

Increasing Contributions in Solicitation Campaigns: The Use of Large and Small Anchorpoints

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Charitable contribution requests including legitimization of paltry contributions or a large anchorpoint are examined. Results show that a large anchorpoint increases average contributions, legitimization of paltry contributions enhances compliance rates, and the combined use of a large anchorpoint and legitimization of paltry contributions does not significantly alter compliance or contribution sizes.

A large body of literature has been devoted to the study of influences on compliance with requests for help, but researchers have focused little attention upon corresponding degrees of help provided by compliant subjects. Because the effectiveness of any campaign to solicit help depends upon compliance rates and magnitudes of help, the focus of this article is upon both aspects. Compliance rates and degrees of response to requests including large anchorpoints, or legitimization of minimal assistance, or both, are compared with responses to simple, unspecified requests for monetary donations in a charitable solicitation context.

RESPONSE MAGNITUDES

After exposure to requests for a contribution, each potential contributor probably forms a perception of some minimally socially acceptable anchorpoint against which candidate contribution amounts are compared. Amounts greater than that minimum anchor are regarded as generous, and amounts smaller than that minimum are regarded as unacceptable. As the magnitude of that lower anchorpoint increases, the magnitude of contribution increases, but the probability of contribution decreases. If an anchorpoint is not included in the requestor's presentation, then the requestee infers an anchorpoint from prior experience.

Large, specific requests should increase response magnitudes, because such requests provide a maxi-

mum anchorpoint against which potential compliant helpers/donors can compare candidate contributions. The assimilation and contrast theory of Sherif, Taub, and Hovland (1958) predicts that moderate stimuli are displaced away from extreme stimuli, so one would expect moderate contributions to be perceived as less generous when contrasted with large contribution anchorpoints. This perception should, in turn, motivate contributions of greater amounts. The introduction of a large anchorpoint alters the context in which a candidate contribution is judged, shifting focus and comparison away from the minimum anchorpoint generated by requestees (from their experiences) toward those upper, maximum boundary amounts, and thus altering judgments concerning the perceived generosity of a moderate contribution (Helson 1964; Sherif and Sherif 1967). Similar contrast effects have been demonstrated in numerous and diverse situations (see Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman 1978; Burger 1986; Dermer et al. 1979; Kenrick and Gutierrez 1980; Sherman et al. 1978).

Schwarzwald, Bizman, and Raz (1983) attempted to increase contribution magnitudes by requesting large, specific amounts. In their field experiment, subjects were asked to donate 40, 50, or 60 Israeli pounds (corresponding to \$1.13, \$1.42, and \$1.70), or an unspecified amount (in the control condition) to a health club for handicapped individuals. Although no differences were observed in amounts actually contributed (which averaged 60 cents), the seemingly small amounts chosen to operationalize the large anchorpoints may have diluted potential effects. The amount of help (e.g., donation size) requested as a large anchorpoint must be significant, yet reasonable. Acceptable amounts of help/donation size are fairly vague magnitudes. If too small an anchor is mentioned, no difference in response magnitudes will be detected from unspecified requests in which potential

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TABLE
EFFECTS OF LEGITIMIZATION OF PALTRY DONATIONS

Study	Percent giving		Average amount given		Total revenue per subject		Cell size
	Control	LPD	Control	LPD	Control	LPD	
Brockner et al. (1984)	.07	.37	2.00	6.00	.13	2.20	15
Cialdini and Schroeder (1976)							
Experiment 1	.29	.50	1.54	1.44	.44	.72	42
Experiment 2	.32	.58	2.07	1.74	.67	1.01	31
Reeves et al. (1987)	.30	.57	2.38	1.49	.66	.84	30
Reingen (1978)							
Experiment 1	.19	.47	.51	.31	.10	.15	32
Experiment 2	.11	.39	.58	.48	.06	.19	28

NOTE: The average amount given and total revenue per subject are in dollar amounts.

contributors generate anchorpoints from prior experiences. If too large a benchmark is chosen, the perceived high cost of satisfactory compliance may inhibit donations of moderate size (Darley and Latane 1970; Latane and Darley 1970; Suedfeld, Bochner, and Wnek 1972; Wagner and Wheeler 1969).

COMPLIANCE PROBABILITY

Cialdini and Schroeder (1976) argued that the addition of legitimization of minimal assistance (e.g., "Even a penny would help.") to requests for help should increase the chances of compliance, because legitimization of minimal assistance renders most excuses for noncompliance (e.g., "We can't afford to contribute.") inappropriate and makes refusal socially embarrassing. When a minimal, paltry anchor (e.g., a penny), lower than the anchor generated by a requestee, is provided, the internally generated anchor is perceived as more generous as well.

Brockner et al. (1984), Cialdini and Schroeder (1976), Reeves, Macolini, and Martin (1987) and Reingen (1978) tested legitimization of paltry donations in field experiments. For the six experiments reported by these authors, the use of legitimization of paltry donations produced significant increases in the number of donations. Although average amounts donated by experimental groups were not significantly different from average amounts donated by control groups, total contribution revenues were increased by legitimizing paltry contributions in all cases. The Table summarizes results from the six studies of legitimization of paltry donations.

CONTRIBUTION REVENUES

Legitimization of paltry donations or minimal cooperation provides a minimum anchorpoint and im-

plies that small response magnitudes are acceptable, although not necessarily desired. Large, specific anchorpoint requests imply that large response magnitudes are desired, but not necessary. Consequently, either manipulation should increase the total magnitude of donated time/help/revenue. Legitimization of paltry responses should increase compliance rates without affecting average response magnitude; large, specific, benchmark requests should increase the average response amounts without reducing compliance rates.

If a large anchor increases response magnitude without reducing compliance, and legitimization of minimum responses enhances compliance without reducing response magnitude, their combined use might generate the greatest total revenue from increased compliance and increased magnitudes. Alternatively, legitimization of paltry contributions may neutralize the impact of a large anchor, because their combined use provides requestor-generated upper and lower anchorpoints. Assimilation and contrast theory suggests that with two explicit and extreme standards for comparison, their impacts as extremes are likely to be neutralizing, thereby negating the beneficial impacts of each. Relative to the upper extreme, a moderate contribution seems paltry; relative to the lower extreme, a moderate contribution seems generous. Consequently, contribution magnitudes may remain unchanged. Further, the mention of a large anchorpoint may render the legitimization of paltry contributions suspect if the two anchors are too distant (e.g., "He says a penny would help, but he wants \$30. I can't afford \$30, and he can't be serious about accepting a penny.").

In the following study, the large and small anchorpoints were employed in a door-to-door charitable solicitation campaign, focusing upon the percentage of subjects who made contributions, the average size of donation by contributors, and total revenue contributed per subject.

METHOD

Subjects were 640 heads of households residing in single- or double-family dwellings in an upper-middle class suburb of a large Midwestern city. Interviewers, 64 male and female college students, administered experimental treatments after being thoroughly instructed in training sessions. Each interviewer was equipped with an identification badge, information brochures, donation envelopes, and receipt books used in fund raising drives by the soliciting charity, the Capitol Area Humane Society in Columbus, Ohio. (Donations were actually contributed to the Humane Society.) Interviewers were assigned randomly to one of 50 areas of approximately equal suburban populations. Within the assigned areas, experimenters were instructed to randomly select house-

holds and did not know that an experiment was being conducted. Interviews were conducted on each of four days (Friday through Monday) between the hours of 9 a.m. and 9 p.m.

Large, specific benchmark requests were operationalized by requesting charitable donations of \$20. Legitimization of paltry donations was operationalized with the addition to unspecified donation requests of the phrase "Even a penny would help."

Interviewers initiated each interaction by introducing themselves as volunteers of the Humane Society and stating, "We are asking people to contribute (\$20) to the Humane Society. Would you like to make a contribution? (Even a penny would help.)" Sixteen interviewers included only the \$20 reference comprising the large, specific benchmark manipulation; 16 interviewers included only the legitimization of paltry donations phrase; 16 interviewers included the \$20 reference and the legitimization of paltry donations phrase; and 16 interviewers used neither. Only one treatment was given by any single interviewer and that treatment was assigned randomly to interviewers. The study was operationalized in this manner to protect the integrity of the experiment. If the interviewers were given all treatments to administer, they would sense that an experiment was being conducted and would be unlikely to handle differing treatments in a consistent manner. Each interviewer completed 10 replications. Receipt book carbons contained records of amounts donated.

RESULTS

Compliance Rates

Twenty percent of the 640 subjects complied with donation requests. Only legitimization of paltry contributions significantly increased compliance (rate) relative to the control group ($\chi^2 = 15.2$; $p < 0.001$). Adding only the phrase "Even a penny would help" more than doubled the contribution rate, from 15 percent in the control group to 34 percent. Use of the large anchor alone (a \$20 donation), in lieu of an unspecified donation, produced a compliance rate of 11 percent, which was not significantly different from the control ($\chi^2 = 1.3$, *ns*). Adding the legitimization phrase in addition to the large anchor produced a compliance rate of 18 percent, which was similarly not significantly different from the control condition response rate ($\chi^2 = 0.6$, *ns*). These results support the basic predictions of the study: provision of a large anchor has no effect on compliance, and legitimization of paltry contributions enhances compliance, unless that manipulation is neutralized by mention of a large, distant anchor.

Contribution Size

Those who made contributions gave an average donation of \$5.88. The large anchorpoint request for

\$20 produced average donations of \$11.61, nearly three times the average donation by control group donors (\$4), which was a significant difference ($t = 4.1$, $p < 0.0002$). Legitimization of paltry contributions ("Even a penny would help.") alone (\$3.02), or in combination with the large anchor (\$4.88), did not significantly affect donation size relative to the unspecified control request ($t = 1.1$, *ns*, for the former contrast, and $t = 0.6$, *ns*, for the latter contrast). As hypothesized, adding the legitimization phrase to a large anchor request significantly reduced donations ($t = 3.2$, $p < 0.003$). These results support basic predictions of the study: the use of a large anchorpoint request alone significantly increases response magnitudes, and legitimization of paltry contributions leaves magnitudes unchanged.

Total Revenues Generated

Average revenue per subject was 95 cents. Use of the large anchorpoint request for a \$20 donation alone more than doubled average revenue relative to the control group, from 59 cents per subject to \$1.25 per subject, which constituted a significant difference ($t = 1.6$, $p < 0.1$).¹ The addition of the phrase "Even a penny would help" alone also increased revenue (to \$1.01 per subject), although by a smaller amount that was not significantly different from revenue in the control condition ($t = 1.0$, *ns*). The use of both manipulations increased revenue (to 89 cents per subject) as well, although that increase also was not significantly different from revenue in the control condition ($t = 0.8$, *ns*).

DISCUSSION

The results of this field experiment suggest that solicitors can improve response magnitudes by either employing a moderately large, but believable, anchorpoint request or by adding a phrase to legitimize paltry response magnitudes, both of which provide potential compliers/helpers/donors with anchorpoint donations. The former tactic increases the size of response by compliant subjects, but does not alter the rate of compliance. The latter tactic increases the rate of compliance, but does not alter average donation amounts.

Although the impact of legitimization of paltry donations has been demonstrated previously, an earlier test of large anchorpoint donation requests (Schwarz-

¹It is not strictly appropriate to reuse the data to determine the significance of differences in average revenues generated, since the data have been utilized to examine the significance of differences in the two components which comprise revenue: compliance probabilities and average donations. Consequently, significance tests are reported and discussed as though no other significance tests had been performed for the information of readers who are primarily interested in the effects of manipulations on revenues generated.

wald et al. 1983) failed because amounts chosen were too small to alter subjects' preconceived anchorpoints. Further research to explore the range of effective anchorpoints and their relation to response magnitudes would be valuable.

Results of this study provide support for the assimilation and contrast theory (Sherif et al. 1958), which has been demonstrated previously in a number of applications involving judgments. The results also support the thesis that judgments of moderate stimuli are displaced away from extreme stimuli, and that requestors can induce focus on a particular extreme stimulus, or anchorpoint. In addition, results from this study suggest that provision of two distant and extreme anchorpoints neutralizes the impact of either as a standard of comparison. This result has strong implications for applications in which multiple request tactics are utilized.

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