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The effect of psychological needs on online conformity

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Introduction

Theoretical Background

- Conformity is the process by which individuals adjust their behavior, opinions, and attitudes to align with those of the majority, a change driven by the influence exerted by the majority.
- Asch (1956) found that 75% of participants conformed to the majority at least once. Recent studies have also observed conformity (Franzen & Mader, 2023; Goodman et al., 2020; Ušto et al., 2019).
- Various factors have been identified as contributing to susceptibility to conformity, such as group size or task type. However, the role of psychological needs has not yet been emphasised.

Objectives and hypotheses

- The study aims to confirm the induction of majority influence through a chat procedure and to test the effect of two needs on conformity scores.
- The research focuses on two psychological needs: the need to belong (NTB) and the need for uniqueness (NFU).
- It is hypothesized that a high level of NFU will result in less conformity, while a high level of NTB may lead to more conformity.

Research Question

Do psychological needs for uniqueness and belonging play a moderating role in the tendency to conform?

Method

Step n°1



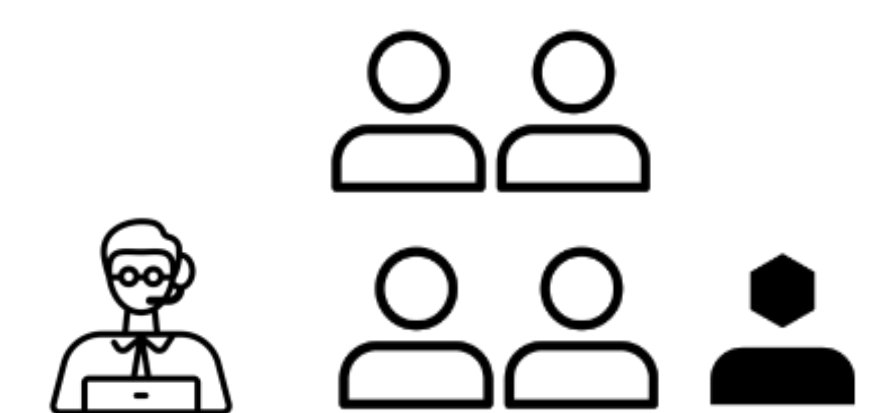
Measurement of psychological needs

Step n°2



Online tchat with moral dilemmas

Experimental condition



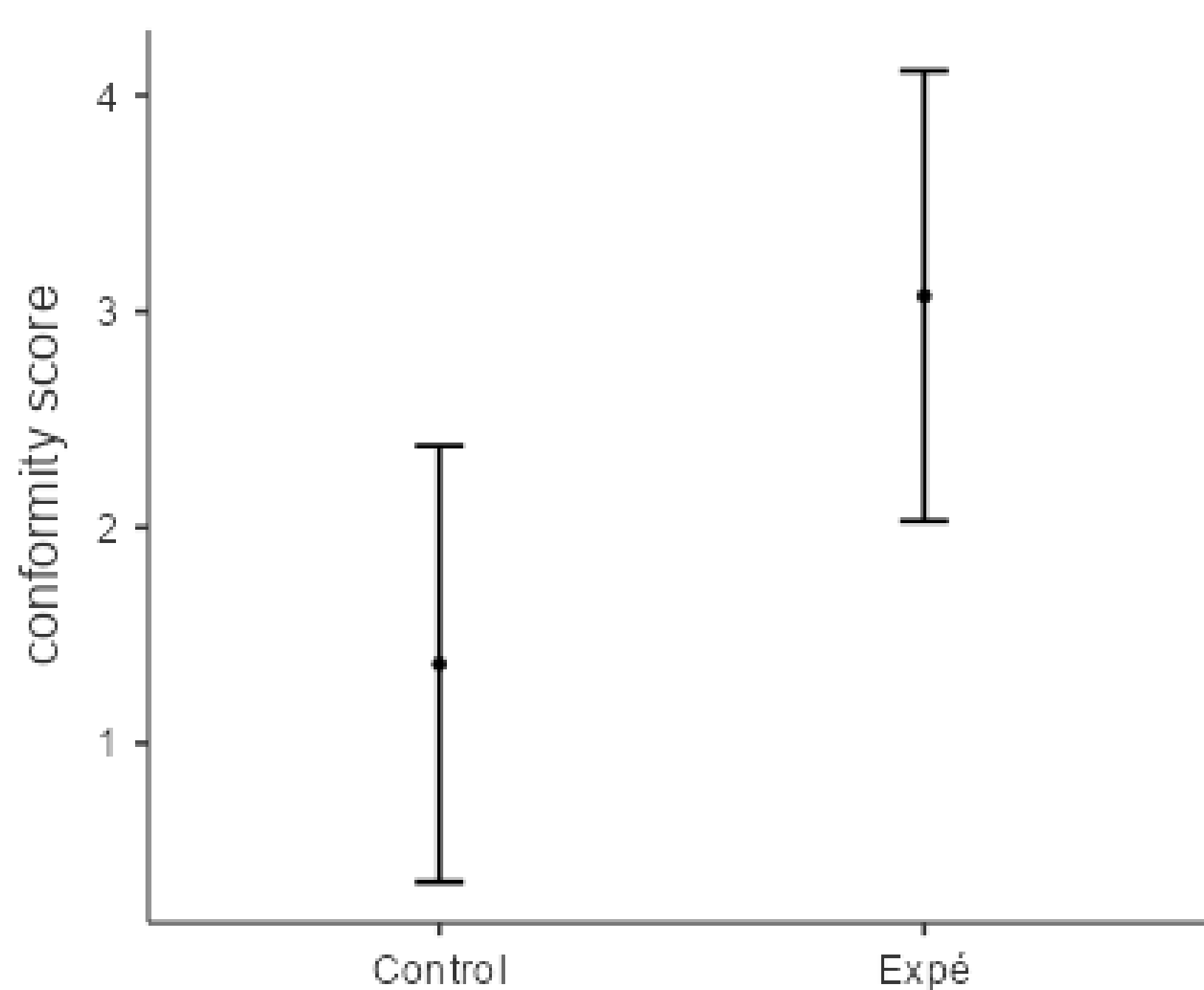
Control condition



- Step 1: Participants are required to complete a survey measuring their need to belong and their need for uniqueness at least 48 hours prior to Step 2.
- Step 2: Participants arrived at the laboratory and responded to 11 moral dilemmas, including 7 critical scenarios. They did so through an online chat with four other students who were actually bots in the experimental condition, or alone in the control condition. In the experimental condition, the robots provided responses that differed from the responses that the majority of individuals would normally give in the seven critical scenarios.

Results

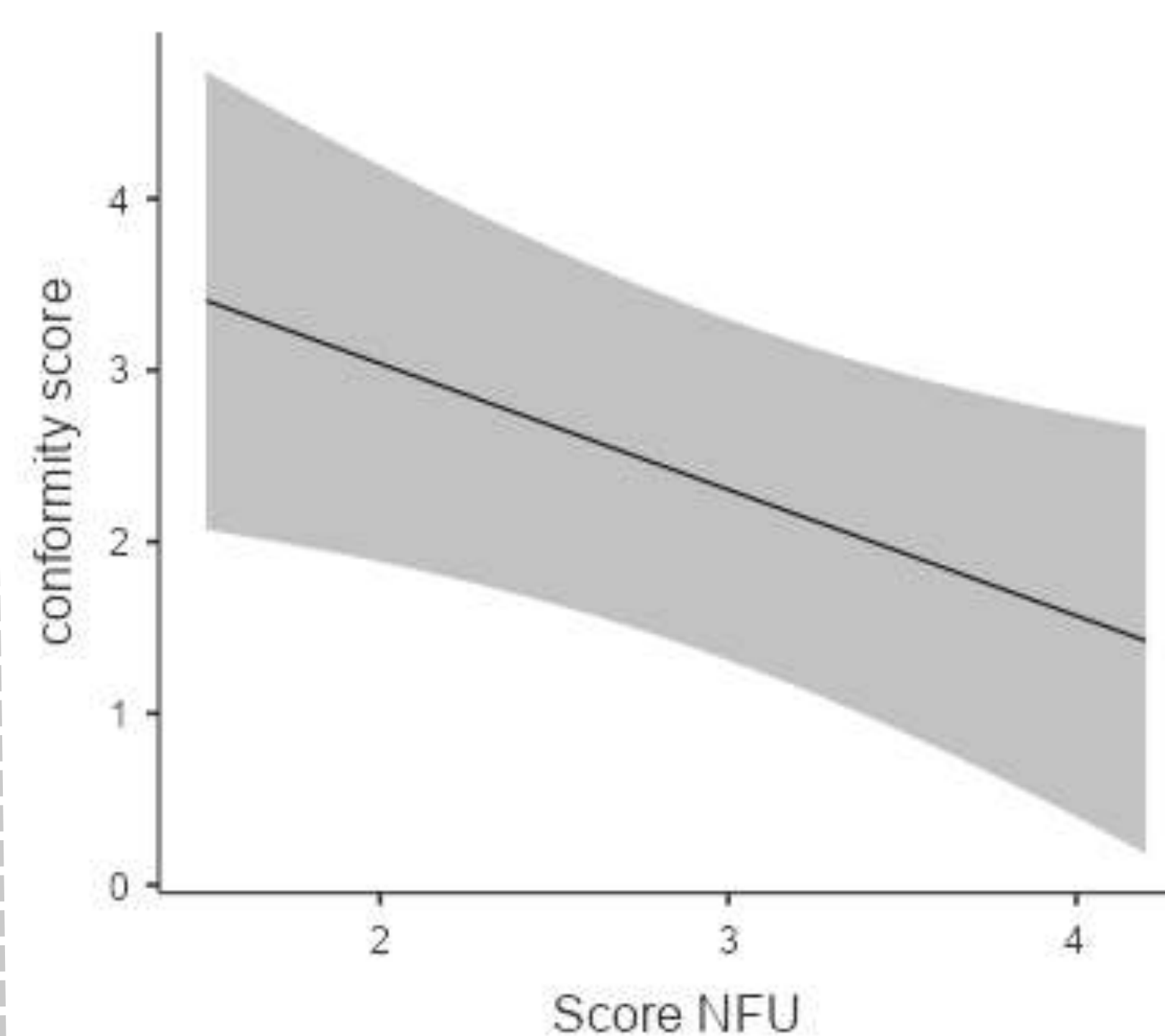
Conformity score x condition



- Participants in the experimental condition provided more conformist responses than those in the control condition

✓ $X^2(1) = 4,46, p = .035$

Conformity score x NFU



- Regardless of the condition, participants with a lower need for uniqueness (NFU) conform more than those with a higher NFU.
- No effect of NTB : $F(1, 143) = 2.89, p = .091$

✓ $R^2 = 0,280, F(1, 143) = 5,29, p = .023$

Discussion

- Our procedure enables the simulation of majority influence without confederates, allowing for the measurement of conformity.
- 96% of the participants in the experimental condition agree with the majority of the participants at least once.
- The lack of effect of the NTB can be attributed to the fact that our procedure does not make the participant's group affiliation sufficiently salient.

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