



Social influence in newly formed groups: The roles of personal and social intentions, group norms, and social identity

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ABSTRACT

Intentions to participate in a group activity in newly formed groups were followed over time. Two forms of intentions were examined: traditional behavioral intention to take part in a group-based act (personal intention), and social intentions to act as an agent of the group (social intention). In addition, the study explored other group process variables as distinctive predictors of 'social identification'. The paper concludes with a discussion of the role of social intentions, linking the findings to social identification development and maintenance over time.

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1. Introduction

According to the theory of reasoned action (TRA), intentions to engage in a behavior are derived from one's evaluation of the action (attitude), and whether one believes that significant other people see it as the appropriate way to act (subjective norms) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Bagozzi and Lee (2002) observed that the TRA conceptualizes intentions largely as focusing on individual acts, plans to perform a behavior by oneself (i.e., personal intentions). However, as well as these individually-based intentions, many intentions contain a social element, expressing one's intention to behave in conjunction with others. Thus, a second form of intention is more 'social', in the sense that it implicates 'joint action', where action is conceived as the person acting as an agent of the group.

It is possible to distinguish various types of intentions. For example, concerning social intentions, one form is an intention for the group. Such a notion might be an experience about something expressed as, "I intend that we act" (Bratman, 1997; e.g., "I intend that our family visit Disneyland next August"). A second form is a social intention and could be expressed, as an intention of, or by, the group, in the form, "We intend to act" (Tuomela, 1995; e.g., "We intend to implement a new defensive strategy in our next football match"). In both cases, however, the intention concerns outcomes for the group, not just the self. Distinguishing

intentions in terms of their personal or social focus allows us to consider the roles of not only attitudes and subjective norms, but also of constructs that are central to group processes, specifically group norms and social identification.

Group norms provide a vehicle for social influence through the process of internalization. That is, intentions can be influenced by shared goals held with other members of the group. We conceive of group norms as the degree of shared goals concerning group activities between group members, and the more they are shared, the stronger should be one's intention to be involved in the group activity (Levine & Moreland, 2004).

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) holds that social identity has three components: self-awareness of membership (cognitive), feelings of belongingness to the group (affective), and self-appraised value/importance to the group (evaluative) (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). According to the social identity perspective on groups, and specifically self-categorization theory participation in a group makes social identity more salient and thereby raises the priority of group-oriented goals (Hogg, 1993). Thus, it is not the group norm per se but the psychological fusion between self and group that motivates intentions for and by the group (Abrams & Hogg, 1990).

1.1. The present study

Building on previous work (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002), herein we propose a model and investigate the formation of social intentions in newly formed social groups of UK university students. This allows

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us to explore the role of attitudes, subjective norms, group norms and social identity for informing personal and social intentions, and to examine key differences in their formation and their maintenance for newly formed groups (as opposed to intentions rooted in long-standing friendships). Introductory year UK university students are commonly assigned to ad hoc tutorial groups at the start of the semester. These groups provide a naturalistic context for studying intention formation and the etiology of decision making over time. Importantly, we examine the development of both types of intentions at two points of time: during the first week of group formation and two weeks later, after members of groups had time to become acquainted. Our model was over two time points, so adds an important contribution to what is known about the ontology of social intentions. More specifically, in this study, we measured students' attitudes towards other members of their tutorial groups, subjective and group norms, social identity, and personal and social intentions involving the group. Hypotheses regarding the relationships among these variables are set out below.

1.1.1. Attitudes

Attitudes are predispositions to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a target act (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). We expect that people will have attitudes towards meeting with their contemporaries in tutorial groups, but we do not expect these attitudes to possess causal efficacy. This is because a novel group context requires attitudes to be socially constructed from scratch or based on prior expectations (Schwarz, 2000) that may have no systematic connection with the attitudes of other group members or their intentions. Therefore, it is unlikely that personal attitudes will exert a strong influence on the overall prediction of intentions.

1.1.2. Subjective norms

Subjective norms are summary reactions to beliefs about the expectations of significant others such as friends or family. Influence here is based on the need for approval and has been termed compliance (Kelman, 1974). Because the tutorial groups under study are new, it seems unlikely that pressure from significant others would have a strong influence on intentions. In particular, it is doubtful that subjective norms should play a substantial role in social intentions about activities with a group when that group does not (yet) include people who would count as 'significant others' (cf. Levine & Moreland, 2004).

1.1.3. Group norms

The third possible influence on intentions is group norms. These are based on internalization processes and manifest as shared values or goals (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). This mutuality finds expression in the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) where group members react in kind to support and benefits provided by co-members. Internalization processes also lead to feelings of moral obligation with respect to the welfare of group members and go beyond returning favors to include the initiation of beneficial actions on behalf of the group and its members (Tyler, 1997). Because group norms constitute direct pressures from the group on each individual member, it seems plausible that they should relate to social intentions. Moreover, the more time members spend with a group, the higher are others' expectations that they will contribute positively to the group's goals (Levine & Moreland, 2004), such that the relationship between group norms and social intentions should be stronger with time. In addition, as group norms may gradually gain in power and psychological importance they seem likely to relate more to subjective norms over time too.

1.1.4. Social identity

Social identity creates the potential for social intentions by psychologically embedding the group in the self-concept. Thus, as so-

cial identification with a group develops, issues of importance to the group gain importance to the self (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982). For example, mere assignment to novel groups is sufficient to result in ingroup favoritism which arises from the desire to achieve positive self-esteem by differentiating the ingroup from outgroups (Houston & Andreopoulou, 2003). Social identities have been found to instigate behaviors for the benefit of other group members (Turner, 1991), and to relate, cross-culturally, to employees' turnover intentions (De Moura, Abrams, Retter, Gunnarsdottir, & Ando, 2009). Therefore, we envisage that people who identify more strongly with a group will hold stronger social intentions (which should demonstrate predictive utility above and beyond that of personal intentions alone).

1.1.5. Effect of time

We further hypothesize that the measures of all variables under study will increase in reliability from Time 1 to Time 2, because respondents will experience greater opportunity for reflection and learning as they become more familiar with the members of the group and their joint interests and actions. Additionally, we expect the effects of attitudes, subjective norms, group norms, and social identity to hold with diachronic (i.e., lagged) effects held constant (Fig. 1). The impacts of attitudes, subjective norms, group norms, and social identity on intentions are therefore tested along with lagged effects, of like variables. This provides a more stringent test of hypotheses than that provided by synchronous (cross-sectional) analyses because the effects of stability of intentions and any constant, unmeasured determinants of intentions collinear with these effects, are partialled-out. Finally, we anticipate moderate to high stability in attitudes, norms, group norms, social identity, and intentions over time.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and design

A total of 117 undergraduate students (86 women; 31 men) from the University of Birmingham took part. Respondents were first year students, assigned randomly to tutorial groups. Each tutorial group consisted of eight people. Aside from random encounters students had no formal or systematic contact with one another prior to their first meeting. Data were collected for time 1 during the second week of classes. Data were collected for time 2 during week 4/5, at the group's 3rd meeting.

2.2. Procedure

Participants were recruited following their introductory weekly tutorial meeting. Before the study commenced, participants were asked if they would participate in an "attitudes" study. (All of those approached agreed.) Participants were asked to identify three fellow tutees for purposes of answering questions about the group. To control for the salience of group membership, groups were allocated randomly so that their members either completed the measures alone or in the same room as other group members at time 1 and the then either together or alone at time 2. Those completing measures alone did so in individual cubicles whereas those in the group setting were seated such that participants sat at least one meter apart from one another. The experimenter read aloud standardized instructions, emphasizing the importance of not discussing the study with other students between research sessions. Participants were told that their responses would be kept confidential, and would not impact on tutorial grades. After completing the measures participants were thanked, and told that they would

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