

Mindfulness limits compliance with the that's-not-all technique

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Abstract

The authors assessed whether That's-Not-All (TNA) influence techniques are mindless phenomena. A psychology club gourmet chocolate sale displayed either large or small boxes of chocolate. When passersby asked for the price of the chocolate, they were given a TNA offer or a control offer. Inquirers were also told no reason, a placebic reason, or a good reason for buying the chocolate. The box price increased mindfulness. People considering the large box were persuaded by the real reason more than by the placebic reason, whereas people considering the small box were equally persuaded by placebic and real reasons. The TNA offer was effective in selling the small box of chocolate (76% for TNA vs. 45% for control) but not the large box (18% for TNA vs. 24% for control). These findings suggest that the TNA effect works only when people are mindlessly considering the offer.

The Popeil Pocket Fisherman, the Ginzu Knife, the blue light special, and the year end 25%-offsale fall under the same theoretical umbrella as instances of the That's Not-All (TNA) technique of social influence (Burger, 1986). The TNA technique employs an initial offer that is revised before the target can respond to a better offer. Burger demonstrated that a TNA offer is almost twice as likely to be accepted as an offer that only states the revised terms.

Although Burger's (1986) studies repeatedly obtained the TNA effect, a reasonable explanation for this effect or even clear boundary conditions for its operation have been elusive. The present research assessed whether the TNA effect is a process of mindless acceptance of the appearance of a bargain--an acceptance that disappears when the offer is evaluated more mindfully.

That's-Not-All Technique

There are two forms of TNA. In the reduced-cost form, the initial offer is improved by decreasing the price, for example, "This cupcake is normally \$1, but I can let you have it today for 75 cents." In the added value form, the initial offer is expanded to include more or upgraded items, for example, "If you buy a cupcake today for 75 cents, you will receive, free of charge, two chocolate-chip cookies!" Burger (1986) demonstrated the effectiveness of each form. He held a psychology club bake sale on a university campus that displayed cupcakes but not a price. When a passerby stopped to ask the price, that person was given the TNA offer or a control offer. For each form, 73% of the targets accepted the TNA offer, whereas less than 45% accepted the control offer of a 75-cent cupcake (reduced-cost control) or a cupcake and two cookies for 75 cents (added value control). Burger (1986) attempted in five additional studies to identify intervening mechanisms that would explain the TNA effect. These studies demonstrated the

reliability of the TNA effect but failed to find any clear evidence for a mediating process. For instance, Burger considered that the revised offer might be interpreted as a personal favor and, consequently, create pressures for reciprocity. Therefore, three experiments added a third offer in which targets learned of a previous price but in a way that highlighted the impersonal source or accidental nature of the price reduction (e.g., "I'm sorry, I had it wrong when I said \$1. I just started selling today. These cupcakes are really 75 cents"). None of these impersonal offers produced sales that were significantly different from the TNA condition, and most were also not significantly different from the control condition. Therefore, the results of these additional experiments were ambiguous about whether reciprocity was involved in acceptance of the TNA offer.

Another of the explanatory processes Burger (1986) considered was that the TNA condition created the appearance of a higher quality cupcake: In the TNA condition, the targets were being offered a \$1 cupcake for 75 cents, whereas in the control condition, they were being offered a 75-cent cupcake for 75 cents. In one study, he asked undergraduates to imagine a \$1 cupcake or a 75-cent cupcake and then to estimate an honest price for the cupcake. This question must have seemed puzzling to the participants because it is extraordinarily full of demand. Not surprisingly, the undergraduates who imagined a more expensive cupcake estimated a significantly higher honest price (66 cents) than undergraduates who imagined a less expensive cupcake (54 cents).

As we considered Burger's (1986) experiments, in particular the experiment that asked respondents to estimate the price of a 75-cent cupcake, two issues became clear. First, the appearance of a bargain was almost certainly not in the price itself (75 cents) but in the counterfactual created by the comparison of the revised offer to the initial offer: The fact is that I can buy this cupcake for 75 cents; the counterfactual is that if I had been here earlier it would have cost me \$1. This counterfactual implied that the target was now getting something for less money than the default price (Roese, 1997; Roese & Olson, 1997). We thought that this counterfactual bargain was probably a chimera that would disappear when exposed to rational, thoughtful consideration, such as might occur when one is asked to estimate the value of a 75-cent cupcake. Under careful thought, both the TNA and the control offer become the same ("This cupcake will cost me 75 cents").

Second, it seemed to us that the targets in Burger's (1986) field experiments probably were not engaging in the same mindful, abstract, rational comparisons as were the undergraduates trying to estimate the value of a 75-cent cupcake. Targets in the field studies were drawn to an actual cupcake and had their focus on it. The cupcake on the table enticed the target to ask the critical question, "How much for the cupcake?" The answer, whether TNA or control, was a small and reasonable amount that did not draw attention away from the cupcake or compel the target to engage in rational, detailed, economic analysis.

Mindfulness and Consideration of Offers

Langer (1989) vividly describes how ordinary, routine, and unimportant events foster mindless acceptance of superficial categories and mindless engagement of automatic

scripts. Her seminal demonstration of this phenomenon was a field study of people's response to real and placebo reasons (Langer, Blank, & Chanowitz, 1978). Experimenters asked to cut in front of someone intending to use a photocopy machine at the City College of New York Graduate Center. The experimenter made either a small request (to copy five pages) or a large request (to copy 20 pages) in one of three forms: (a) only the request accompanied by no justification ("May I use the Xerox machine?"); (b) a request that gave a placebo, tautological justification ("because I have to make copies"); or (c) a request that provided a real justification ("because I'm in a rush"). Langer et al. (1978) concluded that the small request was responded to mindlessly because the placebo reason was as effective (93%) as the real reason (94%) in producing compliance; both were more effective than no reason (60%). However, the larger request seemed to engender mindful consideration because the placebo reason (24%) was no more effective than no reason (24%), and both were less effective than the real reason (42%).

Langer's (1989) conclusion could also describe the targets in the TNA experiments. The targets approached the bake sale wondering if they should purchase a cupcake; they found what appeared to be a bargain; and they mindlessly acted on that appearance. Langer et al.'s (1978) study also provides a model for determining whether the TNA offer works as a mindless inducement. Increasing the cost of the goods sold should initiate more mindful consideration of the offer. Specifically, we assumed that a TNA offer provided the appearance of a bargain that would be available as a peripheral cue to the value of the offer (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Low-cost items would engender mindless, automatic, or peripheral route consideration of the offer, which would make the target more susceptible to the TNA effect. Higher cost items would create more mindful consideration of the offer, focusing attention more on the cost, the desire, and/or the quality of the product, all of which would diminish reliance on peripheral features such as the appearance of a bargain.

This research tested whether mindfulness limits the TNA effect. We conceptually replicated Burger's (1986) reduced-cost form of the TNA offer, with two additions.

First, we added a marker for mindfulness in the form of a short persuasive comment added to some of the offers. Some participants heard no reason, some participants heard a placebo reason that had the form of a persuasive message but was in fact tautological and added no new information, and some participants heard a real reason that provided new information about the quality of the product that participants would not have access to by themselves. Following Langer et al.'s (1978) logic, mindlessness would be implied if the placebo reason was as influential as the real reason, whereas mindfulness would be implied if the placebo reason was no more persuasive than no reason.

Second, we repeated the experiment varying the cost of complying, again following Langer et al.'s (1978) logic. Some participants were offered a relatively low-cost item (\$1), whereas others were offered a more expensive item (\$5). This addition allowed us to assess whether the more expensive item engaged more mindful consideration and reduced compliance with the TNA offer.

METHOD

Overview. Passersby on a college campus encountered a psychology club chocolate sale. Several large boxes of chocolate or several small boxes of chocolate were displayed on the table. When passersby asked for the price, they were given either the control price (\$1 for the small box or \$5 for the large box) or the TNA prices (\$1.25 reduced to \$1 for the small box or \$6.25 reduced to \$5 for the large box) and were given one of three levels of reason for buying the chocolate (no reason, a placebo reason, or a good reason).

Setting. Three experimenters sat at a table with a large sign stating "Psychology Club Gourmet Chocolate Sale" placed in the entrance to Old Main, the main College of Arts and Sciences building at the University of Arkansas. The sale was held Monday through Thursday of the 9th week of the fall semester. Flyers announcing the times and location of the sale were placed at numerous locations on campus.

Participants. People passing by the table were asked, "Would you like to buy a box of chocolate today?" If the person asked, "How much?" he or she was included in the study. In this way, 132 passersby participated in a 2 (box size) x 2 (influence condition) x 3 (reason) experiment, with 11 people in each cell. Passersby in groups or passersby who had the opportunity to overhear a previous sale were not included in the experiment.

Box size. Boxes of chocolates were purchased from the Sweet Shop Chocolate Company in Fort Worth, Texas. The small box was 1.5 x 3.5 inches and contained two "fudge love" chocolate candies. The large box was 3.5 x 5 inches and contained five chocolate truffles. The small box was displayed on the 1st and the 3rd day, and the large box was displayed on the 2nd and 4th day.

Influence condition. A random schedule assigned half the participants to the control condition and half to the TNA condition. In the control condition, one experimenter responded with a price--\$1 in the small box condition and \$5 in the large box condition.

The TNA condition had one experimenter respond with a higher price, that is, \$1.25 in the small box condition and \$6.25 in the large box condition. Immediately, a second experimenter tapped the first on the shoulder, prompting the first to raise a hand in the air and say, "Wait a second." After a 2 to 3 second pause, during which the experimenters conversed, the original experimenter announced, "I'm sorry, actually this box of chocolate is \$1" (\$5 in the large box condition).

Additional reason to purchase chocolate. The random schedule also assigned participants to one of three reason conditions. In the no reason condition, the final price ended the experimenter's response. In the placebo reason and real reason conditions, the original experimenter immediately followed the final price with a statement that gave additional reasons to purchase chocolate. In the placebo reason condition, the experimenter said, "This candy is made of chocolate and sold in this box." In the real reason condition, the experimenter said, "These Sweet Shop chocolates are fudge hand-dipped in chocolate with pecans. Also, Sweet Shop has been in business over 20 years."

Response. Targets then decided whether to purchase a box of chocolate. Most targets made this decision quickly and either walked away or accepted the offer. A few targets purchased more than one box. The third experimenter recorded the target's response as purchasing or not purchasing and completed the exchange of money.

RESULTS

Throughout the 4-day period, 41% of the targets purchased a box of chocolate. The effects of box size, condition, and reason on these purchases were analyzed with planned contrasts using analysis of variance (Judd, McClelland, & Culhane, 1995; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1985; see also, Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996). The targets' responses to purchase or not purchase the chocolate were dichotomous, which is a fact that stretches the parametric assumptions of analysis of variance. However, for comparisons between condition means based on equal sample sizes, the major effects of these violations appear to be inflated error terms and increased Type II errors, with little effect on Type I errors (Box, 1953; Guilford & Fruchter, 1978).

Effect of Reasons

We predicted that the higher prices associated with the large box would create more mindful consideration of the offer and that this more mindful consideration would reduce the effectiveness of the TNA condition. To assess whether targets were more mindful when considering the larger box of chocolate, we analyzed the effect of the reasons offered for the purchase. Targets who were mindful should be persuaded more by good reasons than by placebo reasons, whereas targets who approached the choice mindlessly would be persuaded equally by good reasons and placebo reasons and more persuaded by either than by no reasons. The percentage of targets in each condition who purchased a box of chocolate is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Purchases of Chocolate for Each Box Size, Condition, and Reason (in percentages)

Condition	Reason			Average
	None	Placebic	Real	
Small box size				
That's-Not-All	55	91	82	76
Control	36	45	55	45
Average	45	68	68	60
Large box size				
That's-Not-All	18	0	36	18
Control	18	18	36	24
Average	18	9	36	21

NOTE: There were 11 targets in each cell (132 total).

For all conditions and sizes of boxes, more targets purchased the chocolate when the price was followed by a real reason (52%) than when it was followed by no reason (32%), $F(1,120) = 6.33$, $p (.05)$. The response to the placebo reason depended on the box size. For the small box of chocolate, the placebo reason produced as many purchases (68%) as the real reason (68%), with both being greater than no reason (45%). For the large box of chocolate, the placebo reason produced significantly fewer purchases (9%) than the real reason (36%), $J(2(1) = 4.66$, $p (.05)$, and fewer even than the no reason condition (18%).

A planned comparison tested whether the chocolate sales followed the pattern that would be predicted if targets were mindful when considering the more expensive box of chocolate and mindless when considering the less expensive box of chocolate. Specifically, weights of -1 were assigned to the means for the small box and large box no reason condition and the large box placebo reason condition, whereas weights of +1 were assigned to the small box placebo reason condition and the small and large box real reason conditions. This contrast was significant, $F(1,120) = 18.90$, $p (.001)$. The effectiveness of the various reasons for the two box sizes closely paralleled the pattern of results from the Langer et al. (1978) study and strongly imply that the cost of the chocolate affected mindfulness.

Effectiveness of TNA

The first question we asked about the effectiveness of the TNA offer was whether we replicated the TNA effect selling chocolate in Arkansas. For the small box, the TNA condition resulted in 76% of the customers deciding to spend the \$1, whereas the control condition convinced only 45% to spend the \$1. This 31% advantage for the TNA condition was statistically significant, $F(1, 120) = 7.81$, p [is less than] .01, and quite comparable to the percentages that Burger (1986) reported for cupcakes in California.

The second question we asked was whether the more mindful consideration of the larger box of chocolate would reduce the TNA effect. The results clearly indicated that the higher price caused the TNA effect to melt away. For the large box of chocolate, the TNA procedure resulted in 18% of the customers spending \$5 to make the purchase, whereas 24% of the control condition customers purchased the \$5 chocolate. This difference was in the direction opposite to the TNA effect but was not statistically significant, $F(1,120) = 0.31$, $p = ns$.

A planned contrast tested the hypothesis that the TNA effect would occur with the small box of chocolate but would be absent with the large box of chocolate. Specifically, this planned contrast was the interaction between TNA condition and box size, which was calculated after subtracting the main effect variances. The interaction contrast was significant, $F(1, 120) = 5.62$, p [is less than] .019, indicating that the means conformed to the specific pattern created when the TNA condition was more effective for the small size box than the large size box.

DISCUSSION

This experiment replicated Burger's (1986) original studies, finding that an immediate, apparent sweetening of the deal increased compliance with a low-cost offer. For the small box of candy, the TNA effect was dramatic, increasing sales from 45% to 76%. As in Burger's studies, the TNA effect was shown to be a simple and powerful inducement to greater compliance. To our knowledge, this is the first independent replication of the TNA effect. This effect is well-known (Pettijohn, 1994; Smith & Mackie, 1995) but has not been investigated since Burger's (1986) original studies.

This study moved beyond Burger's (1986) findings in two ways. First, it identified a limiting condition for the TNA effect. Sweetening the deal by reducing the cost did not affect sales for a higher priced box of chocolate. Second, this study found clear evidence that mindlessness is related to the TNA effect. When, as with the low-cost box, targets responded to the offer in a mindless way, the TNA effect worked, but when targets responded to the offer more mindfully, as with the higher cost box, the TNA ceased to be effective.

Mindlessness and Compliance

What drives the TNA effect? These findings suggest that the effect rests on a process that becomes less influential under scrutiny. Mindless consideration of the chocolate offer could operate in at least two ways. One mechanism might involve Gilbert's (1991) Spinozan belief process, in which comprehension of a statement requires initial automatic acceptance of its assertion, which is only later and with greater effort reconsidered. Mindless consideration of an offer would truncate and diminish the reconsideration phase, which would leave the acceptance of the offer more potent.

A second mechanism could engage what Petty and Cacioppo (1986) called peripheral route processing. Mindful consideration implies a central processing route. The central route involves careful consideration of a choice in two ways: first, that many aspects will be considered (chocolate buyers will check the quality of the chocolate, the strength of their desire, the short-term and long-term consequences of the act, the availability of money, the reasonableness of the price, the intersection with other goals such as maintaining a diet), and second, that arguments for and against the action would be likely to be considered. Peripheral route processing, on the other hand, relies on heuristics and appearances. In the case of the TNA, the price reduction creates an appearance of a bargain, that is, a special low price. Thus, mindless consideration of the chocolate offer may move targets from thoughtful consideration of the pros and cons of buying the chocolate to reliance on the heuristic that chocolate on sale is a good deal.

If mindlessness is a limiting condition and qualifying condition for the TNA effect, then the TNA's effectiveness should be increased when targets are made more mindless. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) imply that mindless consideration can be increased by lowering the motivation to process the request or by diminishing the ability to process the request. Thus, events such as distraction, increased cognitive load, demands for a quick decision,

fatigue, or loss of interest should expand the range of offers that would show the TNA effect. In addition, greater motivation, such as increased desire for the product or the dearness of money should make targets more mindful and thus reduce the range of offers that would show the TNA effect.

It is an interesting question whether attentional focus on the cost of an offer or on the value gained by its acceptance would allow the TNA effect to work equally well (cf. Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Slovic & Lichtenstein, 1983). This difference in focus may have been subtly at work in this experiment. Perhaps the low-cost product allowed targets to remain focused on the chocolate, allowing them to process the offer in a more mindless way. However, the higher cost product may have brought cost and quality issues into greater focal attention, leading to a more mindful consideration of the offer.

More generally, these results demonstrate that some social influence techniques seem to work better when the target is mindless. Cialdini (1985) describes these techniques as click-whir phenomena that are automatically triggered by releasing cues. For instance, peripheral cues to persuasion, such as the TNA, testimonials, attractive sources, information about how many have been sold, or simple persuasive messages such as "It is a bargain," should be similarly effective for low-cost, low-effort, mindless decisions. However, other social influences--such as ingratiation--may be unaffected or even enhanced by mindfulness (Cialdini, 1985). What differentiates influence techniques that lose their effectiveness with mindfulness from those that are unaffected or enhanced by mindfulness is a theoretically important question and one that would be quite useful to answer. The method employed in this study could be used effectively to explore these issues with other influence techniques.

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