

Two experiments were conducted to test the generality of the door-in-the-face compliance technique from nonbusiness to business contexts. Results indicate that the compliance-gaining procedure generalizes if a concession is emphasized by making the second request a smaller version of the first request rather than a new request, and if the second request is made large enough to avoid ceiling effects.

## On Implementing the Door-in-the-Face Compliance Technique in a Business Context

Marketing researchers recently have begun to investigate compliance-gaining tactics that influence behavior directly (Tybout 1978), bypassing the cognitive or attitudinal change proposed as necessary in the persuasive approach to behavioral change (Bass, Pessemer, and Lehmann 1972; Ginter 1974; Sheth and Talarzyk 1972). The behavioral influence strategy receiving the greatest attention in the marketing literature is labeled the "foot-in-the-door" (foot) technique. In using this compliance-gaining tactic, a requester first makes a request so small that nearly anyone would comply, in effect getting a "foot in the door." After compliance with the first request occurs, a second, larger request is made—actually the one desired from the outset. In comparison with control conditions in which only the larger request is tendered, the foot technique has been shown to increase compliance reliably in a number of nonbusiness and business settings (Cann, Sherman, and Elkes 1975; Freedman and Fraser 1966; Reingen and Kernan 1977; Scott 1976; Tybout 1978).

A second behavioral induction technique has been labeled "even a penny will help" (Cialdini and Schroeder 1976). In this approach a standard request for a donation is followed with the phrase, "even

a penny will help." As revealed in experiments by Cialdini and Schroeder (1976) as well as Reingen (1978), the addition of the critical phrase reliably increases the proportion of compliant responses without lowering the average amount donated.

A third behavioral influence technique and the one examined in this article is labeled the "door-in-the-face" (face). In the face approach, the requester begins with an initial request so large that nearly everyone refuses it (i.e., the door is slammed in his face). The requester then retreats to a smaller favor—actually the one desired from the outset. When the second, critical request is tendered, the compliance rate is greater than the levels found when only the smaller request is given in isolation (Cann, Sherman, and Elkes 1975; Cialdini and Ascani 1976; Cialdini et al. 1975).

Most reported tests of the face technique have been made in nonbusiness (charity) situations (e.g., giving blood). The reported applications in noncharity contexts have not proved successful. For example, Tybout (1978) found the technique ineffective in inducing female public aid recipients to enroll in a prepaid health program. Similarly, Reingen and Kernan (1979) found the procedure ineffective in inducing consumers to complete a market research questionnaire.

On the basis of the hypothesized theoretical mediator, the face technique should be effective in business as well as nonbusiness settings. Cialdini and his coworkers (Cialdini and Ascani 1976; Cialdini et al. 1975) have suggested that the effectiveness of the face technique results from the influence of a societal rule for reciprocation of concessions that states, "You

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should make concessions to those who make concessions to you." The requester's movement from the initial, extreme favor to the second, more moderate one is seen by the target person as a concession. To reciprocate this concession, the target must move from his or her initial position of noncompliance with the large request to a position of compliance with the smaller request. By virtue of the requester's illusory retreat, then, normative pressures occur that tend to compel a target person, who has refused to perform an initial favor, to consent to perform a second one.

For the reciprocal concessions procedure to work, the requester must be perceived as making a legitimate request, and a concession must be perceived in the movement from the large to the small request. However, conditions may mitigate the perception of these elements in a business setting. In particular, the natural wariness of consumers when approached by sales personnel may increase the difficulty of inducing the desired impressions.

Study I investigated two possible methods of overcoming factors inhibiting the successful operationalization of the face technique in a business setting. First, to induce the perception of concession, the difference between the large and small requests may have to be larger in business than in nonbusiness contexts. Therefore, the size of the large request was varied. Second, even if consumers perceive the concession, they may question its legitimacy. One possible method of conveying the impression of legitimacy is to emphasize how much compliance with the request would "help out" the company. By emphasizing help, a norm of social responsibility may be engaged sufficiently to cancel the effects of the distrust.

In Study I subjects were approached by experimenters representing a fictitious corporation (the California Mutual Insurance Company) and were asked to complete a survey. For half of the subjects, the helpfulness of completing the survey was emphasized and for half no mention was made of helping. To cross the helping manipulation, the size of the initial, large request was varied. Subjects were informed that the survey would take two hours (very large request) or one hour (large request), or no large request was given (control condition).

## STUDY I

### Method

**Subjects.** One hundred ninety-two subjects of both sexes, chosen when they were alone and moving leisurely along university walkways, were employed in the experiment. Subjects were selected only at times within the slack period between classes. Each subject was approached by a student-experimenter of the same sex. Six experimenters were used, four men and two women.

**Design overview and procedure.** A  $2 \times 3$  factorial design was used (helping emphasized/helping not emphasized and very large/large/no first request). In the large request conditions the experimenter would approach the subject and say:

Hello, I'm doing a survey for the California Mutual Insurance Company. For each of the last 12 years, we have been on campus to gather survey information on safety in the home or dorm. The survey takes about an hour to administer. Would you be willing to take an hour, right now, to answer the questions?

In the very large request conditions, two hours was substituted appropriately for one hour in the paragraph.<sup>1</sup>

After the subject had declined to participate, the experimenter would make the second request. In the help emphasized conditions, the experimenter, after giving the first request, would say:

Oh, . . . well, look, one part of the survey is particularly important and is fairly short. It will take only 15 minutes to administer. If you could take 15 minutes *right now* to complete this short survey, it would really help us out.

In the help not emphasized condition a shortened version of the second request was used:

Oh, . . . well, look, one part of the survey is fairly short. It will take only 15 minutes to administer. Could you take 15 minutes *right now* to complete the short survey?

The no first request conditions served as controls. In the helping condition, phrases emphasizing helping were added. In all other respects the requests were identical. The basic control request, with the helping phrases in parentheses, follows.

Hello, I'm doing a survey for the California Mutual Insurance Company. For each of the past 12 years we have been on campus to gather information on safety in the home or dorm. (Your completion of the survey is particularly important to us.) Our survey is fairly short and will take only 15 minutes to administer. (If you) Could you take 15 minutes right now to complete this short survey (it would really help us out)?

### Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the results of the study. The results were analyzed by means of a series of *a priori* planned comparisons. First, the overall percentages of compliance in the very large and large first request conditions were compared. A chi square test indicated no significant difference ( $\chi^2 < 1$ ), providing no support for the hypothesis that increasing the size of conces-

<sup>1</sup>In this experiment and in the one that follows, more than 95% of the subjects said "no" to the large request. Those who said "yes" were eliminated from the data because to retain them would inflate the results in the predicted direction.

**Table 1**  
PERCENTAGE "YES" RESPONSES TO CRITICAL REQUEST  
IN STUDY I

	Size of first request		
	Very large	Large	None (control)
Help emphasized	50.0% <sup>a</sup>	40.6%	43.7%
Help not emphasized	43.7%	46.9%	25.0%

<sup>a</sup>  $N=32$  in each condition.

sion would produce the face effect.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, all subsequent analyses were performed collapsing over the very large and large request conditions.

The next two *a priori* contrasts were between the combined very large and large request conditions and the control cells, first in the help emphasized and then in the help not emphasized conditions. An effect for the face technique was found only in the help not emphasized conditions ( $\chi^2 = 4.47, p < .05$ ). When helping was *not* emphasized, 45.3% complied with the critical request in the two experimental conditions employing the face technique compared with 25.0% complying with the control request. When helping was emphasized, essentially identical percentages of individuals complied with the critical request (45.3% in the two experimental conditions versus 43.7% in control).

Why would the face effect occur only in help not emphasized conditions? One possible explanation is a "ceiling effect" for the amount of request compliance that can be expected in a business setting. Perhaps the maximum compliance rate ceiling was about 50% for requests from a business representative within the sampled student population. The results indicate that either emphasizing helping or using the face technique resulted in sufficient compliance to reach the maximum obtainable compliance level. Thus, only when helping was *not* emphasized and the face technique *not* used was a baseline rate of compliance obtained. Against this baseline, the effects of the face technique could be observed.

The ceiling effect analysis accounts for previous findings by Reingen (1978). In the experiment, Reingen combined two compliance techniques in a single request, using the "even a penny will help" technique with either the face or the foot technique. In combination, the procedures obtained no additional compliance over that found by using the penny technique alone (penny = 47%, penny + foot = 50%, penny + face = 44%, control = 19%).

If the ceiling effect accounts at least partially for previous failures to obtain the face effect, a second method can be used to test the hypothesis. In previous

research performed by the authors (Mowen and Cialdini 1978), the size of the smaller request was set at 10 minutes. In these earlier studies difficulty was found in obtaining the face effect because of a high rate of compliance in the control condition. Raising the time required to complete the questionnaire to 15 minutes in Study I may have lowered the baseline compliance rate sufficiently to produce the face effect. Thus, in Study II the size of the small request was varied (10 minutes versus 15 minutes) to obtain a direct test of the ceiling effect hypotheses.

Study I differed from previous research tests in another significant respect. In Study I the second request was a smaller version of the first request, whereas in the authors' previous research a different type of second request was made in which the survey was described as involving traffic safety. Possibly when the two requests differ (even though the second is smaller), the perception of a concession is not obtained. Importantly, in the two previous studies which failed to produce the face effect (Reingen and Kernan 1979; Tybout 1978), divergent types of requests were utilized. Therefore Study II included a manipulation of the type of second request.

## STUDY II

### Design Overview and Predictions

Study II had a  $2 \times 3$  factorial design. The first factor (the ceiling factor) manipulated the length of time subjects were told it would take to complete the second survey (either 10 or 15 minutes). In the second factor (the perceived concessions factor) the relationship of the small and large requests was varied. A second survey was either not mentioned (the control condition), described as part of the first survey (clear concession condition), or described as a different survey (ambiguous concession condition).

One of three possible effects was anticipated in the study. First, the face effect may occur only when the second request is large enough to prevent a ceiling effect caused by a high level of control group compliance. Support for the hypothesis would occur if *a priori* planned comparisons revealed that the same survey and different survey cells both differed significantly from the control cell only in the moderate request conditions. A second possible outcome is that the face technique would be found only in the clear concession conditions in which the second request was part of the first request. If this were the case, planned comparisons would reveal the same survey conditions to be significantly different from control and the different survey conditions not to differ significantly from the controls across both small and moderate request conditions. Finally, it is possible that in a business context both of the aforementioned factors are necessary to show the face effect experimentally. If so, planned comparisons would reveal

<sup>2</sup> All probabilities reported for tests of significance are based on two-tailed tests.

a significant difference between experimental and control subjects only when the second request is moderate in size and part of the initial large request. Thus, in the 10-minute, second request conditions, no significant effects would be found. However, in the 15-minute, second request conditions the same survey cell would differ from the different survey and control conditions.

### Method

Two hundred sixteen subjects participated in the study. They were selected by the same procedures as in Study I.

In Study II the first request made in the experimental conditions was identical to that used in Study I and was always for one hour. In the second request, when the survey was described as part of the larger survey on traffic safety, the experimenter stated:

Oh, . . . well, look, one part of the survey is fairly short. It will take only 15 (10) minutes to administer. Could you take 15 (10) minutes right now, to complete this short part of the survey?

When the survey was described as a new one, the experimenter stated:

Oh, . . . well, we also have another shorter survey that is on safety in the home or dorm. It will take only 15 (10) minutes . . . etc.

The control conditions were identical, except for the time needed to complete the survey.

Hello, I'm doing a survey for the California Mutual Insurance Company. For each of the past 12 years we have been on campus to gather information on safety in the home or dorm. Our survey is fairly short and will take only 10 (15) minutes to administer. Could you take 10 (15) minutes right now to complete this short survey?

### Results and Discussion

Table 2 gives the results of the second study. First, two overall chi square tests were performed comparing frequencies in the small and moderate request conditions. In the small request conditions, no effect was obtained ( $\chi^2 = 2.03$ , d.f. = 2,  $p > .30$ ). In the moderate request conditions, the effect was significant ( $\chi^2 =$

6.98, d.f. = 2,  $p < .05$ ). Next, individual comparisons were made in the moderate request conditions, revealing that the same survey condition differed significantly from both the different survey ( $\chi^2 = 5.62$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < .02$ ) and control conditions ( $\chi^2 = 4.55$ , d.f. = 1,  $p < .05$ ). This pattern of results fails to fit that expected from either the ceiling or the clear concession hypotheses. Support for the ceiling hypothesis requires that both the same survey and different survey cells differ from the control cell in the moderate request condition. Support for the clear concessions hypothesis requires obtaining the face effect in both small and moderate request conditions. The results, however, do strongly support the hypothesis that both factors are necessary to consider in operationalizing the face technique. That is, the finding that the same survey cell differed significantly from the different survey and the control cells in the moderate request conditions shows that the third possible outcome was obtained.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of the two studies provide substantial insight into the mechanisms operating in the face technique. First, researchers should note that ceiling effects can mask the operation of the procedure. This finding has importance because many researchers, including the authors, assume that in pretesting a 50 or 60% compliance rate is low enough to avoid ceiling effects. The results indicate that the control compliance rate should be 35% or less in marketing contexts. The practical implication of the ceiling effect finding is that the size of the second request can be increased without lowering the overall compliance rate if the face procedure is used. For example, in a market survey the length of the critical second survey could be increased, thereby providing additional information on the respondent.

A second finding of this research is the importance of making the concession unambiguous. By making the second request a reduced portion of the original, large request, the researcher can increase the target's perception of a concession. The clear perception of a concession then strongly invokes the norm that concessions should be reciprocated. The implication of this finding to marketing researchers is that the content and nature of the large request should be carefully considered. First, the initial request should be perceived clearly by respondents as a larger version of the second request. Second, because a small percentage of respondents will agree to the larger request, important additional information can be gained if its content is thoughtfully developed.

The results of the authors' research suggest reasons for Tybout's (1978) failure to obtain the face effect. In her experiment the large request consisted of asking the targets to volunteer ". . . to work five hours a week every week for the next year telling people

**Table 2**  
PERCENTAGE "YES" RESPONSES TO CRITICAL REQUEST  
IN STUDY II

Ceiling factor (size of 2nd request)	Perceived concessions factor		
	Same survey	Different survey	Control
Small (10 minutes)	69.4% <sup>a</sup>	55.5%	69.4%
Moderate (15 minutes)	58.3%	30.6%	33.3%

<sup>a</sup> N=36 in each condition.

about the prepaid plan" (p. 233). The critical request was then made in which the targets were asked to sign up for the plan. An examination of the relationship between the two requests indicates that the moderate request was not a smaller version of the large request, but a completely separate proposal. Further, it is unclear that targets would view the critical request as a significantly smaller task than the first task, because of the importance of the outcome of joining the plan. Thus, the operationalization of the face technique by Tybout was unlikely to have invoked for norm of reciprocal concessions necessary for the success of the compliance-gaining tactic.

The authors' research may also account for the findings of Reingen and Kernan (1979), who found that in the face conditions significantly less compliance occurred than in both control conditions and foot-in-the-door conditions. For the large request they asked subjects to allow an interviewer into their home and to spend three hours completing a questionnaire on consumer reactions to soft drinks. The critical request consisted of asking the subjects to complete a six-page mailed questionnaire on their perceptions of a new line of cars. Because Reingen and Kernan used two different types of requests, rather than clearly making the critical request a reduced version of the large request, subjects may not have perceived that a concession had been made. Consequently, the norm of reciprocity was not invoked and compliance remained low. The significantly lower level of compliance in the face condition may have resulted from a self-perception effect. That is, because the norm of reciprocal concessions was not engaged, the behavior of turning down the first request led subjects to self-attribute an unfavorable disposition toward complying with the second request.

One remaining question is why the face technique is more difficult to apply in a business than a charity context. In particular, in a charity context it appears unnecessary to make the second request a part of the first request. The authors believe that when targets recognize that the request comes from a business organization, defensive mechanisms are engaged. Targets become suspicious and skeptical of the motivations of the requester. It therefore becomes more difficult to create the impression that the concession made in the second request is legitimate. Thus, by making the second request a part of the first, the appearance of concession is increased and the effect obtained.

Several areas remain to be explored in future research. First, the generality of the face technique needs to be demonstrated across divergent types of business organizations. Future research should sample from business organizations other than insurance companies. Second, the face procedure should be tried in other request contexts. The authors' research revealed the effectiveness of the approach in increasing the

compliance with requests to complete a marketing survey. Could bill collectors also use it to increase the repayment rate by first demanding payment of the entire bill and then asking for a smaller portion of the debt?

A more substantive research direction is indicated, however. With the addition of the authors' research to the literature, three techniques have been identified which increase compliance with requests in business contexts—foot-in-the-door, door-in-the-face, and even-a-penny. Moreover, the results of the help emphasized condition in Study I suggest that even the addition of the innocuous statement, "it would really help us out," may increase compliance. The research question arising from the increasing number of potentially useful influence strategies is whether a more basic process can account for all of the findings. One possible mediator is ego protection. Individuals may perceive that they will be disliked if they break an operative norm, such as not reciprocating favors (door-in-the-face), being inconsistent in their behaviors (foot-in-the-door), or acting penuriously (even-a-penny). Each of the behavioral induction techniques may act by subtly placing the target's ego in jeopardy, thus causing the person to comply with the request in defense of ego. If the underlying mediator is ego defense, one can expect to identify numerous methods of increasing compliance. The key point for researchers and practitioners is to gain an understanding of the particular norms operating in a setting and to devise situations in which the target will perceive that he or she will violate the norm by not complying.

In a more practical sense, the authors' findings suggest a number of conclusions. First, to implement the face technique, one must make the second request a smaller version of the large request, not a completely new request. Second, the face may allow the requester to make a larger critical request than is possible with a simple direct solicitation. In other words, acceptable levels of compliance can usually be gained for very small requests. The use of the face technique may allow the delivery of a relatively larger critical request without reducing the compliance rate below acceptable levels. Third, because a small proportion of individuals comply with the large request, practitioners should have available a means for utilizing such individuals. For example, if the request involved a market survey, a long in-depth version should be available. Finally, practitioners should be alert to the norms governing behavior in particular situations. If ego defense mediates the operation of behavioral induction techniques, additional methods may be available to increase compliance.

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