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**On applying the knowledge on social influence techniques**

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### Abstract

The article contains a review of studies on sequential social influence techniques. A great body of research has proved that the foot-in-the-door, door-in-the-face and low-ball techniques are effective tools for marketing and charity uses. On the other hand, there is also data showing some limitations in the practice of these strategies. The possible reasons for both successes and failures in implementing social influence techniques in practice are discussed.

## On applying the knowledge on social influence techniques

### ARE PEOPLE WILLING TO HELP?

While walking in a shopping center or strolling in the street we are frequently asked to be obliging. It becomes customary to be given brochures inducing us to buy something, take advantage of some services or to act altruistically. People collecting money for some charity cause do not surprise us. Requests of different kinds become a part of our everyday life. But are we willing to agree with this multitude of requests? Are we vulnerable to the sight of a beggar, to a child brought up in the street asking for a coin or any other people in need?

There rises a question whether to agree with the variety of requests of both a commercial and prosocial character. In many such situations people automatically refuse requests (Dolinski, 2000). There are several reasons for such insensibility to other people's problems. The first one is connected with cognition processes, especially attention. It is said that our mental resources are limited (e.g. Kahneman, 1973), which makes people unable to get involved in too many activities at the same time. Thus, being under pressure from our everyday duties we select information and chose only the most important matters for ourselves. It has been shown that being in a hurry, people are less eager to help others in need (Darley and Batson, 1973).

Other reasons for refusing others people's requests are often the unclear, ambiguous intentions of their appeals to buy goods or to give money. After fulfilling some such favors we may feel we have been manipulated. Strangers who ask for help are frequently believed to deceive others. After several episodes of listening to somebody's speech and agreeing with his or her request, which then occur to be mystifying, we learn to refuse. Therefore, inhabitants especially of big cities are insensible to appeals for help. They sometimes associate helping with being manipulated, which has a negative meaning. People asking for help use various kinds of

tricks to increase their efficacy. Social psychology has described and verified empirically some of these tricks.

#### HOW TO INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD OF HELP-GIVING?

Freedman and Fraser (1966) began research on social compliance techniques. The investigators wondered how to induce people to comply with a major request without introducing external pressure (for instance by using incentives or threats). They showed that the rate of compliance with a large request can be increased by first making people acquiesce to a small favor. Freedman and Fraser called the procedure of inducing compliance without pressure the “foot-in-the-door” technique. The most frequently invoked mechanism underlying the effectiveness of this strategy is the self-perception process (Bem, 1967, 1972). A person who has complied with the first request, while searching for possible explanations of his behavior, infers his inner states from his or her overt behavior. This change in self-image is believed to be responsible for the increase in subsequent compliance rates.

Since the original Freedman and Fraser studies were published, a great amount of research using the foot-in-the-door tactic revealed its effectiveness (Lepper, 1973; Miller and Suls, 1977; Snyder and Cunningham, 1975; Uranowitz, 1975). Moreover, numerous meta-analyses have confirmed greater compliance with a major request followed by the performance of a minor one (Beaman, Cole, Preston, Klentz and Steblay, 1983; Burger, 1999; DeJong, 1979; Dillard, 1991; Dillard, Hunter and Burgoon, 1984; Fern, Monroe and Avila, 1986). The foot-in-the-door effect seems to be a universal strategy. On the other hand, the research conducted by Freedman and Fraser was the beginning in social psychology to examine the effect of a variety of factors on the likelihood that a person would comply with an uneasy request. Various compliance procedures have been proposed. This article is concerned with one group of social influence strategies -

sequential social influence techniques. This term was first introduced by Seibold, Cantrill and Myers (1985, after: Dolinski, 2005) and refers to a principle: commit a person to performing a target behavior by first proposing him an initial request that is more or less linked to the target behavior. Apart from the foot-in-the-door technique it is conventional to classify the door-in-the-face and the low-ball strategy as sequential techniques (Dolinski, 2000, 2005).

The door-in-the-face strategy similarly, as in case of the foot-in-the-door, involves asking for two requests. However, here the initial favor is relatively large, one which the receiver rejects. Immediately after he or she refuses the first request a second, target request is made (Cialdini, Vincent, Lewis, Catalan, Wheeler and Darby, 1975). Meta-analyses conclude that the door-in-the-face technique is an effective means of enhancing compliance (Dillard, Hunter and Burgoon, 1984; Fern, Monroe and Avila, 1986, O'Keefe and Hale, 1998). Several explanations for this strategy have been proposed, but reciprocal concessions is one of the most important. Cialdini and his colleagues (1975) argue that the "rejection-moderation" situation is analogous to a bargaining interaction. The receiver perceives the reduction in magnitude of the initial large request compared with the second smaller request as a concession made by the message source. He or she feels compelled to make a concession and agrees with the target request. Other researchers suggest that a person feels guilty after refusing the first demand (O'Keefe and Figgé, 1997). To reduce this negative emotion a person fulfils the critical request.

The third sequential social influence technique, the low-ball strategy was described by Cialdini and his colleagues (Cialdini, Cacioppo, Basset and Miller, 1978). In this technique a person is led to immediately accept performing a target request without knowing the full cost of the behavior. Cialdini and his colleagues noticed that car sellers often use this tactic. They offer their clients an extremely attractive price. Once a person makes a decision to buy the newly promoted car, the dealer removes the price advantage by saying for instance that the originally

cited price did not include an expensive option that the consumer had assumed was part of an offer. The mechanism responsible for the efficacy of the low-ball technique is commitment (Kiesler, 1971, after: Cialdini et al., 1978). A person who is committed to a decision is unlikely to alter it and feels pressure to be consistent and act according to their previously made decision.

#### HOW TO USE SEQUENTIAL INFLUENCE TECHNIQUES IN THE FIELD OF TRADE?

What is special about social influence techniques is that their procedures are studied not only in laboratories, but they remain effective outside in natural situations. The majority of social influence strategies were described and empirically verified on the basis of real life observations (Cialdini, 1994). The foot-in-the-door tactic has gained the greatest interest among the sequential social influence techniques. As it has been the most frequently examined strategy, the variety of topics and purposes of its procedures in the browsed literature is also astonishing. The review of studies (DeJong, 1979) points out the diversity of demands used in the foot-in-the-door technique. Participants are often asked to answer several questions on soap, beverages, television habits or local community (quality of living in the certain district or ecology). The requests sometimes concern writing an essay or signing a petition against pollution in the city or protecting the rights of disabled persons. It is also essential to highlight the results of studies showing multiple uses of the foot-in-the-door technique. The strategy of increasing the magnitude of requests proved to be effective for marketing and charity uses (e.g. Dillard, 1991).

Asking the appropriate sequence of questions increases the effectiveness of obtaining answers for private, confidential issues introduced in telephone surveys (Hornik and Zaig, 1990, 1991). The researchers proved that both foot-in-the-door and low-ball are effective. It was the first Freedman and Fraser's (1966) study, which indicated that the foot-in-the-door tactic is a helpful tool for a Research and Development officer. Graduating the degree of requests difficulty

increases the chances of completing time absorbing surveys or participating in other forms of market research. Using this strategy frequently enabled its user to induce people to reveal their consumer attitudes concerned with e.g. preference of radio programs (e.g. Goldman, Creason and McCall, 1981) or taking part in product tasting (e.g. beverages, see: Tybout, Sternhal and Calder, 1983).

Sharkin, Mahalik and Claiborn (1989) revealed that the strategy is efficient not only in taking behavioral indices into account but it may also lead to an increase of motivation. The researchers, while conducting a workshop on communication, observed higher motivation to improve one's communication skills after inducing participants to write down their strong and weak sides.

The low-ball technique is also a fairly effective method when taking commercial purposes into account. Maj (2002) indicated that using this tactic leads to bigger percentages of sold books. He first offered students a discount for educational materials. He asked participants willing to take this opportunity to sign up on a list. In the low-ball condition he then told students he made a mistake and explained that the real price was almost twice as high. In the control condition students were informed about the real price from the very beginning. Those who were led to make a decision felt engaged and more willing to buy books even without a discount. Joule, Guilloux and Weber (1989) introduced the lure tactic, which is a modification of the low-ball strategy. It is particularly fruitful during sale periods at shops. Salespeople display discounted pieces of clothing in a store window. When a client wants to benefit from the exceptional offer he is informed there is nothing in his size. Just before leaving the shop the customer is shown something else which resembles the desired bargain but it is at the regular price. Joule and his colleagues proved in a series of studies that the lure tactic is effective: people stumble into the pitfall of their own decisions.

## IS IT POSSIBLE TO IMPLEMENT SOCIAL INFLUENCE TECHNIQUES FOR CHARITY PURPOSES?

In summary, both the foot-in-the-door and the low-ball techniques are tremendously helpful in trade practice. The use of the door-in-the-face seems more problematic in this field. Patch (1986, 1988) showed that this tactic is rather more effective when it is used “in good causes”, with prosocial appeals. Moreover, meta-analyses (Dillard, Hunter and Burgoon, 1984) indicate that the “rejection-moderation” strategy works when the message source represents civic and environmental organizations but not private marketing firms. In Patch’s (1986) study the door-in-the-face was fruitful only when a person, who formulated requests presented himself as a member of “Parents for Good Programming, a nonprofit organization concerned with public interest”. Contrariwise, the foot-in-the-door effect worked either when the experimenter represented a nonprofit organization or “Multi-media Programming Associates, a consulting group for commercial television interests”. This pattern of results is consistent with the guilt-based explanation of the door-in-the-face technique. Refusing an initial request from a prosocial organization is likely to create more guilt than rejecting a commercial request. A person then may reduce negative feeling by performing a prosocial target request.

The pioneer Cialdini’s et al. (1975) studies proved that the door-in-the-face technique is an efficient method to gather volunteers to work with juvenile delinquents. The participants after first disagreeing to be a counselor for two years were then more willing to go for a walk to the zoo with teenagers from a detention house. Other results of studies show that this tactic is effective when inducing people to become volunteers and sacrifice time to spread information about AIDS (Abrahams and Bell, 1994).



On the other hand, data collected by Patch (1986, 1988) show that the foot-in-the-door strategy seems to be effective to the same extent both in commercial usage and prosocial practice. The important applicational aspect of the foot-in-the-door strategy is using it for charity purposes, in the field of fund-raising. The “small-then-large-request” technique was fruitful while collecting money in fighting with cancer (Pilner, Hart, Kohl and Saari, 1974), for children that were victims of mines (Guéguen and Jacob, 2001), for disabled people (Schwarzwald, Bizman and Raz, 1983) or for the local zoological garden (Williams and Williams, 1989).

At the very beginning of investigating this sequential social influence technique, some researchers treated it as a method of provoking altruistic behavior. They distinguished spontaneous asked-for helping behaviors, thus classifying the foot-in-the-door tactic into an altruism paradigm instead of social influence or compliance topics. The chances of spontaneous helpful behavior were sometimes introduced, for example by letting the subjects pick up the contents of a shopping bag which the experimenter dropped in front of his or her legs, a 50 cent coin or brochures (DeJong, 1981, 1<sup>st</sup> study; Foel and Goldman, 1983; Miller and Suls, 1977; Uranowitz, 1975).

#### HOW TO PROMOTE A GOOD IDEA?

The foot-in-the-door tactic is an excellent method for promoting healthy behaviors. Chartrand, Pinkert and Burger (1999) indicated that it is possible to induce people to take part in an event organized to promote cardiac prevention. The participants of this study, thanks to previously wearing a sign advertising the American Cardiac Association, were then more likely to sacrifice three hours on distributing brochures informing about myocardial infraction. Dolin and Booth-Butterfield (1995) introducing two gradational requests increased the effectiveness of preventive action, which aimed at the early diagnosis of breast cancer among women. The foot-in-the-door

procedure leads also to incite larger groups of people to designate themselves as organ donors (Carducci and Deuser, 1984; Carducci, Deuser, Bauer, Large and Remaekers, 1989; Girandola, 2002).

In order to disseminate any idea, for instance promoting health issues, it is reasonable to use all three techniques: the foot-in-the-door, the door-in-the-face and the low-ball procedures as they get tremendously good results. It was proved by the series of Cann and his colleagues' studies (Cann, Sherman and Elkes, 1975) in which the experimenters successfully incited inhabitants of a small town to distribute to their neighbors 15 brochures with information on safety in the streets after asking them to complete a survey concerning driving habits or after making them refuse a larger request (sacrifice time to count cars passing by). The findings of Spiewak's (2002) research also give evidence that the door-in-the-face may be used to incite people to distribute brochures about handicapped children.

Cialdini's et al. (1978) or Burger and Petty's (1981) findings show that the low-ball procedure can be used to increase the outreach of a charity idea. Burger and Petty's results of studies (1981) indicate that the low-ball technique may lead to increasing the number of volunteers willing to sacrifice time and help an association fighting with cancer. In the Cialdini et al. study experimenters asked students on a university campus to put up posters in front of the entrance to their halls of residence. In the low-ball condition after hearing the participants' agreement, the researcher informed them that he had run out of posters and suggested their going down to the ground floor of their building to get them. Significantly more students made an effort and got the posters to promote a charity organization.

Sequential social influence techniques can also be used in political marketing. The foot-in-the-door tactic was helpful in promoting a candidate running in a presidential campaign. Before presidential elections in 1972 Seligman, Miller, Goldberg, Gelberg, Clark and Bush

(1976) addressed a sequence of requests to inhabitants of a city in Illinois who were undecided on whom to vote. During the first contact, before an initial request was formulated, one part of potential McGovern voters listened to a speech on some less controversial issues of the candidate's program. Then the experimenters handed this part a sign with the candidate's name and asked participants to place it in front of their windows. Another part of the potential voters just listened to the persuasive message and were not given any sign. One week later all of the participants were asked to put a big poster with McGovern's picture in their windows. Those subjects who listened to the arguments favoring the candidate and who initially took the sign with his name succumbed to the target request more frequently than the control condition part did.

Furthermore, it was proved that the sequence of two gradational requests is an effective method for eliminating undesirable behavior. Taylor and Booth-Butterfield (1993) conducted a study among regular pub visitors. The researchers induced intoxicated people sitting there to take a taxi by first making them sign a petition against driving a car after drinking alcohol. Contrarily, those who didn't sign any petition were more reluctant to take a taxi, taking their own cars instead.

The results of studies on blood donation points out the limitations of implementing the foot-in-the-door practice (Cialdini and Ascani, 1976; Foss and Dempsey, 1979). Using different kinds of initial requests among various groups of people, Foss and Dempsey (1979) failed to obtain a greater compliance rate in the foot-in-the-door condition. The researchers doubled the findings obtained by Cialdini and Ascani (1976). Although Freedman and Fraser's strategy seems to be universal, it increases compliance with a wide range of requests, but doesn't significantly affect people's willingness to agree to fulfill more substantial tasks involving behaviors that are psychologically costly to perform.

## CONCLUSIONS

To put it in a nutshell, the sequential social influence techniques: the foot-in-the-door, the door-in-the-face and low-ball procedures appear to be tremendously fruitful strategies. Taking the dearth of helpful behaviors into account caused by automatic refusals, such tactics may be able to alter this situation. The mere involvement in a series of actions may provoke the process of thinking about the source asking for help and thus increase one's willingness to take part in altruistic acts. In order to make people ponder about a person asking for help and importance of engaging in helping behavior it is essential to stop the automacity of refusing by introducing methods of increasing thoughtfulness. It seems that the foot-in-the-door strategy is the best technique of making people be deliberative because of mechanism underlying its effectiveness. The self-perception process as a tool of gaining self-knowledge leads to self-image changes which are directly connected with own just performed behavior. If an initial request is linked with good issues a person fulfilling it starts to think about themselves in line with these good issues. Thus, by inducing people to perform small good things it is possible not only to make them agree with target requests, but it seems a promising method of altering attitudes towards helping in general.

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