

Critical review of 'the foot-in-the-door technique' study



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Critical Review of ‘ Compliance without Pressure: The Foot-in-the-door Technique’

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Introduction

Foot-in-the-door phenomenon is a technique to get individuals to comply for a larger request by first getting them to agree to a much smaller request. This technique is currently being used in many fields of business to get costumers to purchase what the consumers want. There are many studied that have tested this technique, however the study conducted by Freedman and Fraser stands out as one of the main studies conducted under this topic (Myers, 2013)

In this critical review I will be analyzing the study conducted by Freedman and Fraser in the year of 1996.

Summary

The foot-in-the door technique studied by Freedman and Fraser was done in a way to ensure that subjects complied without pressure from the peers or the experiments as the studied conducted before suggested that subjects are more likely to comply when they are under more pressure. The study was conducted in two experiments.

In the initial part of the experiment, the subjects were divided into four groups namely; the Performance condition, One-contact condition, Agree-

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only condition and Familiarization condition. It was hypothesized that subjects in the performance condition would show higher compliance than subjects in the control group: one- contact condition. In the performance condition the subjects were first asked for a simple request and 3 days later were requested a larger but related request. In the On-contact condition which as the control group was asked only for the larger second request. In the agree-only condition the subjects were asked for the first request but either agreed or not was not given to carry out the request. In the final condition the subjects were given as much as time to familiarize with the experimenter as the first two conditions but no request was made. The dependent variable of the study was whether or not the subject agreed to the larger request while the independent variable being whether or not the subjects were approached with a smaller request initially (Freedman & Fraser, 1966).

The subjects were all housewives from California who were chosen randomly and contacted during the morning hours. The initial request was made either on Monday or Tuesday while the larger request was made 3 days later (Freedman & Fraser, 1966).

It was found that the subjects who did not comply for the initial small request did not comply to the larger request. However the performance group had a compliance of 52% while the other conditions being one- contact, agree only and familiarization had 22. 2%, 33. 3% and 27. 8% respectively. Thus the hypothesis was confirmed. However, a second study was carried out in order to eliminate some issues such as relevance to the subject, reasoning,

similarity between the requests and familiarization (Freedman & Fraser, 1966).

In the second part of the experiment, the 114 female and 13 male subjects were asked to first put up a small sign or sign a petition on the issues of safe driving and keeping California clean. And later were asked to put up a large sign in their lawn. There were four conditions that were defined according to the size of the request and the dimension of the task. It was hypothesized that the three conditions which has similar tasks for both requests would comply more than the control group carrying out two different, unrelated tasks. The subjects were contacted between 1. 30-4. 30 on weekdays and were contacted by both male and female experimenters face-to-face. Subjects who complied to the first request tended to readily comply to the second larger request in the conditions where the two tasks were similar or relevant to each other or were on the same aspect. However, even in the fourth condition where the two requests were not similar to each other still there was more compliance to the second request when the subject first complied to the initial request (Freedman & Fraser, 1966).

Evaluation

The main reason of the conducted study was to test the foot in the door technique in a setting with no pressure. Researches argue that in the first experiment done the subjects complied to the second request due to the familiarization with the experimenter however contrasting with the familiarization group it was not significant enough to conclude that the compliance was due to familiarization. Moreover, they argue that the

compliance to the larger request is due to the obligation the subjects were feeling towards the experimenter after agreeing to the smaller request.

Furthermore, they suggest as the experimenters identified themselves as a “non-profit” organization the subjects would have been more likely to help them out (Freedman & Fraser, 1966).

According to my point of view these two experiments are quite standardized and covers almost all the aspects of reasoning to comply to a request.

However there are a few points in the study which I thought could have been more structured and well planned. As the subjects were mostly females and according to the social psychology principles and studied done females are likely to help people out due to the empathy they feel towards others, thus the study is quite gender biased. Even though a slight amount of males are included in the second experiment the number of male subjects are not enough to make a significant difference in the results. Moreover as the subjects were contacted during the morning hours it could have also affected the results as most housewives are quite relaxed after sending their children to school thus having more time to spend on a phone call.

Furthermore, as the second study is not a replication not the first study and the study design is quite different it is not really possible to compare the two studies for the effects that they were tested to eliminate the issues of the first study. As the second study was also face-to-face contact and the subjects were actively involved they would have been more obligated to help than passively agreeing to help on a call. Moreover, the second experiment was clearer in the requests that were made than the first condition as

subject could have suspected that something was going on when they were
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asked to help on the phone and then asked a much larger help three days later. However in the second experiment the condition and the requests were quite clear and sensible.

Conclusion

The above critical review was done on the experiment conducted by Freedman and Fraser on the foot-in-the-door technique. Even though the study is quite standardized and well carried out trying to eliminate some issues on the first study is it not quite reliable to compare the two studied as the experiments and its conditions are quite different from each other.

However, both experiments on its own were able to prove what they were testing and were well executed. Overall, even though there are minor issues in the study as a whole, this research clearly shows the different effects and aspects of complying to the foot-in-the-door technique when pressure is eliminated.

References

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