

CHAPTER TEN

Connecting jumper cables: the effectiveness of pictorial warnings

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

Each year, people are injured improperly jump starting their vehicle. They connect booster cables by incorrectly attaching them to the four battery terminals (i.e., positive to positive and negative to negative). These occurrences suggest the correct procedure is not commonly known (De Puy, 1990). The correct connection involves making the last connection for the car with the dead battery to an earth away from the battery. This procedure avoids having a spark ignite hydrogen gas from the battery, possibly causing an explosion and release of sulphuric acid.

Previous research has shown that warnings can be effective in influencing behaviour. Factors such as the inclusion of colour (Kline *et al.*, 1993) and pictorials (Jaynes and Boles, 1990) have increased compliance behaviour compared to their absence. However, their positive effects are not unequivocal (Duffy *et al.*, 1993; Wogalter *et al.*, 1993). In addition, a tag-type warning has been shown to facilitate compliance (Wogalter and Young, 1994). In the present study, two experiments were conducted to investigate the effectiveness of coloured tag-type warnings pictorially illustrating proper battery cable connection.

10.2 EXPERIMENT 1

Participants diagrammed the procedure for jump starting two vehicles using booster cables while a warning tag was present or absent. Participants also completed a questionnaire about their car battery knowledge.

diagrammed the battery connections more accurately (26.5 per cent) than did participants who were not exposed to the warning (0 per cent) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=65)} = 9.52, p < 0.01$). With lenient scoring (correct connections and correct order), participants exposed to the tag warning were more accurate (41.2 per cent) than participants not exposed to the warning (6.5 per cent) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=65)} = 10.54, p < 0.01$).

With strict scoring (at least four hazards mentioned), participants exposed to the warning had greater hazard recall (32.4 per cent) than those not exposed to the warning (3.2 per cent) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=65)} = 9.14, p < 0.01$). With lenient scoring (at least three hazards mentioned), there was no significant difference between conditions.

With strict scoring (at least four precautions mentioned), participants had greater precaution recall (14.7 per cent) than those not exposed to the warning (0.0 per cent) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=65)} = 4.94, p < 0.05$). With lenient scoring (at least three precautions), participants exposed to the warning had greater precaution recall (79.4 per cent) than those not exposed to the warning (41.9 per cent) ($\chi^2_{(1, N=65)} = 9.62, p < 0.01$).

The preferred location for the battery booster warnings/instructions was analysed with a 2 (tag versus no tag condition) \times 6 (location) mixed-model analysis of variance (with the last factor repeated). The analysis showed only a main effect of location ($F_{(5, 315)} = 40.52, p < 0.0001$). Comparisons using the Newman-Keuls test showed that placement on the cables ($M = 5.92$) and on the battery ($M = 5.65$) did not differ and both were significantly preferred over all other locations ($p < 0.05$). The owner's manual ($M = 4.51$) was no different than the engine compartment ($M = 4.01$), but both were significantly preferred over the glove box ($M = 3.19$) or the sun visor ($M = 2.99$), which did not differ.

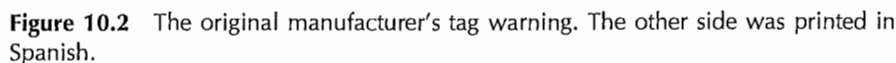
No other questionnaire item differed by warning presence/absence condition. A total of 68 per cent correctly identified the presence of acid in batteries and 91 per cent associated red and black markings with positive/hot and negative/earth, respectively.

10.3 EXPERIMENT 2

In Experiment 2 the presence versus absence of a warning was also examined, but here a behavioural compliance measure in an incidental exposure paradigm was used. In addition, the effectiveness of a manufacturer's current tag warning was compared with an enhanced (multicolour) tag warning.

10.3.1 Method

Twenty-four undergraduates from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute participated. Participants were told that they would be tested on their knowledge of basic automobile maintenance facts and procedures. All procedures were carried out in an automotive shop, on two adjacently parked cars. The batteries in both vehicles were removed and replaced with realistic-appearing non-functional battery shells to eliminate any potential for injury. Several 'filler' tasks (determining tyre air pressure and engine oil, brake fluid and radiator coolant levels) were included to disguise the study's true purpose.



The sequence of steps performed by each participant was recorded. After this task, participants completed a questionnaire to assess whether they had seen and could recall the contents of the warning.

Four of the eight participants in the enhanced tag condition accurately connected the booster cables to the two cars. However, none of the participants in the two other conditions correctly made the battery connections. The effect was significant ($\chi^2_{(2, N=24)} = 9.60, p < 0.01$). The pattern for seeing and recalling the warning content, as assessed by the questionnaire, mirrored the compliance results.

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10.4 DISCUSSION

The results of these two experiments illustrate several points. The first is that people do not know the correct, safe way to connect car battery booster cables. The reason for this is probably that people have viewed other individuals successfully, but incorrectly, jump start cars by connecting the corresponding poles of both batteries – an error that could lead to an explosion. Indeed, participants in Experiment 1 indicated that they had viewed other people jump start cars an average of 11 times. Most of the time, this method will successfully start a vehicle without an explosion, which reinforces the potentially dangerous behaviour. Another factor is that many people probably do not know what an electrical earth is or where inside the engine compartment a usable earth connection might be made. Also, painted surfaces, increased use of plastic and rubber components in newer automobiles, as well as build-up of grease and dirt on metal parts makes locating a proper earth connection difficult.

The second point is that the mere presence of a warning does not guarantee proper safe behaviour. The original manufacturer's warning produced no proper connections. The enhanced warning was evidently better in overcoming the participants' mistaken belief on how car batteries should be connected.

The third point is that, while we were able to facilitate proper connection with the enhanced tag warnings, the percentages of correct connection were not as high as desired. Performance might be increased by enhancing the warning even further and perhaps by placing several (redundant) warnings at relevant locations (e.g. both on the battery and on the cables).

Perhaps the best way to accomplish the goal of safer jump starting is to redesign some of the involved components. For example, the cables themselves could be explicitly labelled on one end 'to be used for the *live* car battery' and the other end 'to be used for the *dead* car battery'. In addition, one of the clamps of the dead battery cable could be designed to appear different from the other clamps to make users aware that it should not be connected to the negative terminal of the dead battery. Similarly, an interactive warning design (e.g. Duffy *et al.*, 1993) that requires users to manipulate the warning physically might be useful in alerting users to read the label information. Finally, a particular place in the engine compartment could be designated (and well labelled) as the 'earth' for use in jump starts.

Careful consideration of vehicle components and cable design, in conjunction with the use of a well-designed set of warnings, could increase the frequency of correct battery connections and decrease injuries.

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