

Effects of Public Image Concerns and Self-Image on Compliance

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ABSTRACT. Whether compliance is affected by targets' impression management was investigated. A confederate approached male shoppers sitting either alone or with a female companion in an American shopping mall and attempted to convince the male shoppers to agree to purchase raffle tickets. The presence of a female companion was expected to heighten the male shoppers' concerns about public image. The effects of self-image on compliance were also examined, using foot-in-the-door (FITD) strategy. The shoppers who were with a female companion agreed to buy more tickets than the shoppers who were alone did, but compliance did not differ as a function of strategy. Thus, concerns about public image affected compliance more than concerns about self-image did.

IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT CAN BE DEFINED as “any behavior by a person that has the purpose of controlling or manipulating the attributions and impressions formed by others” (Tedeschi & Riess, 1981, p. 3). According to Tedeschi and Riess, impression management strategies can be categorized as one of two general types—those that actors use (a) to gain relatively immediate and pre-planned outcomes from their targets or (b) to achieve power resources that can eventually be used in future unplanned encounters with their targets. Jones and Pittman (1980) focused on identifying and describing the former type of impression management strategy, which includes ingratiation, intimidation, exemplification, supplication, and self-promotion. Tedeschi and Riess (1981) focused on the latter type of strategy, which concerns an actor's attempts to create impressions of expertise, legitimate authority, attractiveness, credibility, prestige, and status.

These two classifications contain considerable overlap in terms of the specific types of impressions that are managed. In ingratiation, an actor attempts to

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induce the target to like him in the hope that this will lead the target to provide him or her with specific material benefits. An actor who is attempting to create impressions of attraction also tries to induce a target to like him, but in this case the actor's goal is to increase the likelihood that he or she will be more influential in future interactions with the target. Other related impression management strategies include intimidation and authority, as well as self-promotion and expertise.

Experimental examinations of the impact of impression management strategies on compliance have been largely confined to those described by Tedeschi and Riess (1981) and have been carried out mostly in natural settings, with American adults as subjects. Legitimate authority has been manipulated by having a confederate wear a uniform or regular clothing; the uniform elicited greater compliance (Bickman, 1974; Bushman, 1984, 1988). Jackson and Latané (1981) manipulated confederates' strength (consisting of several components such as status, credibility, and expertise); greater compliance was elicited when the confederates were perceived as having more strength. Empirical studies that have examined Jones and Pittman's (1980) impression management strategies have been mainly concerned with issues such as clarifying distinctions among the strategies (e.g., Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986), rather than investigating the effects of these strategies on compliance.

One study, however, examined the impact of self-promotion on compliance (Rind, 1992). In one condition, a confederate projected impressions of amazement by astounding shoppers sitting in the food court of a shopping mall with his calculating skills, made possible through the use of a concealed communications device. In a second condition, the confederate projected impressions of foolishness by showing himself to be unusually incompetent in calculating arithmetic problems. In a third condition, the confederate made no attempt to create an impression. When the confederate promoted himself by amazing shoppers, he was subsequently able to sell more than three times as many raffle tickets to the shoppers, compared with the amount he was able to sell in the conditions when he made a fool of himself or made no impression at all.

These studies have demonstrated that targets' impressions of an actor can affect their compliance with a subsequent request from the actor. In the present study we also examined the impact of impressions on compliance, but the focus was not on the different impressions made by an actor; rather, the focus was on the different impressions made by the target. The question we wanted to answer was whether a target's own impression management would affect his or her willingness to comply with a subsequent request made by an actor. Based on the impression management research discussed previously, we hypothesized that targets whose impression management concerns were heightened would comply more than targets whose impression management concerns were not heightened.

We also examined the foot-in-the-door (FITD) effect, demonstrated by Freedman and Fraser (1966). This effect refers to the fact that prefacing a critical request by a smaller request with which most people are likely to comply in-

creases the chances that people will comply with the critical request. Since Freedman and Fraser's original demonstration, numerous FITD studies have been conducted, yielding, on average, an effect size of about $r = .20$ (Dillard, 1991). As with research that has examined the effects of impression management on compliance, FITD research has been conducted mostly in the form of field experiments, with American adult subjects in nonacademic settings. Based on this research, we hypothesized that FITD targets would comply more than control targets.

Freedman and Fraser (1966) attributed the FITD effect to a change in subjects' self-image, that is, the subjects who complied with an initial request came to view themselves as people who comply with requests. This change in a target's self-image can be compared with the first factor in this investigation, which involved a target's manipulating others' image of himself or herself. Investigating these two factors allowed us to compare the effects of private versus public images on compliance.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 64 male adult shoppers in the food court of an American suburban shopping mall. The subjects were mostly young, White adults in their 20s and early 30s. Each subject was sitting either alone or with a female companion who was approximately the same age.

Design and Procedure

We used a 2×2 (Social Situation \times Strategy) between-subjects factorial design. The confederate, a 16-year-old White, male high school student, approached male shoppers who were sitting alone or with a female companion and either made the critical request directly or preceded the critical request with an FITD request. The order of occurrence of these four conditions was random. After completing all four conditions once, the confederate proceeded to complete another randomly determined cycle, until 16 cycles had been completed. The experiment was conducted on two consecutive Saturday afternoons during the Christmas shopping season.

In the control strategy conditions, the confederate approached adult male shoppers who were sitting either alone or with an adult female companion. In both situations, the confederate pulled out a book of raffle tickets and said:

Hi. I'm selling raffle tickets for a free weekend trip for two to Bermuda, sponsored by World Travel. The trip is worth over \$1,000. If I sell the most tickets, I'll win a \$50 prize. All proceeds go to the United Way. Could you buy some raffle tickets—they're 25¢ apiece? Any would help, the more the better.¹

The number of raffle tickets the shoppers offered to buy constituted the critical dependent measure, the shoppers' compliance. Also, it was noted whether the shoppers listened to the confederate's entire appeal or whether they stopped him before he had a chance to complete his appeal. When the confederate approached male shoppers who were with a female companion, he always directed his attention and request to the male shoppers so that they would not be likely to defer the confederate's attention to their female companion, thereby diffusing their own responsibility for making a decision regarding the confederate's critical request. The other reason for the confederate's exclusive focus on the male shoppers was that we wanted the shoppers to be aware that their actions were being observed and assessed by their uninvolved female companions, whose impressions they were likely to be concerned about. Thus, we expected that the presence of a female companion would heighten the male shoppers' impression management concerns.

In the FITD conditions, the confederate began by making a small request, with which all the shoppers complied:

Hello, I'm doing a survey for a class project. Could you answer four short questions about television viewing?

After the subjects agreed to the small request, the confederate asked if they owned a television, if they watched more than 10 hr of television a week, if they thought there was too much violence on television, and if they thought unsupervised children should be allowed to watch television.² After the shoppers had answered these questions, the confederate proceeded to make the critical request, as described previously.

In all the conditions, after the shoppers who had agreed to purchase tickets stated how many they would buy, the confederate informed the shoppers that he was conducting a study and that the raffle tickets were not for sale. The confederate then answered any questions the shoppers had about the study.

Results

We hypothesized that targets whose impression management concerns were heightened would comply more than targets whose impression management concerns were not heightened, and that targets who were treated with an FITD re-

¹ This request was based on the request used in Regan's (1971) study on compliance.

² These FITD questions are the same as those that were used in Patch's (1986) study on compliance.

quest would comply more than targets who were not. To test these hypotheses, we performed a 2×2 (Social Situation \times Strategy) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the raffle tickets data (see Table 1). There was a significant main effect for social situation, $F(1, 60) = 4.88, p < .05$; the male shoppers who were with a female companion agreed to buy more tickets ($M = 2.41$) than the male shoppers who were alone did ($M = 1.31$). The effect size for this factor was very moderate, $r = .27$. The FITD shoppers did agree to purchase more tickets ($M = 2.18$) than the control shoppers did ($M = 1.53$), but this difference fell far short of statistical significance, $F(1, 60) = 1.76, p > .10$, effect size $r = .17$. The Social Situation \times Strategy interaction was nonsignificant, $F(1, 60) < 1$. Thus, support was obtained for the impact of the targets' own impression management on their compliance. No support was obtained for the impact of the targets' altered self-images on compliance, however.

We conducted additional analyses on the shoppers' willingness to hear the confederate's entire appeal, to further examine the shoppers' compliance. Only 50% of the shoppers who were alone were willing to hear the entire appeal, compared with 94% of the shoppers who were with a female companion. This difference was highly significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 64) = 15.15, p < .001$, and the effect size was large, $r = .49$. Eighty-one percent of the FITD shoppers listened to the confederate's entire appeal, compared with 63% of control shoppers. This difference was nonsignificant, $\chi^2(1, N = 64) = 2.78, p > .05$, effect size, $r = .21$. Thus, the impact of social situation on receptivity was considerably stronger than the impact of the FITD manipulation was, as evidenced by the relative effect sizes of these factors.

Of the shoppers who listened to the confederate's entire appeal, shoppers who were alone agreed to buy as many tickets ($M = 2.47$) as the shoppers with female companions ($M = 2.57$), $F(1, 43) < 1$, and control shoppers agreed to buy as many tickets ($M = 2.45$) as FITD shoppers did ($M = 2.59$), $F(1, 43) < 1$. The Social Situation \times Strategy interaction was also nonsignificant, $F(1, 43) < 1$.

TABLE 1
Mean Ticket Purchases as a Function of Social Situation and Strategy

Social situation	Strategy	
	Control	FITD
Alone		
<i>M</i>	1.06	1.56
<i>SD</i>	1.91	2.10
Couple		
<i>M</i>	2.00	2.81
<i>SD</i>	2.07	1.83

Note. $n = 16$ per cell. FITD = foot in the door.

This analysis indicates that, given full receptivity to the confederate's appeal, the shoppers agreed to purchase the same number of tickets, regardless of experimental condition. Thus, the most direct impact of social situation was on the shoppers' receptivity, which, in turn, produced greater overall compliance among the shoppers who were with a female companion.

Discussion

In typical compliance studies that involve impression management, an actor projects varying images of himself or herself onto different targets to determine whether a particular impression management strategy affects the targets' compliance. In the present study, we focused on the targets' impression management, rather than that of the actor. The male targets whose impression management concerns were heightened because of the presence of a female companion complied more often with the confederate's request than the male targets who were alone did. This result provides support for the first hypothesis, that an increase in a target's impression management concerns will produce an increase in the target's compliance.

We also examined the FITD effect because this factor has frequently been attributed to an alteration in targets' self-image and, thus, was interesting to compare with the social situation factor, which concerned the targets' projected image. The FITD manipulation failed to increase compliance significantly, although the means were in the expected direction. Thus, the second hypothesis, that targets whose self-image of compliance was enhanced would comply more often, was not supported. Therefore, the target's projected image had a stronger influence on his compliance than the target's self-image did.

In addition to measuring the targets' compliance with the confederate's critical request, we noted whether the targets were willing to listen to the confederate's entire appeal. Only the social situation factor influenced the targets' receptivity significantly, indicating, once again, that outward-directed images had a greater impact than inner images did. An additional analysis, using only receptive targets, indicated that compliance rates did not differ as a function of social situation or compliance strategy; thus, the likelihood of compliance was the same as long as the targets were fully receptive to the confederate's appeal. In this investigation, the key to increasing compliance was to increase the number of receptive male targets, a goal achieved by approaching male shoppers who were with a female companion.

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