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Research Note

The effect of touch on tipping: an evaluation in a French bar

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Abstract

Although positive effect of touch on restaurant's tipping has been widely found in the literature, no evaluation was made outside the United States of America and in a bar. An experiment was carried out in a French bar. A waitress briefly touched (or not) the forearm of a patron when asking him/her what he/she want to drink. Results show that touch increases tipping behavior although giving a tip to a waitress in a bar is unusual in France. The familiarity of tactile contact in France was used to explain our results.

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1. Introduction

The effect of touch on compliance had been widely demonstrated in social psychology literature. Kleinke (1977) found that people were more likely to give a dime when touched by a solicitor. Hornik (1987) found that touch both increases the answer rate to a street survey and the compliance in answering in a subsequent questionnaire. Nannberg and Hansen (1994) also found that a brief touch led the

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subject to completed significantly more items of a questionnaire on very provocative subjects. Touch also had a positive effect on customer's behavior. Hornik (1992a) had found that customers who were touched by an employee when entering in a store, increased their shopping time, their evaluation of the store and their amount of shopping. In the same way, Smith et al. (1982) found that touching customers when approached to sample a new food product increased the probability of trying the food sample and buying the product.

To date, four studies have shown that touch had a positive effect on tipping behavior. When patrons are touch by a waiter or a waitress, they became more generous and left a higher tip (Crusco and Wetzel, 1984; Hornik, 1992b; Lynn et al., 1998; Stephen and Zweigenhaft, 1986). In these experiments, only patrons of restaurants were tested. Then it could be interesting to evaluated the effect of touch in a bar to generalize the effect of tactile contact on tipping. Kaufman and Mahoney (1999) have found that men and women of public tavern in the United States consumed more alcohol when touched by a waitress. Despite the fact that tips was not the dependant variable in this experiment, it seems that the customer behavior was affected by tactile contact in this context. Furthermore, no experiment has tested the effect of touch in a bar and the effect on tipping still remain in place of the effect of touch still remain in question.

All the studies cited above that have tested the effect of touch on tipping come from the United States. Because a service charge is not included in food price, tipping is of paramount importance in that country. In France 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 really worth investigating the effect of touch on tipping in a country where this behavior is not common practice. Tactile contact is central in interrelation between people in France and cross-cultural studies have shown that French people are more familiar with tactile contact than American people (Field, 1999a; Jourard, 1966). So because touch seems to be important in French culture we expected that it could influence tipping positively.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

One hundred and forty-three bar customers (97 males and 46 females) who acted as participants were randomly assign to two groups. All of them were seated alone at a table in a bar of a medium-size city (more than 70000 inhabitants) in a very attractive spot. This provincial town was Vannes, located in the west of France on the Breton Atlantic Coast.

2.2. Procedure

A waitress, regularly employed, were trained by the experimenter to act similarly in the two conditions and to touch a patron in the appropriate way. She was not aware of the goals of our experiment and she had not received any information about previous studies on the effect of touch on tipping or on compliance to a request. Once a patron was seated, the waitress approached him/her with a smile, said “hello” and asked him/her what he/she want to drink. Before beginning this phase, the waitress consulted a list of two codes computed by a random algorithm: “T” for touch and “PT” for nontouch. The waitress had for instruction to act according to the code corresponding to the number order of the client. If she was in the touch condition, the waitress touched briefly the forearm of the patron for 1 or 2s during the initial meeting where the drink was ordered. In control condition, the waitress acted similarly without any contact with the patron. She acted similarly in both conditions when she returned at the patron’s table with the drink and the bill. After the patron had left, the waitress return to the table to clear it. She reported on a notebook how the client had behaved, namely, whether he/she had left a tip or not and how much he/she gave.

3. Results

Preliminary data analysis was conducted for male patrons and experimental treatments and female patrons and experimental treatments. Because no difference were found between male and female on both dependant variables, their data were combined. The overall percentage of tip left is of 17.5%. When the waitress touched the patrons, 24.6% of them left a tip whereas 10.8% of them acted similarly in the non-touch control condition. The difference between this two rates was significant ($X^2(1, 143) = 4.73, p < 0.03, d = 0.18$). Concerning the amount of money left by the clients, we observed a mean (In euro : FF) of 0.278(SD = 0.065) in the touch condition and a mean of 0.239(SD = 0.043) in the nontouch condition. Furthermore, despite the appearances, the difference was not significant ($t(23) = 1.67, p > 0.10$, two-tailed). As to how much the waiters and the waitresses have been given, a conversion was made to calculate tips percentage. This percentage was obtained by dividing the tip size by the bill amount and this quotient was multiplied by 100. In experimental group the mean of tip size was of 16.8% (SD = 4.43) whereas in the control condition the tip size was of 13.7% (SD = 3.37). The difference between this two means was not significant ($t(23) = 1.75, p > 0.09$, two-tailed) but this absence of difference was not explained by different bill sizes in the two group (1.689 in the touch condition and 1.747 FF in control condition: $t(23) < 1$, ns). A main effect for patron sex was found ($X^2(1, 143) = 3.99, p < 0.05$) and shown that significantly more males clients left a tip (21.6%) than females clients (8.7%). However, no difference according to the sex of the patrons was found on the amount of money left or on the mean of tip size ($p > 0.20$ for both). On both

dependant variables, no interaction between the patron's sex and the experimental condition were found.

4. Discussion

As in previous studies, our result show that touch had a positive effect on tipping. The present findings confirmed the results of four studies conducted in restaurants (Crusco and Wetzel, 1984; Hornik, 1992b; Lynn et al., 1998; Stephen and Zweigenhaft, 1986). Because our experiment was conducted in a bar, it appeared that the “touch effect” may be extended to an other situation of tipping. Furthermore, our experiment was carried out in a country where tipping is an unusual behavior especially in a bar. This proved that the effect of touch may be extended to others cultures and that this technique of tactile contact was a powerful method for gaining help in various ways. Cross-cultural studies have shown that people are more familiar with tactile contact in France than in USA where most of the research on the effect of touch were conducted (Field, 1999a; Jourard, 1966). In France, touch has a considerable importance in social interaction and emotion (Field, 1999b; Guéguen, 2004; Guéguen and Fischer-Lokou, 2003) and, perhaps, in this experiment, touch had created a more close relationship between the waitress and the patron. Hornik (1992b) found that waiters and waitresses who touched females or males customers received significantly higher evaluation than when no touch occurred. Research on altruism had shown that a positive evaluation of a man or a woman enhances helping behavior (Graf and Riddell, 1972; Gross et al., 1975; Takemura, 1993). It is then possible that, in our experiment, the positive evaluation of the waitress mediated by her tactile contact had led the patron to help the waitress by giving her a tip. Further interesting questions for future research are whether the efficacy of touch on tipping is mediated by a positive perception of the waiter or the waitress.

Further research needs to test the effect of touch in other countries where the practice of tipping is unusual or where more prevalent (Lynn, 2000). To explore the generality of the “touch effect” on tipping, research had to be conducted in other situations of tipping (beauty salons, taxi, etc.). Because it had been found that touch had a positive effect on the evaluation of a store (Hornik, 1992a) or of a restaurant (Crusco and Wetzel, 1984; Hornik, 1992b), the managers should encourage this method. By increasing tips, touch may create a greater state of fulfillment in the workplace for the employees; their work becoming far more interesting owing to an increase in tips. Furthermore, this method may infer in turn, much more contentment and satisfaction for the patrons; these factors being a means to encourage the patron to come back or to praise the place.

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