

The Effects of a Joke on Tipping When It Is Delivered at the Same Time as the Bill¹

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Former studies showed that a cartoon, such as a smiling face or a cheerful drawing (i.e., the image of the sun), increased the amount of tips given by a customer when added on a bill. A replication was made in accompanying the bill with a small card on which a joke was appended. The experiment took place in a bar with people who had had the same drink. The results showed that people who received the joke card were more likely to tip than were people in the control condition or in a condition where an advertisement card accompanied the bill. The size of the tips left tended to be higher in the joke-card group than in the other conditions. The findings are discussed in terms of the positive mood activated by the joke card, which in turn increased tipping behavior.

In many countries, whether in bars or in restaurants, the waiters' and waitresses' wages are low and most of their income derives from tips. Therefore, for these servers, knowledge about factors that affect customers' tipping behavior becomes important. For two decades, social psychologists have found numerous factors that increase servers' tips. Usually, these factors are seldom expensive, are easy to reproduce, and are under the waiters' and waitresses' control.

Unlike a commonly held view, the servers' quality of service, whether in bars or in restaurants is not related with the tips they get (Harris, 1995). In restaurants, there is no connection between the quality of the food and the provided tips (Lynn & Latané, 1984).

Studies have pointed out that external factors are more likely to have an effect on customers' behavior. Some of these factors depend on the nature of the interaction between a waiter/waitress and his or her customer. Manipulation of a waiter's or waitress's nonverbal behavior can allow an increase in tipping. Thus, a broad smile uncovering a waitress's teeth in a bar can also result in a significant rise in her tips when compared to a situation in which the smile is less strongly marked (Tidd & Lockard, 1978). Moreover, stooping down when talking to a customer also leads to bigger tips (Davis, Schrader, Richardson, Kring, & Kieffer,

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1998). A simple touch of a customer in a restaurant by a waitress or a waiter allows an increase in the size of tips granted (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Hornik, 1992; Lynn, Le, & Sherwyn, 1998; Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986). Some external factors that have not focused on the interaction between the waiter or the waitress and the client also have a positive effect on tipping. Thus, research has shown clearly that a sunny day positively increases the amount of tip given by a customer (Cunningham, 1979). A study by Rind (1996) even indicated that, in a hotel, a mere mention about the weather, given by the waiter to customers who had not yet seen the color of the sky, was sufficient to make his tip vary, depending on whether he told them that it was sunny or that it had rained.

Another type of research on the factors influencing tipping rests on the manipulation of adding information to a customer's bill. If a waitress just wrote "Thank you" at the bottom of a bill, her tips increased (Rind & Bordia, 1995). Drawing a smiling face on a bill also resulted in higher tips (Rind & Bordia, 1996). A mere handmade drawing of a sun, added at the bottom of the bill of customers who were having coffee outside a café, led those customers to tip the waiters or waitresses more frequently and in a much more substantial way (Guéguen & LeGohérel, 2000). In this case, like in the one of the drawing of a smiling face (Rind & Bordia, 1996), the sketch likely activated a positive mood in the customer, which prompted larger tips. In the same way, a sunny day or positive information about the weather probably activated a state of positive mood that, in turn, increased tips (Cunningham, 1979; Rind, 1996). Studies have pointed out that there was a positive link between mood and helping behavior (Bizman, Yinin, Ronco, & Schachar, 1980; Forgas, 1997, 1998; Harris & Smith, 1975; Job, 1987; Levin & Isen, 1975; Rind, 1997; Weyant, 1978). Consistent with these studies, the humorous material added onto the bill or the positive information about the weather could have mediated a positive mood, which, in turn, positively affected the tip size granted to the waiter or waitress.

The present study draws its inspiration from this type of research because a positive mood was activated by a joke that had been written on a card and that was delivered to the customer with the bill. This study was carried out in France where giving the waiter or the waitress a tip is unusual because French legislation mandates that a 12% service charge be included in the cost of the item on the menu. Thus, the customer is aware that a minimum wage is guaranteed for both waiters and waitresses. Therefore, it seems to be worth investigating the factors influencing tipping in a country where this behavior is not common practice. Most of the research concerning factors affecting tipping comes from the United States. Because a service charge is not included in food prices, tipping is of paramount importance in the United States. As mentioned earlier, Guéguen and LeGohérel (2000) showed that, in France, drawing a sun at the bottom of the bill had a positive effect on tipping. A humorous drawing seemed to influence French customers' behavior as well as American customers' behavior.

Hypothesis. Insofar as numerous studies have asserted that a positive mood could further increase tips, we predict that a humorous card, if read, will result in larger tips, compared to a situation in which the card is not shown or in which there is no humorous content on the card.

Method

Participants

The participants were 211 adults (124 men, 87 women) who sat alone outside a bar in a famous seaside resort (the Quiberon peninsula on the west Atlantic coast in France) and who had previously ordered an espresso coffee, thus making it possible to monitor the price of the product. The experiment took place between 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. and was held over 6 consecutive days of a particularly sunny week.

Materials

A 9.5 cm x 5.5 cm white paper card (standard presentation card) was used in the two experimental groups. On the "joke card," the following story was printed:

An Eskimo had been waiting for his girlfriend in front of a movie theater for a long time, and it was getting colder and colder. After a while, shivering with cold and rather infuriated, he opened his coat and drew out a thermometer. He then said loudly, "If she is not here at 15, I'm going!"

On the "advertisement card" the following information was printed in the same way: "Every Friday night, special party at S. . . ." S. . . . was a well-known local nightclub in the peninsula where the experiment took place. The nightclub's address and phone number were also printed on the card. There was nothing else on either card.

Procedure

Three waiters and two waitresses served their customers in their usual manner, taking their orders first. At random, the dish retaining the bill held a card or did not hold a card. Moreover, depending on the circumstances, the card showed either the typewritten joke or the local nightclub's advertisement. The distribution of the participants into experimental conditions was done at random: A (humorous card), B (advertisement card), or C (no-card, control condition). The waiter gave the order of the table to the employee behind the counter. Then, the waiter employee checked the code list corresponding to the customer's order number. If

Table 1

	Percentage of Customers Who Gave Tips and How Much They Gave		
	Joke card (<i>N</i> = 72)	Advertisement card (<i>N</i> = 74)	No card (<i>N</i> = 65)
Customers who gave tips (%)	41.7	18.9	24.6
Tip percentage ^a			
<i>M</i>	23.13	15.63	16.41
<i>SD</i>	12.41	6.37	7.18
<i>N</i>	30	14	16

^aThe values are calculated among the customers who gave a tip in each group.

it happened to be an A or a B, he then turned the card around in such a way that the waiter or waitress could not guess which card it was. The waiter or waitress brought the dish and the card with the coffee the customer had ordered. The bill was displayed under the dish, whereas the card was conspicuously set inside the dish. After cleaning and clearing away the table, the waiter or waitress came back to the counter. The waiter or waitress then reported to the employee behind the counter how the client had behaved; namely, whether or not he or she had left a tip and the size of any tip. The employee behind the counter then wrote down the results next to the customer's order number. There was also a confederate who could see the whole scene from his seat; he would note the customer's behavior, such as whether or not he or she had read the card. When the customer left, he would make a sign to the waiter or waitress in order to indicate whether the customer had or had not read the card.

Results

No statistical differences in the data were found between the three waiters and the two waitresses for the rate of customers who left tips, $\chi^2(4, N = 211) = 7.14, p > .10$; or for tip size, $F(4, 59) = 1.67, ns$. Also, there were no significant differences observed related to the gender of the waiter either for the rate of customers who left tips, $\chi^2(1, N = 211) = 3.45, p > .10$; or for tip size, $F(1, 59) = 0.43, ns$. In the same way, no differences were found in accordance to the gender of the client, either for the rate of clients who gave tips, $\chi^2(1, N = 211) = 2.18, p > .10$; or for tip size, $F(1, 59) = 0.12, p > .10$. Hence, the data were combined across gender and are presented in Table 1.

The three groups differed in terms of the number of customers who left tips, $\chi^2(2, N = 211) = 9.95, p < .01$. Specific comparisons indicate that customers who

viewed the joke gave more tips than did customers in the control condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 4.45, p < .05$; and in the advertisement card condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 146) = 8.97, p < .005$. No difference was observed between the advertisement card group and the control group, $\chi^2(1, N = 139) = 0.73, p > .10$.

With regard to how much the waiters and waitresses were given, a conversion was made to calculate tip percentage. This percentage is obtained by dividing the tip size by the bill amount, and this quotient was multiplied by 100. The ANOVA indicates a general difference between the three groups, $F(2, 59) = 3.74, p < .05$. Post-tests show that the difference between the group that was given a joke card and the control group was marginally significant, $F(1, 47) = 3.96, p = .053$. The difference between the joke-card group and the advertisement-card group was clearly significant, $F(1, 43) = 4.52, p < .05$. As before, there was no difference between the advertisement-card group and the control group, $F(1, 29) = 0.98, p > .10$.

Discussion

The simple act of placing a card bearing a joke on a customer's check dish increased the number of tips received by waiters and waitresses. Moreover, the joke-card group tended to obtain substantial tips. The fact that no such effect was observed in the advertisement-card group clearly reveals that the achieved results are not attributable to the card itself. Therefore, it seems that the joke activates a specific process that induces customers to tip more easily. These findings tend to confirm previous work in the field. Rind and Bordia (1996) demonstrated that a smiley face drawn at the bottom of a bill also increased waitresses' tip rates. Nevertheless, unlike our results, Rind and Bordia pointed out that the drawing did not work if it came from a waiter. It is possible that in our study, the mere act of placing a card with the bill was not considered to be something from the waiter's will, but rather was a habit or a strategy designed to improve the atmosphere of the bar.

The absence of an effect in the ad-card group compared to the control group might appear to contradict a recent study conducted by Rind and Strohmeltz (1999). They showed that a handwritten message on the back of the bill informing the customer of a future event in the restaurant favored tips left to a waitress. In our experiment, the customers of the ad-card group were also informed that a pleasant event in a famous nightclub was scheduled, but this information did not lead to increases in the tipping rate. It is possible that in our experiment, the ad card was not perceived as personalized information, but merely as an advertisement systematically placed in customers' check dishes. On the contrary, in Rind and Strohmeltz's experiment the information about the upcoming event was perceived as more personal; the message was handwritten (not systematic), which could lead the customer, by effect of reciprocity, to grant more tips to the waitress.

The results of this experiment indicate that it is possible to increase tipping in bars. These results show that in France, where tipping a waiter or a waitress is unusual, social psychological techniques are able to encourage tipping behavior as far as customers in bars are concerned. Guéguen and LeGohérel (2000) found, in the same bar, that drawing a sun at the bottom of a bill increased the tips given by customers. In the experiment, the authors found that the average tipping rate to the servers was 17.1% higher in the joke-card group compared to the control group. The systematic use of this technique could increase servers' income from 7704.4 FF (\$1,981.13) per month to 8351.47 FF (\$2,147.52) per month. Considering the part of tipping in waiters' and waitresses' income in France, this technique could increase their wages by about 8%. Managers, then, should encourage these methods, inasmuch as they might create a greater state of fulfillment in the workplace for the employees. Their work could become far more interesting as a result of an increase in tips. Furthermore, these methods might infer, in turn, much more contentment and satisfaction for the customer since these factors could be a means to encourage customers to return or to praise the establishment.

Why do such stimuli increase tips? It could be that these stimuli trigger a positive mood in the customer, which, in turn, makes generous tips more likely. Some studies have found that a mere drawing (e.g., a smiley face, Rind & Bordia, 1996; a sun, Guéguen & LeGohérel, 2000) at the bottom of a bill increased tips left by the customer. All of these pleasant, humorous factors are probably efficient because they have the characteristic of activating a positive mood. A waiter or a waitress who shows some kind of originality or humor owing to either a drawing or a joke activates a positive mood because of the qualitative profit from the social interaction that such service implies. Therefore, it is no surprise that once this positive mood state is activated, the customer will prove to be more inclined to tip the person whose behavior has activated such a state of contentment. Of course, such a mood hypothesis activation needs further study to prove its theoretical validity and to clarify the link between this affective state and tipping behavior.

An evaluation of customers' moods (through the use of scales) should be introduced in future studies. Research has shown that positive moods can be activated in many different ways and do not require elaborate tools, most of the time. To be offered a candy or a cookie brings about the same effect (Harris & Smith, 1975). Atmospheric factors also contribute to activating a positive mood, which affects prosocial behavior. Pleasant ambient smells (e.g., baking cooking, roasting coffee) in a shopping mall leads passersby to provide change for a dollar to a same-gender confederate more readily than in the absence of such odors (Baron, 1997). Pleasant ambient music also plays an important role in helping behavior (Galizio & Hendrick, 1972). Exposing someone to pleasant versus unpleasant pictures or texts leads to influence help (Forgas, 1997, 1998). It would be interesting to test the effect of these mood-inducing techniques (e.g., ambient music, pleasant pictures) on tipping. The mood hypothesis could be evaluated experimentally by a

negative stimulus that could activate a negative mood. Research has shown that the recipient of a request complies less favorably when in a negative mood than when in a neutral state (Forgas, 1998; Kidd & Marshall, 1982; Milberg & Clark, 1988). Therefore, a negative mood inducement would probably decrease a customer's tipping behavior.

The generalizability of our findings must be assessed in future research. The current experiment was conducted in a single bar and involved only unaccompanied customers. The waiters and waitresses we met claimed that customers who are alone tip more easily than do groups. Some studies have found that the percentage of tips is negatively correlated with the number of individuals at a table (Freeman, Walker, Borden, & Latané, 1975; Lynn & Latané, 1984). Therefore, it would be interesting to evaluate the effects of a joke presented with a bill when customers are in group. It is possible that the general positive mood that the humorous card would activate would favor a higher tipping rate than usual.

An evaluation with customers in restaurants also should be conducted because the relationship of a customer with a waiter or waitress is not the same in a restaurant as it is in a bar. The interaction is socially richer and longer in a restaurant than in a bar. The customer can ask for advice from the waiter or waitress on a dish, a menu, and so forth. It is possible that, in these circumstances, the joke would be judged by the customer as coming from the waiter or waitress to create a pleasant atmosphere, which could lead to an increase in tipping rate.

Our evaluation of the effect of humor on tips was conducted with persons who ordered coffee. Lynn (1988) showed a positive link between tips and alcohol consumption. Alcohol often favors a positive mood, which, in turn, could affect tipping behavior. Because a joke could activate a positive mood more easily with customers consuming alcoholic beverages, this could lead to an increase in tipping rate.

Finally, we must keep in mind that even if the positive effect of the joke was obtained on customers' behavior, all kinds of jokes would not induce such an effect. Men and women might have reacted in the same way here because the joke was neutral in terms of gender. It might be different with sexist jokes: a joke laughing at men with a man or a joke laughing at women with a woman. In this case, the joke could cause negative effects on tipping behavior. Studies also have found that women and men react differently to humor with a sexual connotation (Herzog, 1999). Therefore, using this type of humor could lead to different reactions, depending on customers' gender, which could affect their tipping behavior.

In summary, the current research extended the findings of previous studies investigating humor, mood, and human behavior by showing that a joke can be related to helping behavior. The results of the present study suggest that mood can influence tipping behavior. It could be interesting for further research to test the effect of different mood-inducing techniques on tipping behavior.

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