An Examination of Social Collective Decision-Making
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This research investigates the under-researched phenomenon of adolescent social collective decision-making. Employing a longitudinal qualitative methodology, collective decisions made by high school prom organising committees are explored. Influencing strategies and approaches to manage conflict and conflict resolution are revealed. An original model proposes the roles of intra and inters coalitions.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Decision-making by a social entity is a universal experience yet virtually overlooked in consumer research (Ward and Reingen, 1990). A recent call for research to consider affiliation and separation in a social group decision-making setting supports the assertion that this area is under-researched (see Tinson and Nuttall, 2011). Exploring group as opposed to individual decision-making is of particular interest as it provides an opportunity to understand both the social context and social interaction that occurs when making consumption decisions. Although there are a plethora of studies examining the phenomena of family decision-making (e.g. Beatty and Talpade, 1994; Palan and Wilkes, 1997; Lee and Collins, 2000; Chaplin and John, 2010), exploring group consumption and consumer behaviour in an alternate social environment (e.g. amongst colleagues or peers) will generate insight and provide marketing implications for social collective decision-making. Collective decisions made by social groups can be for low or high involvement products and may include, for example, friends deciding which film to see at the cinema, which night club or restaurant to go to, or which holiday to choose. The purpose of this paper, employing a qualitative approach, is to explore the decision-making of an adolescent collective, their social interactions (including conflict and conflict resolution) and to propose an original model based on influencing strategies for social collective decisions.

As such, the objectives of the study are as follows:

• To explore the experience of adolescent social collective decision-making and to establish how adolescents influence one another in a group to make decisions with consequences for the collective

• To understand how social collective decision-making is influenced by the social environment as well as the group dynamics

• To propose an original model based on influencing strategies for social collective decisions

RESEARCH DESIGN

A two stage qualitative approach, employing a longitudinal single embedded case study (Yin, 2009) followed by in-depth interviews, was designed to meet the proposed objectives of this investigation. This involved conducting four focus groups with the committee throughout the year and four individual interviews with the ‘Services Captain’ with overall responsibility for the high-school prom. She was an “embedded unit of analysis” (Yin, 2009: 46). That is, discussions with the Services Captain would allow a more holistic understanding of the way in which social collective decision-making was shaped. There were six members of the committee. Permission to meet with the members of the high-school prom organising committee was given by the school and on-going consent was provided by the pupils (see Tinson, 2009).

Following analysis of the case study material 12 in-depth interviews were arranged with young adults (18-20 years of age) who were members of a high-school prom organising committee within the last three years (see Table 1). All the interviewees attended school in Scotland and each respondent contributed to social collective decisions about the high-school prom e.g. venue, menus, photographer, band etc. The respondents were recruited via email through the use of university class lists to send invites. A semi-structured interview guide was developed for this phase of data collection. Questions ranged from an initially broad approach with questions such as ‘tell me about your prom organising committee’ with later questions addressing the specific aspects of social collection decision-making such as negotiation within the group and how was any conflict resolved to did decisions change over time.

DATA ANALYSIS

An interpretive analytic stance was adopted that drew on the transcriptions (see Bryman and Burgess, 1994) and the constant comparative method described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was employed. Emerging insights and prior assumptions allowed interpretations to develop (Spiggle, 1994). The data was examined by considering social collective decision-making behaviour and changes to decisions and the associated negotiations and context.

FINDINGS

The findings established that adolescents influence one another in a group using a variety of influencing techniques (e.g. coalition formation, reasoning, bargaining and playing on emotion) and that the group is subject to conflict and conflict resolution (e.g. yielding, dominating, compromising and avoiding). Coalition formation (see

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location of prom</th>
<th>Time elapsed since prom attendance</th>
<th>No. of organising committee members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Central Scotland</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>30→11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Central Scotland</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>5→6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dumfries and Galloway</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Highlands</td>
<td>20 months</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Edinburgh &amp; the Lothians</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>12→4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catriona</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Aberdeenshire</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>10→8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>14 months</td>
<td>12→8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>10→6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Central Scotland</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>11→8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Edinburgh &amp; the Lothians</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>15→7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>12→8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Central Scotland</td>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>8→5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lee and Collins (2000) was not only evident within the group but externally between teachers and/or venue liaisons. This allowed for an exploration of the inter-relationship between the macro and micro environment (see Bamaca and Umana-Taylor, 2006). These external coalitions were significant not only because they were recognised as being credible but as a consequence of how the perceptions of these coalitions changed over time. Over the period of event preparation (typically nine months) the external coalitions became more important and were able to appreciably impact on the dynamics and related decision-making of the social collective. Intra coalitions were more likely to use bargaining or emotional appeals (e.g. guilt) to influence decisions whilst inter coalitions and their subsequent position/s on issues were often used as leverage within the social decision-making collective. Dominant roles adopted by intra coalitions typically materialised in (potential) conflict. Noticeably, those who appeared most dominant within the social group either disassociated from decisions made within the collective that they did not agree with or exited the group ‘on principal’ to preserve their perceived integrity (and more effectively manage their individual goals and identity ambitions).

CONCLUSIONS
This paper responds to the need for greater consideration of separation and affiliation in a social group context. This research has not only identified influencing strategies employed to influence choice but has also established how these strategies are used variably over time. The inter-relationship between the macro and the micro environment has also been explored within the context of social collective decision-making and has furthered our knowledge of adolescent social interaction e.g. inclusion and exclusion. A novel theory has been produced here and can be tested in other contexts.

REFERENCES


