

RM Application Worksheet: Social Influence

Topic: Elms and Milgram (1966)

Milgram's groundbreaking obedience study showed that people would obey a legitimate authority to follow extreme orders.

Milgram then wanted to test why people behaved in this way. After varying the study to test the legitimate authority and agentic shift explanations, Milgram planned one more study.

To test the theory that obedience varies due to personality factors, Milgram and Elms used the 'F-scale' questionnaire to measure participants' views on fascism (with the idea that a fascist person is more authoritarian). The participants' scores were then correlated with the voltage shocks that they delivered in the standard obedience paradigm.

Milgram and Elms found that the higher a participant's F-scale score, the longer they shocked in the obedience study, concluding that some people are more obedient than others because they had an authoritarian personality.

RM Application Questions:

1. Outline one issue with measuring the level of authoritarianism using a self-report questionnaire? (2 marks)
2. The questionnaires were given to the participants before they were informed about the aim of the study. If the participants had been informed about the aim of the study before completing the questionnaire, how might this have affected the validity of the findings? (2 marks)
3. Evaluate whether this study is likely to have good temporal validity. (4 marks)
4. Explain what Milgram and Elms would have included in an introduction section of their journal article. (2 marks)
5. A discussion section evaluates the quality of the study and suggests ideas for further research. Suggest one idea for further research that Milgram and Elms may have discussed. (3 marks)
6. Milgram and Elms finished their journal article with a references section. Explain why this references section is important. (3 marks)

RM Application Questions – Suggested Answers:

1. Outline one issue with measuring the level of authoritarianism using a self-report questionnaire? (2 marks)

Self-report measures are prone to demand characteristics, such as social desirability bias. The participants may change their answers so that they do not seem as authoritarian as they are, meaning the validity of the study is compromised.

2. The questionnaires were given to the participants before they were informed about the aim of the study. If the participants had been informed about the aim of the study before completing the questionnaire, how might this have affected the validity of the findings? (2 marks)

This may have led to a problem with demand characteristics. The questionnaire may have prompted the participants to think that the study was actually about their personality characteristics, meaning that the study could lack internal validity as Elms and Milgram would not have been measuring what they set out to measure.

3. Evaluate whether or not this study is likely to have good temporal validity. (4 marks)

Temporal validity is the extent to which the results will generalise over time. On the one hand, it could be argued that the study will generalise over time as society's attitudes to fascism and authority haven't changed drastically in America in the past 50 years. On the other hand, it is more likely that these results would not generalise over time as society in 1960s America may have reacted more strongly against fascism as the Second World War was still a conscious memory for more people and, as such, fewer people are likely to score high on the questionnaire.

4. Explain what Milgram and Elms would have included in an introduction section of their journal article. (2 marks)

The introduction section of a report outlines the aims, hypotheses and justifications for the study. Elms and Milgram will have explained what they predict will happen and will explain why they were interested in the topic of authoritarian personalities, including links to previous research on the subject.

5. A discussion section evaluates the quality of the study and suggests ideas for further research. Suggest one idea for further research that Milgram and Elms may have discussed. (3 marks)

One possible idea for further investigation might be to find a different way of measuring whether someone has an authoritarian personality, without using a self-report questionnaire. This could involve choosing people from authoritarian jobs or doing observations of people in authoritarian situations before the study. Other ideas might include broadening the population validity by researching other cultures and other samples.

6. Milgram and Elms finished their journal article with a references section. Explain why this references section is important. (3 marks)

The references section is important so that the work can be checked for accuracy and plagiarism. Furthermore, if someone was reading the article and became more interested in the topic and wanted to investigate it more, the references section would

point them in the direction of where they could read more about the research in that field.

SAMPLE