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Doors are better than windows. Social influence on the Internet – "Window-In-The-Face Technique

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Abstract

The following article is about social influence on the Internet. Researchers are interested in social influence techniques applied on the Internet - particularly the case of the door-in--the-face technique. It seems that there are hardly any studies about this technique. The researchers conducted two experiments to test the effectiveness of the technique on the Internet. The technique has proved to be ineffective on online conditions. Researchers attempt to explain this phenomenon in the article.

Keywords: social influence, social influence on the Internet, door-in-the-face technique.

Evolution of the World Wide Web has a real impact on people's behavior and their daily lives. Currently, through the internet people can satisfy almost all their needs: do shopping, talk with friends, earn money, meet new people and even have sex. Our lives are becoming more and more virtual. Some researchers are beginning to use new terms to identify people e. g. *Robo – sapiens* (Guadagno, Okdie, & Muscanell, 2013). There is nothing surprising in this because, as some sources show more than 78% of people in North America use the Internet. In Europe more than 63% (*Internet World Stats*, 2012). This means that well over half of people use the Internet and do so almost every day for several hours. Previously, people spent their time mostly in the company of other people - at home, at work, in public places. The Internet has changed that. Now people can spend their time in the net, and do not meet up with others but it does not mean that they are socially excluded. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as instant messaging, texting or e-mail prevents alienation. What is interesting is that it has even been discovered that Internet users actually have larger social networks than nonusers. They visit and call friends on the phone as often as people who do not use Internet (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001). What is also interesting is that relationships formed

on the web develop in the same way as traditional relationships, and - which is also worth attention - their quality is the same as the quality of traditional relationships. Very often relationships that are created on the Internet are transferred into "real life". In some cases, these relationships become so strong that they result in engagement and marriage (Parks, & Floyd, 1995; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002).

The question then arises: do people on the internet function just as in real life? Do phenomena observed in reality happen on the web? These questions are very wide therefore in this article we check only one option: does social influence work the same in reality as on the net?

Social influence - differences between the real world and the Internet

One of the leading authorities on social influence Robert Cialdini (vide: 2009; 2003) assumed that the behavior may change as a result of real or imagined pressure. However, as a result of researches it was found that not all of the six principles of influence - authority, social validation, reciprocity, likability, scarcity, and commitment and consistency -are effective on the web. For example commitment and consistency are effective in CMC but authority is not (Guadagno, & Cialdini, 2005). Similar results are shown by Rosanna E. Guadagno and others (2013) – not all social influence principles are effective online. These six principles are the basis of social impact. Why? Because they explain a very high percentage of submission while social influence is in use. For instance the likelihood that fulfillment of the request of a friend is much higher than the fulfillment of the request of a foreign person. In this case, the best explanation is the principle of likability. We are happy to fulfill requests of people we like. This upholds social bonds and makes us happy. Do you want people to fulfill your requests? Do something that they'll like you. Do you want the people like you? Do them a favor (Doliński, 2005).

So how it possible that not all principles are effective on the Internet? What is the difference between the real and the Internet world? As mentioned earlier a lot of human behavior on the web is the same as in real life! Where is the difference? Researchers have shown that there are four main differences between interaction on the Internet and the real world: anonymity, time and place, physical appearance and physical distance (McKenna, & Bargh, 2000). A perfect example of the differences between standard communication and the CMC is the lack of non-verbal communication. It definitely makes interpretation more difficult and at the same time can reduce the impact of a message (Derks, Bos, & von Grumbkow, 2008). CMC eliminates physical contact and connected with this impact of physical attractiveness whose role in social influence is large (Edinger, & Patterson, 1983). Attractive people are more liked by others, better assessed, more efficient in social life etc. People are more willing to help others who are physically attractive than those who are not beautiful. The stereotype *what is beautiful is good* is common (Wojciszke, 2006; Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). So if you think of the Internet as a place where it is worth using techniques based on the principle of liking it might be not the best choice. Similarity and physical attractiveness

are two drivers that are strongly associated with liking. On the Internet it is difficult to observe - certainly harder than in real life - that is why this rule is not as effective as usual (Guadagno et al., 2013).

Thus, CNC takes place in a different way, and people have more time to rethink their behavior. So they have more attentional resources to generate behavior - no need to hurry with their reactions. Moreover, thanks to anonymity interlocutors do not have to show their true personality. They can create their alter ego or self-presence more strongly than under normal conditions. Thanks to this ability, users can exhibit behavior more or less normative than usual (Postmes, Spears, Sakhel, & De Groot, 2001). A very good example of this phenomenon is the replication the classic Asch experiment on social conformism carried out on the Internet (vide: Wallace, 2001). The researchers created an environment that resembled the internet. On a screen they were shown a section of a line and participants had to indicate from among four others which had exactly the same length as that presented earlier. Answers of the participants were preceded by the replies generated by the computer (this has always been a bad answer). The results showed that participants were not undergoing conformism as much as in the original experiment of Asch. They more often gave correct answers. Patricia Wallace believes that such behavior was caused by lack of physical presence of other people. As a result, the subjects did not have to behave according to the norms and self- presence and consequently they could formulate independent opinions. Anonymity makes that volume of anti -normative behavior increase (Mendels, 1999). But these results are not unequivocal. Other researchers suggest that anonymity can, in some cases, escalate a group identity leading to increased group conformity (e.g. Postmes et al., 2001). As you can see there is no accordance to the behavior of users and these issues require further research. Particular interest seems to move this issue in Poland – Poland still lacks research of social influence on the Internet. It is worth considering do the findings of American researchers also refer to our culture. For this reason, this article refers to is the issue of social influence on the internet with nothing more than the tests designed to check whether the results obtained by American researchers will be the same in Poland.

How is the effectiveness of social influence when we think about sequential techniques? Researchers confirm that the foot-in-the-door technique is effective online (Petrova, Cialdini, & Sills, 2007; Guéguen, 2002). This technique involves the sequential formulation of requests. First formulated is a small, easy to fulfill request and then the request is bigger – the target request. R. Cialdini (2009) proves that the technique is based on the mechanism of perception of myself as a helping person. The technique is effective even if there is a time gap between the requests and when requests are formulated by two different people. Most of the research on this technique used a method of face-to-face or telephone. However, research on the internet also confirmed the effectiveness of the method.

Foot-in-the-door technique has been relatively well studied on the Internet but still has not been exhausted. A completely different situation is associated with the door-in-the-face technique. On the EBSCO data base you can find just a few studies on this technique carried out on the web! Although this is one of the most studied

techniques of social influence researchers do not rush to check its effectiveness on the web!

The door-in-the-face technique looks like the inverse of foot-in-the-door technique. Initially, a request is big. Large enough that no one wants fulfill it. After a large request followed a smaller request. Usually people agree to fulfill this request. For this technique to be effective both requests must be sent by the same person, preferably in a short period of time (Doliński, 2005). Researchers point to various reasons why the technique is effective. Robert Cialdini et al (Cialdini et al., 1975 in: Dolinski, 2005) believe that for the effectiveness of this technique the following are responsible: the effect of contrast (a second request comparison with first, difficult request does not seem be as difficult to fulfill) and the norm of reciprocation based on the rule of reciprocity (we are lowering our expectations so others also should agree to a concession and fulfill lower request). In turn, Daniel O'Keefe and Marianne Figge (1997) indicate guilt as a reason for the effectiveness of the technique. They argue that people fulfill the second request because they feel guilty that they did not perform the first (too difficult, time-consuming, requiring a lot of resources). They also believe that the entity does not fulfill the second request if the first one does not cause the guiltiness. Another explanation refers to the self-presentation. People afraid that they will be perceived badly if they will always refuse help. For this reason they fulfill second request (Pendleton, & Batson, 1979).

Nicolas Guéguen (2003) checked the effectiveness of the technique on the Internet. He sent e-mails to random people and solicited them to visit a humanitarian organization web site. Results show that the technique increased compliance to the last request. But these studies are one of the few that can be found in the databases. Checking the effectiveness of the door-in-the-face technique on the internet is not popular. For this reason, Bartosz Ogonowski and Magdalena Gawrecka decided to carry out studies about this technique in Poland. It was a small and simple experiment, which was to check whether also among Polish Internet users the technique would be effective.

First research

The study included 80 participants (40 in the experimental group and 40 in the control group) users from mIRC (instant messaging). People for the study were randomly selected - a request was sent to every 10 people in the most popular chat. Researchers to the needs of the situation in which the technique is used on the Internet accepted the name window-in-the-face technique - the name is more associated with Windows, which are used by almost every computer user.

The study used a fictitious survey which was posted on the website. The survey consisted of three questions about the European Union and the question about the nickname from the chat. The questionnaire was used in both experimental conditions. The survey was written in the PHP programming language.

This study introduces two groups: control and experimental. In the experimental group, the researcher asked the respondent to send by post a completed questionnaire, which contained 100 questions (big request). The researcher asked to write

"yes" if you agree or "no" if you do not want to fill out the survey. After receiving a negative answer, the researcher put forward a desired request - complete a short questionnaire, which was located on the website. In the control group, the researcher asked respondent only fill in a short questionnaire on the website.

Counting people took place in two ways. Firstly, how many people answered "yes" or "no" to the request of the investigator. Secondly, check the number of people who filled in the survey. Also checked was the person who filled the survey, those that had been requested by the investigator. For this purpose we compared nicknames included in the survey with those used in the chat.

All participants who agreed to fill a questionnaire, filled it. In the control group it was 37% of respondents. In the experimental group, 47% of the respondents. Unfortunately, the results turned out to be not statistically significant!

The results were the basis for the following reflections relating to the effectiveness of the window-in-the-face technique. It was noted that the subjects did not want to open the web page containing the survey because they were afraid that it might contain a virus. Perhaps if researchers confirm participants that this is not a virus the submission would be higher. This can be done through the use of websites of known and respected scientific units (e.g. universities). This problem has not been explained and may be the subject of more research.

The second explanation is that online contact is burdened with a certain distrust of people who ask us about anything. Lack of direct interaction weakens the submission of the respondents and reduces their involvement. This demonstrates the significant role of personal contact over subjects by using a social influence researcher. Katelyn Y.A. McKenna and John Bargh (2000) wrote about this problem. It is also worth thinking about the subjects. Are there any specific features that distinguish this group? What is the difference between the people we meet on the streets and those who spend most of their time on the web. Internet users are so often bombarded by various types requests and ads that they undergo intensive training in assertiveness. They learn to refuse much easier and faster than in real life. All of these doubts are questions for further research.

At the end it is worth asking the most important question: is this technique effective on the internet at all? Perhaps the lack of publications on the subject is not due to lack of interest in the technique, but the lack of evidence for its effectiveness in Internet? Is this technique ineffective while foot-in-the-door technique is effective? For this reason, Bartosz Ogonowski and Maria Kierach decided to carry out further research of technique and check is it effective in other conditions?

Second research

In the second study researchers decided to diminish fear of viruses that can be sent via a web site. For this reason, the researcher presented the subjects that he works with, for a company conducting a research on road traffic. The company has its own website and provides numerous services for drivers. Researchers have made every effort to reduce manipulation and the distrust of the respondents. Respondents could check whether the company actually exists. At the same time,

researchers have tried to eliminate the influence of authority – the brand of the company is not recognized as a leader. The subjects did not have to fear that the sent link contains any virus and could easily see what is on the page proposed by the researcher.

The study was conducted on the two biggest polish chat rooms (czat.onet.pl and czateria.interia.pl). The study was run during three days. The researcher sent private messages to people that were present in a chat room. In experimental group people were first asked to take part in a survey that contained 15 open questions (big request). They were also told that it usually took 45 minutes to complete a survey. They were asked to write whether they agreed or not to complete the survey. After they declined the researcher immediately asked them to enter the site about traffic congestion and to sign up for a newsletter about it (proper request). Researchers measured how many people entered and how many of them signed up for a newsletter. Site entrance was measured through the Google Analytics tool which allows identification of the number of unique entrances. In the control group participants were only asked a proper request and in addition they were also asked to write if they agree to do it or not. This step was necessary because there was a possibility that on the other side of screen there was nobody at that time.

Results

Researchers asked 120 different people in the experimental group and 120 people in a control group. In the experimental group 35 people answered the big request and only those 35 people were considered for the experiment. The rest of them either banned the researcher from further contact (27 people) or did not answer at all (57 people). In control group out of 120 people only 38 people answered others did not reply or banned the researcher.

First measurement involved how many people signed up for a newsletter. In the experimental and control group only one person fulfilled that request. The results turned out to be not statistically significant (X^2 (df=1) = 0,003 p=0,95).

Second the number of entries to web site were counted. In the control group 6 people entered web site and in the experimental group only 3 people. These results also are not statistically significant (X^2 (df=1) = 0,87 p>0,34).

Discussion

The result of the second study confirmed the results of the first study. The technique proved to be ineffective. Individuals did not agree on the first and second request of researchers, and also prohibited the researchers further contact.

In the first study it was observed that subjects were suspicious of requests because they feared that researchers sent viruses. In the second study, this effect was eliminated by changing the experimental manipulation. Unfortunately, the results have not changed. It was observed that subjects even to a lesser extent than in the first study responded positively for the researchers request.

The second study confirmed that the lack of physical presence of others makes

the technique ineffective. So far, only one study confirms the efficacy of techniques (Guéguen, 2003). The study, however, was widely- tested more; than 1,600 people. This large sample of respondents may explain why the effect does not exist in other studies – it is too weak. An attempt to replicate this effect proved to be impossible on a smaller research sample. Perhaps it is also a fact for which there are no other studies about door-in-the-face technique in databases. Journals do not print studies that show statistically insignificant results. The only published studies are not enough to confirm the effectiveness of technique.

The second important factor is the subjects. We do not have any knowledge about the subjects taking part in the research. People involved in the online research can be registered under more than one nickname. This can disrupt of results. Some of them may not be real persons (e.g. corporate account, the bots), parts of them could be underage. All these factors disrupt results. This issue requires further research. One of the basic researches should be a comparison of the subjects involved on the internet study and beyond the internet. Part of this research has already been done. Nicolas Guéguen and Cèline Jacob (2002) showed that subjects lacking the presence of the investigator are not as compliant as those who see the researcher. Men were more compliant than woman. The results show that results can change if researchers create an environment more similar to "real life". The same group of subjects as always gives a different response in changed conditions. But there is still not enough information about the subjects on the internet studies and in the normal studies. The next step in research should be to trace the reactions associated with the refusal. Probably the people in the online study do not feel the discomfort associated with the refusal to the same extent as the people participating in traditional research. They often do not agree on the various requests and thus are not as compliant when someone uses door-in-the-face technique.

Research on the Internet posed a lot of interesting challenges. The development of technology ensures a change in human behavior. It is worth to observe these changes and follow them. Many classic studies can be carried out online. The results can be compared with those that were obtained in the traditional way. This gives the possibility to extend the theory and is extremely interesting from the research point of view.

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