Peer influence strategies in collectively consumed products (Events & Festivals)

An exploratory study among university students

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The paper examines peer influence in the context of purchasing collectively consumed products. The particular focus of the paper is on strategies used by university students for persuasion and resistance when attending events & festivals.

Methodology: Five females and three males studying for a degree in the UK were interviewed. Independent analysis of the interview transcripts was undertaken in order to identify persuasion and resistance strategies, as well as the factors influencing a strategy's success.

Findings: A number of persuasion and resistance strategies are used and certain strategies use specific language techniques. Some of these strategies are only applicable to reference groups who have a history of consuming products together, as

they resort to past experiences as a means of producing a persuasion or resistance argument. The extent to which the influence is successful is also discussed as being very subjective and dependent on the particular context of the persuasion exercise.

Originality/Value: This is the first study to exclusively examine peer influence in the context of collectively consumed products, notably influence and resistance strategies, and the conditions which can make these effective. The study illustrates the types of strategies peers use when attending events, in particular those used by people who live in a fairly close social system (university study) and where there is no formal hierarchy (in contrast with parent-children influence). The context can influence the types of strategies used, for example the nature of the relationship between students, which is based on high levels of trust, makes it inappropriate to use certain strategies.

KEYWORDS: Peer influence, persuasion strategies, resistance strategies, events & festivals, university students

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social influence is the process through which an individual's thoughts, feelings and actions are affected by other people (Smith, Louis, and Schultz 2011). Individuals are influenced by others, but also try to influence others themselves and therefore amongst friends, influence is a mutual process and takes the form of *"conformity, socialization, peer pressure, obedience, leadership, persuasion, minority influence and social change"* (Smith, Louis, and Schultz 2011, p. 599). While social influence can be exerted by primary and secondary groups, primary groups have the greatest ability to influence behaviour (Solomon 2006). Interpersonal influence is, thus, one critical influence on human behaviour and it is not surprising that it has attracted attention from researchers in a number of fields including psychology (Carter, Bennetts, and Carter 2003; Dalton 1987), anti-social behaviour (Livingstone, Young, and Manstead 2011) and purchasing (Roman and Medvedev 2011).

From a consumer behaviour point of view, it has been acknowledged that interpersonal influence has a great role in shaping consumer decisions (Solomon 2006). However, past research suggests that certain types of products are more prone to peer influence than others. One product category where peer influence is thought to be intense is events & festivals (from here on referred to as events). Events are one-time or infrequently occurring occasions which provide customers or guests with "an opportunity for an experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience" (Getz 2013, p. 27). Events research shows that socialization is a key motivator for participating in events including performing arts events (Gainer 1995), arts festivals (Yolal, Çetinel, and Uysal 2009) and sporting events (Hemmatinezhad, Nia, and Kalar 2010). Moreover, events are often attended and experienced not individually but in groups, whether with family members, friends or work associates (Gainer 1995; Getz 2013), which are the most common peer groups.

Park and Lessig (1997) pointed out that the type of group and the product category influence the susceptibility to reference group influence. Traditionally, the propensity to influence has been assessed through Bearden and Etzel's (1982) public/private and necessity/luxury dimensions. It can be argued that events are examples of public luxuries, that is, they are products that are consumed in the public view and are not commonly owned or used. Research has demonstrated that these types of products are likely to attract higher levels of reference group influence than other types (e.g. Bearden and Etzel 1982; Kulviwat, Bruner, and Al-Shuridah 2009), particularly when the influence comes from peers (Childers and Rao 2012). Therefore, studying the use of peer influence in the context of attending events is imperative if a better understanding of the event decision-making process is to be achieved. Yet, the study of reference group influence in services has been limited (Hsu, Kang, and Lam 2006)

and with few notable exceptions (e.g. Wakefield 1995), reference group influence on event attendance has not been studied to any detailed extent.

However, the extent and patterns of reference group influence within public luxuries is likely to vary according to whether the product is consumed individually or by the members of the reference group. *Individually consumed products* pertain to influence on products that are not going to be jointly consumed by the influencer and the persuaded. In this case, the influence attempt is driven by selfish reasons if the influencer is the main beneficiary of the influence exercise and by altruistic reasons if the product is to be consumed for the benefit of the persuaded. In contrast, in *collectively consumed products*, the influencer tries to influence the persuaded about a decision involving a product they will both consume. Groups who consume products together, notably in experiences such as attending events, are likely to feature individuals who strongly identify with the group. Research shows that the higher the level of identification with the group, the greater the group's influence on attitudes and behaviour of its members (Chatzisarantis et al. 2009). Therefore, from the two types of public luxuries, (reference) group consumed luxuries are likely to command higher levels of peer influence when compared to individually consumed products.

While peer influence is expected to shape decisions and behaviours irrespective of age, for university students the role peer influence plays in everyday life is seen to be intensified due to the proximity of friends within that environment (Dalton 1987; Penman and McBrill, 2008). Unlike previous experience within their life, university students are surrounded primarily by friends (Marshall et al. 2010) because they exist within every area of a student's life such as within their university course, accommodation, seminar groups and social lives. The increased frequency of interaction with friends at university makes students particularly vulnerable to the influence from their peers (Marshall et al. 2010). Peers act as a source of behavioural standards against which individuals can evaluate themselves and this influence tends to be intensified when parental influence is weak (Dalton 1987).

Socialization with friends is a key motivation to attend events and often the decision to attend is dependent on whether peers also attend (Lewis and Moital 2013). This attendance interdependence provides a rich ground for interpersonal persuasion to be deployed. This process of persuasion involves two parties: the influencer, who deploys influencing strategies, and the persuaded, who may accept or resist persuasion. Given that studies on persuasion in the context of collectively consumed products are few, this paper explores peer influence in the context of attending events, with a particular focus on strategies used by university students for persuasion and resistance, and the factors influencing the success of a strategy.

2. INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE IN CONSUMPTION DECISIONS

Reference groups have been defined as *"actual individuals or groups that have significant relevance upon an individual's evaluation, aspiration or behavior"* (Solomon 2006, p. 350). The need to fit in and identify with groups is often the primary drive for the consumption of products and services (Solomon 2006), and young adults are no exception (Penman and McBrill, 2008). Therefore an individual's behaviour is

influenced by those desirable individuals (Ebren 2009) and many buying actions come from this need to identify with a membership or reference groups (Venkatesan 1966). Resistance is defined as noncompliance with a directive (Newman 2002) manifested through a *"response by an individual that attempts to reduce or eliminate the impact of another's influence attempt"* (Sherman, Crawford, and McConnell 2004, p. 169). Therefore, resistance and influence tend to go hand in hand (Knowles and Linn 2004).

Past research on interpersonal influence on consumer behaviour has often focused on the consumption of undesirable products, such as smoking, drinking alcohol and taking drugs (e.g. Borsari and Carey 2001; Wagner and Punyanunt-Carter 2005). Research on the consumption of more socially acceptable products has focused on a range of consumer goods, including clothing (e.g. (Lachance, Beaudoin, and Robitaille 2003), food (e.g. Kuenzel and Musters 2007) and technology-based products (e.g. Lee and Murphy 2006; Kulviwat, Bruner, and Al-Shuridah 2009). Studies on interpersonal influence in the context of purchasing experiences are less common. An experience is a "subjective episode (...) with an emphasis on emotions and senses lived during the immersion at the expense of the cognitive dimension" (Carù and Cova 2003: 273). Events, as well as leisure travel and theatre outings are examples of experiences (Bigné, Sánchez, and Sánchez 2001; Hume et al. 2006; Hsu, Kang, and Lam 2006), in that they are sought for their emotion-inducing capabilities (e.g. excitement, relaxation, fun).

As a result of the quantitative nature of most studies on interpersonal influence, it is often assumed that the propensity to interpersonal influence is a personality trait. Some researchers overtly acknowledge this assumption (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989; Hawley, Little, and Pasupathi 2002); in other studies, measurement is largely devoid of context, implying that respondents should express general patterns of behaviour (Marquis 2004; Mangleburg, Doney, and Bristol 2004). In some cases, these general patterns of persuasion were used to develop typologies of interpersonal influence (Hawley, Little, and Pasupathi 2002). While these studies can uncover general patterns of interpersonal influence, they do not consider situational effects, which are thought to be a key influence on whether, when and how influence occurs (Brown et al. 2008). For example, the category of product being purchased was found to affect the susceptibility to social influence (Chavda, Haley and Dunn, 2005).

Most studies on interpersonal influence do not go beyond examining the existence of, or susceptibility to social influence (e.g. Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989; Kulviwat, Bruner, and Al-Shuridah 2009; Lee and Murphy 2006; Mangleburg, Doney, and Bristol 2004) and the conditions in which such influence varies (e.g. (Marquis 2004; Narayan, Rao, and Saunders 2011; Hsu, Kang, and Lam 2006). Research on how interpersonal influence occurs, including persuasion and resistance strategies, is less common. While a number of studies have contributed to building a body of knowledge on the strategies used for interpersonal influence, much of this research focuses on the family as a reference group and on persuasion and resistance in the context of child-parent interaction (Palan and Wilkes 1997; Lawlor and Prothero 2011). Groups of friends, unlike families, imply neither a level of authority nor a natural power imbalance among members of the group. The consequence is that the frequency and impact of specific persuasion and resistance strategies is likely to be different. For example, parents can use authority to enforce a decision, a situation which is unlikely to happen among friends.

Palan and Wilkes (1997) and Lawlor and Prothero (2011) examined the strategies used in the context of family consumption decisions, and parents' responses to these influence attempts, including resistance and compliance strategies. Others, in turn, have only focused on influence (e.g. Marquis 2004) or resistance (e.g. Jacks and Cameron 2003) strategies. A variety of persuasion and resisting strategies have been put forward since Marwell and Schmidt (1967) tested a list of 16 compliance-gaining strategies. Palan and Wilkes (1997) uncovered a wide range of strategies that could be broadly grouped into three categories: bargaining, persuasion and emotional. Focusing on consumption and non-consumption, Mallalieu (1999) found university students to employ different persuasion strategies, a finding supported by Wagner and Punyanunt-carter's (2005) study on the strategies used to encourage friends to drink. Other studies have looked at specific strategies such as guilt (e.g. O'Keefe 2002) and looking ahead (Sherman, Crawford, and McConnell 2004).

The literature has only briefly recognized that the extent of an influencer's self-interest influences the propensity to exert interpersonal influence. The essential assumption is that sometimes persuasion is exercised for personal gain, while in other situations persuasion aims to benefit others. One of the first studies to examine interpersonal influence in the context of self- or other directed-gain was Boster and Stiff's (1984) research on the factors influencing the choice of compliance-gaining message. Fifteen years later, Mallalieu (1999) examined the relationship between strategy choice and type of benefit (whether only the influencer or only the persuaded benefits). One limitation of these studies is that they are based on the assumption that the benefit is either for the influencer or for the persuaded, without considering the possibility that influence occurs in contexts where both parties potentially benefit from the persuasion exercise. Other work has highlighted the pervasiveness of interpersonal influence when it comes to the consumption of jointly consumed products (Gainer 1995; Lee and Murphy 2006). Despite these valuable contributions, research on persuasion and resistance strategies in the context of collectively consumed products, and in particular experience-based products, is very limited.

3. STUDY METHODS

3.1. Data collection

A look at previous research suggests that using quantitative methods would not be appropriate because as Roman and Medvedev (2011) found, peer influence was unknown amongst participants as few associated influence with the purchase of products. Because of their interactive nature and length of interaction, qualitative methods provided the flexibility for the researcher to uncover persuasion and resistance in the context of attending events. Individual interviews were chosen as a data collection technique. Data collection techniques that require group interaction, such as focus groups, would not be appropriate in this context; Roman and Medvedev (2011) pointed out that many individuals tend to refuse to acknowledge that social influence plays a part within their purchase decisions and believe that they are individual thinkers and cannot be easily influenced. Techniques such as focus groups would be inappropriate in such circumstances, because the group nature of the technique could heighten the self-defensive character of the participant. Individual

interviews, in contrast, are more likely to facilitate the creation of a rapport between researcher and participant (Creswell 1998), leading to a more honest, in-depth discussion of peer influence. Informed consent was obtained from participants.

An interview discussion guide was constructed consisting of a number of topics in order to gain a detailed understanding of peer influence in the context of events. The initial topic focused on participants' behaviours and opinions towards events attendance decision-making, the role friends play in attending events and the decision-making process when attending events. Covering this topic enabled an understanding of the context in which event attendance decisions take place. It was also expected that it would start answering the research questions of this study. Next, the interview focused on three themes associated with the three areas to be covered in the study: persuasion strategies, resistance strategies and influence success and failure. Participants were asked to give real examples where possible through regression to recent event participation in order to gain accurate information on the strategies used and their success.

The interview brief did not impose a specific definition of event upon students. Instead, it adopted a more naturalistic definition by letting participants resort to examples that they viewed as events. The unique feature of an event is its infrequent nature (Getz, 2013); however, there is no objective way of defining infrequent. Students sometimes referred to going to nightclubs and while this could, at first glance, not be considered an infrequent behaviour, nightclubs are often the venue for special events. For example, when they bring in well-known DJs or host themed nights as opposed to a regular night with a set played by the resident DJ. Hosting a guest DJ or a uniquely themed night could be considered infrequent and therefore it would fall within the definition of event. Besides clubbing events, students discussed a variety of events, including car shows, fashion shows, balls, movie premieres, as well as music concerts and festivals.

Five females and three males studying for a degree in the UK were interviewed (See profile of participants in Table 1). Han and Li (2009) identified gender differences with regards to how people respond to peer influence. Therefore, it was important to collect data from both genders. The study focused on a homogeneous group, is exploratory in nature (Jones, Holloway, and Brown 2012) and involved collecting rich data about the (influence and resistance) strategies employed by participants. Therefore, small samples are appropriate (Holloway and Wheller 2009). Advertisements were set out within the university campus in order to generate willing participants. Not all participants could be interviewed face-to-face and therefore for participant convenience purposes half were interviewed by Skype. The interviews lasted between 16 and 28 minutes. Three of the females were final-year students who lived together in a house, whereas the remainder were first- or second-year students who did not live together and did not know each other.

3.2. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed as the analytic method. The essence of the method is the identification of themes that capture "something important about the data in relation to the research question" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 82). Following from the research objectives, all instances across the data that pertained to peer influence and event attendance, persuasion strategies, resistance strategies and the factors influencing the

success of a strategy were identified. Next, for each of the main themes, sub-themes were developed that reflected unique strategies or factors influencing success. The analysis was undertaken primarily at the 'semantic' level (Boyatzis 1998), which means that the themes were "identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data" (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 84). At times, the analysis looked at the latent ideas within the data to reflect less explicit accounts of the strategies employed and their effectiveness.

Table 1 - Profile of participants

Name	Age	Year of study	Interview mode
Joanna	21	4th	On-campus
Martha	22	4th	On-campus
Danielle	18	1st	Skype
Lauren	18	1st	Skype
Charlotte	21	4th	On-campus
Matt	19	2nd	On-campus
Peter	19	1st	Skype
Andrew	20	2nd	Skype

As the analysis was driven by an interest in identifying strategies and strategy effectiveness, prevalence was counted if the data indicated a reference to these themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). All instances within each sub-theme (i.e. all strategies and all factors influencing success) were labelled. If a strategy has been documented in the literature, the existing label was employed; if not, a label was created. Initially, the transcripts were read by the researcher who carried out the interviews. After this initial familiarization stage (Jones, Holloway, and Brown 2012), the transcripts were read again and evidence related to each of the four research themes was identified. Irrelevant data was discarded from further analysis. An example of discarded data included when participants went off subject such as attending events with their parents. In order to ensure analytical rigor (Lincoln and Guba 1985), a second member then read the transcripts, independently creating a template for each of the above four themes, which was then compared to the one resulting from the first analysis. After this procedure, only very minor changes to the first analysis were required.

4. PEER INFLUENCE IN THE DECISION TO ATTEND EVENTS

4.1. Peer groups and event attendance

Participants were asked questions about whether they enjoyed attending events, and why and who they attended them with. Many participants tended to admit that it was unlikely that they would go to events by themselves. While some of the participants did not rule out that possibility, they would only do it in exceptional circumstances. Danielle mentioned that if peers were not going the decision of attending would be re-considered, while participant Lauren initially acknowledged the possibility of going alone, but then withdrew that position and affirmed that she would have to go with at least one of her friends:

"Possibly…I don't know. It would depend on the type of event. Actually I don't know if I would go by myself. No, you know, I would have to go with at least one other person"

The reluctance to attend events alone is explained by the fact that attending events with groups of friends was seen to be directly related to the enjoyment of the event. Lauren and Charlotte's answers illustrate the connection between event attendance with friends and enjoyment.

"I think events are only as good as you make them and the people you are with can make it good or bad" (Lauren)

"I can go to events on my own so I can have my own enjoyment out of it but if I'm with friends that enjoy it as well, then it makes it even better." (Andrew)

This supports research that discusses the importance socialization plays in events (Yolal, Çetinel, and Uysal 2009; Hemmatinezhad, Nia, and Kalar 2010) as well as Getz's (2013) contention that people are less likely to attend events alone due to the benefits of group interaction.

4.2. Influencing strategies

Participants were asked about situations they had been in which led to influence for attending events. The purpose was to identify the persuasion strategies they would use to change their peers' behaviour (Jacks and Cameron, 2003) with regards to attending events. It is recognized that friends do influence each other and there are a number of methods that have been described that students adopt in order to influence others to join them if they do not want to attend an event. The main strategy described is constant **harassment** which can be split into two sections, process of harassment and content of that harassment. The process is related to frequency whereas content is related to specific arguments used. There is a commonality on the frequency for harassment amongst participants. Harassment can be used very frequently suggesting that participants believe that the more they pester the persuaded to attend an event, the more likely the latter is to give in to the influence.

"Yeah I would give them reasons for coming out again and again and again like constant bombardment" (Lauren)

In terms of arguments for the harassment, a number of reasons are highlighted within the data and these are grouped into four general arguments; fun, money, unique experiences and attributes of the event. Harassment persuasion uses the definitive language persuasion technique (Borg 2004) in which statements are made to appear as fact. The following quotes illustrate each of these four reasons.

Fun: *"I think it would be constant 'come on, come on, come on'…and say things like it will be fun, it will be a great night"* (Joanna)

Money: *"I have managed to save a fair bit of money over the last few years and she always brings it up and says I have tons of money… spend it!"* (Martha)

Unique experiences: *"You'll never be able to do this again!"* (Lauren)

Attributes of the event: *"try to tell them about stalls, that there's going to be like little jewellery stalls, saying we can maybe like go for a lunch, or coffee or something at the same time" (Matt)*

Another strategy used by peers is **guilt tripping** the persuaded. The statements below incorporate the exaggerated language persuasion (Borg 2004) technique which creates dramatic statements. Thus, it appears that different persuasion strategies use different language techniques. The harassment strategy uses definitive language, while the guilt tripping strategy uses exaggerated language.

"Tell them how much they are going to miss out more than anything and like make them feel guilty about not going...You generally make them feel guilty or try and make them feel like they'll be missing out" (Charlotte)

"My best friend Ashling turned to me and said 'Oh you haven't been out in ages and you're always so funny when you're out... and you're so entertaining and so nice to have out' and that made me feel really, really bad that I wasn't going" (Danielle)

The above statements suggest that there are two separate ways in which participants are seen to guilt trip others. Firstly, by providing the persuaded with compliments and second is highlighting that they will miss out if they do not attend. The following comments further support the use of both strategies.

Compliments: *"It will be really bad without you"* (Charlotte)

"We always have a good time when you're out, you make it so much fun" (Joanna)

Missing out: *"It's the last time we'll all be together and we can all say goodbye to each other and like celebrate finishing uni"* (Charlotte)

"they'll like tell me all the good things about it, why you should go because if you don't go then you'll have missed out on this or like, quite a lot of things this year, but you're in Fresher's year just to think about what you're going to do next year when you have to work a lot harder so…" (Peter)

Using these methods of guilt tripping supports O'Keefe's (2002) explanation that influencers can guilt trip individuals by drawing attention to appropriate conducts of behaviour that are not being met by the persuaded. The use of compliments to manipulate the persuaded is in line with the assertions of Cialdini (2006).

In addition to the above strategies, another one discussed is further intensifying the pressure put onto the persuaded by getting more people involved in the influencing process. **Group peer pressure** is discussed in the literature (Smith, Louis, and Schultz 2011). However, the results distinguish between two levels of group peer pressure: one or two members trying to persuade and the whole group trying to persuade an individual. There is little research on persuasion tactics as a whole group. One participant explained how group pressure takes place:

"I would talk to others going and like as a group... we would all go 'come on' and try and guilt them as a whole group and apply the full amount of pressure and they don't really have the choice but to say anything other than 'yeah okay, I'll come" (Charlotte)

A more subtle form of group pressure that can be applied is mentioned in the form of University's end-of year ball event in which groups of friends dress up in a group costume which is discussed and pre-determined before the event. If the persuaded is exposed to these **group discussions** it could put pressure on them to attend the event and be part of that 'pre-event ritual'.

A further strategy discussed is that the influencer can become quite aggressive and forceful towards the persuaded when told that they are not attending. Thus, this strategy is not used initially but only when the influencer encounters resistance. **Negative affect**, described in the literature as a response to influence in an angry, irritated or upset way, is usually viewed as a resistance strategy (Jacks and Cameron 2003). However, anger as a response was described by participants for influencing others rather than resistance. This is because the original influencer is using negative affect as a means of resisting against resistance; in such a case, the original resister becomes the influencer (does not want to attend the event) and the original influencer the resister (resisting the original resister's decision not to attend the event). The following two passages illustrate that when discussing their own reactions to being influenced, the persuaded dismiss anger as a response; however, they suggest that when the influence is not successful on them, the influencer can become aggressive.

> "I prefer not to get angry and instead try to explain why I'm not going out and usually that is enough" (Danielle)

> "Your friends only want you to come so you can't take it too seriously and like we won't hold it against anyone" (Lauren)

On the other hand, **subtle forcefulness** is seen to be used as a strategy for influence but does not necessarily incorporate aggression or anger. This supports Borg's (2004) language technique of forcing, in which the persuaded feels like they do not have a choice.

> "Say things like 'so what are you wearing tonight? Or 'so you're coming tonight'. They aren't said as questions, they are more obligations." (Martha)

> "She kind of knows when to bring it up, knows when to stop, so like she would, she brought it up last week Saturday. This Saturday which just passed. She's like "oh, you've made the decision about maybe the event on Friday" and I was like "yeah I think I'll probably go, still thinking about it. (…) And then again, she brought it up today, knowing it's tomorrow she's like "oh, so what are you wearing tomorrow?" and I was like "I still haven't said I'm coming but I'll probably wear this and that if I will go" and then I just left her now and I was like "OK, I'll see you tomorrow." Because I finally made up my mind that I'll go. But yeah, she would probably, she nags but in a very subtle way." (Matt)

Another strategy involved employing what could be called the **'chain of persuasion'**, whereby an individual influences another and who in turn influences more individuals. Matt illustrated this point then he said:

> "if one of my female housemates says yes, then my other housemate [who] is actually her boyfriend so they're a couple. So when she says yes, he will definitely say yes and then him and the other three, two boys which live with us, are very close, so if he goes, they will probably go as a chain reaction."

This strategy is very efficient as instead of having to persuade various individuals, the influencer knows that influencing one individual will lead to influencing several more through a chain of persuasion.

Lastly, **reaching a compromise** is mentioned as a strategy in which the influencer gets the outcome they want, albeit not completely. There were three types of compromising strategies which give the power to the persuaded, although in different ways. Firstly, the power is given as the persuaded can choose when the group leaves the event and the event experience ends. Secondly, the power allows the persuaded to choose an aspect of the event experience such as a venue or activity.

> "*You do try to and make a compromise if they have really strong negative attitude like go for a bit and then move on somewhere else they prefer*" (Charlotte)

A third way involved reaching a group compromise whereby the group managed to satisfy opposed interests, for example, going to two events on the same night. This supports the notion of transgression-compliance (O'Keefe 2002), which explains that negotiating an appropriate alternative within group discussions can sway the decision of others.

Table 2 presents a summary of the eight influence strategies, including a brief description.

Table 2: Summary of influence strategies

Strategy	Description
Guilt tripping	Making others feel guilty or bad about not going, either through complimenting them or highlighting they will be missing out on a great experience.
Negative affect	Responding in an angry, irritated or upset way when others resist influence.
Harassment	Telling others the reasons why they should attend time and time again until they either change their mind or give up.
Group discussion	Exposing others to group discussions prior to attending the event in order to put pressure on them.
Group peer pressure	An intensification of the pressure put on others by deliberately getting more people involved in the influencing process.
Subtle forcefulness	Using non-aggressive language in the form of affirmative/definitive statements rather than questions which forces the persuaded to feel like they do not have a choice.
Chain of persuasion	Persuading one individual to go who in turn influences the target individual(s) to go to the event.
Reaching a compromise	The influencer hands power to the persuaded to shape certain features of the event experience.

4.3. Resistance strategies

Similarly to being asked about influencing strategies, participants were also asked about how they or the persuaded tries to resist the influence exerted on them. In other words, how they resist attempts to change their behaviour (Jacks and Cameron, 2003) towards wanting attending an event. This area is not focused on as strongly as influencing strategies within the literature. The most commonly adopted resistance strategy involves **repeating the reasons for not attending** over and over again:

> *"You sort of name off all the reasons I don't like the club and all the things that have happened in the club and then they eventually get bored of hearing it all"*
> (Danielle)

This strategy supports research on counter arguments for resistance in which the individual finds fault in the opposing viewpoint (Jacks and Cameron 2003). However, in the literature, there is a separate strategy known as attitude bolstering which allows the persuaded to give merit to their own viewpoint (Jacks and Cameron 2003). Attitude bolstering and counter arguing are seen as separate techniques for resistance in the literature but these results show that these strategies go hand in hand rather than separately to resist peer influence as the persuaded counter-argues with the influencer and gives merit to their own viewpoint simultaneously.

Sometimes participants just repeatedly said **no** without providing reasons or elaborating little on why they don't want to go to the event. This resistance strategy is explained by Andrew when he said:

> *"they will phone me up but nine times out of ten I just hear that they've been out because I think they've got so used me saying no, so, they don't invite me. Just say I don't want to go. Don't sound like my cup of tea"*

Other strategies include **avoidance techniques** in the form of changing the subject ("*I tend to change the subject and she will forget about it for a while*", Martha), not engaging in the preparation rituals ("*Usually I just won't get ready when they do and just sit at the computer*" Martha) and using excuses such as work requirements or lack of money as reasons why the individual is not attending. Avoidance strategies support the selective avoidance strategy (Knowles and Linn 2004) in which the persuaded leaves the situation and tunes out the message (Jacks and Cameron 2003) in order to neutralize or suspend the persuasion attempt (Palan and Mallalieu 2012). Using some of these strategies does not always seem to be fully effective, but recognized as more of a tactic in delaying the influence rather than a full resistance strategy. Martha's answer illustrated this point:

> *"If I change the subject and she forgets about it for a bit, she will usually bring it up again later and try and get me to go but I tend to just repeat what I said before"*

The last strategy used is to **bring up something unpleasant** as reinforcement for the decision to not attend. One participant gave an example when one of their housemates went out clubbing even though they were not feeling well and the group had to leave early because they were unwell.

"Bring up that and say things like 'last time you were ill and we went out, we had to come back so we don't want that again do we?' and then she will drop it usually" (Martha)

The resisting strategies identified in this study support research conducted by Livingstone, Young, and Manstead (2011) who found that those that identify with a group can react against them. Other resistance strategies that are discussed in the literature (Jacks and Cameron 2003; Palan and Wilkes 1997), such as discrediting the source, discounting the influence altogether and message distortion, were not found to be used. The small sample size and the specific context of the research (collective consumption by close friends) may explain why these strategies were not discussed by participants.

There appears to be a pattern in the strategies not adopted to resist peer influence as these strategies attack the message directly or the source of the message, the friends of the persuaded. The reason for not using such strategies is perhaps illustrated in Lauren's statement:

"I trust what they say definitely. I wouldn't necessarily take it for absolute fact what they say but I think I trust them enough. They are clever enough people and they have given me examples where their knowledge has been proven right."

When concerning peer influence, it is clear that the participants trust the viewpoints of their friends and although they might react against the influencing messages, they still believe the messages to be accurate in terms of content and friends are seen to be trustworthy sources of information.

Table 3 provides a summary of the four resistance strategies employed, including a brief description.

Table 3: Summary of resistance strategies

Strategy	Description
Saying no	Confidently saying no when invited to go to the event.
Repeating reasons	Re-stating reasons that counter-argue with the influencer and give merit to the viewpoint of the persuaded.
Avoidance techniques	Behavioural and verbal responses aimed at leaving the situation and tuning out the message.
Bring up something unpleasant	The outcomes of unpleasant past consumption experiences are recalled and similarities with the current consumption drawn.

4.4. Influence success or failure

Although there seems to be a consensus amongst university students as to how to resist and exert influence on their peers, there is less knowledge about the extent to which such persuasion and resistance strategies are successful. To start with, the study identified that the ability to persuade friends to attend events is not always successful if there are **tangible reasons** for them not being able to attend, rather than

not wanting to attend. Money and work commitments appear to be valid reasons for resisting persuasion.

> *"It depends on the situation they are in so if they had like work the next day or whatever then someone trying to persuade them isn't going to make a difference"* (Joanna)

> *"If it is one where there are other reasons like no money or essays then I won't change my mind"* (Danielle)

On the other hand, the **type of strategy employed** could also influence the outcome of the persuasion exercise. Guilt tripping friends to attend is seen to be very effective, supporting Hibbert et al.'s (2007) conclusions that compliance is likely if guilt is used. This is supported through the answer by Danielle (*"I'm a sucker for a guilt trip – this one works every time for me"*) and Charlotte (*"Making them feel guilty works really well and like trying to make them think that they will definitely have a good time"*).

Success is also subjective and dependent on the **mood and strength of attitude** (towards attending) of the persuaded.

> *"It has worked where they'll make me feel like I'm missing out so sometimes I do give in and go but I usually have to be in the right mood and I guess not feel SO against going"* (Martha)

> *"It depends what kind of mood they get you in. If it is one where you don't really care, then nine times out of ten they get you to come out"* (Danielle)

> *"That's why she doesn't try and like talk me into it because she knows that once my mind's made up, it's probably not going to change"* (Matt)

This supports research that discusses that internal decision-making is essential to resistance and that once an individual has made a decision they convince themselves that this is the correct decision (Cialdini 2006).

Success of persuasion is also recognized to be related to **how well the influencer knows the persuaded**, which enables a better understanding of what would work to get the desired outcome and therefore influence would require less effort. This supports literature that explains that understanding an individual's personality allows participants to adopt a more effective strategy (Borg 2004).

> *"The closer the friend is, the more you can influence them or them you because you know them loads and you know what makes them tick and what tricks will work with them to get them to go"* (Charlotte)

The opposite also affected the success or failure of the influence exercise, as illustrated in Matt's answer below. Matt explains that he knows his friend's tastes regarding attending events, which do not always match his own, and when this friend suggests going to an event he immediately evaluates the type of event to see if it matches his tastes. He accepted influence when the event was of his taste and rejected it when it was not. Thus, Matt's **knowledge of the influencer** was instrumental to accepting or resisting persuasion:

> *"she usually asks me "oh let's go to this event" stuff like that, I'll instantly know, no, that she's just being nice, simply because I know that some events she likes to go, and she will bring up somewhere it'll just be quiet events, which I'm like "oh*

yes, sure." But in some instances it will be that she'll bring up like a really noisy event and I wouldn't want to go to that so I would have to say no."

Another participant's (Martha) view highlighted the fact that some friends can develop a more dominant **personality** within the group and that in such cases this can also influence the outcome. She pointed that "*One of my housemates rules the roost so she will usually get her way regardless of how much you say no*". This suggests that compliance with an influence strategy can be a secondary outcome, with the primary objective of the compliance being a desire to avoid unpleasant outcomes such as confrontation between friends, especially if the influencer is perceived to be more dominant or stubborn than the persuaded. Peter's personality, in contrast, did not lead him to insist too much and to accept any reasons as valid reasons, hence reducing the likelihood of succeeding:

> *"Everyone's entitled to their own opinion, everyone's entitled to their own likes and dislikes so if they don't like something that's fine. It's up to them."* (Andrew)

> *"I would, yeah, I would have tried to have persuaded them for a little bit. I won't go on and on and on about it (…) I'd tell them why it was good and why they should, but …. (…) So, [if] they don't have enough money, or if they've got something important in, like early in the next morning. Yeah, I'm pretty, I'm not too pushy so, it's like, even if it's just because they felt a bit tired or whatever like, well I wouldn't force them to go or anything, if they didn't want to do it."*

A further success strategy is related to the influencer's belief of his/her **probability of success**. Through socialization, group members learn about each other, including personality traits and interests, which lead to conclusions about how likely is that they will say yes to suggestions of going to an event. Matt explained this point when he said:

> *"And then I didn't bother asking the others because I was, like, they'll probably all say no, they're boys, don't really go shopping [for vintage clothes at a vintage fair]."*

Lastly, another participant described a process that requires a priori success in persuading the individual that doing it will be a good thing, and then applying other persuasion techniques. This strategy involved **working through layers of resistance**, notably on the 'attitude' barrier before applying other persuasion techniques. Participant Charlotte's answer illustrates this point:

> *"Trying to make them think that they definitely will have a good time. As soon as they think that, you don't have to try so hard because they are basically convincing themselves to go"*
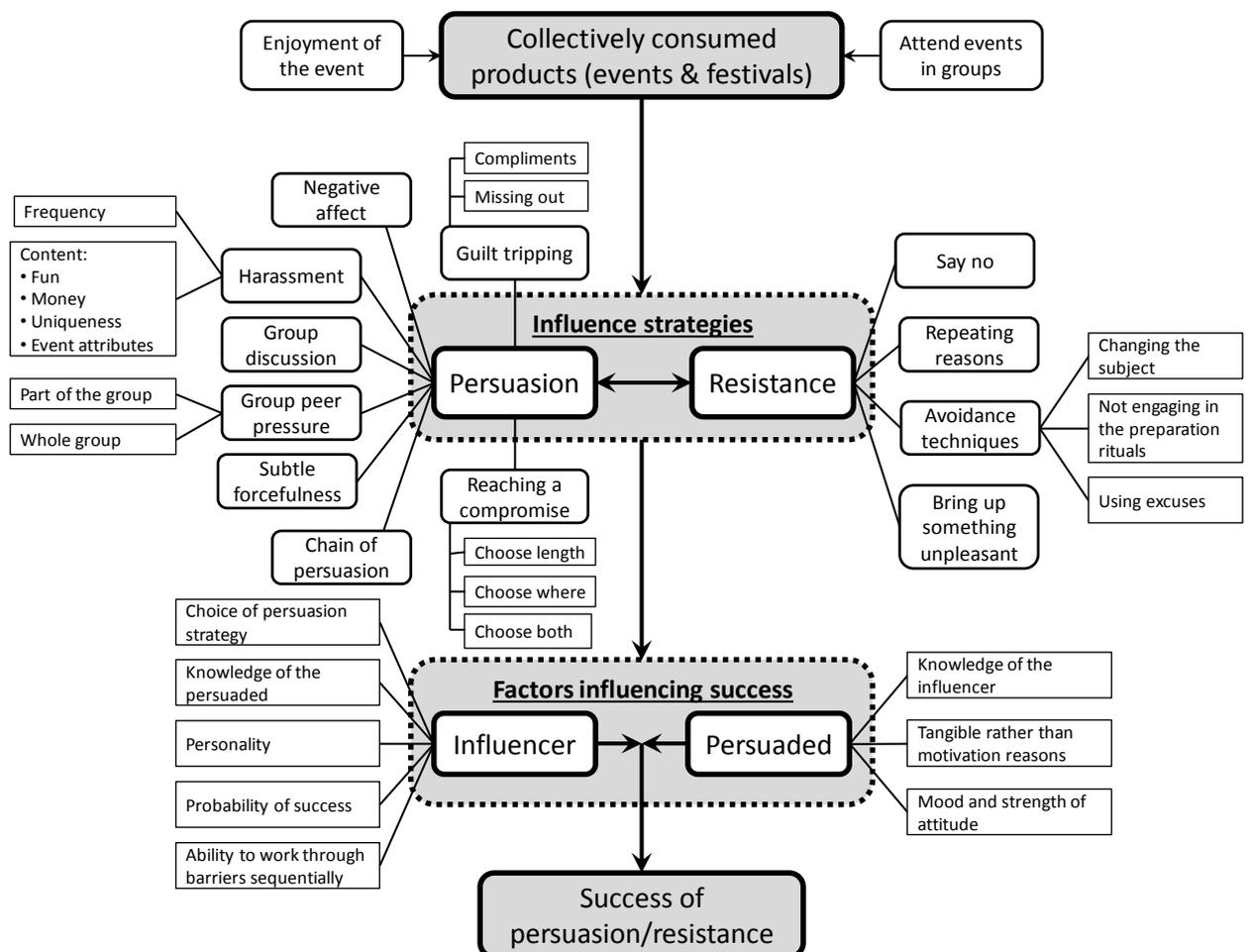
In summary, the success or failure of influence is subjective and varies according to a number of factors related to both the influencer and the persuaded. Overall, these support Brown et al.'s (2008) contention that "the manifestations and effects of peer influence depend on the context in which it occurs" (p. 30).

5. CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this paper was to examine peer influence strategies in the context of purchasing a collectively consumed product – events & festivals. Five female and three male students were interviewed about attending events in groups and the strategies employed when influencing friends or resisting influence from them. This paper has shown that interpersonal influence in the context of event attendance occurs when an individual (or a group of people) tries to influence another individual (or group of people) to attend the event. As a collectively consumed product, there is a strong egoistic motive on the part of the influencer, for the influencer knows that his/her own enjoyment is dependent on whether the persuaded also attends.

The findings of the study are summarized in Figure 1. The persuasion exercise occurs in a context when an individual (the influencer) attempts to persuade friends to also attend the event so that (his/her) experience is enjoyable. In order to secure a positive decision by friends, the influencer deploys a number of strategies. If those friends are not willing to comply with the influencer's requests, they use a range of resistance strategies. The success of the influence exercise is then dependent on a number of factors related to both the influencer and the persuaded (friends).

Figure 1 - Peer influence in collectively consumed products: events & festivals

The consumption of collectively consumed products by individuals who strongly identify with the group involves the deployment of a variety of persuasion and resistance strategies. While the strategies identified are not new, this study provides additional knowledge about how they are deployed. With regards to the persuasion strategies, group persuasion has been identified in the literature (Smith, Louis, and Schultz 2011), although this study found it to be used in two ways: subtly (through group discussions) and overtly (through group peer pressure), with the latter deployed by part of the group or the whole. The whole-group peer pressure strategy has not been identified in the literature before, and it seems that the persuader takes advantage of physical availability of other persuaders. This is due to the fact that students spend substantial amounts of time together and often share the same dwelling. Harassment, another strategy identified in this study, is a well-known persuasion strategy, similar to persistence and nagging (Palan and Wilkes, 1997) or the ask repetitively (Marquis, 2004) strategies. This study went further by suggesting process and content of harassment to be separated, making a contribution to knowledge as research tends to focus on the employment of the strategy rather than how the strategy is employed. The research has also uncovered two arguments used when guilt tripping: complimenting the persuaded and using missing out appeals. Research has identified this strategy (Palant and Wilkes, 1997), but had so far failed to provide detail with regards to how the strategy is deployed.

This research has shown that certain persuasion strategies use specific language techniques, as was the case of using definitive language when deploying harassment strategies and exaggerated language within the guilt tripping strategy. The three language techniques described by Borg (2004), the definitive, the exaggerated and the forcing, are certainly used as a form of persuasion; however, they are not used as sole strategies. Certain strategies are used for influence such as guilt tripping the persuaded. However, influencers recognize that using different types of language for different strategies will enable their success. While the use of language is important to successfully delivering these strategies, they are only incorporated into the delivery of the strategy to effectively administer it. Language is not used as an individual strategy of persuasion; instead language is used to add effect to these strategies.

In this study, resistance strategies employed by students when attempting to reject peer influence were also uncovered. Some of these resistance strategies such as bringing up something unpleasant are only applicable to reference groups who have a history of consuming products together, as they resort to past experiences as a means of producing a resistance argument. While avoidance strategies have been identified in the literature (Knowles and Linn 2004; Jacks and Cameron 2003, Palan and Mallalieu 2012), this research identified the types of avoidance strategies employed, some of which are likely to be employed only in the case of collectively consumed experiences. For example, many events require engaging in pre-event rituals, such as buying clothes or other objects/equipment, or getting ready to go to the event, and failing to engage in these rituals was one of the avoidance strategies.

Moreover, some strategies were not adopted as resistance strategies due to the specific context of the influence exercise. For example, source derogation (Jacks and Cameron, 2003) was not adopted due to the trust students placed in their friends and their interest in maintaining group cohesion. Jacks and Cameron (2003) identified social validation as a resistance strategy, which involves praying for strength to stand

strong on convictions and thinking or talking about the fact that others share one's opinion. This strategy is likely to be employed in highly sensitive topics, closely related to the person's self-concept such as abortion. For more mundane topics, such as going to events, it may not be necessary to resort to such a strategy.

Silvia (2005) has shown that interpersonal similarity enhances the propensity to comply and reduces the predisposition to resist. Given that this study focused on influence among highly similar individuals, it is possible that the lower predisposition to resist leads to unwillingness to use certain resistance strategies. This may also be the reason why fewer resistance strategies were identified when compared to persuasion strategies. Uncovering the range of resistance strategies used by friends contributes significantly towards the current literature due to the scarcity of research on how individuals resist influence in a social context, and more specifically when purchasing jointly consumed products.

Finally, the study has also uncovered the conditions which contribute to the success or failure of the influence exercise, an area that, to be best of our knowledge, the literature has not explicitly covered before. Two highly situational factors appear to influence the effectiveness of persuasion and resistance: mood and mindset of how strongly the persuaded feels about the situation and the nature of the reasons for not being able to attend the event. In addition, success is also dependent on how the influencer approaches the persuasion exercise, including the choice of strategy and the ability to work through layers of resistance. These results shed light on the relationship between the influence context and the effectiveness of persuasion and resistance strategies, a gap in research previously identified in the literature (Manning, Pogson, and Morrison 2008).

5.1. Theoretical and managerial implications

The study contributes to theory in two ways. First, although few, if any, would disagree that group decision-making processes prevail when it comes to collectively consumed products such as events & festivals, little research has been carried out in this area. This is the first study to exclusively examine peer influence in the context of collectively consumed products, notably influence and resistance strategies, and the conditions which can make these effective. Second, this study illustrated the types of strategies peers use when attending events, in particular those used by people who live in a fairly close social system (university study) and, in contrast with family-children influence, who have no formal hierarchy. The context can influence the types of strategies used, for example the nature of the relationship between students which is based on high levels of trust makes it inappropriate to use certain strategies.

The findings of this study also have important implications for marketing practice. First, an understanding of influence and resistance strategies can inform the promotion of the events. For example, the promotional message can emphasize the benefits of attending, which influencers can then use themselves. Without a positive attitude, the persuasion work is less effective and thus promotion should also aim to develop a positive attitude, on which the influencers can build by applying other persuasion techniques. The results have also highlighted some constraints to attendance, notably

time and money, which are perceived as an effective resistance strategy. This means that event organizers should be careful when staging events so as not to collide with busy working (assessment) periods. Also, understanding student finances could help to set the pricing strategy, or to communicate value for money through the promotional message.

The results suggest that students are a vulnerable group that can easily be taken advantage of. Participants recognised that they use, or they see others using, a plethora of influence strategies, and that some are fairly skilled in deploying these strategies to their advantage in a conscious and purposive way. Therefore, young adults who are less aware of the mechanisms employed to influence them, and of the resistance strategies they could deploy to counteract them, are potentially vulnerable to excessive or misdirected influence, with detrimental effects on their wellbeing. Social marketing can assist in addressing this issue due to its focus on building public awareness and changing behaviour that is potentially harmful (Hastings, 2007). The knowledge about influence and resistance uncovered in this research, together with the extant literature on the topic, could provide a basis for developing information material, information sessions or even interactive workshops targeted at these vulnerable groups, alerting them to potentially undue influence and how to react. It may be easier to change the behaviour of the persuaded than of the influencer and therefore, in order to enable young consumers not to succumb to peer pressure, a focus on resistance strategies should be prioritised.

5.2. Limitations and recommendations for further research

The study is obviously not without its limitations. Eight interviews were conducted, which is towards the lower end suggested by Dukes (1984). However, given the fairly high homogeneity of the sample (university students), it can be argued that the number of interviews allowed a deep understanding of the topic to be gained (Jones, Holloway, and Brown 2012). The use of individual interviews, which are very interactive in nature, further facilitated gaining rich and in-depth understanding of the strategies employed. The fact that the study focused on university students could also be considered a limitation. Although they are an appropriate sample to research, this opened up bias towards the types of events that were discussed, such as nightclub events. This may have been due to the fact that these types of events are consumed frequently by students (Mintel 2010). However, strategies might not be transferable to other events, such as those that require the purchase of a (potentially expensive) ticket in advance. Future research could, therefore, focus on a larger number of participants, including other types, so as to provide a deeper understanding of the influence exerted on individuals by friends when attending events.

In addition, peer influence tends to be more intense among individuals who spend substantial time together. University students are among the groups where there is intense and frequent interaction, which means that this study focused on groups towards the extreme side of the interaction continuum. Extending this study to non-students would allow a comparison of influence for specific types of events and between segments. Further research could include a comparison between first and final-year students at university as first-year students are trying to make friends and fit

in whereas final year students have more established friendships. This would provide a good basis to explore the relationship between influence strategies and important aspects of group decision-making, especially those that develop over time such as group leadership and group cohesiveness. Finally, the interviews relied on the participants' own reports of influence and resistance strategies and awareness of these strategies may be limited and therefore this might have compromised the results. For example, the study uncovered more persuasion than resistance strategies. It is possible that participants were less able to recollect and articulate resistance strategies and therefore future studies could, for example, attempt to record conversations within groups and analyse them so as to provide a more naturalistic data collection process. Another plausible explanation for the unbalanced number of influence and resistance strategies is an unconscious inclination on the part of the researcher who collected the data to focus the discussion more on influence than resistance. Researchers wanting to build on this research should be aware of this potential bias and take additional steps to ensure a more balanced discussion.

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