

Abstract

This research tested the effectiveness of the evoking freedom technique in two field experiments. Participants were asked to either complete a survey (Experiment 1) or to allow a stranger to borrow their mobile phone to make a call (Experiment 2). Half of the requests involved language that evoked freedom (“feel free to say no”). In both experiments, results showed significantly greater compliance in the “feel free to say no” condition.

Introduction

- The evoking freedom technique, also known as “but you are free” (BYAF), involves offering individuals the option to refuse a given request (Guéguen & Pascual, 2000).
- The effectiveness of BYAF is explained in terms of both reactance theory and commitment theory. Reactance theory suggested that perceived threats to personal freedom motivate individuals to reestablish their freedom (Wright, Agtarap, & Mlynski, 2015).
- Commitment theory proposed that perceived volition increases an individual’s level of commitment (Kiesler & Sakumura, 1966;)
- The BYAF technique has increased compliance for both reasonable and seemingly outlandish requests. These requests include solicitations for bus fare (Guéguen & Pascual, 2000), ordering a specific dish at a restaurant (Guéguen, Jacob, & Pascual, 2013), clicking on specific websites (Joule, Girandola, & Bernard, 2007), and holding a clear plastic box with a large spider (Guéguen, Silone, David, & Pascual, 2015).

Purpose and Hypothesis

We conducted two experiments to test the effectiveness of the evoking freedom technique on a university campus. For both studies, we hypothesized that the addition of the BYAF phrase (“feel free to say no”) would increase compliance to requests.

“FREE TO SAY NO”: EVOKING FREEDOM INCREASED COMPLIANCE IN TWO FIELD EXPERIMENTS

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Experiment 1 Methodology

Participants:

- 45 male and female University of Baltimore students (after omitting 6 students who did not listen to the complete request)
- Approximately half were assigned in the BYAF condition ($n = 25$) and half were in the control condition ($n = 20$)

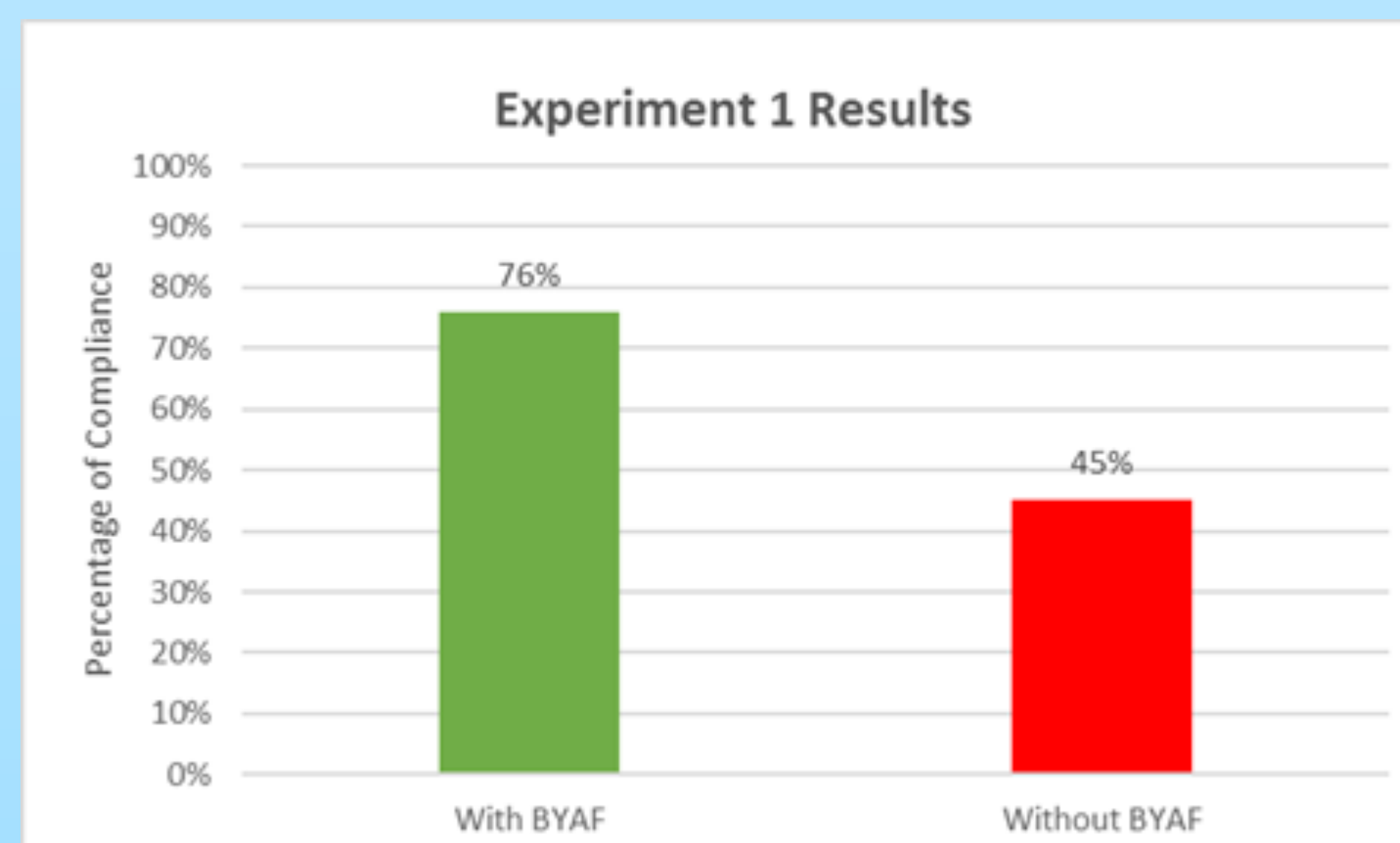
Design/Procedure:

- This study involved a one-way (evoking freedom vs. control) between-subjects experimental design.
- Participants were asked to fill out a modified University of Baltimore student satisfaction survey in the Student Center. BYAF participants were exposed to the same request, but a “feel free to say no” statement was included at the end.

Experiment 1 Results

- A Chi-square test for independence determined that allowing participants the freedom to refuse a request significantly increased compliance, $\chi^2(1, N = 45) = 4.54$, $p = .03$. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Percentage of compliance as a function of condition.



Experiment 2 Methodology

Participants:

- 40 male and female University of Baltimore students ($n = 20$ in the BYAF condition and $n = 20$ in the control condition)

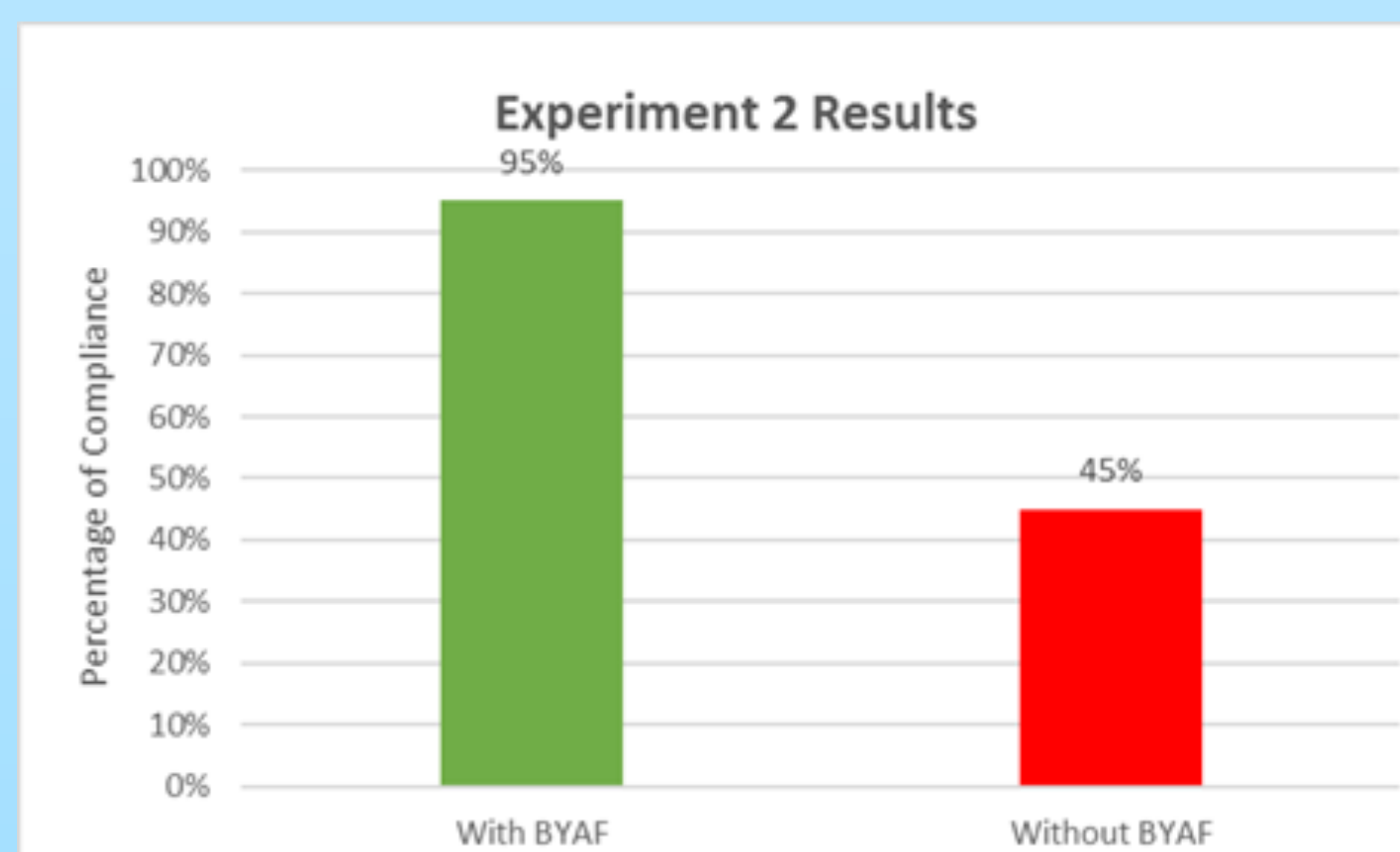
Design/Procedure:

- This study also involved a one-way (evoking freedom vs. control) between-subjects experimental design.
- In the control condition, a confederate approached a participant with a direct request to use their cell phone.
- In the experimental condition, a confederate approached a participant with the same request, followed by the phrase “feel free to say no” at the end. If the participant accepted the request, the confederate used the participant's cell phone to briefly call his/her own phone number.

Experiment 2 Results

- A Chi-square test for independence determined that allowing participants the freedom to refuse the cell phone request significantly increased compliance, $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 11.90$, $p < .001$. See Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Percentage of compliance as a function of condition.



Discussion

- In two different experiments, using two quite different requests, the BYAF technique significantly increased compliance.
- The 95% compliance rate observed for the BYAF condition in Experiment 2 is especially noteworthy. Cell phones are highly valued and expensive possessions, representing a critical part of student’s lives (Nikhita, 2015). In addition, UB police personnel frequently caution students about cell phone theft, thus the overwhelming majority of students agreeing to relinquish their (likely) most valued possession to a stranger was surprising.
- The vast majority of research on this technique has been conducted in France. Our studies illustrate that this technique replicates in another highly individualistic culture using both a low and high-cost request.
- Given the diminished value that collectivistic cultures place on personal freedom, it would be worthwhile to examine this aspect of culture (ind./coll.) as a moderator of these effects.

A live trap-door spider was used in an experiment conducted by Guéguen, Silone, David, & Pascual, 2015.



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