

Compliance Gaining

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November 19, 2022

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2022). *Compliance Gaining*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=39347>

Compliance gaining is a term used in the social sciences, specifically in sociology and communication studies, to identify the act of intentionally trying to alter behavior. The term refers to how people try to get other people to DO things, or comply. Compliance is separate, but not unrelated to persuasion. There is a distinction between attitudes and behavior. Compliance gaining targets actual behavioral changes to goals set by the source.

For example, if trying to persuade a young person to vote, an adult would provide reasons to the why they must take voting seriously as a citizen. If persuasive, they might convince the young person that voting is important. However, the fact the young person now agrees and understands voting is important, does not ensure they will actually vote.

Definition

Tamara D. Golish defines and summarizes the works and myriad elements concerning compliance gaining, stating, Wheeless, Barraclough, and Stewart (1983) define compliance-gaining as "the communicative behavior in which an agent elicits from a target some agent-selected behavior" (p. 111). Compliance-gaining is different from the more traditional approach to persuasion because it emphasizes active rather than reactive communicators and how people influence others, including the multiple strategies people use to gain compliance (Lee, Levine, & Cambra, 1997). According to McQuillen et al. (1984), compliance-gaining "focuses on message selection rather than message impact" (p. 748). The central concern with this approach is the type of message sent and the individual and situational differences that influence those messages" (Golish 1999).

Developments and Studies

Compliance

Compliance gaining was not originally conceived in the field of communication but found its roots in the late 1960s as a result of studies and research by two sociologists, Gerald Marwel and David Schmitt. In 1967, Marwell and Schmitt produced some interesting compliance-gaining tactics concerning the act of getting a teenager to study. The tactics, sixteen in all, are as follows.

Promise: If you comply, I will reward you. For example, you offer to increase Dick's allowance if he studies more.

Threat: If you do not comply, I will punish you. For example, you threaten to forbid Dick to use the car if he doesn't start studying more.

Expertise (positive): If you comply, you will be rewarded because of the "nature of things." For example, you tell Dick that if he gets good grades he be able to get into college and get a good job.

Expertise (negative): If you do not comply, you will be punished because of the "nature of things." For example, you tell Dick that if he does not get good grades he will not be able to get into college

or get a good job.

Liking: Act friendly and helpful to get the person in a "good frame of mind" so they comply with the request. For example, you try to be as friendly and pleasant as possible to put Dick in a good mood before asking him to study.

Pre-giving: Reward the person before requesting compliance. For example, raise Dick's allowance and tell him you now expect him to study.

Aversive stimulation: Continuously punish the person, making cessation contingent on compliance. For example, you tell Dick he may not use the car until he studies more.

Debt: You owe me compliance because of past favors. For example, you point out that you have sacrificed and saved to pay for Dick's education and that he owes it to you to get good enough grades to get into a good college.

Moral appeal: You are immoral if you do not comply. You tell Dick that it is morally wrong for anyone not to get as good grades as possible and that he should study more.

Self-feeling (positive): You will feel better about yourself if you comply. For example, you tell Dick that he will feel proud if he gets himself to study more.

Self-feeling (negative): You will feel worse about yourself if you do not comply. For example, you tell Dick that he will feel ashamed of himself if he gets bad grades.

Altercasting (positive): A person with "good" qualities would comply. For example, you tell Dick that because he is a mature and intelligent person he naturally will want to study more and get good grades.

Altercasting (negative): Only a person with "bad" qualities would not comply. For example, you tell Dick that he should study because only someone very childish does not study.

Altruism: I need your compliance very badly, so do it for me. For example, you tell Dick that you really want very badly for him to get into a good college and that you wish he would study more as a personal favor to you.

Esteem (positive): People you value will think better of you if you comply. For example, you tell Dick that the whole family will be very proud of him if he gets good grades.

Esteem (negative): People you value will think the worse of you if you do not comply. For example, you tell Dick that the whole family will be very disappointed in him if he gets poor grades.

In 1967, Marwell and Schmitt conducted experimental research, using the sixteen compliance gaining tactics and identified five basic compliance-gaining strategies: Rewarding activity, Punishing activity, Expertise, Activation of impersonal commitments, and Activation of personal commitments.

Power

Another element of compliance-gaining was produced in the early 1960s, as French and Raven were researching the concepts of power, legitimacy, and politeness. They identified five influential aspects associated with power, which help illustrate elements of the study of compliance. The five

bases of power are as follows:

Reward Power: A person with reward power has control over some valued resource (e.g., promotions and raises).

Coercive Power: A person with coercive power has the ability to inflict punishments (e.g., fire you.)

Expert Power: Expert power is based on what a person knows (e.g., you may do what a doctor tells you to do because they know more about medicine than you do).

Legitimate Power: Legitimate power is based on formal rank or position (e.g., you obey someone's commands because they are the vice president in the company for which you work).

Referent Power: People have referent power when the person they are trying to influence wants to be like them (e.g., a mentor often has this type of power).

(French & Raven, 1960)

Techniques and terms

The study of compliance gaining has been central in the development of many commonly used or heard of techniques. The following techniques are a few of what has evolved as a product of the study of compliance gaining strategies. Note, many of these techniques have been empirically documented increasing compliance.

Foot-in-the-door (FITD)

The FITD technique can be defined as a gradual-persuasion technique in which an initial, modest request precedes a larger request (Rodafinos, & Vucevic, & Sideridis., 2005). FITD is a simple technique where a person asks another for something to establish a relationship and get them to positively associate with what he is offering. The initial request must be small enough to ensure they don't reject it. Once the request is accepted, the person asks for something larger (e.g., money, participation, etc). Since the individual succumbed to the first request, they have established a positive association with the stimulus, and see the larger request in terms of consistency with past actions.

For example, an activist knocks on a door and asks the person inside to sign a petition to help "save the whales," and they do sign it. A few hours later the activist comes back and asks the same individual to donate \$10 dollars to save the whales. The initial request has increased the chance that the individual will grant the second one.