

TESTING INCREASED FRIENDLINESS AS AN EXPLANATION OF THE EVOKING FREEDOM COMPLIANCE-GAINING TECHNIQUE

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Abstract: *It was hypothesized that the enhanced compliance rate associated with the use of the “evoking freedom” technique of compliance-gaining may be explained by a causal model in which the use of the technique causes the target to perceive the requester as friendlier, which*

increases the target's likelihood of compliance. A research question explored the extent to which targets of the evoking freedom request had to recall hearing the key phrase for the effect to occur. These issues were examined using previously unreported measures from a larger data collection of a series of 6 studies. Averaging the effects across the studies (N = 720), weak fit was found for the three-variable model. Targets who recalled the phrase complied more than those who did not.

The list of traditional compliance-gaining techniques such as the foot-in-the-door, the door-in-the-face, and the legitimization of paltry favors has been lengthened to include evoking freedom. The technique is deployed by simply adding some variation of the phrase “you are free to refuse” to a compliance-gaining script (Guéguen & Pascual, 2000). It was originally referred to as the “but-you-are-free” technique due to the frequency with which that particular phrase was used in field tests. But more recent work implementing it with different variations on the phrase has motivated the selection of the more general term “evoking freedom” (Guéguen, Joule, Halimi-Falkowicz, Pascual, Fischer-Lokou, & Dufourcq-Brana, 2013).

Meta-analytic estimates show that the effect size associated with using the technique is similar to those found with the more traditional techniques and that it can be implemented with less difficulty (Carpenter, 2013). Furthermore, the Carpenter meta-analysis found that the technique was about equally effective for prosocial requests and self-interested requests. A recent and particularly imaginative study found that the technique was even effective for a request to hold a transparent box containing an enormous spider (Guéguen, Silone, & David, 2015).

This report will test a hypotheses designed to explain why the technique works. Specifically perceived friendliness will be tested as a mediator of the technique's increase in compliance. In addition, a research question will explore whether or not the target needs to be aware that the key phrase was present to increase compliance. These issues will be explored by a reanalysis of a previously published set of studies. The data analyzed here includes six studies that were originally collected as part of Samson-Secrieru, L. (2009) doctoral thesis. The effect of the technique on the compliance rates found in these studies was published previously (Samson-Secrieru, L., 2010) but that report did not include examine the measures of the proposed mediator or moderator that were also collected. Also, neither the journal article nor the thesis reported any mediation or causal modeling tests.

The following section will first elaborate on the evoking freedom technique. Then the “friendliness” explanation for the technique's effectiveness will be developed. That explanation will be used to derive a simple mediation model. Finally, a research question will be discussed concerning the need for the target to be aware of the presence of the request.

Evoking Freedom

Guéguen and Pascual (2000) presented the first evoking freedom study. Confederates walked up to strangers and asked them for some spare change to buy a bus ticket. Half of the requests were simple direct requests and the other half added the phrase “but you are free to accept or refuse.” With the addition of this key phrase, the targets were over eight times more likely to comply.

Friendliness as an Explanation

It is possible that stating that the target is free to refuse makes the requester seem friendlier. The requester is distancing herself or himself from the role of the high pressure requester by explicitly stating that the target does not have to say yes. To the naïve target, a pushy person who is only out to gain the compliance of the target would never tell the target they do not have to comply. Evoking the target's freedom may cause the target to feel that the requester is friendlier than a requester who merely makes the request.

A slight increase in perceived friendliness may be all that is required to increase compliance likelihood. Burger, Soroka, Gonzago, Murphy, and Somervell (2001) argued that creating “fleeting attraction” is enough to produce a feeling of liking for the requester in the mind of the target. That feeling of liking then translates to a greater likelihood of compliance (cf. Dolinski, Nawrat, & Rudak, 2001). Burger et al. showed that merely engaging in a brief interaction is enough to increase liking and subsequent compliance with a request. It may be that merely showing that one is being friendly rather than pushy may be enough to produce the same sense of fleeting attraction Burger et al. induced in the lab. Therefore, it was hypothesized that perceived friendliness would mediate the effect of the technique on compliance. If the data show a good fit to a basic path model with perceived friendliness serving as the mediating variable, it would be strong evidence consistent with the friendliness explanation of the technique.

Another unresolved issue is whether the inclusion of the key phrase is something that targets need to be aware of for the technique to work. Classic research on the placebo information technique suggests that sometimes compliance-gaining phrases increase compliance without the target necessarily being aware of the content of those phrases (Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978). Some compliance-gaining techniques may operate better when the target is not operating at a high level of awareness (Dolinski, Ciszek, Godlewski, & Zawadzki, 2002). It is unknown if the target has to be consciously aware of whether or not the requester added the evocation of freedom to the request for the phrase to be associated with a higher compliance-rate. It may be that the phrase passes unnoticed but manages to make the request seem friendlier without the target being aware of its presence. It is also possible that the target needs to notice the phrase to be moved to comply. Therefore this study will examine the research question of whether or not in the evoking freedom condition, compliance will be higher when targets of the request recall hearing the key phrase than when they do not.

Method

Six studies were conducted in 3 different countries (France, Romania, and Russia) using two different requests (giving change for a bus ticket and completing a ten-minute survey). The exact details of each of the studies can be found in the report of the effect of the evoking freedom induction on compliance reported in Samson-Secrieru, L. (2010) and in Samson-Secrieru, L. doctoral thesis (2009). Here an overview of the six studies will be reported along with the details of the measurement of the mediating variables used in the studies.

In each of the six studies, 120 participants were recruited by approaching strangers with a request in a field setting. In studies 1, 3, and 5 the participants were people in a bus station. In studies 2, 4, and 6, the participants were people walking around various public locations. In each location and within each cell of the design, there were an equal number of male and female participants.

Procedure

In studies 1, 3, and 5 participants were approached and informed that the requester had forgotten her or his money and only had half as much of the money needed for a bus ticket. In studies 2, 4, and 6 participants were approached and asked to immediately participate in a ten-minute survey. In all studies, half of the participants were asked with a direct request to perform the target behavior. For the other half, the phrase “But, of course, you are free to accept or refuse” was added to the end of the request script. Local languages were used for each country. Experimental conditions were assigned randomly with the constraint of equal numbers of each sex in each cell and equal cell sizes. Immediately after refusing or accepting, the target was informed that the request was part of a research study and they were asked to respond to five questions. One of these asked if the request

included the evoking freedom phrase and one of the others was the “friendliness” measure. Afterwards the participants were thanked.

Measures

Verbal compliance with the request was recorded, as was the sex of the participant. To determine if the targets recalled an evocation of freedom, they were asked by the requester, “Did I tell you that you were free to accept or refuse my request?” A response of no was coded 0 and yes was coded 1. The other measure related to the current investigation was the friendliness measure. Participants were asked to indicate how friendly the requester was by choosing a number from 0-10 with 0 indicating “absolutely not friendly” and 10 indicating “very friendly.” For all six studies, the distribution of friendliness scores were substantially negatively skewed. The descriptive statistics for each of the 6 studies are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Perceived Friendliness and Proportions for Agreeing that the Phrase was Present and for Agreeing to the Request

	Noticing Rate	Mean Friendliness	Compliance Rate
Study 1	50.83%	6.97 (1.07)	30.80%
Study 2	50%	8.02 (.97)	29.20%
Study 3	49.17%	7.93 (1.07)	28.30%
Study 4	50.83%	8.03 (1.17)	36.70%
Study 5	48.33%	6.62 (1.18)	21.70%
Study 6	50.83%	7.18 (1.03)	20.80%

Note: Standard deviations for friendliness are in parentheses

Results

The exact effects of evoking freedom on compliance from each study were reported in Samson-Secrieru, L. (2010). Here, the results from each study were all combined together for data analysis. Initially, the effect of using the evoking freedom technique relative to using the direct request on compliance will be examined. There was a tendency for evoking freedom to be associated with higher compliance than a direct request $r = .17$. This result is very similar to the meta-analytic estimate from 32 studies of $r = .18$ reported in Carpenter (2013) for studies in which the target responded immediately.

Two additional correlations are needed to test the mediation model, the correlation between the technique’s presence or absence and perceived friendliness and the correlation between perceived friendliness and compliance. The effect of the presence or absence of the technique on perceived friendliness was $r(718) = .44$ and the effect of perceived friendliness on compliance was $r(718) = .69$.

To test the mediation model, the basic algorithm of structural equation modeling was employed. Specifically, for variables x, y, and z, if y mediates the relationship between x and z then $r_{xz} = r_{xy} * r_{yz}$ (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982; Hamilton, 2017). Hamilton notes that if the predicted correlation falls within 0-.05 of the obtained correlation, it indicates good fit and within .05-.09 indicates adequate fit. For the proposed mediation model, the model predicts the correlation between the use of the technique and compliance is $r = .30$. The error of prediction is therefore $.30 - .17 = .13$, suggesting poor fit of the model.

Examination of the correlations in each study suggests that the two Russian samples found an unusually small effect for the technique on compliance. Given that the obtained correlation was smaller than the predicted, the mediation model was tested again without the Russian samples. The obtained correlation was $r = .21$ which still different from the correlation predicted by the model ($.46 * .69 = .32$). The difference showed that the error ($.32 - .21 = .11$) fell somewhat outside of the normal bounds of good fit.

The research question asked whether the targets in the evoking freedom condition would be more likely to have complied if they reported hearing the key evoking freedom phrase than if they did not. In the evoking freedom condition, 85% reported hearing the key phrase overall. In the evoking freedom condition, those who reported hearing the key phrase complied with the request at a higher rate (39%) than those who did not recall hearing it (7%). This difference was substantial and statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 360) = 9.36, p = .002, r = .16, OR = 3.09$. The research question was answered in the affirmative.

Discussion

This study sought to test the hypothesis that the evoking freedom compliance-gaining technique is associated with an increase in compliance because the technique causes the target to perceive the requester as friendlier. A research question was also investigated concerning the extent to which the technique needed to be recalled by the target to cause the increase in perceived compliance. Combining the results of six studies showed that the results were not consistent with the proposed mediation model. When the aberrant Russian samples were removed, the model came close to adequate fit. The nature of the error indicated that the model failed to fit because the relationship between the technique and compliance was too small. Boster, Cruz, Manata, DeAngelis, and Zhuang (2016) argued that the effects of range restriction (Schmidt & Hunter, 2015) cause most compliance-gaining effectiveness estimates to be underestimates. Therefore, it may be possible that without the artifact of range restriction, the model would fit. Unfortunately, range restriction cannot be directly corrected for in this case so that possibility remains theoretical.

Additionally, examination of the results associated with the research question suggests that the evoking freedom technique is less likely to be one of those that operate outside of the awareness of the target. Although this finding does not point to a particular theoretical explanation, it does suggest that a successful theoretical explanation of the technique's effectiveness may need to include the target's awareness of the presence of the evoking freedom phrase.

Limitations

"Friendliness" was measured with a single-item measure of unknown validity and reliability. It is unclear how participants estimated the friendliness of the request. There may be considerable variation among participants in how this item is interpreted. Future research with validated measures that are more closely targeted at the theoretical constructs proposed to explain the technique is suggested. Research with a more validated measure may find stronger empirical support for the importance of this variable.

The experimental nature of the study allows stronger causal claims to be made about some of the paths in the proposed models, but not all of them. For example, the relationship between perceived friendliness and compliance may be bidirectional. Just as people are more likely to comply with people they perceive as friendly, they may also be more likely to perceive the requester as friendly because it would be consistent with their behavior towards the requester. Consistency is a powerful motivator in compliance-gaining situations (Freedman and Fraser, 1966). Additional research is needed to attempt to separate the two effects experimentally by simply varying the friendliness of the requester and assessing that induction's effect on compliance.

Conclusion

The evoking freedom technique has once again been demonstrated as a successful means of increasing compliance, consistent with dozens of other studies (Carpenter, 2013). Yet, this study has also helped move this research forward by exploring a potential mediating mechanism. If the theoretical underpinning of the technique can be understood, then

the technique may be improved and further boundary conditions may be identified. It may also be possible to combine this technique with others using similar mechanisms to even further improve the scientific understanding of compliance.

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