1.6 Social Influence Processes and Social Change: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

1 Nolan et al. conducted a field study on social norms and energy conservation by sending residents messages about neighbours reducing energy use. Briefly outline the main finding of Nolan et al. and its relevance to social-norms interventions in real-world environmental campaigns.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Explain how a social-norms intervention designed to reduce littering in a town could be evaluated, using the Nolan et al. field study approach as a model. In your answer identify one practical method of data collection and one advantage and one limitation of field experimentation for this intervention.

(Total for Question 2 is 6 marks)

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3 Discuss the role of social influence processes in social change. In your answer refer to both majority and minority influence, the roles of normative and informational social influence, social-norms interventions such as Nolan et al., and social cryptomnesia. Use examples or the campaign scenario where appropriate.

(Total for Question 3 is 16 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.6 Social Influence Processes and Social Change: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

states that Nolan et al. found messages saying that neighbours were reducing energy use caused residents to reduce their own energy consumption more than control messages about general environmental reasons oe	**M1**
explains that this supports the use of descriptive social norms to change behaviour in field settings oe	**A1**
adds that the effect indicates people follow perceived common behaviour of others, so highlighting local norms can encourage conservation oe	**B1**
links to relevance: shows social-norms interventions can work outside the laboratory, in real communities oe	**B1**

Answer: Nolan et al. found that messages stating neighbours were reducing energy use produced greater reductions in residents' energy use than general messages; this supports using descriptive social-norms messages in real-world campaigns because people tend to follow perceived common behaviour locally.

Question 2

identifies a field experiment method: e.g. sending tailored messages to households saying most neighbours do not litter, with a control group receiving general anti-littering information oe	**M1**
explains a practical data collection method: e.g. measure litter counts in public bins and on streets before and after messaging, or use unobtrusive observations of people dropping litter oe	**A1**
gives one advantage: high ecological validity since the intervention is tested in a real community and behaviour is observed in a natural setting oe	**M1**
explains why this advantage matters: findings better predict real-world impact and policy relevance than lab studies oe	**A1**
gives one limitation: field experiments have less experimental control and more potential confounding variables, such as weather or other local campaigns oe	**M1**
explains the limitation: uncontrolled variables make establishing a clear causal link between the message and behaviour harder and can reduce internal validity oe	**A1**

Answer: Use a field experiment like Nolan et al.: send descriptive-norm messages to some neighbourhoods and neutral messages to controls, then collect litter counts or unobtrusive observations before and after. Advantage: high ecological validity so results predict real-world behaviour and inform policy. Limitation: less experimental control and possible confounds such as weather or other local events that make causality harder to establish.

Question 3

Level 4 Knowledge of social influence processes and social change is accurate, detailed and well organised. Discussion is thorough and evaluative, integrating AO1, AO2 and AO3 material. The answer considers both supporting and challenging evidence, applies concepts to examples or scenarios effectively, and shows clear chains of reasoning about mechanisms and consequences.	**13-16**
Level 3 Knowledge is clear and mostly accurate with some detail. Discussion includes evaluation and some integration of evidence and application. Some points are developed and supported, though coverage may be less comprehensive or less analytical than top band answers.	**9-12**
Level 2 Knowledge is present but limited or partially accurate. Discussion is largely descriptive with limited evaluation or application. Points are brief and not developed into sustained argument.	**5-8**
Level 1 Knowledge is minimal and statements are superficial. Little or no relevant evaluation or application. Answer may be disorganised or fragmentary.	**1-4**
Level 0 No creditable content.	**0**

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Indicative content:

- AO1: Minority influence processes: consistency, commitment and flexibility help minorities persuade the majority; the snowball effect describes how small shifts can become large-scale change over time.
- AO1: Majority processes: conformity via normative social influence (NSI) and informational social influence (ISI) maintain existing norms but can also enable rapid spread once a new norm is perceived as common.
- AO2: Application: minority campaigns use consistency and commitment to attract attention and credibility; flexibility helps negotiate incremental policy shifts; early adopters create a snowball effect that turns minority positions into majority practice.
- AO2: Nolan et al. shows descriptive norm messages can change real behaviour, demonstrating how majority-like cues can be used deliberately in interventions to encourage desired behaviours such as energy saving or recycling.
- AO3: Evaluation of minority influence: supporting evidence shows minorities can initiate change but effects are often slow and indirect; minority influence is strengthened by clear, consistent messaging but can be undermined by perceived extremism or lack of flexibility.
- AO3: Evaluation of social-norms interventions: field studies like Nolan et al. have high ecological validity and real policy relevance, but field interventions risk confounds and ethical issues if messaging misrepresents behaviour or pressures vulnerable groups.
- AO3: Role of ISI and NSI: ISI explains change where uncertainty exists and people look for information, NSI explains public compliance when people want social approval; both can explain resistance where entrenched norms or distrust reduce the impact of persuasive messages.
- AO3: Social cryptomnesia: societies may adopt new norms but forget the originators; this has implications for historical recognition and for the morale of activists, and means models of change must account for how memory and attribution affect long-term outcomes.
- AO3: Counter-evidence and individual differences: not everyone conforms or changes; personality, prior commitment, cultural context and competing information sources affect whether influence leads to social change; Perrin and Spencer type replications show variability across time and culture.
- AO3: Practical considerations: ethical use of social-norms messaging, the need for accurate descriptive information, monitoring unintended consequences, and combining minority-led activism with institutional change to secure lasting outcomes.

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