

Logos and Compliance: A Strong Case of Mindless Trust ¹

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Paper Revised and Submitted for Publication in Organization Science

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Abstract

In four studies we examine the relationship between the presence of an organizational logo and compliance, and document higher compliance rates in the presence than in the absence of the logo. Study 1 verified this relationship in the field and Study 2 replicated the field findings in a lab setting. Study 2 also confirmed trust as a mediator and risk as a moderator of this relationship, showing that trust and greater compliance are produced by the presence of a logo in high-risk but not in low-risk situations. Study 3 confirmed the moderating effects of risk on these findings in a field setting. Study 4 then used a lab set-up to confirm generalization of the findings to different logos. The findings hold important implications for research and management of symbols, trust and compliance in organizations and for organization theory on trust and compliance.

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Suppose a stranger approached you on the street and offered you a food sample. Would you take it? Would your reaction change if he or she was wearing a shirt bearing the logo of a recognized commercial product? We suggest it might. The logo serves as an icon connecting the person to a larger entity, making the offer appear legitimate and turning the stranger from one unknown (and therefore to be feared) into someone with an identity, however impersonal. In much the same way employees may react differently and comply more when they see rules and regulations posted on corporate stationery. And a new technology may be trusted more if or when its implementation documents are accompanied by the corporate logo. The appearance of a logo, we suggest, creates an association to the larger organizational entity, which can elicit employee trust and compliance.

In four empirical studies we document a relationship between visible symbols (or logos), trust and compliant behavior. Our findings identify what is, in fact, a paradoxical situation. Logos seem to be superficial and easy to fake or manipulate – for example, they can be downloaded from the internet and printed anywhere. This would suggest that in potentially threatening or risky contexts, logos should be regarded with suspicion. And yet our findings show that logos are likely to increase compliance when the risks and potential costs in a situation are high rather than low. Why this is so is a question we address.

We begin with a short review of research on organizational symbols as a source of information and of research connecting symbols, trust and compliance. This review lays the

groundwork for our hypotheses. We then report on two field studies and two lab studies that support these hypotheses. Our discussion extends the implications of these findings to organizations and organization theory.

Symbols as Information

Symbols are organizational artifacts (objects, actions or events) to which people attribute meaning (Gioia, 1986; Rafaeli & Worline, 2000; Rafaeli & Pratt, 2005). One subset includes visual and identifiable symbols, such as logos (Schultz, Hatch & Ciccolella, 2005; Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Organizational research has discussed symbols primarily as representations of organizational culture and values (Schein, 1990; Trice & Beyer, 1984), with some work linking symbols to identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2000; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997). But symbols are important to managers, organizations and organizational stakeholders because of the emotions and behaviors they evoke (Gagliardi, 1996; Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004) and because of their potential to convey legitimacy (Zucker, 1986). We suggest here that organizational symbols are also important influences over issues of trust and compliance.

The interpretation of organizational symbols is unconscious (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), making them a form of mental processing that is taken for granted (Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001) and potentially more primitive and therefore quicker than rational thought (Gagliardi, 1996; Jung, 1982). Symbols can be read as cues for appropriate behavior in an otherwise ambiguous situation (Garfinkel, 1967; Locke, 1996; Rafaeli & Worline, 2000), but their meaning is a product of the organizational culture in which they occur, and the context or

situation in which they are encountered (Garfinkel, 1967; Jung, 1982). Probably through the emotions they evoke (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004), organizational symbols can influence the inferences and behaviors of different organizational constituents (Babin & Darden, 1995; McCall & Belmont, 1996; Ornstein, 1986).

Two types of organizational symbols on which we focus are clothing and logos.

Clothing is an equivocal organizational symbol (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) and a powerful factor in impression management (Bickman, 1974). While logos are symbols that managers can use to associate their organization with desired notions and emotion (Hatch & Schultz, 2000) and to influence the behavior of both customers and employees (Harquail, 2005 in Rafaeli & Pratt, 2005; Schultz et al., 2005). A "marriage" of employee clothing with logos, as developed below, can therefore be expected to influence behavior, and in particular, compliance.

Compliance

The dictionary definition of compliance is "an act or process of agreeing to follow a request or proposal of another party" (Cowie, 1989: 1403). A more conceptual definition, which we will follow throughout this paper, refers *to one party accepting or responding positively to a request made by another party*; this definition positions compliance as a subset of social influence (Asch, 1955; Cialdini, 2000; Milgram, 1963) and allows us to focus on the special case of compliance involving two people where one (a stranger) poses a request with which the other is expected to comply. Such dynamics occur for example when - as Martin, Feldman, Hatch and Sitkin, (1983) describe – one organization employee asks

another employee to show an ID or badge before allowing entry into a protected organization zone; this situation requires that all organization members, regardless of organization rank or seniority, comply with a request of an unfamiliar employee. Similarly, when a new technology is introduced, employees (who are often reluctant to use the new technology) are expected to comply with the requests of IT specialists (who are not traditional supervisors), and employee compliance with these requests can be critical to successful implementation (Gioia, 1986). The first empirical question we examine is whether contextual symbols (such as the badge or logo donned by the requesting employee in the above examples) enhance or diminish compliance.

Building on Bandura (1977), contextual symbols can be expected to influence compliance by acting as a source of information about appropriate behavior in an otherwise ambiguous situation. Clothing, for example, can elicit associations of authority, and thereby serve as a cue for obedience (Bickman, 1974; Joseph & Alex, 1972), which may legitimate actions that would -- in other circumstances -- seem inappropriate (Milgram, 1963). Symbols seem to override the lack of other information, which is why, for example, people comply with requests made by an individual wearing a uniform without knowing anything else about this individual (Bickman, 1974). This effect of symbols led to the universal norm of police officers and security guards wearing distinct uniforms (Joseph & Alex, 1972). Garfinkel's (1967) analyses likewise suggest that symbols may provide people with information about behavior that is "normal" or "appropriate" in a given situation. Orders from a uniformed person appear to be construed as "normal" in most settings, making compliance appropriate.

Similarly, action guidelines formatted in a typical organizational fashion or on stationery adorned with an organizational logo may appear "normal" and therefore induce compliance.

Prior research has examined the effects of symbols on compliance only with clothing that represents formal authority (e.g. police or security guard uniforms; Bickman, 1974; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). In this case, two factors may explain compliance – trust in the person making the request, or fear of ramifications from non-compliance. Police and security uniforms can increase compliance through automatically aroused fear and the associated cognitive scripts (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). An open question we examine is whether other organizational symbols that do not connote authority and do not inspire fear also influence compliance. We predict that organizational symbols that evoke a visible association with a larger entity are likely to induce compliance². Our focus in particular is on *organizational logos*, our prediction being that compliance in the presence of organizational symbols occurs because people interpret the symbol to mean a presumed association with other entities.

That organizational symbols connoting an association to a larger entity can increase compliance is supported by research in electronic commerce. Concern about the reliability of e-commerce gave birth to institutions designed to assure trustworthiness, such as WebTrust (<http://www.webtrust.net>). Grazioli and Jarvenpaa (2000:399), for example, note that the organizational logo of a third party (e.g., the "seal" of the Better Business Bureau) influences purchases from an unknown site. Similar "seals" are offered by The American Institute of Chartered Public Accountants (<http://www.aicpa.org/>; see also Mauldin & Arunachalam, 2002). By the same logic, an e-mail request donning an address that connects the sender to a

larger organization (e.g. xxx@Stanford.edu) can receive more compliance than if the same request is sent from a non-descript address (e.g. xxx@hotmail.com).

The process we describe is what Stewart (2003:6) referred to as "trust transfer", in which a signal that an unknown organization is associated (through its web site) with another, trusted organization leads to greater trust of the former organization. Continuing this line of thought the appearance of a corporate logo can be presumed to associate the entity (e.g., employee, letter, e-mail) in which it appears with the larger commercial entity that the logo represents. For this effect to hold the logo must be visible to and presumed to be relevant by observers, and must not represent a disrespected entity; logos that are not visible may be subject to selective attention filtering and therefore ignored (Allport, 1989), and logos that represent a disrespected entity may intentionally be ignored. Hence our first prediction:

Hypothesis1: A visible organizational symbol that associates a strange entity with a larger organizational entity (as long as this entity is not disrespected) will increase other people's compliance with an implicit request made by the strange entity ³.

Hypothesis 1 would also be supported by Garfinkel's (1967) idea of "situational normality,"⁴ because people who put requests to others in the absence of any visible association to a larger entity are likely to appear odd or suspicious. Garfinkel illustrated that a non-uniformed individual taking orders and serving water in a restaurant brings distress to customers and employees. Thus, a complimentary prediction to Hypothesis 1 that builds on

Garfinkel (1967) is that the absence of a visible symbol linking someone to a larger entity will decrease compliance.

That the presence or absence of symbols can boost or reduce compliance raises a further question: must a symbol be associated with a recognized or familiar entity in order to increase compliance? The concept of product branding presumes that familiarity influences compliance among both employees and customers (cf. Bergstrom, Blumenthal & Crothers, 2002). Luhmann (1979, 1988:95) also emphasized the importance of familiarity, suggesting it to be a precondition for trust and compliance. It may therefore be that only known and familiar organizational logos will enhance compliance.

But there are findings that do not support the importance of familiarity: Mauldin and Arunachalam (2002), for example, found that familiarity with an e-commerce vendor was not associated with intent to purchase. Amidst the plethora of corporate logos people may be unable to consistently distinguish between familiar and unfamiliar logos and so, potentially, unconsciously or mindlessly trust any organizational logo. Familiarity with particular details of a logo may be less important than a sense that the logo "seems" familiar. Garfinkel's (1967) analysis of "situational normality" would suggest that people tend to view any situation where a corporate logo is present as "normal," so that the absence of a logo in situations where the logo is expected will stand out and induce suspicion, while the presence of any logo would appear "normal." Luhmann (1988) noted that the distinction of familiar and unfamiliar is often blurred, with the familiar creating a halo over the unfamiliar. Thus,

differences between different logos may be less noticeable than whether or not a corporate logo is present.

The "mindlessness effect" (Langer, 1989) also suggests detailed familiarity with a specific logo as less important than the presence of a logo that "appears" or "feels" familiar. Mindlessness -- thoughtless application of old ways of thinking to new situations (Ashforth & Fried, 1988) – would mean that people do not note the details of a logo in a social situation that includes a logo. Conversely, a request for compliance in the absence of a logo, which provides no association to a larger entity, may evoke "mindfulness" (Garfinkel, 1967), creating suspicion and reducing compliance. This is our second hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: A visible organizational symbol that associates a strange entity with a larger organizational entity will increase other people's compliance with an implicit request made by this strange entity. This will be true whether the symbol is familiar or unfamiliar*⁵.

Similar to Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2 could also be expressed through the complementary prediction that the *absence* of a logo will *decrease compliance* compared to the presence of any logo, whether familiar or unfamiliar.

Symbols, Compliance and Trust

The key mechanism underlying the predictions stipulated in Hypotheses 1 and 2 is trust. Trust can be defined in different ways (e.g., Bigley & Pearce, 1998; Zucker, 1986) but as noted by Lewis and Weigert (1985:968), "always involves an element of risk and potential doubt" (see also Luhmann, 1988; Malhotra & Murnighan, 2002). We therefore assume that

trust occurs when people down play the risks a situation involves. Integrating Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995:712), Lewis and Weigert (1985), Bigley and Pearce (1998), and Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer (1998), we view trust as *the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party*, and presume trust occurs when people's actions suggest a presumption that another party will not cause harm even if the intent or actions of the other party are not fully known. Our assumption also is that an indication of trustworthiness or of trusting beliefs represents trust, which means that trust in other people can be measured using measures of the perceived trustworthiness of these people.

With this definition of trust, we suggest that organizational symbols and logos can promote trust. Connecting symbols to evoked trust is consistent with foundational analyses of trust (cf. Lewis and Weigert, 1995:968), but this connection has received limited empirical support in the organizational realm and with respect to corporate symbols. Extending the idea of "swift trust" suggested by Meyerson, Weick and Kramer (1996:166), we suggest that corporate symbols can act as contextual cues that evoke trust between people who are otherwise strangers. Such trust -- in initial interactions between strangers -- is critical to modern organizational arrangements, which increasingly rely on new formed and temporary relationships (McKnight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998; Meyerson et al., 1996). Trust can reduce complexity and ambiguity about an unknown interaction (Barber, 1983), and initial trust may be influenced by *dispositional factors* (i.e., individual traits and properties that inspire people to trust others, Rotter 1967), *institutional factors* (i.e., impersonal factors that

elicit trust, Shapiro, 1987), and *cognitive factors* (i.e., qualities or calculations that evoke trust, Brewer, 1991; Meyerson et al., 1996; McKnight et al.1998; Sitkin and Roth, 1993).

Trusting behavior can be motivated by positive affect (emotional trust) and by rational analysis of a situation (cognitive trust) (McAllister, 1995; Lewis and Weigert, 1985). The latter presumes calculations that the person being trusted will do something beneficial (Rousseau et al., 1998), and is the foundation of the "Prisoner's Dilemma" (e.g., Deutsch, 1949). Cognitive trust may also be due to fear of sanctions, if a breach of trust is presumed to exceed the benefits, or it may be a product of other cognitive processes, for example when the social categorization of another person or situation evokes trust (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Impersonal trust, which is also referred to as system trust (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Zucker, 1986), is when trust is evoked by properties of a given situation (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). This may be viewed as a specific case of cognitive trust, because properties of the situation -- be it a natural social situation (Garfinkel, 1967) or an organizational situation (Shapiro, 1987) -- lead to the categorization of the people involved as trustworthy. Symbols present in a given situation may be one cue that induces such categorization. In suggesting the effects of symbols or logos on trust we therefore connect what has previously been defined as "cognitive trust" to what was considered elsewhere as "impersonal" or "system trust."

As noted by Shapiro (1987), system trust can stem from structural assurances, such as regulations or guarantees, or from perceptual cues that somehow suggest that everything is in proper order (Grazioli & Jarvenpaa, 2000; Kaplan & Nieschwietz, 2003; Lewis &

Weigert, 1985: 974). Symbols can therefore help evoke trust by encouraging mental categorizing of a given situation as fitting current expectations (Garfinkel, 1967), which identifies expected patterns of behavior, and promotes a sense of security in these behaviors (Garfinkel, 1967; Lewis & Weigert, 1985). For example, a person may be trusted because symbols connect him or her to a profession (Zucker, 1986): white smocks identify people as physicians (Becker, Geer, Hughes & Strauss, 1961; Fiol & O'Connor, 2005), and suits classify managers or consultants as business professionals (e.g., Hollander, 1994). Through social categorization visible symbols associate between any entity (e.g., an individual) and a larger social category (e.g., a profession, an organization; Fiske & Taylor, 1991); when the category feels trustworthy the entity is also endowed with trust. Perhaps because of mindlessness (Langer, 1989) the involvement of a larger entity can imply proper social order, which is likely to enhance trust. Stewart's (2003) finding of greater trust in organizations whose web pages suggest approval by other organizations supports this logic.

This analysis suggests that only symbols that somehow fit into a given social situation – that is, fit into people's mental model of how a situation should appear (Hinsz, Tinndale & Vollrath, 1997) – will evoke trust in a stranger. Symbols "out of place" in a given situation are likely to produce distrust. A corporate report bearing a skull and crossbones which symbolizes "poison", may be out of place in an accounting organization but would not stand out as odd to employees or customers of an exterminating organization. Most corporate logos connote neutral or positive associations, so can be expected to appear appropriate, and

consequently evoke trust and compliance. Hence, bearing the qualification that a symbol does not stand out as inappropriate, we pose a next hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: A visible organizational symbol through which a strange entity (e.g., a strange person) is associated with a larger organizational entity will increase other people's initial trust in the strange entity⁵.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predict greater compliance with requests made by people associated with a larger entity through a visible corporate symbol. Integrating this prediction with Hypothesis 3, which predicts a relationship between symbols and trust, suggests that trust is the reaction to symbols that brings about compliance. Thus, trust is predicted to mediate the relationship between the association with a larger entity suggested by a visible symbol and compliance with an implicit request posed by the strange entity displaying the symbol. Since multiple factors can inspire trust and compliance, the reasonable prediction is that trust is a partial (rather than a complete) mediator of the relationship between symbols and compliance. Similar to Hypotheses 1 and 2, Garfinkel's (1967) analysis could be interpreted to suggest that Hypothesis 3 should be reversed. That is, an *absence* of symbols connecting a strange entity to a larger entity may be argued to stand out as odd and therefore to *provoke distrust*, which would in turn *reduce compliance*. We cannot preclude this alternative prediction.

A final question we consider is what conditions strengthen or weaken the effects of visible symbols on initial trust, and we propose the effects to be stronger in conditions of high (rather than low) risk. Luhmann (1988) suggested that normal everyday behavior is

founded on people's presumed confidence that their natural expectations will not be disappointed. In contrast, Luhmann (1988) connected trust to situations of risk, where one's actions may be costly or dangerous (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). High risk involves possible pain or loss, but also includes a degree of ambiguity: risk means one is vulnerable but the likelihood of harm is not absolute. In conditions of ambiguity people search for and rely upon contextual cues to determine their behavior (Latane and Darley, 1968). The ambiguity inherent in risky situations may therefore make people more attentive to social, contextual cues than they would be in less risky situations.

The need to attend to contextual cues in conditions of high risk is bolstered by the greater importance of trust in conditions of high risk (Luhmann, 1988:97; Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande, 1992; Bigley and Pearce, 1998; Johnson-George & Swap, 1982:1306; Weber, Malhotra and Murnighan, 2005:2). Thus, when no risk is involved, people can comply regardless of their trust in the entity demanding compliance, while when compliance implies risk, people are likely to comply only if they trust the demanding party (Mayer et al., 1995). This dynamic suggests that people will be more likely to look for cues of trustworthiness in high-risk situations, hence, our next predictions:

Hypothesis 4a: *A visible organizational symbol through which a strange entity is associated with a larger entity will enhance trust in the strange entity, in high-risk but not low-risk conditions ⁵.*

Hypothesis 4b: A visible organizational symbol through which a strange entity is associated with a large entity will enhance compliance with an implicit request of this strange entity in high-risk but not low-risk conditions⁵.

In sum, we predict visible organizational symbols that associate strange individuals with a larger entity to lead to greater trust and compliance by other people. But we predict this effect will occur primarily in high- rather than low-risk situations. Figure 1 summarizes our complete research model, as does our final hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Trust partially mediates the connection between organizational symbols and compliance under high- but not low-risk conditions.

As described next, we tested our five hypotheses in four separate studies: two field stimulation experiments (Salancik, 1979) and two experimental laboratory studies.

Study 1: Organizational Logo and Public Compliance

Method overview, design and participants

The study was a field experiment with three experimentally-manipulated conditions: presence of a logo of a known product, presence of a logo of an unknown product, absence of a logo. Accomplices who were not aware of the research hypotheses were asked to distribute food samples to pedestrians while wearing a t-shirt and hat that created the independent variable. The dependent variable was the extent of compliance (eating the food sample) by pedestrians (N=696, age over 20) who were randomly approached on a major thoroughfare.

Independent variable

The presence of an organizational logo was manipulated through the shirt and hat worn by the food distributor, with three conditions: (a) **Known logo**: Printed on the shirt and hat was the logo of a well-known and strongly branded Israeli savory snack (Bamba, which holds 25% of the snack market in Israel). The known logo was intentionally selected to represent a neutral or potentially positive product – a savory snack – with a very strong presence in the local commercial market, but not a logo typically worn on clothing. (b) **Unknown logo**: Printed on an identical shirt and hat was the commercial logo of an Australian snack that was not sold locally or nationally at the time. This logo was carefully selected to ensure that it would not be familiar to the vast majority of Israelis, but would still represent an existing larger entity. (c) **No logo**: The same t-shirt and hat as in the other conditions, but unadorned. Distributors in all three cases were given identical pants to wear.

The known and unknown logo were downloaded from the internet and printed on regular t-shirts and hats at a local store (see Figure 2). The known logo was in Hebrew – the official language of Israel. The unknown logo was in English, a language typical of many brands in Israel yet representing foreign products. The use of an English-language logo in the unfamiliar condition was designed to enhance its unfamiliarity in the eyes of passers-by.

Dependent variable

Compliance was defined as the agreement to take and eat a food sample.

Procedure

Undergraduate electrical engineering students were recruited for a study in consumer behavior and randomly assigned to pairs. Electrical engineering students were intentionally sought to ensure that the distributors had no prior background in marketing and to reduce the likelihood that they would second-guess the experimental goals. Only male students were recruited to act as distributors in order to hold gender effects constant and to avoid any effects that gender of distributor may introduce. One student in each pair was randomly assigned to be a distributor and the second to be an observer. The distributor was given a plastic bowl with food samples, and a uniform that included pants, hat and t-shirt, and was asked to distribute the food samples to adult passersby on a busy thoroughfare. They were told to use a simple and consistent script in offering the food, namely "May I offer you a taste?" Observers were told to follow the distributors but to remain out of sight and to code whether or not each passerby approached took and ate a piece. One of the authors accompanied all pairs but remained out of sight.

Distributors operated in two central locations of two large cities during the afternoon hours of several weekdays; they stood at a prominent location on the sidewalk of a busy street and approached pedestrians, offering them unbranded food samples that bore no connection to either of the companies represented by the independent variable. In total 6 data collection sessions were held (with 6 different pairs of distributors - students), 2 under each condition. All sessions lasted 2 hours and were identical in all regards except for the experimentally-manipulated independent variable. Thus, randomly-selected pedestrians were

the study participants, and hired students – unaware of the study hypotheses and paid for their time – were research accomplices.

Study 1: Results

Compliance in the "known logo" condition was 55% and 51% in the "unknown logo" , as compared to 23% in the "no logo" condition. Hypothesis 1 was supported with significantly greater compliance under the "known logo" condition than under the "no logo" condition ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 51.12, P = .000, \text{Effect size (Phi Squared)} = .07$). The presence of a known, organizational logo had a significant effect on compliance, as predicted by Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 was also supported, since compliance under the "known logo" condition (55%) was not significantly different from that in the "unknown logo" condition (51%), $\chi^2_{(1)} = 1.006, p > .10$. Thus, Study 1 suggests that organizational symbols that are not associated with formal authority induce compliance, and that familiarity with the organizational logo is not essential for such compliance.

Study 1: Discussion

The results of Study 1 confirmed that the presence of a familiar logo influences people's compliance with strangers' requests. These results extend previous findings on the effects of authority-related symbols on compliance (Bickman, 1974) by confirming the influence of corporate symbols (Fombrun & van Riel, 2003; Fournier, 1998). But the results suggest people do not differentiate between familiar and unfamiliar logos, since the presence of a logo triggered compliance independent of its familiarity. As suggested earlier, this may

be another manifestation of the "mindlessness effect", i.e. incomplete consideration of the appropriateness of a specific pattern of behavior (Ashforth & Fried, 1988; Langer, 1989).

A potential limitation of Study 1 might have been the use of organizational symbols in different languages (Hebrew and English). The use of different languages was intended to make the familiar/unfamiliar distinction starker but it may have also introduced an issue of in-group / local culture (Hebrew) versus out-group / foreign culture (English). The Hebrew logo may, for example, induce a sense of pride in the local product relative to the foreign logo, which may have effects on trust (e.g., Sherif, 1966). However, the lack of significant difference in compliance with the familiar and unfamiliar logos suggests that, even if these in-group/out-group effects occur they are masked by the stronger compliance induced by the presence of any symbol.

Study 1 could not verify that trust is the mechanism underlying the observed compliance, since the field setting of Study 1 did not allow us to manipulate or measure trust. This was, therefore, the focus of Study 2. Likewise, Study 1 could not examine risk as a moderator of the relationship between symbols and compliance (Hypothesis 4) since it only assessed compliance in a high risk condition (taking food from strangers is a prototypical risky behavior, Byrnes, Miller & Schafer, 1999). This prediction was also tested in Study 2.

Study 2: Trust as a mediator and risk as a moderator of the connection between organizational symbols and compliance

Method overview, design and participants

In Study 2 participants in a lab experiment were asked to indicate their reactions towards requests made by individuals in various pictures. The design was a full factorial 2 × 2 (high/low risk × presence/absence of organizational logo) between-subjects design. Participants were undergraduate students of a major institution of higher education in Israel (N=123, 70 males) who participated in the experiment in partial fulfillment of course requirements.

Procedure

Upon entering a computer lab, participants were assigned a subject number that randomly determined their experimental condition. A Visual Basic program gave the following general instructions on the PC screens:

In the next screen you will see a picture of an individual you do not know along with a short description of a situation involving this individual. Please think about this situation, as in the following screen you will be asked to answer a few questions regarding how you would be likely to react in the situation presented. Please type in your answers. We are looking for your own perceptions and reactions, so there is no right or wrong answer.

Participants could look at the photos as long as they wanted and were told to press a "continue" key to move on to the next screen. After responding to questions on the two dependent measures, participants were asked for demographic information, debriefed, and dismissed.

Independent variables

The *presence of an organizational logo* was manipulated through the t-shirt worn by the individual in the picture a participant saw. Under the "with logo" condition, the logo

used in the "unfamiliar logo" case of Study 1 was printed on the individual's yellow t-shirt (see Figure 2 (b)). In the "without logo" case, the shirt was plain.

Degree of risk embedded in the situation was manipulated through the content of the request associated with each picture. *High risk* was created by a description of an offer to taste some food; *Low risk* was created by a description of an offer of a paper flyer saying "Have a Nice Day."

Dependent variables

Intent to comply was measured by participants' responses to the question "To what extent would you be willing to comply with the request of the person in the picture?" (5-point Likert-type scale). Because of the experimental context actual compliance could not be assessed, but reports of intended compliance has been used previously as a proxy for actual compliance (Mauldin and Arunachalam, 2002; Grazioli and Jarvenpaa, 2000; Kaplan and Nieschwietz, 2003; Stewart, 2003).

Trust was measured by participants' responses to a three item index of trustworthiness: "To what extent do you ... feel a sense of trust in the person in the photo?" "...feel that the person in the photo is trustworthy?" "...believe that the person in the photo might be harmful to you?" (reverse coded) (5-point Likert scale, Cronbach's Alpha = .87).

Manipulation check

A separate random sample of 53 students was asked to indicate the level of risk implied by a request: 27 students were asked regarding taking food from a stranger and 26 were asked regarding taking a paper flyer from a stranger. The question was "To what extent

would you characterize the situation presented as risky?” (5-point Likert scale). The food offer situation was rated as involving significantly more risk than the paper flyer scenario ($M_{\text{food}} = 3.14, M_{\text{paper}} = 1.76, t(51)=4.62, p<.00$). Control variables of gender and age were insignificant in the regression analysis.

Study 2 Results

The data collected in Study 2, unlike that of Study 1, allowed testing of main effects as well as mediation and moderation effects. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the two dependent variables of Study 2 (intent to comply and reported trust). Table 2 presents the results of an ANOVA that tested Hypotheses 3, 4 and 5. Gender was included as a covariate in all analyses, but there were no significant gender effects.

As summarized in Table 2, the data supported two main effects on reported intent to comply: the presence of a logo, $F(1, 118) = 19.73, p<0.001$ (effect size (Eta Squared) =.10), and risk level, $F(1, 118) = 50.60, P<0.001$ (effect size (Eta Squared) =.25). Reported intent to comply was higher in the presence of a logo than in the absence of a logo ($M=1.08$ versus $M=.69$), providing additional support for Hypothesis 1. Not surprisingly (though unpredicted), intent to comply was also higher in the low-risk than in the high-risk condition ($M=1.20$ compared with $M=.57$). This somewhat affirms the external validity of our findings, because people can be expected to be more likely to comply with casual requests of strangers when the risk involved is low or nonexistent. The hypotheses regarding trust were also confirmed, as summarized in Tables 1 and 3: The presence of a logo had a significant main effect on trust, $F(1, 118) = 7.69, p<0.01$ (effect size (Eta Squared) =.06), and consistent

with Hypothesis 3, reported trust was significantly higher in the presence of a logo ($M=3.32$) than in the absence of a logo ($M=2.87$).

Moderation Analyses

Supporting Hypothesis 4a, the effect of the interaction between logo and risk on trust was significant, $F(1, 118) = 15.27, p < 0.001$, Effect size (Eta Squared) = .11. The presence of a logo made a significant difference in reported trust in the high-risk condition ($M = 3.38$ vs. $M = 2.40$) but not in the low-risk condition ($M=3.25$ vs. 3.39) (see Table 2). Hypothesis 4b was also supported, with a significant interaction between logo and risk on intent to comply, ($F(1, 118) = 6.83, p < 0.01, ES = .03$). As predicted presence of a logo led to a significant difference in the intent to comply in the high-risk condition but not in the low-risk condition ($M = 2.87$ versus $M = 1.51$ in high-risk, 3.77 versus 3.38 in low-risk; see Tables 1 and 2).

Mediation Analyses

Since the presence of a logo had no effect on trust or on willingness to comply in the low-risk condition, the mediation predictions were tested only in the high-risk condition. A series of regression models supported the mediation prediction of Hypothesis 5 (Baron and Kenny, 1986): trust mediated the observed relationship between the presence of a logo and compliance in the high-risk condition (see Table 3). A first equation confirmed that trust (the mediator) was predicted by the logo (independent variable), ($B = .465; p = .000$; Model 1 in Table 3). A second equation confirmed that intent to comply (dependent variable) was predicted by the presence of a logo (independent variable), ($B = .507, p = .000$; Model 2 in Table 3). A third equation tested the prediction of intent to comply (dependent variable) by

presence of a logo (independent variable) and trust (mediator) together (Model 3 in Table 3); trust had a significant positive effect on intent to comply ($B=.592$; $p=.000$), and the effect of a logo (independent variable) on intent to comply, although still significant ($B=.232$, $p=.021$), was significantly weaker than when the logo was included as a sole predictor ($B=.302$ as compared with $B=.5070$). Hypothesis 5 was therefore supported, confirming trust as a partial mediator of the effect of a logo on intent to comply in high-risk conditions.

Study 2 Discussion

The findings of Study 2 continue to support Hypothesis 1, and also confirm trust as the mechanism through which symbols affect willingness to comply in the presence of an organizational logo, as predicted by Hypothesis 3. The presence of an organizational logo had a significant, direct effect on reported trust, which in turn influenced reported intent to comply. The results of Study 2 also show that risk moderates the connection between presence of a logo and intent to comply, since trust generated by the presence of a logo influenced compliance in a high-risk, but not a low-risk situation. As we predicted, in the low-risk situation (e.g., taking a flyer) the presence of a logo led to greater compliance regardless of the level of trust. Thus, people appear less likely to be affected by contextual factors in low- than in high-risk situations.

Our Study 2 data could not, however, confirm the influence of a logo on actual behavior in a high- versus low-risk scenario because the data collected were people's assessments of how they *would* behave in a given situation. Some researchers rely on reports of behavior in imagined situations. For example, Mauldin and Arunachalam (2002) used

reports of intent to purchase as a proxy for real purchase on the internet (see also Grazioli and Jarvenpaa, 2000; Kaplan and Nieschwietz, 2003; Stewart, 2003). However, people can be bad predictors of their future feelings (Loewenstein & Schkade, 1999) since, as Bemmaro (1995) noted, factors and information that come into play when behavior is actually determined can lead to variations between actual and predicted behavior. To anchor our claims in actual behavior, Study 3 uses another field stimulation to verify the moderating effects of risk on the relationship between symbols and compliant behavior (Hypothesis 4).

Study 3: Organizational Logos, Risk and Public Compliance

Method overview, design and participants

Study 3 expanded the methods of Study 1 to examine compliance in both a high- and a low-risk situation. The design was a full factorial 2×2 (presence or absence of logo \times high- or low-risk) between-participant design. Participants were pedestrians (N=701, age over 20).

Independent variables

(1) *Presence of an organizational logo* was manipulated with the same stimuli as in Study 1, with two conditions: known logo (see Figure 2(a)) and no logo (plain shirt and hat).
(2) *Level of risk* was manipulated through the type of product offered, with two conditions: food (high-risk) and a white paper flyer saying "Have a Nice Day" (low-risk).

Dependent Variable

As in Study 1, observers coded participant compliance with the offers.

Procedure

As in Study 1, male students were recruited for a paid experiment and randomly assigned to act as distributors or observers. Participants were not told anything about the food, the flyer or the purpose of the distribution; they were told that for the experiment they are asked to distribute food or flyers respectively to passersby. Data were collected on two busy street corners during three different midweek afternoons, under procedures similar to those of Study 1. Each data collection session lasted about two hours, and a total of 8 sessions were held, two in each condition. Sessions were identical in all regards except for the experimentally-manipulated independent variables. Thus, here too randomly-selected passersby were the participants in the study, and hired students -- unaware of the study hypotheses -- were research accomplices who created the experimental manipulation. Participants were exposed to one of four conditions: *Low risk with no logo* (stranger in a plain t-shirt and hat offering a paper flyer), *Low risk with logo* (stranger wearing a shirt and hat displaying an organizational logo offering a paper flyer), *High risk with no logo* (stranger in a plain shirt and hat offering a food sample), and *High risk with logo* (stranger wearing a hat and shirt with a logo offering a food sample).

Study 3 Results

As in Study 1, the data collected in Study 3 were nominal (compliance, measured by percent of people accepting the offer), so the analysis relied on chi-square analyses. The chi-square test confirmed a significant effect of the presence of a logo on compliance in the high-risk condition: significantly more people took and ate the food sample in the “with-logo” than

in the " no-logo" condition (55% versus 23%, $\chi^2(1) = 51.12, P = .000$, Effect Size (Phi Squared) = .07). In contrast, the effect of the logo in the low-risk condition (taking a flyer) was insignificant: 88% took a flyer when a logo was present, 86% with no logo ($\chi^2(1) = .295, p > .10$). A Logit regression confirmed the significant effect of the interaction between risk and logo on compliance, as predicted by Hypothesis 4 ($B = 1.42; p < .000$).

Study 3 Discussion

Studies 1 and 2 show a robust association between the presence of an organizational logo and compliance in a high-risk situation, and Studies 2 and 3 show no such influence in circumstances of low risk. Study 3 supports our prediction that risk moderates the influence of symbols (logos in this case) on compliance, but could not assess the mediating role of trust as the explanatory mechanism, showing only that symbols enhance compliance when trust is critical (in high-risk situations), but not when trust is not an issue (in low-risk situations). Moreover our findings so far document only the effects of a specific set of logos with a specific set of requests. And, the paper flyer treatment representing low risk in Studies 2 and 3 was extremely low in risk, perhaps even no risk, suggesting that it may be the presence of some risk (as opposed to no risk) that leads to the effects of symbols. In Study 4 we address these limitations.

Study 4: Logos, Trust and Compliance in Different Settings

Method overview, design and participants

Study 4 used the laboratory design of Study 2 with different pictures, logos and requests to which participants were exposed. The logo used in Study 4 was intentionally

selected to be different in color, form and style from the commercially branded logos used in Studies 1 through 3, and was the logo of an unfamiliar educational facility (see Figure 2- Study 4) that, like the previous logos, we downloaded from the internet. The requests in Study 4 were designed to present situations in which compliance would require active participation and an actual investment of resources. As described below, the high-risk request was for a monetary donation (an investment of money), while the low-risk request was to complete a brief survey (an investment of time). The design was a full factorial 2 × 2 (high/low risk × presence/absence of organizational logo) between-subjects design. Participants were undergraduate students (N=130, 70 males), who participated in the experiment in partial fulfillment of course requirements.

Independent variables

The *presence of an organizational logo* was manipulated in the same way as in Study 2. In the "with logo" condition, the person in the photo wore a t-shirt on which was printed the logo shown in Figure 2. In the "no logo" condition, the shirt was plain.

Degree of risk was manipulated through the content of the request associated with each picture. *High risk* was created by a request for a monetary donation to an unknown charity that claimed to support homeless children; the question was worded very generally ("would you donate money to ..."), without mention of a specific fundraising organization or a specific amount of money. *Low risk* was created by a request to complete a short public-opinion survey comprising 10 multiple-choice questions about social-policy issues.

Completing the survey required only 2-3 minutes.

Our assumption was that donating money can be construed as risky because given the information available (i.e., only a photo and no accompanying documentation), there would be no way to know for sure who would ultimately receive or make use of the money. A donation to an unknown person is risky because it includes a significant element of uncertainty: people soliciting donations can in theory pocket the cash, or can channel it to goals that the donor does not support. Such abuse of a donation can pose a risk to the donor's self image and evoke concerns about being a 'sucker' ("Frier" in Hebrew), a highly salient concern in Israeli culture (Roniger and Feige, 1993). Completing a survey on the other hand may consume time, and while "time is money" no uncertainty is involved since the exact amount of time is clear and known, and the implications for one's self image are minimal.

Manipulation check

A separate random sample of 29 students was asked to indicate the level of risk implied by a request: 15 students responded regarding donating money and 14 regarding completing a survey, using the same question as in study 2. A t-test confirmed donating money as significantly more risky than completing a survey ($M_{\text{money}} = 2.8, M_{\text{survey}} = 1.9, t(27)=2.77, p=.01$).

Study 4 Results

Table 1 (Study 4) presents the means and standard deviations of the two dependent variables, and Table 2 (Study 4) summarizes an ANOVA that tested Hypotheses 3, 4 and 5. The data supported two main effects on the reported intent to comply – the presence of a logo, $F(1, 125) = 28.61, p < 0.001$ (Effect Size (Eta Squared) = .14); and risk level, $F(1, 125)$

= 7.07, $P < 0.01$ (Effect Size (Eta Squared) = .03). Supporting Hypothesis 4, reported intent to comply was higher in the presence than the absence of a logo ($M=3.16$ compared with $M=2.28$), and higher in the low-risk than in the high-risk condition ($M=2.91$ compared with $M= 2.56$). The interaction effect of the two variables (logo and risk) on the intent to comply was also significant, $F(1, 125) = 30.94$, $p < 0.001$ (Effect Size (Eta Squared) = .16). Post hoc analyses confirmed that the presence of a logo led to a significant difference in the intent to comply in the high-risk but not in the low-risk condition ($M = 3.38$ as compared with $M= 1.63$ in high-risk, 2.89 as compared with 2.93 in low-risk) (see Table 1).

The hypotheses regarding trust were also confirmed, as summarized in Table 2. A significant main effect of the presence of a logo on trust was found ($F(1, 125) = 16.66$, $p < 0.001$ (Effect Size (Eta Squared) = .08), with higher reported trust in the presence ($M=3.23$) than in the absence of a logo ($M=2.73$). As specifically predicted by Hypothesis 4, the interaction between logo and risk was also significant ($F(1, 125) = 44.82$, $p < 0.001$, (Effect Size (Eta Squared) = .22), since the presence of a logo made a significant difference in reported trust in the high-risk ($M = 3.5$ compared with $M= 2.1$) but not in the low-risk condition ($M=2.91$ compared with 3.36).

Mediation Analyses

As in Study 2, we followed Baron and Kenny (1986) to test the mediation prediction of Hypothesis 6 (see Table 4). As predicted, in the high-risk condition trust mediated the relationship between the presence of a logo and compliance. A first equation confirmed that trust (the mediator) is predicted by presence of a logo (independent variable), ($B= .765$;

$p=.000$; Model 1 in Table 4). A second equation confirmed that intent to comply (dependent variable) is also predicted by the presence of a logo (independent variable), ($B= .757$; $p=.000$; Model 2 in Table 4). A third equation verified that intent to comply (dependent variable) is predicted by the presence of a logo (independent variable) and trust (mediator) together (see Model 3 in Table 4), verifying again the partial mediation. In this third equation, trust had a significant positive effect on intent to comply ($B= .523$; $p=.000$); and the effect of a logo (independent variable) on intent to comply, though still significant ($B=.357$, $p=.002$), was considerably weaker than when only the logo was included as a predictor ($B= .357$ as compared with $B=.757$). Thus, Study 4 again confirms the hypothesis of trust as a partial mediator of the effect of a logo on intent to comply in high-risk conditions.

General Discussion

A manager receives a letter offering information that may be of use to his or her organization. Will she trust this information? Would his reaction change if the letter is printed on letterhead with a logo? Our analyses suggest that it might. Our four studies show that symbolic organizational logos influence people's decisions to comply with a stranger's request. The studies also showed that detailed familiarity with the logo does not change the extent of compliance (Study 1), that trust partially explains the effects of logos (Studies 2 and 4), and that conditions of high risk amplify the extent to which a logo inspires trust (Studies 2

and 4) and compliance (Study 3). As we discuss next, our findings hold important implications for both research and management.

Familiarity or Situational Normality?

Our Study 1 showed that compliance was increased in the presence of a logo regardless of whether or not the logo was familiar. Rather than familiarity of the symbol, what led to greater compliance was the presence of a symbol, which, building on Garfinkel (1967), may be because symbols impart a sense of appropriate behavior by placing a situation in a recognizable context. We document the effects of a small set of organizational logos, but these effects clearly transcend to day-to-day situations in organizations. For example, employees receiving instructions (e.g., to install new software) are more likely to comply if the instructions appear on a document bearing the organizational logo. The logo connotes the connection of the instructions to a larger and legitimate entity (e.g., the organization).

Extending Zucker (1986), we suggest organizational symbols and logos to be institutional vehicles that produce trust. Logos may inspire trust because they connect to societal regulations of the larger firms that the logo represents. Zucker (1986) used this rationale to explain how diplomas in physician offices increase trust, presumably because they symbolize the backing of the University and the regulations of the authority that granted the diploma (e.g., American Medical Association). Zucker (1986) referred to diplomas as "structural assurances." Other authors describe a similar process using different concepts. Milliman and Fugate (1988) referred to "proof source," and McKnight et al. (1998) referred

to "safety nets" and "guarantees" in referring to vehicles for building institution-based trust. A key vehicle are "assurance seals" -- hyperlinks to other entities in the WWW (Grazioli & Jarvenpaa, 2000; Kaplan & Nieschwietz, 2003; Mauldin & Arunachalam, 2002), which create a process of "trust transfer" (Stewart, 2003). In short, symbols can transfer trust to an unknown entity through an implied association with a larger and seemingly trustworthy group.

Yet, Zucker's (1986) claimed that social legitimization is essential for a trust transfer process, while we show that the presence of a logo instilled a sense of legitimacy independent of whether or not people were familiar with the logo. This may be because a symbol can mark a situation as "normal:" A person handing out food samples on the street is "normal" if this person is a representative of an established organization that can be *presumed* to be socially regulated, so laws of health ensure that the person is not handing out bad food samples. Such representation is established by the presence of a logo. Thus, our analysis connects Zucker's (1986) idea of structural trust with Garfinkel's (1967) idea of situational normality by suggesting that the existence of a logo, even an unfamiliar logo, can impart a sense of trust by implying that a firm is part of a "normal set" of regulated and responsible acting corporations.

For example, a memo regarding implementation of new software with no company logo and in a non-appropriate format might raise suspicion and decrease compliance. Our analysis draws together two types of institution based trust to explain this effect. The lack of a logo indicates lack of structural assurances of the memo. Situational normality would call

into question such a memo because it does not appear "normal." As we discuss next, an intriguing question is whether this social influence process is mindful or mind-less.

Mindful or Mindless Trust?

Previous research has confirmed that people are more likely to comply with individuals in whom they trust (Mayer et al., 1995) even when participants are unfamiliar with each other (Bigley & Pearce, 1998). Our contribution is in adding organizational symbols to the set of contextual factors that can influence trust and compliance, as long as they (the symbols) appear normal. This analysis enriches the concept of institution-based trust (Zucker, 1986) and integrates it with the idea of affect-based trust (Lewis and Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995), while challenging the idea that trust and compliance rely exclusively on rational decision processes (e.g. Axelrod, 1984). Previous research connected trust and compliance to symbols that unequivocally represent authority (e.g., a police badge; Bickman, 1974; Mayer et al., 1995; Milgram, 1963; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). Our analyses show that organizational logos that are appropriate to the context can also evoke trust and compliance.

An open question is whether the presence of a logo increased trust and therefore compliance in our experiments, or whether the absence of a logo creates distrust and reduced compliance. A related question is whether people are aware or conscious of the influence of logos and symbols, since a response to the presence of a logo likely suggests an aware or conscious effect, while a response to absence likely represents an unconscious process. A cognitive view would argue that that people are aware, or *mindful*, when complying with

others' requests, their mindfulness elicited by the presence of logos that appear "appropriate."

However, a purely cognitive process would also predict a difference between familiar and unfamiliar logos, since cognitive-based trust is connected to familiarity (Luhmann, 1979; Simmel, 1900). Our findings that familiarity did not influence behavior suggest an unconscious component to compliance in the presence of logos, which offers support to the idea of *mindless* or emotion-based trust.

Mindless trust suggests that people may be unconscious of the presence of symbols but still react to them emotionally and automatically. Mindlessness or "automaticity" has been documented in responses to various unconscious cues (Ashforth & Fried, 1988; Bargh & Chartrand, 1999) and eloquently illustrated by Pencil (1976) with regard to mundane actions such as passing the salt at the dinner table. Since people do not regularly hand out food in public without some good reason, a "mindlessness" logic suggests that the absence of logo would unconsciously be construed as indicating a situational normality problem. The presence of a logo provides justification for this odd behavior by categorizing the person and the situation as legitimate, because people who represent organizations *do* sometimes hand out food in public (Garfinkel, 1967). The absence of a logo can therefore be suggested to create a sense of the food sample situation as problematic, which would cause stress and decrease trust and compliance. This suggests that the reactions we observed follow from *mindfulness to the absence of a logo*, and *mindlessness to the presence of a logo*. Future research is needed to tease out these competing explanations.

Our studies join others in illustrating that a lack of awareness of how symbols affect our behavior does not preclude them having such an effect (Babin & Darden, 1995; Gagliardi, 1996; Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee & Welch, 2001; North et al., 1999; Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001; Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). The idea of mindless trust also supports suggestions that trusting actions can be sudden, dramatic, and occasionally unwise and dangerous (Weber, Malhotra & Murnighan, 2005), and may occur between people who have never met and are unlikely to meet again (Berg, Dickhaut & McCabe, 1995).

However, for automatic (mindless) trust to occur, the observed logo needs to be *appropriate for the situation*. For example, a representative sporting a Pampers' logo while promoting a new credit card is unlikely to elicit compliance. There is no perfect "objective" fit or appropriateness of a logo to a situation or a request, but there are societal shared assumptions of reasonable appropriateness (Garfinkel, 1967). Such assumptions may be shared by certain social groups, however: the logo of NEWater – a brand of bottled water in Singapore made from reprocessed sewage – may evoke trust and compliance in a community actively committed to recycling, but may be felt as inappropriate elsewhere.

Objective or Subjective Perceptions of Risk

The presence of a logo promoted trust and compliance in situations that our manipulation check confirmed to be high- rather than low-risk. Authors have noted that in the absence of risk trust is not required as a precursor of compliance (Bigley & Pearce, 1998; Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998), which is consistent with our findings that the effect of symbols on compliance is also less powerful in low-risk situations. However, the

evaluation of risk is highly subjective (Kogan & Wallach, 1967), so some situations may be perceived as risky by some individuals and be viewed as mundane by others.

It may also be that symbols and logos that evoke trust lead to a reduction in perceived risk (Biswas & Biswas, 2004), suggesting a need to examine the direct effect of organizational symbols on perceived risk. We manipulated the level of risk and considered it as an independent variable because our intent was to compare the effects of symbols in situations likely to be perceived as (and which a manipulation check confirmed as) more or less risky. Our design reduces the threat of same-source-bias, which would occur if participants were asked about both their sense of risk and their sense of trust and compliance. But this design also precludes considering the possible effects of perceptions of risk.

In other words, the reduction in perceived risk may be what leads to enhanced compliance in the presence of logos. Our data could not test this alternative perspective because we experimentally manipulated degrees of risk. However, this is a valuable angle for future research; the question of whether there are situations where logos inspire high trust and compliance with no reflection on perceived risk we must leave for future work.

Summary, Limitations and Managerial Implications

Our findings lead to a potentially disturbing insight: Symbols lead people to do things that otherwise probably would not be done. Trust and behavior can be easily manipulated by symbols. The managerial implication is clear: logos and symbols should be used wherever trust and compliance are needed, particularly in situations involving high-risk. But going back to the paradox with which we opened, caution is essential because symbols or logos can

be easily forged. Recall that we loaded all of the organization logos we used from the internet. People who repeatedly encounter the need to assess trust can become "experts" and look for signs that indicate trustworthiness but are also difficult to mimic; Gambetta and Hamill (2005), for example, describe how skilled taxi drivers who must assess the trustworthiness of their passengers become at identifying valid cues. Our findings reveal the vulnerability of people who are novices.

Useful managerial implications regard organizational situations where trust is essential because the stakes for the employee and the organization can be high. Edelman, Uggen, and Erlanger (1999), for example, suggest that civil rights offices, grievance procedures, and other legal structures can be visible symbols of compliance with affirmative action laws. Employers can engage symbols that create the legitimacy because they appear to represent larger (and legitimate) entities, such as affirmative action offices that have the appearance of administrative agencies and compliance officers who look like police officers. In a similar vein, organizational logos on corporate documents advertising commitment to affirmative action or to grievance procedures can give additional validity and enhance employees' trust in the these procedure.

But there are limitations to our findings. First, the risk in all of our experimental conditions was relatively benign; future research must verify generalization to other symbols, other (and higher) risks and other contexts. Second, our studies tested the effects of three organizational logos, all of which were commercial and either neutral or mildly positive in character, on a population of people (students and the general public) in one country (Israel).

It is unlikely that all symbols will elicit the same degree of trust and compliance. Moderating factors may include the design of the logo, features of the context (e.g., the person bearing a logo, or the website displaying a seal, cf. McKnight, Kacmar, and Choudhury, 2004a), characteristics of the target person or the extent to which the symbol is noticed or perceived as legitimate. Individual differences may also moderate the effects we suggest: The influence of the logos of a political party or a policy movement (e.g., the NRA) may, for example, depend on the political affiliation or orientation of the target person. Third, our experimental studies measured compliance with pictures of one person. It remains to be seen whether our findings can be replicated with a different picture or set of pictures of different people.

Thus, our studies cannot offer the last word on the effect of organizational symbols on trust and compliance, but we hope that they help put these questions on the agenda for future research. Such research can turn to studies in environmental and product design where the meanings embedded in symbols has been addressed (Heskett, 2002; Norman, 2004). Research in history and art may also be illuminating, perhaps through explorations of extreme cases, such as Arieli-Horowitz's (2001) analysis of symbols used by the Nazi movement.

However, our four studies offer a good starting point both methodologically and theoretically. Our findings – of two lab studies and two field studies – show that symbols, and specifically organizational logos, can be critical to the emergence of trust and compliance. These findings call for further exploration by researchers interested in symbols and artifacts, as well as in trust and compliance.

¹ We thank the editor and three reviewers for insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper and for suggesting theoretical frameworks that help ground our arguments.

² As noted below this may not be true for all symbols; negatively-perceived symbols (e.g., the Nazi swastika) will not necessarily induce compliance.

³ Limitations to this hypothesis will be discussed and elaborated below.

⁴ We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this theoretical insight.

⁵ Similar to Hypothesis 1, this hypothesis refers only to instances where the associated organizational entity is not disrespected.