Using Public Commitment to Gain Customer Compliance

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ABSTRACT
We investigate the role of public commitment in gaining customer compliance in a long-term service (e.g., online education) where customer adherence to his/her role when away from the service provider is important in the successful delivery of the service. Given the major role customers have in the delivery process of services it is important to understand how service providers can influence customers to comply with their service role. Dellande, Gilly, and Graham (2004) found that motivation is a key customer attribute in gaining long-term compliance when the customer is away from the provider. We examined the effect of manipulating public commitment to motivate customer compliance behavior.

INTRODUCTION
Increasing numbers of services now require customers to comply with their service roles to ensure the successful delivery of the service. Examples of these include weight loss and educational programs, financial services, and others whose clients have to engage in certain prescribed behaviors to gain the maximum benefit from the service provider. Weight loss clients have to comply with the recommended exercise and dietary regimen to lose weight, students have to do the assigned work on a regular basis to learn effectively, and investors have to save money regularly to accumulate enough wealth to create an adequate retirement nest egg.

Gaining customer compliance can be difficult even when the service provider and the client meet face-to-face on a regular basis. For example, non-compliance with physicians’ directives has been reported to be upwards of 80% (Dellande and Taylor, 2004). As such, motivating customers to comply with prescribed behaviors becomes exceedingly challenging when the service provider and the client meet infrequently. Since the advent of the Internet, more and more services are being delivered via technology. This may mean that a customer never sees the service facility or personnel (Bittner, Brown, and Meuter, 2000).

Under these circumstances, the provider must find ways of influencing the customer to ensure adherence to his/her roles (Dellande, Gilly, and Graham 2004). We propose that service providers can encourage their clients to make a public commitment to their goals, and that this will result in significantly higher levels of long-term customer compliant behavior. The research findings in this study are important for providers of any service in which customer compliance, particularly long-term compliance, with his/her role determines the success of the service delivery process.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS AND HYPOTHESES
Public commitment
While the concept of public commitment has been around for some time, it has gained renewed attention of late in the consumer behavior literature. Nyer and Gopinath (2005) used public commitment to explain the differential effects of complaining behavior and word-of-mouth on subsequent customer satisfaction levels. Public commitment was shown to increase resistance to counter-attitudinal persuasion (Nyer and Gopinath 2006).

Kiesler (1971) posited that commitment is a binding of the individual to the position implied by his act or decision. He indicated that a key factor that determines the magnitude of the commitment is the publicness with which the individual declares his/her commitment to a position. According to Pallak, Cook, and Sullivan (1980) attitudes stated publicly are relatively stable and are more likely to result in consistent behaviors. Pallak and Cummings (1976) have shown that when homeowners make a public commitment to energy conservation, they are more likely to comply, compared to homeowners who make the declaration in a less public manner or those who do not make a public commitment at all. Public commitment to a goal is an action (e.g., placing a sticker supporting a presidential candidate on one’s car) which contributes to one’s motivation to act due to anticipated personal and social disapproval and penalties for failure to follow through with the promised activities (Parrott et al. 1998). For example, the action of recommending a practice has been shown to increase one’s behavior via a sense of personal commitment to behave in the prescribed fashion to avoid feelings of hypocrisy. People have a strong desire to appear consistent and rational in the eyes of others (Tedeschi, 1981). The more publicly one states one’s attitudes, the more one is committed to and locked to that position (Hollenbeck, Williams, and Klein, 1989). Thus the act of making a public commitment, which is usually but not necessarily, the result of a deeply-held commitment to a goal can also be used to strengthen the commitment that individuals have towards various goals and to ensure behaviors consistent with those goals. The above literature supports the following hypothesis.

H1: Higher levels of public commitment to a target behavior will result in higher levels of compliance with that behavior.

Goal importance
Foot-in-the-door (FITD) is a behavioral influence technique frequently used to increase compliance. The technique is based on the premise that an individual who accedes to a small request is more likely to agree to a much larger request later. The psychological process of self-perception has been the most popularly suggested explanation for FITD outcomes (Burger, 1999; Tybout, Sternthal, and Calder, 1983). Bem’s (1972) self-perception theory posits that people infer how they feel about an issue by examining their past behavior. This inferred attitude then influences future behavior. Thus individuals who make a public commitment to a goal by engaging in a token act (for example, by wearing a Breast Cancer Awareness pin) may later evaluate the goal as being more important because they use their past behavior as a cue to their beliefs on the issue. This research leads us to the following hypothesis:

H2: Individuals who make a public commitment to a target goal will evaluate the goal as being more important compared to individuals who do not make a public commitment. Further, the effect of public commitment on compliance with the goal will be partly mediated by the evaluation of goal importance.

We hypothesize that goal importance will only partially mediate the effect of public commitment on compliance behavior since we believe that public commitment will have significant direct effects on compliance behavior. In other words, we suggest that the
change in goal importance can only partially explain the totality of the effect of public commitment on compliance behavior.

Susceptibility to normative influence

As discussed earlier, individuals who make a public commitment to a goal are less likely to behave in a manner contrary to their publicly stated position so as to avoid social disapproval and feelings of hypocrisy. However, would all individuals be equally likely to be induced to behave in a manner consistent with their publicly stated goals through a fear of social disapproval? Clearly not all individuals are equally influenced by the opinions of others. Individuals who are high in susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) are more willing to conform to the expectations of others (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel, 1989). These individuals are also more hesitant to engage in behaviors that may lead to the disapproval of their peers (Wooten and Reed II, 2004). We therefore believe that individuals high in SNI will be more likely to engage in the promised behavior following a public commitment compared to individuals who are low in SNI. However SNI is not likely to affect subjects who make no public commitment to the target behavior. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis.

H3: The effect of public commitment on compliance will be moderated by susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) with effects as indicated above.

METHODODOLOGY

Design

The study uses a 3 x 2 full factorial design manipulating three levels of public commitment (no public commitment, low public commitment, and high public commitment), and using a median split to generate two levels of SNI (low and high).

Subjects

In this study we investigated the effect of manipulating public commitment on sustained paper conservation behavior among 102 students of an online introductory marketing course. The online course context was selected for this investigation because it was ideal for manipulating the independent variable (public commitment) and for observing the dependent variable (compliance behavior). Also, using a sample comprised of students is a realistic sample given the context of the study–paper conservation in an online course.

The online course was designed for non-business undergraduate students pursuing various degree programs and located in a few geographically dispersed academic centers. All lectures, assignments, quizzes, and tests were conducted online, and the students met face-to-face with each other and with the instructor for the first time on the last day of the term. All assignments were designed to be done by individual students, and since the class roster was not made available online, the students had no direct means of knowing the identity of their course mates.

Procedures

During the first week of the course students accessed the course introduction module which included an outline of the course, instructions on how to read online lectures, take online quizzes, etc. This introductory module also included a one-page essay on the importance to society of minimizing the wastage of paper. It noted that despite the early promise of computer technology promoting a ‘paperless society,’ it had done the opposite by making it easier for computer users to print documents at the touch of a button. The essay suggested that a significant reduction in paper use could be achieved if computer users were to read online documents off the screen without printing the documents. The manipulations described below were conducted only after it was verified (using the tracking system built into the online system) that each student had accessed this online essay.

The students were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (no public commitment, low public commitment, and high public commitment). Each subject in the ‘low public commitment’ condition was sent a personalized email message a day after he/she had first accessed the course introduction module. This email message included a survey question which asked the student whether he/she would be willing to make a commitment to reducing the use of paper by reading course lectures online. These subjects were advised that they were under no compulsion to make this commitment and that they could ignore any promise made to conserve paper if they felt that it was affecting their ability to do well in the course. Within twenty-four hours after each student responded, they were sent a personalized reply acknowledging his/her decision. All but one student in the ‘low public commitment’ condition agreed to read the course material online. The student who declined to make the commitment was eliminated from the study.

Each subject in the ‘high public commitment’ condition was sent a similar email message asking whether he/she would be willing to make a commitment to conserving paper. These ‘high public commitment’ subjects were informed that the instructor would acknowledge the students who had agreed to conserve paper by listing their names in an email to be sent to their classmates. These subjects too were informed that they were under no compulsion to make this promise and that they could renege on any promise made to conserve paper if they felt that it was affecting their ability to do well in the course. All subjects in the ‘high public commitment’ condition agreed to read the course material online. Within twenty-four hours after each student responded, he/she was sent an email that included what was claimed to be a partial list of the students who had agreed to engage in paper conservation. This list included the individual subject’s name and the names of nine fictitious students. The list sent to the students included fictitious names so as to prevent students from identifying their fellow course-mates (this was required by the Institutional Review Board to protect student privacy). Further, the list sent to students was claimed to be a partial list to prevent subjects from speculating about the percentage of the class that had agreed to the request to conserve paper, and to reduce the likelihood that the subjects would discover the manipulative intent of the researchers. Subjects in the ‘no public commitment’ condition were not contacted and were thus not asked to make a public commitment to conserve paper. However, it was verified that all 102 subjects (including those in the ‘no public commitment’ condition) had accessed the online essay about the importance of paper conservation.

Measures

A few days after the manipulation of the various public commitment conditions, all subjects were sent an email message containing an online survey designed to assess the clarity of course objectives. This survey also included two measures of importance of paper conservation and six measures of susceptibility to normative influence (adapted from Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel, 1989). The questions were measured on a seven point scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree.’ See Exhibit 1 for a list of the questions used to measure importance of paper conservation and susceptibility to normative influence.
Each online lecture was available in two formats—one optimized for online viewing and the other optimized for printing, both of which were available to all students. The lectures designed for online viewing were broken up into numerous easy-to-read screens, while each print-optimized lecture was available as a single printable file. The online course was set up in a manner that permitted us to measure the amount of time each student spent on each of the fifteen online lecture modules. Data from the first lecture module was not included in the study since students may have been unfamiliar with the online lecture delivery system during the first week of the semester. In addition to the above, the system also measured the total number of print-optimized lectures that were accessed at least once by each student. At no point during the course were students informed that the instructor had the ability to monitor their online behavior. Further, during debriefing, no student indicated knowing or having suspected the instructor of having the ability to monitor students’ behaviors within the online course environment. Thus it is unlikely that the compliance behavior exhibited by the students was a result of the students’ need to please their teacher or caused by a fear of negative consequences for not complying with his instructions.

We make the assumption that a student who reads a lecture online is likely to spend more time viewing the lecture online, compared to a student who prints the document. We also assume that a student who reads the lecture online is not as likely to access the print-optimized page, compared to a student who prints the lecture. While the time spent viewing the online lecture material (or the accessing of the print-optimized pages) can be influenced by many external factors, we believe that the process of random assignment of subjects to the three experimental groups will cancel out most, if not all extraneous influences, leaving compliance with the paper conservation request as the main determinant of the time spent online.

After eliminating students who did not complete the course, we were left with data from 96 subjects (32, 33, and 31 subjects respectively in the no, low, and high public commitment conditions). The only direct meeting between the instructor and all the students enrolled in the course took place on the last day of the course. At this time subjects were asked to estimate the number of lectures they had read online (as opposed to the number of lectures that they had printed), and this estimate was found to be strongly correlated to the number of print-optimized lectures that were accessed (r=0.72) and to the amount of time spent accessing the online lectures (r=0.79). A debriefing session was conducted at that time during which subjects were found to have no knowledge of the manipulative intent of the researchers. As indicated previously, the debriefing also revealed that subjects were neither aware nor suspicious that the instructor had the ability to monitor students’ activities within the online lecture modules. Further, no subjects reported having downloaded the online lectures onto their personal computers for offline viewing.

RESULTS

The impact of public commitment on compliance behavior

The time spent online on each of the fourteen lectures was added together to yield a new variable representing the total time spent online on the lecture material (TIME). A simple analysis of variance indicated that the level of public commitment had a significant impact on TIME ($F_{2,93}=44.79$, $p=0.00$). Subjects in the high public commitment condition spent significantly more time online (385 minutes) than subjects in the low public commitment condition (335 minutes; $F_{1,62}=5.79$, $p=0.02$) or those in the no public commitment condition (205 minutes; $F_{1,61}=79.90$, $p=0.00$). Further, subjects in the low public commitment condition spent significantly more time online than those in the no public commitment condition ($F_{1,63}=55.11$, $p=0.00$).

A similar analysis was performed on the number of print-optimized lectures accessed (PRINT) by each subject. The public commitment conditions were found to have a significant impact on PRINT ($F_{2,93}=13.88$, $p=0.00$). Subjects in the high public commitment condition accessed significantly fewer print optimized lectures (5.23 lectures) than subjects in the low public commitment condition (7.52 lectures; $F_{1,62}=7.10$, $p=0.01$) or those in the no public commitment condition (9.75 lectures; $F_{1,61}=34.17$, $p=0.00$). Further, subjects in the low public commitment condition accessed significantly fewer print-optimized lectures compared to those in the no public commitment condition ($F_{1,63}=6.00$, $p=0.02$).

The above analyses indicate that manipulating the act of public commitment can be very effective in motivating individuals to engage in sustained compliance with a target behavior. Also the degree of compliance obtained with high public commitment was higher than that obtained with low public commitment or with no public commitment, while low public commitment resulted in higher levels of long-term compliance compared to no public commitment.

Prior studies have shown that the degree of compliance declines as the regimen durations increases (Rorer, Tucker, and Blake, 1988; Cummings, Baker, Kirscht, and Levin, 1982). To examine whether the paper conservation compliance behavior was sustained throughout the fourteen week period, we divided the fourteen weekly lectures into two halves and calculated the time spent online on the first seven lectures (TIME1), and on the last seven lectures (TIME2) and we repeated the previous analyses on these two new variables. The level of public commitment had a significant effect on both TIME1 ($F_{2,93}=14.31$, $p=0.00$) and TIME2 ($F_{2,93}=25.51$, $p=0.00$). During the first seven weeks subjects in the high public commitment condition spent significantly more time online (TIME1=222 minutes) than those in the low public commitment condition (197 minutes; $F_{1,62}=1.52$, $p=0.22$). However subjects in both the high public commitment condition ($F_{1,61}=27.03$, $p=0.00$) and those in the low public commitment condition ($F_{1,63}=18.49$, $p=0.00$) spent significantly more time online compared to the no public commitment subjects (126 minutes). During the second seven week period subjects in the high public commitment condition spent significantly more time online (TIME2=163 minutes) than those in the low public commitment condition (138 minutes; $F_{1,62}=3.65$, $p=0.06$). Moreover subjects in the high public commitment condition ($F_{1,61}=49.18$, $p=0.00$) and those in the low public commitment condition ($F_{1,63}=29.22$, $p=0.00$) spent significantly more time online compared to the no public commitment subjects (80 minutes).

Direct comparisons of the time spent viewing online lectures in the two halves of the semester is not meaningful since the complexity of the topics covered, and the length of the lectures in

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1The online lecture material was not designed to replace the hard-copy text book (which all subjects were required to read), but rather represented a commentary by the instructor that expanded upon or provided a different perspective on some of the topics discussed in each text book chapter. In addition to reading the online lecture notes and the hard-copy text book, students had to complete various online and offline assignments and take numerous online quizzes. The times spent online on these other activities were not included in our measurement of TIME.
the two halves of the semester were not identical. However that does not diminish the significance of the above findings since the analysis was successful in demonstrating that high public commitment resulted in sustained compliance behavior over the entire fourteen week period, and that the weaker low public commitment while not as effective in eliciting compliance over the long run, was better than no public commitment in sustaining long-term compliance behavior.

The preceding analyses indicate that public commitment motivates individuals to engage in sustained compliance behavior and that the degree of compliance obtained varies with the degree of publicness with which the commitment is declared. Further, the compliance obtained through the manipulation of high public commitment was sustained throughout a fourteen week period.

Goal importance as a mediator

Given the prior results, an important question to examine is how public commitment influences subsequent compliance behavior. We suggest that the act of making a public commitment to a goal such as paper conservation will make the goal more salient and important to the individual. Further as suggested by H2, the subjects’ evaluation of the importance of paper conservation (IMP) is expected to mediate the effect of the experimental manipulation of public commitment on the time spent online (TIME) and on the number of print-optimized lectures accessed (PRINT). Exhibit 1 includes the two measures of IMP. These measures did not show any evidence of scale compression, with the observations ranging from 1 to 7 on the seven-point scales and standard deviations of 1.23 and 1.35 for the two measures.

To verify H2, a two-step MANCOVA was performed. This analysis follows the procedure suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) where mediation is tested using four steps. First, the independent variable (the manipulation of public commitment) should be shown to have a significant effect on the mediator (IMP). Second, the independent variable should be shown to have a significant effect on the dependent variable (TIME). Third, the mediator should be shown to have a significant effect on the dependent variable. In the final step, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable should be shown to be nonsignificant when the mediating variable is introduced as a covariate. If all four of these steps are met, then the data are consistent with the hypothesis that the mediator variable completely mediates the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, and if the first three steps are met but step 4 is not, then partial mediation is indicated.

Steps 1 and 2 were done using a simple MANOVA performed with TIME, PRINT and IMP as dependent variables and the public commitment conditions as the independent factor. As required by Baron and Kenny (1986), the public commitment conditions had a significant effect on TIME (F 2,93=44.79, p=0.00), PRINT (F 2,93=13.88, p=0.00), and IMP (F 2,93=12.33, p=0.00). Steps 3 and 4 were done using MANCOVA, where IMP was introduced as a covariate, with TIME and PRINT as the dependent variables, and the public commitment conditions as the independent factor. IMP had a significant effect on TIME (F 1,92=25.72, p=0.00), and on PRINT (F 1,92=16.80, p=0.00). The final step of the test for mediation was to test if the introduction of IMP as a covariate led to the impact of the public commitment manipulation on TIME becoming insignificant. The F test indicated that public commitment continued to have a significant direct effect on TIME (now F 2,92=25.63, p=0.00 compared to the previous F 2,93=44.79, p=0.00) and PRINT (now F 2,92=5.40, p=0.01 compared to the previous F 2,93=13.88, p=0.00). In keeping with Baron and Kenny (1986), we conclude that the importance placed by the subjects on paper conservation partially mediated the effect of public commitment on the time spent online and on the number of print-optimized lectures accessed.

Susceptibility to normative influence as a moderator

Susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) was hypothesized to be a moderator of the effect of public commitment on long term compliance. Factor analysis revealed that five of the six measures of SNI formed a uni-dimensional construct with principal components extraction leading to factor loadings ranging from 0.69 to 0.86. After eliminating one SNI measure, (refer to Exhibit 1) the remaining five measures were found to have high reliability (Cronbach α=0.85), and therefore a combined scale was formed by averaging the five SNI measures. A new dummy variable SNI was created with a value of 0 to indicate subjects whose combined SNI was at or below the median, and a value of 1 to indicate subjects whose SNI scores were above the median. A two factor ANOVA

**EXHIBIT 1**

Measures of Importance of Paper Conservation

- I think conserving paper is an important objective
- The goal of reducing paper wastage is a worthwhile one

Measures of Susceptibility to Normative Influence (SNI)

- If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands they buy
- It is important that others like the products and brands I buy*
- I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them
- When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of
- I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others
- I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase

* These six measures of SNI were used after a pretest of the entire eight item subscale revealed that two measures did not have very high reliability.

* This item was dropped from the analysis in the main study because of low reliability.
(Public Commitment and SNI) was run and both Public Commit-
ment ($F_{2,90}=57.17$, $p=0.00$) and SNI ($F_{1,90}=14.20$, $p=0.00$) were
found to have significant main effects on the time spent online
(TIME). More interesting was the significant two-way interaction
between Public Commitment and SNI ($F_{2,90}=6.32$, $p=0.00$) de-
picted in Figure 1. Similar results were found when using the
number of print-optimized lectures accessed (PRINT) as the depen-
dent variable. Public Commitment ($F_{2,90}=17.00$, $p=0.00$) and SNI
($F_{1,90}=6.78$, $p=0.01$) were found to have significant main effects on
PRINT. Once again there was a significant two-way interaction
between Public Commitment and SNI ($F_{2,90}=8.98$, $p=0.00$).

To explain the interaction we examined the values of TIME
and PRINT for the three experimental conditions for both the high
and low SNI subjects (see Table 1 and Figure 1). Subjects high in
SNI spent significantly more time reading lectures online compared
to the low SNI subjects under conditions of low and high public
commitment. There was no significant difference in the time spent
online between the high and low SNI subjects under the no commit-
ment condition. Similar results were obtained with PRINT as the
dependent variable. These analyses provide support for our hypo-
thesis that susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) is a moderator
of the effect of public commitment on long term compliance. Thus
the low public commitment manipulation was adequate to ensure
high levels of compliance from subjects high in SNI, but the high
public commitment condition was required to gain maximum
compliance from subjects low in SNI.

**DISCUSSION**

This study contributes to the consumer behavior literature by
identifying a technique that providers can use to gain compliance
when customer compliance with his/her role once away from the
firm is integral to the successful delivery of the service. We
determined that public commitment was a significant motivator in
ensuring compliance behavior over an extended time period. Sub-
jects who made a public commitment to conserve paper by reading
lectures online were found to have done so compared to subjects
who made a less public commitment, and compared to those who
made no commitment at all. This result is particularly interesting

![FIGURE 1]
TIME by Public Commitment and SNI

![TABLE 1]
TIME and PRINT by Public Commitment and SNI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>PRINT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High SNI</td>
<td>Low SNI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Public Commitment</td>
<td>197.10</td>
<td>214.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Public Commitment</td>
<td>382.21</td>
<td>295.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Public Commitment</td>
<td>433.01</td>
<td>340.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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because the study participants did not benefit significantly from the outcome (paper conservation). Public commitment should have an even more significant impact on customer compliance in the case of services where consumers directly benefit from being compliant—services such as weight loss programs, long-term financial planning, and debt management programs.

Further it was found that the act of making a public commitment to a goal caused subjects to assess the goal as being more important. This appraisal of the importance of the goal was found to mediate some of the effect of public commitment on the compliance behavior (paper conservation). Finally we found the personality trait susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) to be a determinant of how effective public commitment would be in gaining compliance. Subjects high in SNI were more likely to be affected by public commitment, compared to those lower in SNI. Providers may want to explore alternate motivators for consumers low in SNI.

Prior investigations of long-term compliance in the medical arena have shown that regimen duration is predictive of compliance, with compliance decreasing with increasing regimen length. Long-term regimens tend to be more complex and often involve substantial behavior modification and this usually results in low levels of compliance. This despite the fact that the behaviors being requested are ones that the subjects should be highly motivated to comply with, e.g., weight loss, cholesterol reduction, hemodialysis treatment (Fishman, 1995).

In this study, we investigated compliance with the request to conserve paper by reading online course material off the computer screen rather than printing the online material for offline perusal. This compliance request required customers to engage in a modified behavior over an extended time period (fourteen weeks)—a behavior which is not intrinsically motivating to most subjects, and which was to be performed outside of the purview of the service provider. Under these circumstances, the ability to find significant differences in compliance behavior lends greater support to our hypothesis that the publicness with which a commitment is made will have a significant and favorable impact on long-term compliance behavior.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study examined the role of public commitment as a means of motivating customers of an online marketing course to comply with a one-time request to conserve paper. The findings of this study have important managerial implications for services marketers and others as it addresses how they can manage behavior when the customer is away from the provider and gain compliance needed to create the service.

First, public commitment was found to have a significant impact on compliance behavior despite the fact that the outcome of paper conservation did not significantly benefit the subjects, illuminating the potency of public commitment. Thus service providers should consider requesting their customers to make at least a low level public commitment to comply with his/her service role. Secondly, a one-time request to make a public commitment was asked of subjects, a more conservative test than found in most real life situations. Nevertheless, the impact of the one-time request, to make a public commitment, on compliance was robust. Repeated public commitments by subjects may significantly boost their motivation to comply with their stated goals. For example, in weight loss programs, counselors should repeatedly remind clients to “eat right.”

Thirdly, service providers may want to determine, in advance of providing the service, the importance of goal attainment to customers. Customers who evaluate a goal as being important may be more inclined to stay on task, e.g., adhere to a debt management program. And lastly, service providers should determine whether customers are susceptible to outside influence. Providers have more influence over customers who are concerned about hypocrisy or social disapproval. For example, individuals who are more susceptible to such social influence could be reminded of the undesirable consequences of not complying with the prescribed actions. At the same time, service providers may want to use other means of eliciting compliance behavior from those customers who are not susceptible to normative influence.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Though we found that subjects in the public commitment condition evaluated paper conservation to be more important than the subjects in the no commitment condition, we were unable to measure the pre-post change in Importance of Paper Conservation (IMP) caused by the manipulation of public commitment. The way this study was structured, there would have been only a few days between the two measurements of IMP. We concluded that two measurements of IMP in quick succession would have caused subjects to base their second response on their recollection of their previous response and also cause them to suspect the manipulative intent of the researchers. Thus IMP was measured only once, following the manipulation of public commitment, but before the measurement of compliance behavior began.

Future research should examine whether the manipulation of public commitment causes a change in the assessment of the importance of the target behavior by utilizing pre and post measures of goal importance. Additionally, future research should investigate and attempt to validate the role of public commitment in gaining compliance in the context of other services with different types of subjects and compliance behaviors. While this paper has examined the personality factor susceptibility to interpersonal influence, there are other individual factors, e.g., preference for consistency, which could impact conformity (Lascu and Zinkhan, 1999) and should be studied.

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