

“Foot-in-the-Mouth” Versus “Door-in-the-Face” Requests

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SINCE THE ORIGINAL RESEARCH on compliance without pressure (Freedman & Frazer, 1966), several compliance procedures have been proposed: *door-in-the-face* (Cialdini et al., 1975), *low-ball* (Cialdini, Cacioppo, Basset, & Miller, 1978), *foot-in-the-door* (Freedman & Frazer), and *lure* (Joule, Gouilloux, & Weber, 1989). Some researchers have attempted to combine procedures—for instance, door-in-the-face with foot-in-the-door (Goldman, 1986), foot-in-the-door with low-ball (Joule, 1987), or foot-in-the-door with lure (Joule et al., 1989). Howard (1990) has presented a new compliance procedure, called the *foot-in-the-mouth*: Asking individuals how they felt and having them verbally respond facilitated compliance with a subsequent request for a contribution to charity.

The purpose of the present study was to compare reactions to the foot-in-the-mouth (Howard, 1990) and the door-in-the-face effects. The door-in-the-face procedure consists of preceding the target request by a request so costly that it is unacceptable.

The participants were 90 French homemakers. The experimenter introduced himself as a member of a charitable association that collected food for the needy people of the town. The target request was to obtain a donation.

In the control condition, this target request (for a donation of food) was presented directly. In the foot-in-the-mouth condition, the interaction began with the question “How are you feeling?” After the participant’s answer, the experimenter presented the target request.

In the foot-in-the-mouth–door-in-the-face condition, the participant answered the question “How are you feeling?” Then, the experimenter proposed an unacceptable request (door-in-the-face manipulation): to give food every week for 3 months. After the participant’s refusal, the experimenter presented the target request for a single donation.

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The dependent variable was the percentage of participants who agreed to comply with the target request: 26.6% (8 of 30 participants) for the control condition, 40% (12 of 30) for the foot-in-the-mouth condition, and 60% (18 of 30) for the foot-in-the-mouth-door-in-the-face condition.

Although the control condition and the foot-in-the-mouth condition did not differ significantly (26.6% and 40%, respectively), $\chi^2(1, N = 60) = 1.2, p < .20$, the control condition and the foot-in-the-mouth-door-in-the-face condition differed significantly (26.6% and 60%, respectively), $\chi^2(1, N = 60) = 6.64, p < .05$.

As expected, the combination of the foot-in-the-mouth and door-in-the-face procedures turned out to be more effective, but only slightly so, than the foot-in-the-mouth procedure alone (60% and 40%, respectively), $\chi^2(1, N = 60) = 2.4, p < .12$.

The results point out the effectiveness of the foot-in-the-mouth procedure, especially when combined with the door-in-the-face procedure. The foot-in-the-mouth procedure proved to be efficient, even when the situation was a face-to-face interaction and not a telephone solicitation (Howard, 1990). An interpretation of these results is based on Kiesler's (1971) commitment theory. Kiesler (p. 30) defined commitment as "a pledging or binding of the individual to behavioral acts." One way of increasing commitment is to increase the degree of public explicitness of an act. On the other hand, a major function of commitment is to impart resistance to change. Therefore, by answering the question "How are you feeling?" the participant is committed to a certain way of acting. But the unacceptable request (door-in-the-face manipulation) may have the function of casting doubt on the initial commitment represented by the verbal response to the question. The socially acceptable cost (presentation of the target request), by rendering the initial commitment (foot-in-the-mouth request) salient, leads the participant to accept the target request.

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Received December 29, 1997

Accepted March 16, 1998

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