

## AN EVALUATION OF TOUCH ON A LARGE REQUEST: A FIELD SETTING<sup>1</sup>

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*Summary.*—The effect of touch on compliance to a request has traditionally been tested with small solicitation (answer to a small questionnaire, give a dime to a confederate, . . .). In our experiment a larger request was evaluated. Passersby, 53 men and 67 women, were asked by two confederates to look after a large and very excited dog for 10 minutes because each wanted to go into a pharmacy where animals were prohibited. In half of the cases, subjects were touched during the request. Analysis showed that, when touched, 55% of the subjects agreed with the request whereas 35% only in the no-touch control condition agreed. This finding indicates that touch was positively associated with the subjects' compliance ( $p < .03$ ).

Previous studies showed a brief tactile contact has a positive effect on compliance. Kleinke (1977) and Brockner, Pressman, Cabitt, and Moran (1982) found that touching forearms of people was associated with their being more likely to return the money found in a telephone box or to give a dime to a requester. Hornik (1987) and Paulsell and Goldman (1984) reported that touch increased the response rate to a street survey. A brief touch of a restaurant patron by a waitress or a waiter frequently raised the rate of tips left by the client (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986; Hornik, 1992b; Lynn, Le, & Sherwyn, 1998). Although these studies clearly indicate that touch is related to compliance, none tested the efficacy of a tactile contact on larger request, one which would imply a more active or a longer participation of the subject. In Kleinke's (1977) or in Brockner, *et al.*'s studies (1982), a single dime was solicited by the toucher. In studies by Hornik (1987) and in Paulsell and Goldman (1984) subjects were solicited to respond to a short survey containing 4 or 5 questions for which "Yes" or "No" were possible answers. To date, no evaluation of the effect of touch on larger requests have been made using direct solicitation.

Further, when no solicitation was made by the solicitor, tactile contact also enhanced spontaneous compliance by a subject even when the behavior implied spending money. Hornik (1992a) and Smith, Gier, and Willis (1982) stated that a person demonstrating products in a store observed that the willingness to taste the products increased when followed by a touch of a client

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during the formulation of the request and increased the selling rate of the product tasted. Even when no-direct solicitation to spend money was made in these two studies, authors suggest that touch can have a positive effect on a larger request when direct solicitation of help is made by the toucher. To test this effect, an experiment was carried out in which passersby were asked by a confederate to look after a very large dog, pulling on its leash. When formulating the request, the confederate briefly touched or did not touch the subject. It was hypothesized that in the touch condition people consented more favorably to the request formulated by the confederate.

#### METHOD

##### *Subjects*

Fifty-three male and 67 female adult passersby served as subjects.

##### *Procedure*

The experiment took place in a very busy street of a medium-sized tourist town (100,000 citizens) in France. The subjects were randomly assigned to two groups ( $n_s = 60$ ). They were solicited by two confederates; one was a 20-yr.-old man and the other was a 20-yr.-old woman, who were dressed in a casual manner like most of people of their age (jeans, sneakers, clean shirt). The confederate, who acted individually, had a dog on a leash. The dog was quite large (more than 88 lbs.), looked very excited, continuously pulling on its leash, hopping around people to play with or to be stroked by them. After selecting a subject (a man or a woman aged approximately 18 to 50), the confederate, holding the leash, held it out to the subject while asking the person to look after the dog for 10 min., just long enough to cross the street to a pharmacy from which animals were prohibited. In half of the cases, while soliciting the subject, the confederate touched the subject's arm for 1 sec. If the subject agreed to hold the dog, the confederate then gave the person the leash and crossed the street to the pharmacy. After entering the pharmacy, the confederate returned again and debriefed the subject.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis showed that in the touch condition, 55.0% (33 of 60) of the subjects consented to look after the dog and to wait for its owner's return, while only 35.0% (21 of 60) consented in the control condition. The difference between the rates was significant [ $\chi_1^2(N=120)=4.85, p < .03$ ]. However, no differences were found between the rates for the male and female confederates [ $\chi_1^2(N=120)=0.93, ns$ ] or for the subjects' sex [ $\chi_1^2(N=120)=1.56, ns$ ].

That touch had a significant positive effect on compliance to a particularly large request supports the effect of tactile contact on social influence as

well as the effect's generality across reports in the literature. Further, interesting questions for research are whether the efficacy of touch is mediated by a positive perception of the solicitor. Several studies have indicated that touch facilitates a positive evaluation of the toucher (Fisher, Rytting, & Heslin, 1976; Wycoff & Holley, 1990; Hornik, 1992b) and that a positive evaluation enhances helping behavior (Gross, Wallston, & Piliavin, 1975). It is then possible that the positive impression of the solicitor activated by touch predisposes the subject favorably to help the toucher.

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