FOOT-IN-THE-DOOR TECHNIQUE USING A COURTSHIP REQUEST: A FIELD EXPERIMENT

NICOLAS GUÉGUEN
Université de Bretagne-Sud

MARIE MARCHAND
Université de Provence

ALEXANDRE PASCUAL
Université de Bordeaux 2

MARCEL LOUREL
Université de Rouen

Summary.—"Foot-in-the-door" is a well-known compliance technique which increases compliance to a request. Many investigations with this paradigm have generally used prosocial requests to test its effect. Evaluation of the effect of foot-in-the-door was carried out with a courtship request. 360 young women were solicited in the street to accept having a drink with a young male confederate. In the foot-in-the-door condition, before being solicited to have a drink, the young woman was asked to give directions to the confederate or to give him a light for his cigarette. Analysis showed foot-in-the-door was associated with greater compliance to the second request. The theoretical implication of such results with this nonprosocial request are discussed.

For many years now, social psychologists have studied several procedures used for gaining compliance to various requests (Pratkanis, 2007); however, the effects of such procedures on courtship requests were rarely examined by scientists.

In 1966, Freedman and Fraser convinced 43% of a group of housewives to allow a team of five or six investigators to stay at their homes for 2 hr. to make an inventory of all products used in cleaning and cooking. Three days before this visit, the women were asked to fill out a questionnaire of eight questions concerning their consumption. Without this preliminary request, only 22% of the persons accepted the visit of the investigators. This technique of presenting the subject with a small request before submitting the request sought has been called the "foot-in-the-door" technique. Various meta-analyses of numerous studies on this technique have shown its effects on compliance (Beaman, Cole, Preston, Klentz, & Mehrkens-Steblay, 1983; Dillard, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1984; Fern, Monroe, & Avila, 1986; Burger, 1999; Pascual & Guéguen, 2005). It is well-known that this technique is efficient for influencing people to respond positively to various requests. Most requests have been prosocial, e.g., giving someone a dime (Harris, 1972; Guéguen & Fischer-Lokou, 1999), answering a questionnaire (Hornik, Zaig, & Shadmon, 1991), and persuading students to take a card designating them

1Address correspondence to Nicolas Guéguen, Université de Bretagne-Sud, UFR LSHP, 4 rue Jean Zay, BP 92116, 36321 Lorient Cedex, France or e-mail (nicolas.gueguen@univ-ubs.fr).

DOI 10.2466/PR0.103.2.529-534
as an organ donor (Carducci, Deuser, Bauer, Large, & Ramaekers, 1989). However, the technique’s efficiency is not limited to prosocial requests, as Katzev and Johnson (1983) showed in having people decrease their energy consumption at home. Dolin and Booth-Butterfield (1995) found that adult women who were assigned to a foot-in-the-door treatment during a health fair at a shopping mall agreed more favorably to a request to schedule a gynecological examination. Goldman, Creason, and McCall (1981) reported its efficiency in convincing people to call individuals selected from the telephone directory and ask them to take a survey for the profit of a private organization. Guéguen and Jacob (in press) found that foot-in-the-door in a selling context (a footwear store) was associated with greater compliance to the sale suggestion addressed by a seller. Thus, these studies show the foot-in-the-door technique can be applied to requests other than prosocial ones.

In the literature, the foot-in-the-door effect is theoretically explained by self-perception theory (Freedman & Fraser, 1966), in which the preliminary request was assumed to make participants feel they are helping other people or caring for others. Once such a perception is activated, it favors compliance to a second request. The explanation based on self-perception is perhaps readily explained by the prosocial nature of many tested requests.

Yet a few studies show that a positive effect of foot-in-the-door can be obtained with other requests, so use of the self-perception theory could be questioned and other explanations required. The present study was done to explore the range of influence of the foot-in-the-door procedure and its common explanation. The current experiment tested the effect of the foot-in-the-door technique on courtship behavior.

2. Method

The participants were 378 young females approximately 18 to 22 years of age, who were walking alone in several shopping areas of a medium-sized city (population greater than 60,000) in a very attractive spot of the West Atlantic Coast in France. Participants were assigned to the three experimental conditions using a random distribution. Data of 18 participants in both foot-in-the-door conditions were excluded from analysis because they did not agree with the first initial request. Three young men ages 19 to 21 years acted as confederates. They were neatly dressed in jeans and sneakers like most young people of their age.

In the first experimental condition, a confederate approached a young woman with a cigarette in one hand. In France, the rate of female smokers ages 18 to 24 years is about 38% (Mermet, 2007), and in the town in which the experiment was carried out, 1 young woman out of 11 had a cigarette in hand when walking in the street. Given such a rate, it was easy to obtain a sufficient sample size. The confederate approached the target with a smile
and said, “Hello, I’m sorry to bother you but would you have a light for my cigarette?” If the young woman responded, “Yes,” then the confederate waited until the young woman gave him a light and then said, “Thank you very much. Are you busy now? If not, we could have a drink together, if you have some time.” If the young woman responded that she had no light (6 participants), the confederate said, “It doesn’t matter,” and then solicited the young woman to have a drink in the same way. In the second experimental condition, a confederate approached a young woman and said, “Hello, I’m sorry to bother you but I am looking for the Place de Libération.” If the young woman responded that she knew where the place was, the confederate waited until she gave him directions and then said, “Thank you very much. Are you busy . . .” and presented the same request. If the young woman responded that she did not know this place (12 participants), the confederate said, “It doesn’t matter,” and then addressed his request. In the control condition, a confederate directly addressed the second request to a young woman in this way, “Hello, I’m sorry to bother you but I was wondering if you were busy now. If not, we could have a drink together if you have some time.” In these three experimental conditions, the three confederates were instructed to act in the same way and had practice sessions before the experiment began.

In this experiment, compliance with the proposition to have a drink with the confederate was the only behavioral dependent variable measured. However, confederates were also instructed to take down the possible justification of the participants’ refusals. In most cases, the response was only “no” or “no thanks,” but some of the women justified their refusal because they were in a committed relationship (“No thanks, I am married,” “I am engaged,” “I am with someone at the moment”) or because they had no time (“I have no time,” “I have something else to do,” “I am in a hurry”). If the participant accepted the confederate’s solicitation, the confederate debriefed her. She was told that she had participated in an experiment on social behavior in a courtship context. A preprinted information form was then given to the participant who was asked to provide information for the experiment (name, age, address, phone number). Information concerning the role of the experimenter and our laboratory web site was indicated on the form. The encounter ended with the confederate saying, “Thanks for your participation, and I’m sorry that I’ve taken up your time. Perhaps we could meet another time. Bye!” If the participant refused, the confederate was instructed to say, “Too bad. It’s not my day. Have a nice afternoon!” and to wait for another participant. Each confederate tested 42 participants in the three experimental conditions.
RESULTS

Differences in frequency of response among the three confederates were not significant, hence data were collapsed across confederates. In the two foot-in-the-door conditions, the data of participants who did not perform the initial request were excluded from analysis (6 in the first request for a light and 12 in the first request for directions). The numbers of young women who accepted the request of the confederate was 4/120 (3.3%) in the control condition, 18/120 (15.0%) in the first foot-in-the-door condition (request for a light), and 19/120 (15.8%) in the second condition (request for directions). The difference among conditions was statistically significant \( \chi^2(N=360) = 11.62, p < .005; \ r = .18 \). Additional comparisons showed that the control condition was significantly different from the first foot-in-the-door condition \( \chi^2(N=240) = 9.81, p < .002; \ r = .20 \) and the second foot-in-the-door condition \( \chi^2(N=240) = 10.82, p < .001; \ r = .21 \). Further, these two conditions were not significantly different \( \chi^2(N=240) = 0.03, \ ns; \ r = .01 \).

Additional analyses were performed using information given by some participants who refused the confederate’s request. Indeed, some of the young women who refused the courtship request justified their refusal by telling the confederate that they were married, engaged, or with a man. The rate of young women who justified their refusal in this way was 31/116 (26.7%) in the control condition, 26/102 (25.5%) in the first experimental condition (request for a light) and 24/101 (23.8%) in the second one (request for directions), but the overall difference was not statistically significant \( \chi^2(N=319) = 0.25, \ ns \); neither were differences between pairs.

In some other cases, the young women turned down the confederate’s proposition by telling him that they did not have enough time. The rate of refusals using this justification was 22/116 (19.0%) in the control condition, 19/102 (18.6%) in the first experimental condition (request for a light) and 20/101 (19.8%) in the second one (request for directions). The overall difference among conditions \( \chi^2(N=319) = 0.05, \ ns \) or between pairs was not statistically significant. Thus, the reasons addressed by some women to justify their refusal of the confederates’ propositions remained the same in the three experimental conditions and suggested the samples were similar.

DISCUSSION

In this experiment, the first request addressed to women by a male confederate predisposed them to accept a second request. Such results are congruent with previous studies that found that the foot-in-the-door technique increased compliance to a request (Beaman, et al., 1983; Dillard, et al., 1984; Fern, et al., 1986; Burger, 1999; Pascual & Guéguen, 2005). However, the present study extends the influence of the technique to another kind of request. In most previous studies of this kind, compliance with
prosocial requests was the dependent variable. In some studies, the efficiency of the procedure was not limited to prosocial requests (Goldman, et al., 1981; Katzev & Johnson, 1983; Dolin & Booth-Butterfield, 1995; Guéguen & Jacob, in press); however, in the present study the paradigm used requests in a courtship relation for the first time.

The effect of foot-in-the-door has been explained theoretically using self-perception theory (Freedman & Fraser, 1966): the preliminary request makes the participant feel that she is someone who helps other people or cares for others, which leads to compliance more favorable with a second request of help in a congruent manner. In the present experiment, in the foot-in-the-door condition, the first request was prosocial, but the second request was clearly a courtship request and not congruent with the perception activated with the first request for help. In this experiment, then, the self-perception theory may perhaps not be appropriate.

Similarly, consistency is often cited in support of the foot-in-the-door effect (Baer, Goldman, & Juhanke, 1977; DeJong, 1981; Eisenberg, Cialdini, McCreath, & Shell, 1989). This notion posits that people tend to act in ways consistent with their beliefs and values. A participant who perceives herself to be a nice, helpful person would be predisposed to comply with a request for a cigarette or directions, but this would not explain the greater likelihood of engaging in courtship behavior. Rather, present efficiency of the technique might be accounted for by familiarity. Guéguen (2004) reported that someone introduced through a photograph and a little information (last name, first name, age ...) was helped more favorably a few minutes later when the person dropped pamphlets on the floor. This effect of familiarization created by the first request was proposed by Freedman and Fraser (1966), who found that different amounts of familiarization provided during a first request in three foot-in-the-door conditions were associated with differing compliance with a second request. Baer, et al. (1977) reported mere interpersonal contact between two strangers facilitated prosocial behavior. In their experiment, relative to the control condition, compliance with a request was the same in foot-in-the-door paradigm as in a condition in which interpersonal contact was made.

Of course, the explanation in terms of familiarity is clearly speculative given the present comparisons only focus on participants' behavior. Further studies exploring the perception of familiarity of the solicitor by the participant are now necessary when the foot-in-the-door technique is employed with a courtship solicitation.

REFERENCES


Accepted September 22, 2008.