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► **To cite this version:**

Celine Jacob, Nicolas Gueguen, Alexandre Pascual, Lamy Lubomir. Disrupt Pique Technique: When Disrupting First Increases the Effectiveness of the Pique Technique. Polish Psychological Bulletin, 2024, 55, pp.32-36. 10.24425/ppb.2024.150354 . hal-04791275

**HAL Id: hal-04791275**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04791275v1>**

Submitted on 19 Nov 2024

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## Disrupt Pique Technique: When Disrupting First Increases the Effectiveness of the Pique Technique

**Abstract:** This study examined the effect of the pique technique preceded by a disrupting process. Passersby in the street were asked for money, either for a common amount of change (control) or 37 cents (pique technique). In half of the cases, the requester added a disrupting sentence at the beginning of the request. Results showed that the pique technique alone and the disrupting technique alone increased compliance with the request. Adding a first disrupting sentence to the pique also increased compliance compared with the other three conditions. These results support the theoretical explanation that the initial disrupting sentence associated with the pique could reduce the influence of the refusal script activated by the money request.

**Keywords:** *Request, Compliance, Pique, Disrupting*

For a long time, social psychologists have been investigating several procedures used for gaining compliance with a request (see Pratkanis, 2007, Dolinski & Gryzb, 2022 for a review). One of these techniques, the pique technique, has received little interest from scientists. The pique technique consists in using an unusual request to attract mindful consideration from people. In the seminal work on this technique, Santos, Leve, and Pratkanis (1994) asked men and women in the street for money using either a conventional request (“a quarter” or “some change”) or an uncommon request (“17 cents” or “37 cents”) called the “pique”. The researchers observed that the pique increased the number of passersby who agreed with the request but not the amount of money offered. Burger, Hornisher, Martin, Newman, and Pringle (2007) reported an overall effect of the pique on compliance, but the researchers also found an increase in the amount of money given by the participants. However, these researchers reported that this overall effect of the pique technique on the amount of money was explained only with those participants who inquired about the unusual amount, whether the solicitor

gave participants a specific or an uninformative reason. According to their meta-analysis of the pique technique, Lee and Feeley (2017) found an overall effect size that was larger than the meta-analytic estimates of the effect sizes for other well-known compliance gaining techniques such as the foot-in-the-door (Dillard, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1984), the door-in-the-face (Feeley, Anker, & Aloe, 2012), or the legitimization of paltry favors (Lee, Moon, & Feeley, 2016).

Initially, Santos et al. (1994) used two theoretical processes, not necessarily opposed, to explain the effectiveness of the pique technique. Based on a heuristic processing explanation, the researchers argued that the pique technique was effective because the uncommon request disrupts the participants’ refusal script that is activated when a stranger asks them for money. The researchers also stated that the pique technique could have aroused the participants’ curiosity and focused their attention on the uncommon request. Such attention could have created a legitimization effect: passersby may have considered the uncommon amount of money



requested and decided that this request was a legitimate one, which in turn increased their willingness to give money to the solicitor. In this study, we replicated the pique technique per se and examined the effect of beginning the solicitation with a disrupting sentence. If the pique creates a disrupting effect, then it could be hypothesized that increasing overall disruption could increase the participants' compliance.

The disrupt-then-reframe technique (DTR) consists in using confusing phrasing or language in the first part of the request (disrupt) and following it immediately with a reason to comply with the request (reframe). In the first study on this technique, Davis and Knowles (1999) reported that stating the price of a package of note cards in pennies rather than in dollars ("They're 300 pennies... that's \$3") and then adding the direct reframe ("It's a bargain") increased the number of participants who complied with the request. Further studies indicated that the DTR effect was created in multiple ways and for different requests. Kubala (2002) asked people to participate in a survey and gave the amount of time necessary first in seconds and then in minutes to create the DTR effect. In a charity bake-sale situation, Knowles, Butler, and Linn (2001) disrupted their participants by using first the term "halfcakes" instead of "cupcakes" Carpenter and Boster (2009) carried out a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of the DTR technique based on 14 studies and reported that the effect-size of the increased probability of compliance associated with the DTR was larger than the effect-size reported for other compliance gaining procedures such as the foot-in-the-door (Dillard, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1984) or the door-in-the-face (O'Keefe & Hale, 1998).

In their seminal work on the DTR technique, Davis and Knowles (1999) reported that neither the disrupt sentence alone nor the reframe sentence alone were sufficient to influence compliance. Such results could suggest that a disrupt sentence could exert an effect on the participant only when the target is reframed by yet another sentence. Previous research has shown that the effectiveness of some well-known compliance-gaining techniques increased when a request or a sentence was added to the conventional procedure. With the well-known foot-in-the-door technique, Dolinski (2000), Goldman, Creason, and McCall (1981) or Guéguen, Silone, and David (2016) reported that an intermediate request between the initial and the final request increased compliance with the final request more than when only the initial request was used. Guéguen et al. (2013) examined the evoking freedom technique and reported that telling people twice that they were free to accept or to refuse a request increased compliance compared with a situation where the "freedom" sentence was used once only.

The objective of the present experiment was to evaluate the effect of giving a disrupt sentence before using the pique technique. Santos et al. (1994) stated that the pique technique may act as a disruption, which then increases compliance. Thus, it could be hypothesized that if the pique request is preceded by a disrupt phase, greater

disruption will be created, and greater compliance will be obtained than with the pique technique alone or the DTR technique alone.

## METHOD

### Participants

The participants were 200 passersby who were walking alone in the street. All appeared to be between 25 and 60 years of age. According to the meta-analysis conducted by Carpenter and Boster (2009) on the DTR technique and the meta-analysis performed by Lee and Feeley (2017) of the pique technique where a significant overall effect size was found for both techniques, the mean of the number of participants used in the studies selected for these two meta-analyses was calculated. We found a mean of 49.77 participants per experimental condition. Thus, in our study, 50 participants were tested in each condition.

### Procedure

Two 19-20-year-old male undergraduate students acted as solicitors in this study. They were neatly dressed in a traditional way for young people of their age (jeans/sneakers/T-shirt). To avoid possible variations in the confederates' behavior, they were not informed of the experimental hypothesis.

Except for the verbal content, the confederates were instructed to act in a similar way in each condition. In a pretest, the confederates were trained by testing five participants in each condition. The experiment took place in a street on particularly sunny days at the beginning of summer. The confederates were instructed to test a passerby in one of the four experimental conditions according to a prearranged order. The confederate was instructed to approach the first adult (approximately between 25 and 60 years of age) he saw walking alone. In the control condition, the confederate approached the participant by saying, "Hello, can you spare a few coins for bus fare, please?" In the pique condition, the confederate asked in the same tone: "Hello, can you spare 37 cents for bus fare, please?" In the disrupt condition, the confederate said, "Hello, can you spare 20 plus...er... 7 plus er... (the confederate screwed up his brow and feigned to count on his fingers during 2 seconds) ...er can you spare a few coins for bus fare, please?" In the disrupt-then-pique condition, the confederate said, "Hello, can you spare 20 plus...er... 7 plus er... (the confederate screwed up his brow and feigned to count on his fingers during 2 seconds) ...er... can you spare 37 cents for bus fare, please?" The confederate then noted whether the participants agreed or not to the request, and if they did, the amount of money they gave. The confederate was also instructed to report whether the participant asked him the amount he wanted but it was found that no-one asked the question. The confederate was instructed to give back the money to the participant and to explain that the solicitation was done as part of a study conducted in his university to evaluate how many people accepted to donate to an unknown person who asked money in the street.

## RESULTS

The number of participants who comply with the request was the first dependent variable whereas the amount of the money left was the second dependent variable. Data are present in Table 1.

separate the participants who inquired or not about the uncommon amount because the reason for solicitation was contained in the verbal request.

Contrary to the results found by Davis and Knowles (1999), we found that the disrupt-only condition increased compliance compared with the control condition. These

**Table 1.** Percentage of Donators and Monetary Value of Donations Received (in Euros) According to Experimental Conditions

Measure <sup>1</sup>	Control condition	Disrupt condition	Pique condition	Disrupt+Pique condition
Number of donators	10.0% (5/50)	26.0% (13/50) <sup>a</sup>	36.0% (18/50) <sup>a</sup>	58% (29/50)
Amount of donations <sup>2</sup>	0.220 <sup>a</sup> (0.164)	0.252 <sup>ab</sup> (0.152)	0.345 <sup>abc</sup> (0.188)	0.452 <sup>c</sup> (0.217)

1-Percentages or means with the same letter are not significantly different from each other

2-Mean (SD in brackets). Data provided only from participants who complied with the request.

With the number of participants who complied with the request a Chi-square test of independence revealed an overall statistical difference ( $\chi^2(1, N = 200) = 27.80, p < .001, r = .35$ ). Pairwise comparisons showed that the control condition was significantly different from the disrupt condition ( $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 4.34, p = .037, r = .20$ ), the pique condition ( $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 9.54, p = .002, r = .29$ ) and the disrupt-then-pique condition ( $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 25.67, p < .001, r = .45$ ). The disrupt condition appeared not significantly different from the pique condition ( $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 1.17, p = .282, r = .11$ ) but statistically different from the disrupt-then-pique condition ( $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 10.51, p = .001, r = .31$ ). It was also found that the pique condition was statistically different from the disrupt-then-pique condition ( $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 4.86, p = .028, r = .22$ ).

With the mean amount of money given by the participants an analysis of variance (Anova) was performed and revealed an overall difference between the four conditions ( $F(3, 61) = 4.43, p = .007$ ). Pairwise comparisons revealed that the control condition was significantly different from the disrupt-then-pique condition ( $t(34) = 2.27, p = .016, r = .44$ ) and that the disrupt condition was significantly different from the disrupt-then-pique condition ( $t(34) = 3.00, p = .005, r = 0.43$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This study, conducted in a field setting and examining behaviors, showed that, congruent with the findings reported by Burger et al. (2007) and Santos et al. (1994), the pique technique appeared effective to increase compliance with the request. In accordance with Santos et al.'s study but not with Burger et al.'s, we observed no significant difference in the amount of money offered. However, this difference could be explained by a methodological difference. Burger et al. reported an effect of the pique only with those participants who inquired about the unusual amount. In this study, it was not possible to

researchers also reported a difference between the disrupt-only condition (35%) and the control condition (25%), but this difference was not significant. However, their sample sizes were considerably smaller ( $N = 20$ ) than in our study ( $N = 50$ ). Moreover, we did not observe any significant difference in the amount of money offered by the participants in the disrupt-only condition and the control condition.

More interestingly, we noted that a greater number of participants complied with the request in the disrupt-then-pique condition than in all the other experimental conditions, including the pique-only condition. It was also reported that the disrupt-then-pique condition led participants to give more money than in the control condition and the disrupt-only condition. Thus, overall, we found strong evidence that the disrupt-then-pique condition exerted an additional effect and appeared efficient to increase compliance with a money request. Contrary to previous research studying combined compliance techniques (Dolinski, 2000; Goldman et al., 1981; Guéguen et al., 2013) the effect reported in this study could not be explained by the length of the tested sentence because we reported a significant difference between the disrupt condition and the disrupt-then-pique condition whereas the length of the sentence was near the same: 20 words in the disrupt condition and 19 words in the disrupt-then-pique condition.

Santos et al. (1994) have proposed two processes to explain the effectiveness of the pique technique. First, they suggested that the pique technique disrupts the refusal script. Second, the researchers stated that the pique could have aroused curiosity and focused participants' attention on the uncommon request. Based on the results reported in this experiment, it seems that the first theoretical proposition could help us explain why the disrupt-then-pique condition increased the participants' compliance. Disrupting the participants is sufficient to increase compliance probably because the disruption itself has the property to disrupt the refusal script that is

activated when a stranger requests something from people in the street. Adding the pique after the first phase of disruption probably increased the level of disruption. Thus, accordingly, this high level of disruption probably reduced the effect of the refusal script, which in turn increased the level of compliance. The disrupt-then-pique condition may have doubled up the amount of disruption, which explains why we reported that the disrupt-then-pique condition was significantly different from both the disrupt-only condition and the pique-only condition. Congruent with a heuristic explanation, such a level of disruption may have prevented the activation of the script of refusal that is automatically activated when individuals are solicited by strangers. Such findings are conceptually important because they suggest that perhaps both the pique technique and the DTR are explained by the same disruption effect.

Dolinski (2000) and Goldman et al. (1981) reported that using two initial requests rather than one increased the efficiency of the classical foot-in-the-door technique. Goldman et al. explained that the level of self-perception created by the single foot-in-the-door technique was probably higher in the two-feet-in-the-door condition, which could explain why there was increased compliance in this condition compared with the single foot-in-the-door condition. Similarly, Guéguen et al. (2013) reported that saying twice rather than once that someone was free to accept or to refuse to comply increased compliance. The researchers argued that repetition probably decreases the level of psychological reactance to comply more than when the evocation of freedom is used once only. If perceived freedom is a condition for compliance, the level of freedom is likely to be higher when the solicitor repeats, during the interaction, that the participants are free to comply; in turn, this increases the participants' willingness to comply with the request. Thus, the same additional effect was probably created in our study. Two disrupt episodes, namely one created with the first disrupt sentence and another one created with the pique, produced a high level of disruption of the refusal script; in turn, this decreased the number of participants' refusals. As we found no difference between the pique technique condition and the disrupt technique condition, but a difference between these two conditions and the combined condition, we could call this technique as the two-disrupt procedure in accordance with the name used in previous studies when the same technique is employed two times in the same request: the two feet-in-the-door procedure (Goldman et al., 1981; Guéguen, Silone, David, 2016) or the two-door-in-the-face procedure (Goldman & Creason, 1981). In the same way, according to Santos et al. (1994) who stated that the pique technique may act as a disruption, which then increases compliance, we could probably state that the pique technique and the disrupt technique are similar. From a theoretical point of view, the results of this study support the assumption that combining techniques that probably activate the same process could be an interesting method to evaluate the process activated.

This study presents some limitations and needs replication in the future. First, only male confederates were used. The meta-analysis on the DTR technique conducted by Carpenter and Boster (2009) or the meta-analysis on the pique technique performed by Lee and Feeley (2017) reported no difference in the efficiency of the DTR according to the gender of the solicitor and Santos et al. (1994) and Burger et al. (2007) both reported that the pique technique was effective to gain compliance when using female confederates. However, it would be worth studying the effect of female confederates with these two combined techniques. The results reported here show that this combined technique was effective for gaining compliance in a different culture – in this case, the French culture. It would also be worth testing this technique in other cultures, since cultural factors influence compliance-gaining procedures (Kilbourne, 1989; Pascual et al., 2012).

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