

# **Getting a Foot-in-the-Door : Enhancing the Effectiveness of Cause-Related Marketing**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Research has consistently found that despite a high degree of expressed concern about the environment on the part of individuals, far fewer are willing to follow-up this concern with behavioral actions in support of the environment, especially when these actions require the individuals to absorb some costs. Using the theoretical framework of the foot-in-the-door technique, we conducted two studies to examine the effect of a small, active commitment to an environmental cause on consumer preference for a product that supported that cause. The empirical results show strong support for the fact that getting consumers to make an active commitment to a cause is an important prerequisite for behavioral consistency (in terms of willingness to buy a product). Further, we add to the evidence on self-perception theory as an underlying process for the effectiveness of the technique. We also find that although the commitment increases willingness to buy a product related to the cause, the effect works only when the effort required to support the cause is minimal. Implications for marketing theory and practice are discussed.

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# **Getting a Foot-in-the-Door : Enhancing the Effectiveness of Cause-Related Marketing**

## **1. Introduction**

Corporations have long been interested in inducing compliance behavior from members of their target groups. This compliance can take various shapes and forms. For example, a non-profit organization may be interested in inducing teenagers to quit (or abstain from) smoking, a relief organization may want its target audience to donate money or resources, and a for-profit organization may want people to prefer and purchase its products over competitors'. In the context of influence and compliance, some researchers have also expressed concern about how seemingly small and harmless commitment can induce significant behavioral change (Cialdini, 2001). According to the commitment/consistency principle, getting a person to comply with a small and seemingly harmless request greatly increases their likelihood of complying with a subsequent larger request. Within the domain of the commitment/consistency principle, an interesting way to induce compliance that has been extensively studied in social psychology is the "foot-in-the-door" technique (Burger, 1999; Snyder and Cunningham, 1975; Seligman, Bush, and Kirsch, 1976; Uranowitz, 1975). The basic premise of this technique is that once a person complies with a small request, it becomes more probable that (s)he would comply with a bigger, more substantial related request.

This study, conducted in the context of environmental product marketing, examines the effect of exactly this kind of small and harmless commitment on behavioral intention. Specifically, we want to test if a small commitment to an environmental cause induces purchase intention changes consistent with that commitment. This study is interesting and important from many perspectives. First, the "small commitment" technique provides a strong tool to marketers to induce behavioral changes. It would be managerially relevant to examine the efficacy of this technique. Second, consumer interest in green marketing has increased significantly in recent years. Green marketing, however, is not a cost-free option. Often, buyers have to do with a product that is of slightly lower quality (as in case of recycled paper), spend extra money (as in case of buying organic foods), or exert extra effort (as in case of recycling cans and bottles) to support the cause. Marketers have also complained that though customers say they support green marketing, many of them are not actually willing to share the cost of it (Mandese, 1991). Hence, it would be interesting to examine if this technique can be used to induce customers to commit to such causes and share the responsibility of carrying them through. Finally, from a theoretical perspective, there are still some gaps in our understanding of the boundary conditions of the foot-in-the-door technique and the importance of some of the processes underlying its effectiveness. This study attempts to address some of these gaps.

## **2. Environmental Consumerism and Foot-in-the-Door**

Environmental consumerism can take two essential forms. First, consumers can take steps to conserve the natural resources and protect the environment from further damage through their purchase and consumption behavior (also called green buying). Examples of such measures

would be recycling paper, metal, and plastic, using recyclable and biodegradable materials, using energy conserving products, and buying products manufactured with “safer” production (e.g., less polluting) techniques. This would include post-consumption environmentally friendly behaviors such as recycling cans and paper, proper disposal of harmful products such as solvents and spent batteries, and proper disposal of waste. Second, environmental consumerism also includes those actions of consumers that go beyond the immediate consumption experience. This would include such activities as supporting organizations that fight for environmental protection, volunteering for “environment-enhancing” activities as beach litter-removal participation, engaging in political activism to protect the environment, and making donations to organizations that work for protection of the environment.

Using two studies, this research investigates consumers’ willingness to support environmental causes (linked to their product purchases) through charitable donations to organizations actively engaged in environmental protection. Specifically, we examine if the foot-in-the-door technique can be effectively applied to increase consumer support for products linked to such donations. In other words, we examine if making a small commitment to a cause has an effect on people’s willingness to buy products from companies that support that cause through charitable contributions. In addition, we also examine how this willingness changes when the customer has to pay extra for the donation versus when the donation is made by the company without any incremental cost to the customer. Our motivation to conduct this additional analysis is as follows. Several studies have found no correlation between pro-environment attitude and pro-environment behavior (see, e.g., Oskamp et al., 1991; Vining and Ebreo, 1990). In psychology, several studies have found the foot-in-the-door technique to be ineffective, suggesting that the technique may have some boundary conditions (see, e.g., Foss and Dempsey, 1979; Harari, Mohr, and Hosey, 1980). One variable that has been shown to reduce compliance with the second request is the amount of effort needed to complete the second request. If the second request is seen as too demanding, it may counteract the positive effects of foot-in-the-door (Cialdini and Ascani, 1976). In our study, we explore the impact of the initial small commitment when the customer is asked to pay extra for the cause. Thus, whereas the main focus of our experiment is on the impact of the foot-in-the-door technique in getting support for environmental causes, we also examine consumers’ reaction when they are asked to shoulder a greater burden of the cost of supporting the cause.

### *2.1. Prior Experimental Evidence*

Several studies have been conducted in the past to examine the existence of and boundary conditions for the foot-in-the-door technique. There appears to be abundant empirical evidence in support of its existence. Freedman and Fraser’s (1966) seminal work found that compliance with a small initial request positively influenced the compliance to larger related subsequent request. Similarly, Goethals and Reckman (1973) showed that students distorted their recall of their initial answers after attending a discussion group that was designed to alter their opinion. The students distorted their recall to be consistent with their new views. In a different context, Stults and Messe (1984) demonstrated that public announcement of intention affected subsequent behavior, as subjects strove to project a consistent public image. Sherman (1980) examined the impact of one’s own predicted behavior on actual

behavior and found that subjects were more likely to engage in their self-predicted behavior in order to be consistent, even when such behavior was not their “normal” behavior. A study done by Schwarzwald, Bizman, and Raz (1983) showed that people who signed a petition for the establishment of a social club for handicapped individuals were more willing to donate to and comply with large donation requests than people who were not previously approached about the petition. In marketing, Tybout (1978) examined the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door and other influence strategies on gaining consumer acceptance for a new service and found that the strategy interacted with source credibility to influence effectiveness. More recently, research has examined the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door in increasing subjects’ intent to become organ donors (Girandola, 2002). Although most social psychological research on the technique has focused on its effectiveness in an interpersonal, social interaction, it has also been tested and shown to be effective in a computer-mediated context. A small commitment to a cause made online resulted in an increase in compliance with a charitable solicitation (Guéguen and Jacob, 2001). This led us to believe that the technique could potentially be used in an advertising and marketing context.

## *2.2. How Does Foot-In-The-Door Work?*

Cialdini’s (2001) commitment/consistency theory provides an elegant overview of the foot-in-the-door phenomenon. Because consistency is valued in society, people have a strong desire to be and appear consistent in their behaviors. Thus, performing a behavior pressures the subject to perform future behaviors that are consistent with the initial behavior. As a compliance technique, it can be used effectively by convincing subjects to perform a seemingly insignificant task to which they are likely to agree without giving much thought. Once subjects agree to do a small task, they also end up agreeing to the next bigger task to be consistent in their behavior. The need to be consistent is driven by a variety of related underlying processes (Burger, 1999). The process most commonly used to explain why foot-in-the-door works is self-perception theory (Bem, 1972). According to this theory, individuals generally hold only weak or hazy attitudes and use self-observations of their behaviors to infer their attitudes. That is, on complying with an initial request, people infer that they must feel favorably about the issue and thus are more likely to comply with related future requests as a result of this newly formed attitude.

In a detailed analysis of over three decades of research on the foot-in-the-door technique, Burger (1999) presented an explanation for the inconsistent results shown in prior research on foot-in the door. He suggests that there are multiple related and interacting psychological processes that underlie the operation of the technique. Some of these processes enhance the effectiveness of the technique and others inhibit it. For example, self-perception effects, the need for consistency, subject attribution for the behavior, and resistance to renegeing on commitments all enhance the effect, while reactance against multiple requests without reciprocation, conformity to established norms, and attributions may reduce the effect. Using meta-analytic techniques, Burger’s (1999) paper found support for all these processes and suggested that most studies on foot-in-the-door actually are the result of multiple simultaneous processes.

Given that the processes that generate the foot-in-the-door effect have already been extensively examined, we focus instead on the effectiveness of the use of this technique to influence purchase intentions.

### 3. Study 1

In the first study, we examine foot-in-the-door in a marketing context and see if the psychological pressure caused by the principle transfers over to purchase intention of a related product. Specifically, we see if a small commitment to an environmental cause influences the willingness to buy a product that supports that cause. We asked our subjects to actively declare their attitudes towards an environmental issue (protection of rainforests). Given the nature of the issue, and the seeming harmlessness of declaring their positive attitude towards rainforest protection on a questionnaire, it was assumed that most of them would say that they are favorably inclined to protect rainforests. The subjects were then asked if they would be willing to buy a product for which the seller made a donation to protect the rainforests with each purchase. It was expected that subjects who actively committed to supporting rainforest protection prior to exposure to the stimulus would be more willing to buy the “cause-related” product as compared to subjects not making any such commitment. Therefore, the first hypothesis of our study can be stated as follows:

*H1: Making a small active commitment to an environmental cause results in a greater willingness to buy a product that donates to that cause.*

In his review of the foot-in-the-door experiments, Burger (1999) explains that one prediction derived from self-perception theory is that the degree of compliance with the second request would be directly related to the similarity between the first and second requests. That is, if commitment to a certain cause alters the subject’s self-perception about his or her beliefs about that cause, it should not increase compliance towards a request on an unrelated cause. In one of their experiments, Freedman and Fraser (1966) provided evidence in support of this prediction by showing that a commitment to display a small sign encouraging driver safety resulted in increased compliance to display a large lawn sign asking people to drive carefully. However, when the initial request was for a different cause – keeping California beautiful – the compliance rate was much lower (48% against 76% for similar requests). Surprisingly, there have been few further examinations of this important prediction. In the words of Burger (1999, p. 311), “Although Freedman and Fraser (1966) provided evidence consistent with the prediction in their original study, this obvious variable has gone relatively unexamined ever since.”

From an experimental design standpoint, we also need to ensure that any increased willingness to buy a product among subjects making a commitment is not due simply to the mere existence of the additional questions prior to stimulus exposure rather than because of the resulting commitment and altered self-perception. Prior research is also unclear whether the attitude change as a result of self-perception is towards a specific target or towards a more general cause (Burger, 1999). That is, does a small commitment towards rainforest protection result in altered attitudes only about rainforest protection behaviors or does it result in a more favorable attitude towards charitable causes in general? In our study, we

explored this important issue by testing whether declaration of attitudes towards one cause had any significant effect on behavioral intention towards some other cause. Consistent with the self-perception process, we believe that making an active commitment to protecting the rainforest would not result in an increased willingness to buy a product that donates to a juvenile crime reduction. Thus, our second hypothesis was as follows:

*H2: Making an active commitment to a cause will not result in increased willingness to buy a product that promotes some other unrelated cause.*

Despite the empirical support enjoyed by the commitment/consistency principle and the foot-in-the-door theory, there are some studies that have failed to find such evidence, especially in the context of donations to charitable causes. The studies have generally shown that if the second request is perceived as being particularly effortful relative to the first request, compliance drops dramatically. Foss and Dempsey (1979) failed to observe the foot-in-the-door phenomenon in their experiments. They first attempted to get a small commitment followed by a request to donate blood. Their results were not supportive of the foot-in-the-door technique. Similarly, Cialdini and Ascani (1976) and Harari, Mohr, and Hosey (1980) found that the door-in-the-face technique (make a large request first, followed by a far more moderate request) worked better than the foot-in-the-door technique. In study 1, we try to validate the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door within a marketing context. We also explore the boundary conditions of the theory by examining if, after expressing their willingness to buy the product that supports the cause, subjects prefer a cash rebate rather than a donation to that cause.

### *3.1. Method*

In order to test the effect of commitment on subsequent behavior, we decided to ask subjects in the experimental condition questions about their commitment to an environmental issue (protection of rainforests) prior to exposure to the advertisement stimulus. Subjects were simply asked to agree or disagree with a set of non-threatening statements regarding the issue. Given the nature of the issue, we were fairly confident that subjects would all be favorably inclined towards it. This belief was based on the results of an informal pilot and is also borne out by a post-hoc analysis of their responses. The pilot study also compared subjects' commitment to rainforests and juvenile crime prevention, and the two were found to be statistically similar.

### *3.2. Experimental Stimuli*

On receiving the experimental booklet, subjects were presented the statements supporting the protection of rainforests. This part was designed to make the subjects express an active commitment to the cause. They were then presented with a print advertisement that bundled a commonly purchased household product with a contribution to the environmental cause. The print advertisement was for liquid laundry detergent, and the advertisement prominently displayed the fact that the manufacturer will make a donation of \$1 towards the environmental cause for every purchase. Subjects in the control condition were directly shown the advertisement without having to answer any questions about commitment to the

cause. To test the second hypothesis, two sets of advertisements were prepared. In one case, the donation was to the cause (protection of rainforests) to which subjects had committed before seeing the advertisement. In the second set, the proposed donation was to an unrelated cause (prevention of juvenile crime). Finally, to examine the subjects' willingness to part with money, another version of the questionnaire asked subjects if they preferred to receive cash back or donate the money to the cause. The advertisements were realistic.

### *3.3. Experimental Design and Data Collection*

Subjects were a group of 98 individuals that included homemakers, students, professionals, technical, and clerical workers. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the following four conditions:

Condition 1: [Commitment to rainforests→ donation to rainforests] Subjects first made a commitment to rainforests. They were then shown an advertisement for a product with a proposed donation to protection of rainforests with each purchase.

Condition 2: [No prior commitment to rainforests→ donation to rainforests] Subjects were asked no questions about their commitment to rainforests. They were simply shown the advertisement for a product with a proposed donation to protection of rainforests with each purchase.

Condition 3: [Commitment to rainforests→ donation to juvenile crime prevention] Subjects first made an active commitment to rainforests. They were then shown an ad for a product with a proposed donation to prevention of juvenile crime with each purchase.

Condition 4: [Commitment to rainforests→ donation to rainforests or cash rebate] Subjects first made an active commitment to rainforests. They were then shown the advertisement and were given the option of either donating \$1 to protection of rainforests or take \$1 off the price.

In each of the conditions, subjects first answered some basic demographic questions. After exposure to the advertisement, subjects were asked a series of questions that included willingness to buy the advertised product and value perceptions. In Condition 4, additional questions asking subjects their preference for donating to a cause versus a cash rebate were asked.

We compared the willingness to buy the product between Conditions 1 and 2 to test Hypothesis 1. The second hypothesis was tested by comparing the results for Conditions 1 and 3. An examination of the choices made in Condition 4 will provided some preliminary answers to our exploratory question – given a choice, will people committing to a cause prefer a cash discount over a donation to the cause?

### *3.4. Results*

Before conducting the substantive analysis, we checked the average commitment level to the cause of rainforest protection. Our premise, given the nature of the issue, was that when

asked, most respondents would express a favorable attitude towards it. Actively stating that attitude however will result in an increased willingness to perform behaviors consistent with that stated attitude. As noted in Table 1, the average commitment to rainforest protection was high and statistically similar across the three groups that were asked questions related to it (commitment was assessed on five-point scales). It is important to note the underlying theoretical assumption here – that it is the act of making a small active commitment to the rainforest that makes them more willing to buy a product that donates to the cause they have just committed to. Overall, subjects in all conditions were expected to be equally committed to rainforest protection and this is what we found. We also performed another check to make sure that the subjects found the "value of the product" consistent across four conditions. As shown in Table 1, subjects did not statistically differ in their assessment of the value of the product across these conditions.

**Table 1: Commitment to Rainforests and Value of the Product (on a scale of 1 to 5)**

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Average Commitment</i>	<i>Average Product Value</i>
1	3.87*	3.71*
2	N/A**	3.52*
3	3.96*	3.43*
4	3.72*	3.74*

\* all values are statistically similar within a column

\*\* commitment not assessed

Willingness to buy was assessed using three items. An average of item values was used to represent this measure. Data were analyzed using the ANOVA technique. As noted in Table 2, our results show strong support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. Subjects who expressed their commitment to rainforests were more willing to buy a product that supported protection of rainforests than did subjects who did not express any such commitment (Conditions 1 vs. 2). Similarly, subjects who made commitment to rainforests demonstrated far less willingness to buy a product supporting juvenile crime prevention than the same product when it supported the cause they had committed to (protecting rainforests).



**Table 2: Willingness to Buy (Means on a scale of 1 to 5)**

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Willingness to Buy</i>
1	3.35
2	2.72
3	2.41
<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Difference</i>
H1: Diff(1 and 2)	0.73*
H2: Diff(1 and 3)	0.94*

\* significant at  $p < 0.05$

Condition 4 results were interesting. Despite having expressed commitment to protection of rainforests, 80% of subjects opted for cash rebate of \$1 rather than donating that dollar to protecting rainforests. Thus, it appears that the compliance-inducing power of the commitment is not strong enough to overcome subjects' preference for cash back.

### *3.5. Discussion*

Study 1 shows quite clearly that getting subjects to make an active commitment to a cause positively influences their willingness to buy a product that supports that cause. In other words, the initial commitment to a cause causes subjects to react favorably to a product that associates itself with that charitable cause.

The results also provide indirect evidence in support of self-perception theory as an underlying psychological process for this effect. We find that an active commitment towards one cause (rainforest protection) has minimal effect on behavior related to another unrelated cause (juvenile crime prevention). It is interesting to note here that the willingness to buy between Conditions 2 and 3 was statistically the same. Thus, the expression of commitment to rainforests made no difference at all to behavior related to juvenile crime prevention. In other words, subjects who expressed no commitment to any cause behaved similarly to those who made a commitment to an unrelated cause.

We also found some exploratory evidence that while commitments can increase willingness to buy a product related to the commitment, it will not result in a significant preference for donating cash to the cause as opposed to putting it in their pocket. This result is somewhat counterintuitive, as one would have expected the respondents to "put their money where their mouth is." We decided to conduct a second study to explore this issue further. We were interested in determining if the source of the money for the charitable contribution (the subjects' own pocket as opposed to a company contribution) would affect the effectiveness of the foot-in-the-door technique.

## 4. Study 2

The first study did not address the issue of the source of donation. In other words, it was not explicitly stated if the donation was being made by the buyer or by the company. The implicit assumption was that the charitable contribution would not raise the cost of the product to the purchaser. The exploratory part of the study indicated that subjects will be more favorably inclined to buy the cause-related product if they didn't have to pay for the donation themselves. In other words, the initial commitment will have an effect on willingness to buy only if the donation is being made by the company. If the subjects have to pay from their own pockets for supporting the cause, they may be reluctant to do so. Thus, the follow-up study was designed to test the following hypothesis:

*H3: Making an active commitment to an environmental cause results in a greater willingness to buy a product that donates to such a cause, only if the donation does not entail an additional cost to the customer.*

### 4.1. Study 2 Design

The design of this study was similar to that of the first study. However, two additional factors were included in this study. The first factor was the source of donation. In one condition, the subjects were told that the donation was being made by the company at no increased expense to them. They were told that “the company will make the donation without increasing the price of the detergent for you.” In the other condition, the subjects were told that the donation will be an added cost for the customer. They were told that they will be paying more than what they usually pay for their detergent purchase, and that “the extra [money] that you will pay for the detergent will go as a donation” to the cause. We also controlled for the size of the donation by including two levels of donation: \$1.00 and \$0.50 for a \$7.99 purchase. Thus, the study had a 2x2x2 between-subject design (commitment x donation source x donation amount).

### 4.2. Results

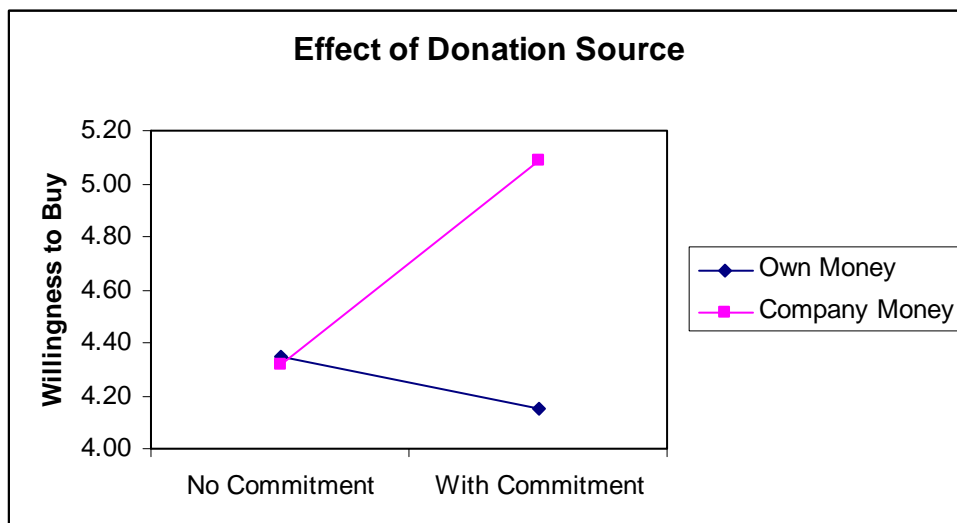
One hundred and fifty three undergraduate students at a Midwestern U.S. university were randomly assigned to the eight experimental conditions. Our analysis indicated no effect for the size of the donation and all subsequent analysis was done for the remaining 2x2 design. The means and cell sizes (in parentheses) for each cell are reported in Table 3.

**Table 3: Mean Values for Willingness to Buy**

	<b>Commitment=No</b>	<b>Commitment=Yes</b>
<b>Donation Source=Own</b>	4.35 (39)	4.15 (39)
<b>Donation Source=Company</b>	4.32 (39)	5.09 (36)

In order to test H3, we compared the difference in means for the two commitment conditions. When the source of donation was the subjects' own funds, the willingness to buy the product was statistically equivalent across the two conditions (4.35 vs. 4.15,  $p=0.60$ ). However, when the source of the donation was the company, commitment had a strong positive impact on willingness to buy (4.32 vs. 5.09,  $p<0.03$ ). Thus, our data supports H3, as subjects seem to follow through with the commitment only if supporting the cause does not entail a direct out-of-pocket expense. We further confirmed this finding by running two separate ANOVA analyses for the two groups (based on donation source). As expected, we find that when the company donates to the cause, commitment has a strong influence on willingness to buy ( $F(1, 74) = 5.46, p<0.03$ ) whereas commitment has no significant influence when subjects had to pay more for the product in order to support the cause. Thus, study 2 supports the findings of our original study and also adds an important qualifier to its findings. After having expressed a commitment to a cause, subjects tend to be more favorably disposed to supporting a product that contributes to that cause. However, this disposition works only in those situations where subjects do not perceive a direct out-of-pocket expense to supporting the product. This finding is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

*Figure 1: Effect of Donation Source on Commitment Effectiveness*



### 4.3. Discussion

An interesting finding of study 2 was that even when subjects expressed commitment to a cause, they chose not to support it monetarily when they were given the option of retaining the monetary benefit for themselves. The preliminary finding in study 1 was that when given the option subjects who expressed a commitment to rainforests were more likely to take a dollar rebate than donate it to the rainforests. In study 2, when subjects who made a commitment to a cause were told that they would have to shoulder the cost of the charitable contribution to that cost, they were no more willing to buy the product than subjects who had made no commitment. In fact, subjects who made a commitment had a slightly (though not statistically significant) lower willingness to buy the product than those not making a commitment. This could be indicative of a reactance effect where subjects who made the commitment felt they were being taken advantage of when they were immediately asked to

pay a premium to buy a product supporting the cause. It is also possible that the link between a charitable donation and product purchase is stronger for some products than others. Strahilevitz and Myers (1998) examined the effectiveness of using donations to charity as an incentive to purchase a product. They theorized that the purchased product fulfills a desired need, whereas the donation to charity generates the altruistic, good feeling, referred to as the "warm glow," associated with contributing to a worthy cause. Purchases that provide this "warm glow" are referred to as affect-based complementarities. They hypothesized that the altruistic, feel-good donation strategy would be more effective in the case of hedonic rather than practical products. Subjects in their study were given either a point-of-purchase cash rebate or a donation-to-charity incentive at the time of purchase. Cash rebate coupon redemptions were higher for the practical purchase than the hedonic purchase. Given that our product, a laundry detergent, is a utilitarian purchase, our findings are consistent with those of Strahilevitz and Myers (1998). It is possible that subjects would have opted for donations instead of cash rebates if we had chosen a hedonic product.

## 5. Conclusion

We find support for the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door in the context of consumer reactions to products supporting environmental causes. Two studies provided evidence that behavioral consistency after a commitment extends to the domain of purchase intentions. That is, in order to be consistent with their expressed commitments, people are willing to modify their purchase intentions. For example, whenever subjects expressed commitment to rainforests, they expressed greater willingness to support products that contributed to rainforest protection. To demonstrate that the effect is cause specific, we demonstrated that commitment to one cause had no significant impact on behavioral intention towards a product contributing to another cause. Commitment to rainforests did not make the respondents support juvenile crime prevention. We also explored some boundary conditions for its effectiveness in a marketing context. The positive effect of a commitment was not strong enough to cause people to put their own money towards a product supporting the cause.

Burger (1999) suggests that one psychological process that may inhibit the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door is psychological reactance. That is, by immediately following an initial request with a second larger request, norms of reciprocity may be violated and subjects may react against the second request and thereby be *less* willing to comply with the second request. Thus, the effectiveness of foot-in-the-door may be enhanced by allowing for a delay between the commitment and the subsequent desired behavior. One study examining this effect concluded that compliance with a second request was increased when either a different person made the second request or when there was a delay (their experiment used 2 days) between the first and second requests (Chartrand, Pinckert, and Burger, 1999). In the context of our studies, this may suggest that the technique may actually be *more* effective in "real-world" settings where there will inevitably be a time delay between when companies can obtain consumer commitment and when they can present their product associated with the cause. In both our studies, the first "request" (making a commitment to a cause) was immediately followed by the second request (purchase of product contributing to the cause). Especially in the case of the increased effort, where subjects were asked to shoulder the cost of the contribution, it is possible that we observed a reactance effect where subjects in the

commitment condition felt they were being taken advantage of and reacted against this loss of freedom by reducing their intention to buy the product. Thus, in the real world, with a temporal and spatial delay between the presentations of the two requests, the commitment may be effective at getting consumers to pay the cost of the contribution to the cause while still resulting in an increased willingness to buy the product.

Extensive research in social psychology has examined the effectiveness of small commitments in increasing the likelihood of compliance with subsequent related requests. Another body of research has examined the idea of “green marketing” and the surprising lack of consistency between peoples’ reported environmental consciousness and environmentally conscious behavior. We bring these two streams of research together in this study and demonstrate that marketers may be able to effectively use the commitment/consistency principle to (a) increase consumer preference for their product, and (b) get consumers to behaviorally follow through with their professed commitment to environmental causes. Based on a review of recent studies, for example, Hume (1991) concluded that there is a significant gap between the stated beliefs and actual pro-environment actions of consumers. In one study, almost three-fourths of all respondents claimed that they would pay more for “green” products, but only 14% actually bought goods made from recycled materials (cf. Mainieri et al., 1997). It appears that making consumers actively commit to the “green” cause may actually result in greater follow through on that claim.

Our study showed strong empirical evidence that consumers induced to make small and seemingly harmless active commitments to an environmental cause are much more likely to remain consistent with that commitment and have greater intention to purchase products that support that cause. Marketers can make their environmental efforts pay off in greater sales much more effectively if they can get consumers to make an active commitment to their cause. The results of this study show that this commitment can be relatively small. When confronted with a situation where a small commitment towards an environmental cause is required, few consumers are likely to actively repudiate the cause. Most people would agree to “caring about the environment” or be willing to support the “reduction of harmful environmental pollutants.” While several marketers are willing to provide sales-based donations to such causes based on consumers’ expressed beliefs, there have been few studies on the impact of these charitable contributions made by marketers on consumer preference for the product. This study provides a theoretical framework and subsequent empirical support for a commitment/consistency-based reaction. While consumers may profess a concern for the environment, they may only be willing to buy a product supporting that cause when their concern for the environment has been made salient with an active commitment.

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