between traditional healthcare delivery systems, digital platforms, and social networks. The integration of social influence principles in public health strategies requires careful consideration of cultural factors, community dynamics, and technological accessibility [40].

8. Conclusion

Social influence shape healthcare outcomes through their effects on patient behavior, treatment adherence, and medical decision-making. The inter-relationship of conformity, compliance, and obedience in healthcare settings creates complex behavioral patterns that directly impact clinical outcomes. Traditional healthcare authority structures create new channels for social influence while challenging established medical hierarchies. Digital transformation in healthcare has introduced new dimensions of social influence, fundamentally altering how patients interact with medical information and healthcare providers. These changes require adaptive methods from healthcare professionals and systems to effectively utilize social influence for positive health outcomes. The rise of virtual health communities and social media health information sharing has created both opportunities and challenges for medical practice. Healthcare providers must balance professional authority with patient autonomy while acknowledging the powerful role of social networks in health decisions. Success in modern healthcare increasingly depends on understanding and appropriately utilizing social influence mechanisms.

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