REQUESTER'S ACCEPTANCE AND NON-ACCEPTANCE OF THE REFUSAL OF THE INITIAL REQUEST: HOW TO IMPROVE THE DOOR-IN-THE-FACE EFFECTS?

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ABSTRACT

The door-in-the-face technique (Cialdini, Vincent, Lewis, Catalan, Wheeler & Darby, 1975) increases the likelihood that subjects will comply with a target request after they have been submitted first to a request too costly to for agreement. This study tests the effects of the requester's acceptance versus non-acceptance of the refusal of the extreme request on the rate of acceptance of the target request. In accordance with our expectations, the door-in-the-face effect is reduced when the requester perceives as acceptable the non-compliance with the extreme request whereas it is increased when the non-compliance is perceived as unacceptable by the requester. These results are discussed.

Introduced by Cialdini, Vincent, Lewis, Catalan, Wheeler and Darby (1975), the door-in-the-face technique increases the likelihood that subjects will agree to a target request after having turned down a more important request deemed too costly to be complied with. Cialdini et al. (1975) wanted students to agree to escort a group of young boys from a juvenile detention center to a two-hours visit to a local zoo. The number of students who agreed to this request was multiplied by three after having turned down a first more costly request, than when there was no initial larger request (control condition). This first request was to agree to volunteer at the detention center two hours a week for two years.

On the basis of studies on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and on bargaining behavior

(Benton, Kelley & Liebling, 1972), Cialdini et al. (1975) interpreted these results in terms of reciprocal concessions. For these authors, the fact of complying with the target request can be perceived as a concession (saying "yes" instead of "no") made in response to the requester's prior concession (the requester moved from an extreme request to a smaller request). However, if the results of some studies concur with this interpretation (cf. Goldman & Creason, 1981 ; Reeves, Baker, Boyd & Cialdini, 1991), others differ. Tusing and Dillard (2000), in particular, found that participants are more likely to perceive the situation as one of help or assistance rather than a bargaining situation. Moreover, the door-in-the-face effect is not proportional to the size of the concession made (Fern, Monroe & Avila, 1986), as would be expected if it was interpreted as reciprocal concessions.

The four meta-analyses currently available (cf. Dillard, Hunter & Burgoon, 1984; Fern, Monroe & Avila, 1986; O'Keefe & Hale, 1998, 2001 ; Pascual & Guéguen, 2005) allow us to clearly delineate the conditions in which the door-in-the-face effect is obtained : both requests must be made by a single requester (Cialdini et al., 1975 ; O'Keefe & Hale, 1998, 2001) ; requesters and participants must be facing each other (Fern, Monroe & Avila, 1986 ; O'Keefe & Hale, 1998, 2001) ; the two requests must be sequential (Cann, Sherman & Elkes, 1975) and must involve the same beneficiary (O'Keefe & Figgé, 1997) ; the requests must have a pro-social appeal (Dillard, Hunter & Burgoon, 1984; Foehl & Goldman, 1983 ; Patch, 1986, 1988 ; O'Keefe & Hale, 1998, 2001), as the effectiveness of the procedure tends to wane when it is put at the service of personal interests (Millar, 2001).

Taking into account the limitations of the interpretation in terms of reciprocal concessions originally put forward by Cialdini et al. (1975), the authors have tried to investigate other theoretical routes that could lead to better interpretations explaining the door-in-the-face effect. According to Miller, Seligman, Clark and Bush (1976 ; Cantrill & Seibold, 1986 ; Abrahams & Bell, 1994), the concession made by the requester cannot be identified as the main causal factor explaining the door-in-the-face effect. For some authors, the compliance to the second request appears to stem from a contrast in terms of cost (high *versus* low) of the two requests. The first large request will be used as a point of comparison by virtue of which the second request tends to appear less costly than if it had stood on its own.

For other authors (Foehl & Goldman, 1983), the door-in-the-face effect could be explained by the impression that the requester makes on the participant by enunciating a first pro-social request. With this request, the requester gives the impression of being a respectable and dignified person, dedicated to noble causes and so to whom it is difficult to refuse a favor.
Among alternative interpretations to the door-in-the-face phenomenon, the self-presentation explanation (Pendleton & Batson, 1979) is often put forward as one of the most relevant (Penrod, 1983; Tedeschi, Lindskol & Rosenfeld, 1985; Baron & Byrne, 1990 ; Brigham, 1991). The compliance to the target request, following the non-compliance with an initial request, would be a result from the desire of the participant to avoid being perceived as someone indifferent to the problems of others. It is therefore in order to make a good impression on the requester that he/she agrees to a target request.

Other researchers (Bell, Abrahams, Clark & Schlatter, 1996; Tusing & Dillard, 2000) think that turning down the initial request makes the participant aware that he or she is breaking a norm of

social responsibility (Berkowitz and Daniels, 1963), and is therefore led to agree to the target request in order to comply to the norm.

The interpretation put forward by O'Keefe and Figge (1997) is based on the notion of guilt. It suggests that the initial request induces a feeling of guilt in the participant which is dispelled through agreement with the target request. Some authors (Tusing & Dillard, 2000) rightly deem that the two previous explanations are closely linked insofar as a feeling of guilt is difficult to separate from the awareness that one has broken a social norm.

Based on this, the most recent explanation concerning the door-in-the-face effect is motivational (Terrier & Joule, 2008). Indeed, it suggests that turning down the extreme request induces a state of tension which can be decreased by complying with the target request. On the basis of the studies carried out by Pendleton and Batson (1979), Bell et al. (1996) or Tusing and Dillard (2000), Terrier and Joule (2008) support the idea that the tension stems from the fact that the participant perceives the decision of turning down the extreme request as unacceptable to the requester. More specifically, Terrier and Joule (2008, exp. 2) show that, on the one hand, when the requester communicates to the participant the fact that he/she perceives the refusal of the extreme request to be acceptable, the tension felt by the participants after a refusal is lower and, on the other hand, the door-in-the-face effect is hampered.

These results have led us to formulate a new hypothesis: if the requester communicates to the participants that he/she understands that an extreme request may be turned down, the door-in-the-face effect is hampered. Hence, this effect should be increased when the requester communicates to the participants that he/she cannot understand that an extreme request may be turned down.

H1: We expect a higher rate of acceptance of the request when the requester communicates to the participants that he/she cannot understand how an extreme request may be turned down than when, as in classic door-in-the-face procedures, he/she says nothing.

H2: We expect a higher rate of acceptance of the target request when the requester communicates to the participants that he/she cannot understand how an extreme request can be turned down than when, on the contrary, he/she communicates the fact that he/she understands a refusal.

Both hypotheses are tested in the present experiment.

EXPERIMENT

Method

The experiment brings together 3 experimental conditions (classic door-in-the-face, acceptance door-in-the-face, non-acceptance door-in-the-face) and a control condition.

Participants
168 female students from the University of Provence, not studying psychology, were randomly assigned to the different conditions.

Procedure
We approached participants in the corridors of the University using an experimenter who claimed to be a member of the French humanitarian organization, the "Midi du Cœur".
In all the three experimental conditions, the experimenter, after introducing him/herself, expressed the same request (extreme request): "*Hello, I' m a volunteer for the* "*Midi du Cœur d'Aix*". *As you know, this organization tries to help those who need it most and we are currently looking for volunteers to help us out. The work entails preparing food baskets and providing support to people in difficulty and involves your presence every weekend during at least a year in order to establish long-term contacts*".

From this moment, the procedure differs in each of the three experimental conditions
In the *classic door-in-the-face* condition, the experimenter carried on by saying: "*Would it be interesting for you?* ". Following the refusal, he/she made the target request: "*In the coming weeks, we will need occasional help, could you give us a hand just one Saturday? Would you be interested?* ". When the participant agreed, the experimenter took down his/her name and phone number.

In the *acceptance door-in-the-face* condition the experimenter carried on by saying: "*Despite how helpful this may be, I understand that some people are unable to accept. Would you be interested?* " and in the *non-acceptance door-in-the-face* condition the experimenter said: "*Given the help that this brings, I have a hard time understanding that some people are unable to accept. Would you be interested?* ". In both cases, once the request was turned down, the experimenter continued with the target request in the same way as in the *classic door-in-the-face* condition.

In the control condition, after having introduced him/herself the experimenter directly made the target request: "*Hello, I'm a volunteer at the "Midi du Cœur d'Aix" (…). In the coming weeks, we will need help on occasion; could you give us a hand just one Saturday? Would you be interested?* "

Results

As in almost all studies of the door-in-the-face effect, all the participants turned down the exaggerated request. The acceptance rate for the target request is higher in the *classic door-in-the-face* condition than in the control condition (respectively, 52.4% (22/42) *versus* 28.6% (12/42), *Wald*=4.824, *p*<.05). The classic door-in-the-face effect is demonstrated.

Table 1. Acceptance rate of the target request

Control Condition	Classic Door-in-the-face	Non-acceptance Door-in-the-face	Acceptance Door-in-the-face
28.6% (12/42)	**52.4%** (22/42)	**73.8%** (31/42)	**31.0%** (13/42)

Note : The number of people are given in parentheses.

As in Terrier and Joule's experiment (2008, exp. 2), the acceptance rate of the target request is lower in the *door-in-the-face acceptance* condition than in the *classic door-in-the-face* condition (respectively, 31.0% (13/42) *versus* 52.4% (22/42), *Wald*=3.895, p<.05).
Finally, hypotheses 1 and 2 are confirmed. In line with hypothesis 1, the acceptance rate of the target request is higher in the *non acceptance door-in-the-face* condition than in the *classic door-in-the-face* condition (respectively, 73.8% (31/42) *versus* 52.4% (22/42), *Wald*=4.048, p<.05). In line with hypothesis 2, the acceptance rate of the target request is higher in the *door-in-the-face non acceptance* condition than in *door-in-the-face acceptance* condition (respectively, 73.8% (31/42) *versus* 31.0% (13/42), *Wald*=14.409, p<001).

DISCUSSION

This experiment presents a classic door-in-the-face effect. Thus, the participants are more likely to agree to a target request when it is preceded by an exaggerated request, than if it is formulated alone (Cialdini et al., 1975; Miller et al., 1976). The results obtained by Terrier and Joule (2008, exp. 2) are also replicated: the door-in-the-face procedure loses its efficiency when the requester lets the participants know that he/she would understand if they turned down the first request (exaggerated request). Conversely, and in line with our expectations, the door-in-the-face procedure is more efficient when the requester lets the participants know that he/she would have difficulty understanding a refusal to comply with the first request.

Therefore, through the manipulation of the participants' perception of the acceptable or, on the contrary, non-acceptable nature of their refusal of the exaggerated request in the eyes of the requester, we can manage the efficiency of the door-in-the-face procedure: if the refusal is perceived as acceptable the door-in-the-face effect is hampered, on the contrary if it is not, the effect will be increased. The results are in line with a motivational interpretation of the door-in-the-face effect (cf. Terrier & Joule, 2008). Indeed, it could be thought that the refusal of the initial request should generate a lesser state of tension when the requester told participants that he/she thinks that turning down the request is acceptable and, conversely, create more tension when the requester mentioned that he/she thought that a refusal would be unacceptable. This motivational interpretation allows the integration of three different interpretations: the social responsibility interpretation (Bell et al., 1996), the self-presentation interpretation (Pendleton & Batson, 1979) and the guilt interpretation (O'Keefe & Figge, 1997). Indeed, when an exaggerated request is turned down, the participant may realize that he/she has broken a significant social norm according to which one should help the needy (Berkowitz & Daniels, 1963; Tusing & Dillard, 2000). This realization creates a state of tension. The participant may also feel the need to re-establish a positive image in the eyes of the requester who witnessed the breaking of the

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norm (Pendleton & Batson, 1979). A great number of results show that the fact of breaking a norm induces negative evaluations of the transgressor (Brauer & Chekroun, 2005 ; Festinger, Schachter & Back, 1950 ; Schachter, 1961) and the fear of such negative evaluations is likely to create a state of tension. Finally, it is possible that the realization that one has broken a significant social norm leads to a feeling of guilt and a state of tension.

Thus, in the motivational interpretation, the state of tension experienced by the participant could involve the intervention of all three processes: one process related to the breaking of a norm of social responsibility, another related to self-presentation and the last one related to guilt.

However, our results are incompatible with an interpretation that would only count on the first process. Indeed, in cases where the refusal of an exaggerated request is said to be acceptable, the effects fade away even though they should not do so inasmuch as the norm of social responsibility (helping the needy) is activated by the nature of the requests (pro-social requests).

They are compatible, on the other hand, with the self-presentation interpretation (Pendleton & Batson, 1979). It is indeed understandable that in the *door-in-the-face acceptance* condition the participants are less likely to feel the need to make a positive impression by agreeing to the target request after turning down the exaggerated request, insofar as their image is not really threatened. In the same way, it is understandable that in the *door-in-the-face non-acceptance* condition, participants want to restore a positive image in the eyes of the requester, by showing him/her that they are not the kind of person that the refusal of the first request may make them appear.

The results are also compatible with an interpretation in terms of guilt (O'Keefe & Figge, 1997). It is indeed possible that participants will feel less guilty following the refusal of the exaggerated request in the *door-in-the-face acceptance* condition and will feel guiltier in the *door-in-the-face non-acceptance* condition. If such is indeed the case, the gap in the levels of guilt (cf. Millar, 2002b) may therefore allow us to understand that, compared to the *classic door-in-the-face* condition, the rate of agreement to the target request is lower in the *acceptance* condition and higher in the *non-acceptance* condition.

Although the door-in-the-face remains a theoretical enigma (Tusing & Dillard, 2000; Turner, Tamborini, Limon & Zuckerman-Hyman, 2007), it seems that several processes, all compatible with a motivational interpretation, are involved. Future studies should enable to progress to be made in solving this enigma, namely through the identification of the respective weight of the different processes according to the type of request and the type of context in which the door-in-the-face procedure is used.

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