

Assessing the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door technique of compliance in Indian context

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ABSTRACT

The present study was designed to assess the effectiveness of the Foot in the door technique of Compliance. In compliance, a small and innocuous request is first presented which is then followed by a larger one. The objectives of the present experiment were to investigate the effect of Foot-In-The-Door Condition (small and large request) on Compliance Rate along with assessing the effect of Gender. It was hypothesized that the Compliance Rate in the Foot-In-The-Door Condition would be higher than the Controlled Condition and that there would be significant gender differences in compliance rate. Significant difference between two percentages was calculated. 200 participants (100 males & 100 females) studying in different educational institutions were contacted. Each participant was assigned to different experimental conditions. In each experimental condition, the participants were presented with different kinds of request. The dependent variable in the present study was the subjects' compliance rate to the request. It was measured by the number of participants who agreed to fill the longer questionnaire. The findings showed that the Compliance Rate in the Foot-In-The-Door Condition was significantly higher than that of the Controlled Condition. Also, compliance rate among males was higher than that of the females. The findings have been discussed on the basis of previous researches.

Keywords: *Compliance, Compliance Rate, Foot-In-The-Door Technique, Small, Large Request*

The witty foot-in-the-door technique of compliance is one of the earliest and most extensively researched compliance procedures explored by social psychologists. It has been shown repeatedly that people who are induced to comply with a small request are much more likely to comply with a subsequent (critical) request of greater magnitude than would be the case if there had been no preliminary request (Freedman & Fraser, 1966; Cann, Sherman, & Elkes, 1975; Pliner, Hart, Kohl, & Saari, 1974; Seligman, Bush, & Kirsch, 1976; Snyder & Cunningham, 1975). It is a general tendency of people to get their target request accepted by first presenting a meager request which no body will decline. It is quite commonly seen in day-to-day interactions. Compliance is a powerful process of social influence.

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Assessing the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door technique of compliance in Indian context

Cialdini, a renowned social psychologist wanted to understand why people comply with those requests that they ought to have refused to. He decided that to know more about compliance, the best way would be to study what he labeled as *compliance professionals*-individuals whose success is depended on their capability to get other people to say yes. These people include salespersons, con artists, telemarketers, politicians, professional negotiators etc. Cialdini employed a very simple technique to learn from such people: he, for a short time duration use to conceal his real identity and take jobs in a variety of settings where obtaining compliance was a way of life. Based on his first-hand experience, he concluded that the tactics used in such settings were based on a number of *principles* that compelled people to move in the desired direction by the persuader (*Cialdini, 1994, 2006*). These principles were principle of reciprocity, principle social validation, principle of consistency, principle of friendship/liking, principle of scarcity and authority. Also, there are a number of techniques through which compliance can be gained. These are Door-in-the-face- ask for the stars, Low-ball technique-changing the deal, That's-Not-All Seeking Compliance By Sweetening the Deal, Pregiving: I'll Scratch Your Back If You'll Scratch Mine and Foot-in-the-door: Give me an inch and I'll take a mile.

In India, there are hardly any studies on foot-in-the-door technique of compliance. Hence, the present experiment assessed the efficacy of Foot-in-the-door technique in obtaining compliance. A brief introduction of this technique is as follows:

Foot-In-The-Door: Give Me an Inch and I'LL take a Mile

In this kind of a social influence process first a small and innocuous request is presented and then a larger one. The initial request is so small and insignificant that almost no one would decline it. After the first request is accepted, a larger, more substantial request is presented. The more the subject commits to the small request, the more likely he feels that he is obliged to acquiesce with the larger one. This leads to more compliance to the second larger request. It would not have been possible if the second requested was to be presented alone. It is this second larger request that is more significant to the one gaining compliance.

Here the tendency of people to first concede to a small request and later to comply with a larger one is exhibited. You first get a small *YES* and then later a bigger one. The essence of such behavior is that the small commitment has created an alliance between the requester and the requestee. When a larger request is made, the requester feels obligated to behave consistently with the previous one.

The foot-in-the-door technique was first scientifically tested by Freedman and Fraser (1966). Human beings are fundamentally motivated by the need to belong and this need motivates them to cultivate relationships by complying with others. People are motivated to achieve their goals in the most efficient and accurate manner possible. When faced with compliance-gaining attempts, an individual need to correctly interpret the available information and react as a single inaccurate behavior may result in great loss. Study of compliance enables one to find and observe these means of social influence that people put to use to reach their goals or to attain social or personal gains.

The Foot-In-The-Door technique of compliance can be used for enhancing pro-social behaviour. Researches have shown that social activities like blood-donation and charity actually increased after the use of Foot-In-The-Door technique. Same can be done in real life settings for sensitizing people to come forward for a social cause. There is a dearth of experiments using Foot-In-The-Door technique of compliance in India. The present

Assessing the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door technique of compliance in Indian context

experiment would help in giving valuable inputs regarding the nature of compliance and effects of Foot-In-The-Door technique.

The role personality in compliance has been the centre of interest for many researchers (Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom (1995); Guadagno, Asher, Demaine, & Cialdini, 2001). Individual differences in preference for consistency have been examined by Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom 1995; Council, Grant, Smith, and Matz, 1997. Self-Esteem has been shown to play a significant role in compliance (Gudjonsson, Sigurdsson, Brynjolfsdottir, & Hreinsdottir, 2002; Steele, 1970; Gudjonsson & Sigurdsson, 2003. Guilt is one of the commonest traits to be found in compliant individuals (Freedman, Wallington, & Bless, 1967; Carlsmith and Gross, 1969; Konecni, 1972). Prosocial request (Arbuthnot, Tedeschi, Wayner, Turner, Kressel & Rush, 1977; Carducci & Deuser, 1984, Guéguen & Jacob, 2001; Bloom, McBride, Pollak, Schwartz-Bloom, and Lipkus (2006) have been studied in context of compliance.

The objectives of the present experiment were to investigate

1. The effect of *Foot-In-The-Door Condition* (small and large request) on *Compliance Rate*.
2. The effect of *Gender* on *Compliance Rate*.

On the basis of review of literature, following hypotheses were formulated:

1. The Compliance Rate in the *Foot-In-The-Door Condition* would be higher than the *Controlled Condition*.
2. There would be following gender differences in compliance rate: -
 - 2a The Compliance Rate among males in the *Foot-In-The-Door Condition* would be higher than that among females.
 - 2b The Compliance Rate among males in the *Controlled Condition* would be higher than that among females.

METHODOLOGY

Design

In the present experiment *significant difference between two percentages* was calculated.

Participants

200 participants (100 males & 100 females) studying in different educational institutions like Punjabi University, Patiala; Thapar University, Patiala; and Govt. Bikram College, Patiala (Punjab, India) were contacted. Each participant was assigned to different experimental conditions. In each experimental condition, the participants were presented with different kinds of request.

Experimental Settings

The experimental settings contained two experimentally manipulated conditions:

Foot-In-The-Door Condition: In this condition the subjects were presented with two requests: an initial small request followed by a large subsequent request.

Controlled Condition: In this condition the subjects were presented with only large request.

Procedure

(a) Experimental Task: The experimental task involved filling up of two questionnaires, the small and large questionnaires. The small questionnaire consisted of 15 statements which were to be answered on a five-point rating scale. The large questionnaire comprised of 74

Assessing the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door technique of compliance in Indian context

statements which were to be answered on a five-point rating scale. In the Foot-In-The-Door Condition, request to fill the short questionnaire followed by another request to fill the large questionnaire was made. In the Controlled Condition, the participants were requested to fill the large questionnaire only.

(b) Experimental Manipulation

Foot-In-The-Door Condition: This condition involved first presenting the subject with a request of filling a short questionnaire which hardly took 1-2 minutes. The experimenter told the subject,

“I am a psychology student and there is a survey being conducted that assesses the general attitude of people. There are some questionnaires to be filled. Will you be kind enough to fill them? It will make my work a lot easier. It will hardly take any time.”

After the completion of the questionnaire, the subject was thanked and asked,
“Thank you very much. Your help is much appreciated. There is another questionnaire, a little longer. Will you please fill this too as it will greatly help me.”

At the same time the subject was shown the second longer questionnaire. If the subject accepted the request, he was given the questionnaire along with instructions to fill it and if he/ she declined the request, was simply thanked.

Controlled Condition

This condition involved presenting the subject with the request of filling a longer questionnaire. The experimenter told the subjects,

“I am a psychology student and there is a survey being conducted that assesses the general attitude of people. There are some questionnaires to be filled. They are a little lengthier. Will you be kind enough to fill them? It will make my work a lot easier.”

At the same time the subject was shown the questionnaire. If the subject accepted the request he was given the questionnaire along with instructions to fill it and if he/ she declined the request, was simply thanked.

(c) Dependent Measure

Compliance Rate: The dependent variable in the present study corresponds to the subjects' compliance rate to the request. It was measured by the number of participants who agreed to fill the longer questionnaire.

When the participants completed the dependent measure, they were given a three item Post Experimental Questionnaire (PEQ) to fill. Each item in PEQ (Table No: - 1) was to be rated on a two-point rating scale (Yes/No). Finally, the subjects were thanked for their participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Checks of experimental manipulation

Post Experimental Questionnaire was administered to study effectiveness of experimental manipulation. The significant differences between the two percentages for item I showed that the subjects agreed to the second (large request) because they had already fulfilled the small request (Yes= 72 % and No= 28%, Table No.1). The significant differences between the two percentages for item II showed that the subjects found difficult to say no to the second request after having said yes to the first request (Yes= 68% and No=32%, Table No.

Assessing the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door technique of compliance in Indian context

1). The significant differences between the two percentages for item III showed that subjects refused to comply with second request because they were busy (Yes= 75% and No=25%, Table No.1).

The significant difference between the two percentages of the foot-in-the-door condition and the controlled condition came out to be significant (CR=2.18, $p<0.01$). This shows that compliance rate gained in the Foot-In-The-Door condition was much higher (46%) than that gained in the Controlled Condition (31%). The participants who had previously complied with a small and insignificant request were more willing to comply with the target request than those who were directly presented with the target request.

The significant difference between the two percentages of males and females in the Foot-In-The-Door condition came out to be significant (C.R.=2.8, $p<0.01$). In the Foot-In-The-Door condition males were more willing to comply with second larger request than the female participants. The significant difference between the two percentages of males and females in the Controlled condition came out to be (C.R.=3.5, $p<0.01$). The male participants were more willing to comply with the second larger request even in the Controlled Condition as compared to the female participants. The overall significant difference between the two percentages of males and females also came out to be significant (C.R.=3.6, $p<0.01$). This showed that overall, too, males were more willing to comply with the target request than compared to the females in all the conditions.

Table No: 1 Post Experimental Questionnaire (PEQ)

Items	Yes	No	Critical Ratio
1. Did you agree to second (large request) because you had already fulfilled the first (small request) one?	72%	28%	6.2**
2. Did you find it difficult to say 'no' to second request after having said 'yes' to first request?	68%	32%	5.09**
3. Did you refuse the second request because you were busy?	75%	25%	7.07**

** $p<0.01$

Table No: 2 Compliance Rate of the subjects in Foot-In-The-Door

Foot-In-The-Door Condition	Controlled Condition	Critical Ratio
46%	31%	2.18*

* $p<0.05$

Table No: 3 Compliance Rate of Males and Females in the Foot-In-The-Door Condition

Males	Females	Critical Ratio
30%	16%	2.8**

** $p<0.01$

Table No: 4 Compliance Rate among Males and Females in Controlled Condition

Males	Females	Critical Ratio
22%	9%	3.5**

** $p<0.01$

Assessing the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door technique of compliance in Indian context

Table 1 shows the results of Post Experimental Questionnaire that was used to assess the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation. On being asked if they agreed to the second request because they had already said yes to the first request, 72 % of the subjects answered in yes and 28% answered in no (CR= 6.2, $p < 0.01$). In the second questions the subjects were asked if they found saying no to the second request difficult, 68% said yes and 32% said no (CR= 5.09, $p < 0.01$). On being asked if they refused the second request of the Experimenter because they were busy 75% said yes and 25% yes no (CR=7.07, $p < 0.01$). Thus, overall, the responses to the PEQ shows that the experimental manipulation was effective. The findings prove that there is a significant effect of The-Foot-In-The-Door on Compliance. As shown in Table no 2, Compliance Rate in the Foot-In-The-Door Condition was higher than that of the Controlled Condition. In the Foot-In-The-Door condition, the compliance rate was 46%, whereas in the Controlled Condition it was 31%. The participants who had previously complied with a small and insignificant request were more willing to comply with the target request than those who were directly presented with the target request. The significant difference between the two percentages of the foot-in-the-door condition and the controlled condition came out to be significant (CR=2.18). Thus, the first hypothesis of the present experiment is proven, which was the 'Compliance Rate in the *Foot-In-The-Door Condition* would be higher than that in the *Controlled Condition*.

This could have happened because when an individual complies with a small initial request, he naturally interprets that he is a kind of a benevolent person. In order to retain his Self-Perception (of being benevolent), such an individual is more likely to comply with the second large request (Beaman, Svanum, Manlove, & Hampton, 1974; Pliner, Hart, Kohl, & Sardi, 1974; Jerry M. Burger & Rosanna E. Guadagno, 2003). There is a need in people to view their attitudes and behaviours as consistent and also that they should appear consistent to others too (Cialdini, Trost, and Newsom, 1995; Council, Grant, Smith, and Matz, 1997; Guadagno, Asher, Demaine, & Cialdini, 2001). It is argued that when this notion is applied to the Foot-In-The-Door phenomenon, the need for consistency potentially affects the individual's response to the target request; i.e. the subjects' awareness of their earlier behaviour motivates them to behave in a consistent manner when they are presented with the target request, thus enhancing the Foot-In-The-Door effect.

Size of the initial request is also a significant factor that explains the findings of the present experiment. Since, the size of the first request was of adequate size i.e., neither too big nor too small, compliance was found. The initial request used in Foot-In-The-Door studies is small and easy to carry out that almost every individual agrees to perform it. The individuals reflect back on their reaction to the first request when they decide whether to comply with the target request or not. This is supported by a study in which the subjects were asked to answer a few series of short questions in ascending order in four conditions. After that, all the subjects were again called back to answer 55 more questions. Only those subjects in the conditions who were asked adequate amount of questions agreed to answer the next set of larger series of questions (Seligman, Bush, and Kirsch, 1976).

In the present experiment the subjects actually performed the first request. The performance with the initial request greatly affected the likelihood of the participants to comply with the second larger request. As individuals evaluate their behaviour to decide on their attitude, reflecting back at their actual behaviour provides salient knowledge about one's attitude as compared to a simple verbal promise (Burger, 1999). Table No: 3 shows that the compliance rate among males was higher than that of the females in the foot-in-the-door condition. The difference between the two percentages of males and females for compliance in the Foot-In-

Assessing the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door technique of compliance in Indian context

The-Door condition came out to be significant ($CR=2.8$, $p<0.01$). The significant difference between the two percentages of males and females in the Controlled condition also came out to be significant ($CR=3.5$, $p<0.01$) and has been shown in Table 4. Thus, both parts of the second hypothesis of the present experiment were accepted. The experimenter in the present experiment was a female. Probably this was the reason as to why males complied more than females. The data provided by the studies of Dolinska and Dolinski (2006), shows that both the genders, males and females are quite successful when asking the members of the opposite gender rather than their own.

The findings have following significant implications

Foot-In-The-Door technique works as a strong tool in the area marketing research and the pro-social behaviour. It can help induce people to come forward for organ donation, collection of funds and also to prevent serious illnesses such as cancer. It can produce lasting changes on the pro-environmental behaviour. It can also prove very useful in recruiting teen smokers to the cessation program. Also, the technique can be used to obtain greater motivation in counseling context. Organizations can also increase the sale and demand of their products by convincing prospective buyers using FITD technique.

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Assessing the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door technique of compliance in Indian context

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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