

Watching vs. Reading: Studying Influences on Tipping Behavior in a Laboratory Setting

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Abstract

This study compared two strategies for investigating restaurant tipping in a laboratory setting. 101 participants either read a narrative or watched a video of a good or poor dining experience. Afterwards, participants paid the bill including tip and evaluated the service provided. Tipping decisions and evaluations were more influenced by the quality of service in the video condition. Using videos appeared to increase the experimental and mundane realism when studying tipping in a controlled setting.

Introduction

While many studies have examined intrapersonal, interpersonal, and situational influences on restaurant tipping behavior, experimental control to isolate causal factors is often a challenge given that this research typically done in naturalistic settings (e.g., Rind & Strohmetz, 1999, 2001a; 2001b; Strohmetz & Rind, 2001; Strohmetz, Rind, Lynn, & Reed, 2002).

One approach is to have participants read a narrative describing a hypothetical restaurant dining experience and then indicate how much they believe they would tip the server that situation (e.g., Karniouchina, Mishra, & Verma, 2008). The current study examines another possibility – having participants watch an animated portrayal of a dining experience and then make decisions concerning payment of the bill, including the tip.

The goal of the current study is to evaluate whether asking participants to watch the interactions between a server and the dining party will differentially impact subsequent tipping decisions compared to reading a narrative describing the same encounter, particularly if the quality of the service is poor. If this is the case, then researchers will have another, possibly better, option for replicating real world situations in a laboratory setting that provides the desired experimental control without sacrificing experimental and mundane realism.

Method

While sitting at table in a psychology lab configured to resemble a restaurant, 101 undergraduate participants (77 females; Mean age = 19.3 years) either watched an animated video or read a script depicting a good or bad restaurant dining experience. Upon completion of the video or reading of the narrative, the experimenter, dressed as a restaurant server, handed the participant a copy of the dining party's check in a black billfold. Using the play money provided at the start of the experiment, participants paid the bill, including the tip as if they were the person in the video or story. Participants then evaluated the dining experience they had either observed or read.



Results (cont'd)

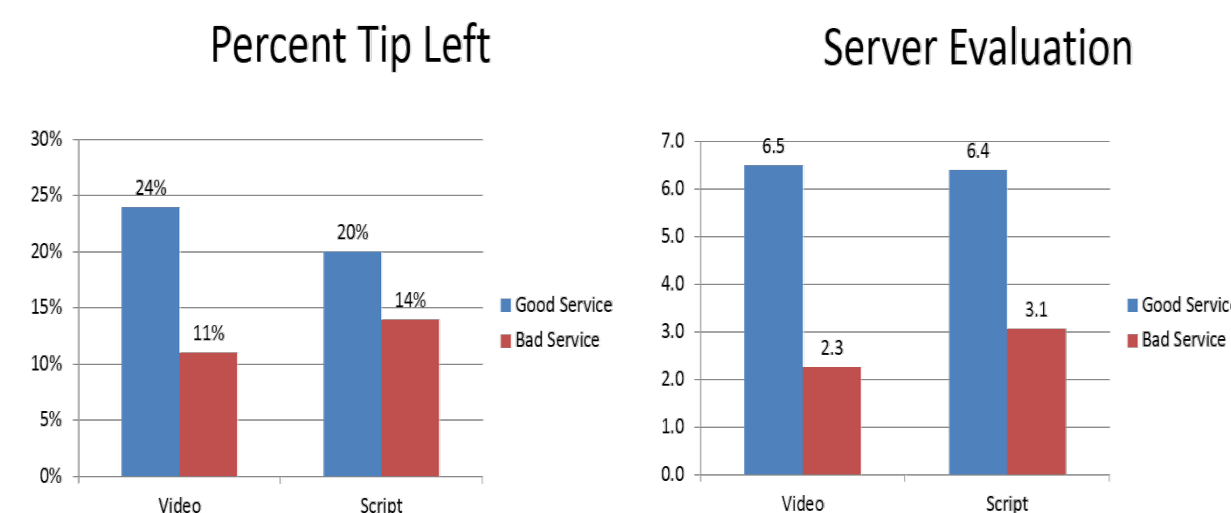
With respect to participants' evaluation of the server, there was the large significant main effect for quality of service condition, $F(1, 97) = 571.48, p < .0001$, effect size $r = .92$. Not surprisingly, the evaluation of the server was higher in the good condition compared to poor service condition (6.4 vs. 2.7). There was also a significant main effect for video versus narrative conditions, $F(1, 97) = 6.03, p = .006$, effect size $r = .24$. Participants evaluated the server better in the narrative condition (4.7 vs. 4.5). There was also significant interaction effect, $F(1, 97) = 7.93, p = .006$, effect size $r = .27$. Participants evaluated the server most poorly in the video/bad service condition.

Discussion

These results suggest that having participants observe an animated video of a dining scenario differentially impacted their perceptions of a good and poor quality dining experience compared to reading a narrative account of the same situation. These differences also emerged in the participant's actual behavior as they "paid" the restaurant bill. Participants' evaluations and tipping behavior were particularly influenced by watching a poor dining experience encounter. Conducting field experiments that manipulate factors such as quality of dining experience, may be difficult if not impractical and unethical. Using videos within a laboratory setting may be a more effective strategy for enhancing experimental and mundane realism of such investigations.

Results

The primary dependent variable was the percentage the participants tipped the server. The mean tip across all conditions was 17.6%, which is consistent with the norm of tipping 15% to 20% of the total restaurant bill. As expected, there was a main effect for quality of service, $F(1, 94) = 34.51, p < .0001$, effect size $r = .52$. Participants in the good service condition tipped the waiter significantly higher than those in the poor service condition (22% vs. 13%). While there was no main effect for video vs script (18% vs. 17%), the interaction effect was significant, $F(1, 94) = 5.04, p = .027$, effect size $r = .23$. On average, participants in the video conditions tipped the good server 54% more than they tipped the poor server (24% vs. 11%). For participants in the narrative conditions, this difference was only 30% (20% vs. 14%). This suggests that watching the animated video increased participants' scrutiny of the server when determining the tip.



References

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