



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## International Journal of Hospitality Management

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/ijhosman](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ijhosman)

## Research note

## Effects of the Door-in-the-Face technique on restaurant customers' behavior

Nicolas Guéguen\*, Céline Jacob, Sébastien Meineri

Université de Bretagne-Sud, Département Droit, Eco, Gestion, Laboratoire CRPCC, rue de la loi, 56000 Vannes, France

## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Door-in-the-Face  
Restaurant  
Customer's compliance

## ABSTRACT

We tested the Door-in-the-Face technique in a restaurant. After the refusal of a dessert at the end of the meal, waitresses proposed a tea/or a coffee to the customers. This later proposition was addressed immediately after the refusal of the dessert or 3 min later. It was found that the number of customers who ordered coffee/tea was significantly higher in the no-delay condition. Contrast theory was used to explain this effect.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

The Door-in-the-Face (DITF) is a compliance technique which consists in asking a first substantially larger request to a person, which had a high probability to be refused, then submitting a second less expensive request. By this way, the 2nd critical request has more probability to be accepted than if it was formulated directly (without the first expensive request) to the individual (Cialdini et al., 1975). A recent meta-analysis (Pascual and Guéguen, 2005) has showed that the DITF is an effective technique to increase compliance to a request. Most of the studies on DITF have used requests for the profit of human organization, health or charity. However, Goldman and Creason (1981) have found that DITF was an effective technique to encourage participants to respond to a survey for a private local radio. However, in their experiment, as in the majority of studies on DITF technique, only verbal compliance to the request was measured. Mowen and Cialdini (1980) have also tested the effect of the DITF in a business context and have found a positive effect of this technique. Moreover, verbal compliance was the only dependent variable of their experiment. More recently, Ebster and Neumayr (2008) found an effect of the DITF technique in a retail-context. Hikers on day trips who had arrived to a mountain hut were approached by an experimenter who invited them to buy some home-made cheese. In the DITF condition they were invited to buy a 2 pounds piece that cost 8 euros. As expected this initial request was rejected by all participants who were immediately proposed to buy a one pound piece that cost 4 euros. In this way, it was found that 24% of the tourists bought the piece of cheese whereas they were 9% in the control condition where the target request was directly addressed to the participants. For Shanab and Isonio (1980) the effect of the DITF is explained with the contrast the-

ory. According to this theory, the initial large request serves as an anchor point that led to perceive the second request to appear less costly than when this request is directly proposed to the person. Congruent with such explanation, they found that when several minutes separated the presentation of the initial large request and the second request, the DITF was not efficient to gain compliance whereas it was efficient when no delay separated the two requests. These authors concluded that participants were unable to contrast the two requests when a delay occurred that led them to perceive the real cost of the second request.

Our objective was to test such contrast perception in a retail setting and to generalize the effect of the DITD technique on restaurant customer. In many restaurants in France, customers did not choose a dessert (53% according to Mermert, 2010). However, employees were instructed by their manager to systematically ask the patron if they want a dessert and if they want to end their meal with a cup of coffee or a cup of tea. So, in such circumstances, it is possible to evaluate if the rejection of the dessert solicitation could have an effect on the acceptance of the coffee/tea proposition. Congruent with the contrast theory, we expected that more compliance with the coffee/tea suggestion will be found if the solicitation was addressed immediately after the non-acceptance of the dessert suggestion than when the coffee/tea suggestion would be addressed 1 min later.

## 1. Method

## 1.1. Participants

Five hundred and fifty-eight restaurant customers (329 males and 229 females) acted as participants and were randomly assigned to three groups. All were seated alone at a table in one of three restaurants located in one of two medium-size cities (both with about 75,000 inhabitants) in an attractive spot in France. The

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [nicolas.gueguen@univ-ubs.fr](mailto:nicolas.gueguen@univ-ubs.fr) (N. Guéguen), [Celine.jacob@univ-ubs.fr](mailto:Celine.jacob@univ-ubs.fr) (C. Jacob), [Sebastien.meineri@univ-ubs.fr](mailto:Sebastien.meineri@univ-ubs.fr) (S. Meineri).

**Table 1**  
Number of customers who order a tea or a coffee in the three experimental conditions.

	DITF no-delay	DITF–delay	No solicitation
Male customers	55.1% (81/147)	38.2% (58/152)	23.3%(7/30)
Female customers	42.7% (41/96)	26.2% (27/103)	13.3%(4/30)

restaurants proposed a menu composed mainly of seafood. The experiment was conducted only with customers who did not choose a menu including a dessert or did not ordered themselves a dessert. According to previous studies conducted in France (Mermet, 2010) 32% of the meals in restaurant end with a dessert so manager instructed their employees to suggest a dessert because by this may, a 15% increase in the orders was found.

### 1.2. Procedure

Five regularly employed, certified and naïve waitresses were trained by the experimenter to act similarly under experimental conditions. The waitresses were instructed to wait until the customer finished his/her main course. Upon arrival to the table in order to clear it, the waitress asked the customer “Would you want a dessert Sir/Madam?” If the customer agreed then the waitress acted as usual and gave the dessert menu to the customer. If the customer said “no”, then the waitress was instructed to use two different methods according to a random distribution. She was instructed to look at a large digital clock on a wall and if the last minute was an odd number, she was instructed to use the DITF with no delay whereas if the number was not an odd number, she was instructed to use the DITF with a delay. In the DITF with no delay condition, after the refusal of the dessert suggestion by the customer, the waitress immediately asked the participant “All right. So perhaps you will take a cup of tea or a coffee?” and wait for the response of the customer. If “yes” the waitress said “I finish cleaning the table and I bring it immediately”. If the response was “no” then the waitress said “ok, thanks” and finished to clean the table and left the customer’s table. In the DITF with no delay condition, after the refusal of the dessert suggestion by the customer, the waitress said “Ok, thanks” and finished to clean the table and left the customer’s table. She was instructed to wait 3 min and to return to the customer’s table and to ask him/her. “Perhaps you will take a cup of tea or a coffee?” If “yes” then the waitress said “I bring it immediately Sir/Madam”. If the customer responded “no” then the waitress said “Ok, thanks” and left the customer’s table. In order to have a control group the managers accepted that no solicitation for a coffee-tea was addressed to 20 customers (10 men and 10 women) in each restaurant. These customers were selected according to a random distribution: each day, tables with a customer alone received a number and we selected, with the help of a randomizer software, the number of 2 tables one with a man and one with a woman that will be tested in the control condition. So waitress asked the customers for a dessert and if the response was “no”, did not solicited the patron for a tea or a coffee. Only 20 customers were used in each restaurant given the fact that the usual practice in these three restaurants was to propose a coffee or a tea systematically.

## 2. Results

With the rate of patrons who ordered a cup of tea or a coffee, a 3 (experimental condition: DITF with no delay, DITF with a delay, no solicitation)  $\times$  2 (customer gender: male, female)  $\times$  2 (behavior: compliance or not) log-linear analysis was performed. Data are presented in Table 1.

A main effect of the experimental condition was found ( $\chi^2(2, N=558)=32.32, p<.001, r=0.23$ ). Additional comparison revealed that more coffee or tea was ordered in the DITF without any delay than when a delay occurred between the two requests ( $\chi^2(1, N=498)=14.58, p<.001, r=0.17$ ) or when no solicitation for such product was addressed ( $\chi^2(1, N=313)=26.46, p<.001, r=0.28$ ). The difference between the DITF-no delay condition and the no solicitation condition appeared statistically significant ( $\chi^2(1, N=315)=8.19, p<.005, r=0.16$ ). A main effect of customer’s gender was found ( $\chi^2(1, N=558)=8.12, p<.005, r=0.15$ ) revealing that men ordered more coffee or tea than women. The interaction between the experimental conditions and the customers’ gender revealed no statistical effect ( $\chi^2(2, N=558)=2.23, p=.54, \phi=0.02$ ).

## 3. Discussion

Our hypothesis was supported by the results. More orders were found when the final request was proposed by the waitress immediately after the refusal of the initial request than when a delay existed between the two requests. Such results have a theoretical implication given the fact that the DITF technique appeared to be efficient only when there was no delay between the two requests. These results extended and confirm Shanab and Isonio’s (1980) results who found in a laboratory setting that a several minutes delay between the first and the second request is associated with no statistical efficiency of the DITF technique. Our results confirm these data and extended them to a new dependent variable related with customer behavior.

According to Shanab and Isonio (1980) the DITF effect occurred when the individual can perceive a contrast between the first request and the second request: contrast that led him/her to perceive the second request to appear less costly. It seems that when a delay occurred between the two requests this contrast effect remove and led the individual to perceived the second request on its real cost. In the restaurants where the experiment was carried out, desserts cost between 4€ and 8.5€ whereas coffee or tea cost between 1.4€ and 2.2€. When a dessert was proposed to the customer, probably the cost of such item was activated and because these items are expensive, they led the customers to perceive the tea or the coffee to be less expensive than usual. When a delay occurred between the two requests, the information activated by the first requested has probably disappeared in memory and the coffee/tea were perceived to be more costly than in the no-delay condition.

Of course, such results have some managerial implication. In this experiment, we found that a significant increase of tea or coffee orders in the three restaurants where the experiment was carried out. We also found that it is necessary to propose tea/or coffee to the customers (the two DITF conditions presented higher coffee/tea order rates than the no solicitation condition) but it appear that no delay between the two requests are necessary to maximize the rate of order. Of course, waitress usually proposed the coffee/tea request as soon as the dessert request was refused. However this experiment shows that the no delay method should be used systematically.

## References

- Cialdini, R., Vincent, J., Lewis, S., Catalan, J., Wheeler, D., Lee Darby, B., 1975. Reciprocal concessions procedure for inducing compliance: the door-in-the-face technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31, 206–215.
- Ebster, C., Neumayr, B., 2008. Applying the door-in-the-face compliance technique to retailing. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 18 (1), 121–128.

- Goldman, M., Creason, C., 1981. Inducing compliance by a two-door-in-the-face procedure and a self-determination request. *The Journal of Social Psychology* 114, 229–235.
- Pascual, A., Guéguen, N., 2005. Foot-in-the-door and door-in-the-face: a comparative meta-analytic study. *Psychological Reports* 96, 122–128.
- Mermet, G., 2010. *Francoscopie 2010*. Larousse, Paris.
- Mowen, J., Cialdini, R., 1980. On implementing the door-in-the-face compliance technique in a business context. *Journal of Marketing Research* 17, 253–258.
- Shanab, M., Isonio, S., 1980. The effects of delay upon compliance with socially undesirable requests in the Door-in-the-Face paradigm. *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society* 15, 76–78.