Self-Service Technology, the Presence of Others, and Donation Programs In Restaurants

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Purpose: To examine how the use of tableside self-service technology (SST) and the presence of others impacts guest donation behavior in cause-related marketing campaigns.

Theoretical Framework: Costly signaling theory (Bird & Smith, 2005): Costly signaling theory suggests that altruistic act communicates a willingness and ability to incur costs for the sake of others in the group. Such signals enhance a person's status among those who witness the act, as they indicate that the actor has resources to spare.

Hypothesis 1: Restaurant customers are more likely to participate in a cause-related marketing initiative when there is a matching donation made by the sponsoring organization than when such a matching donation is absent.
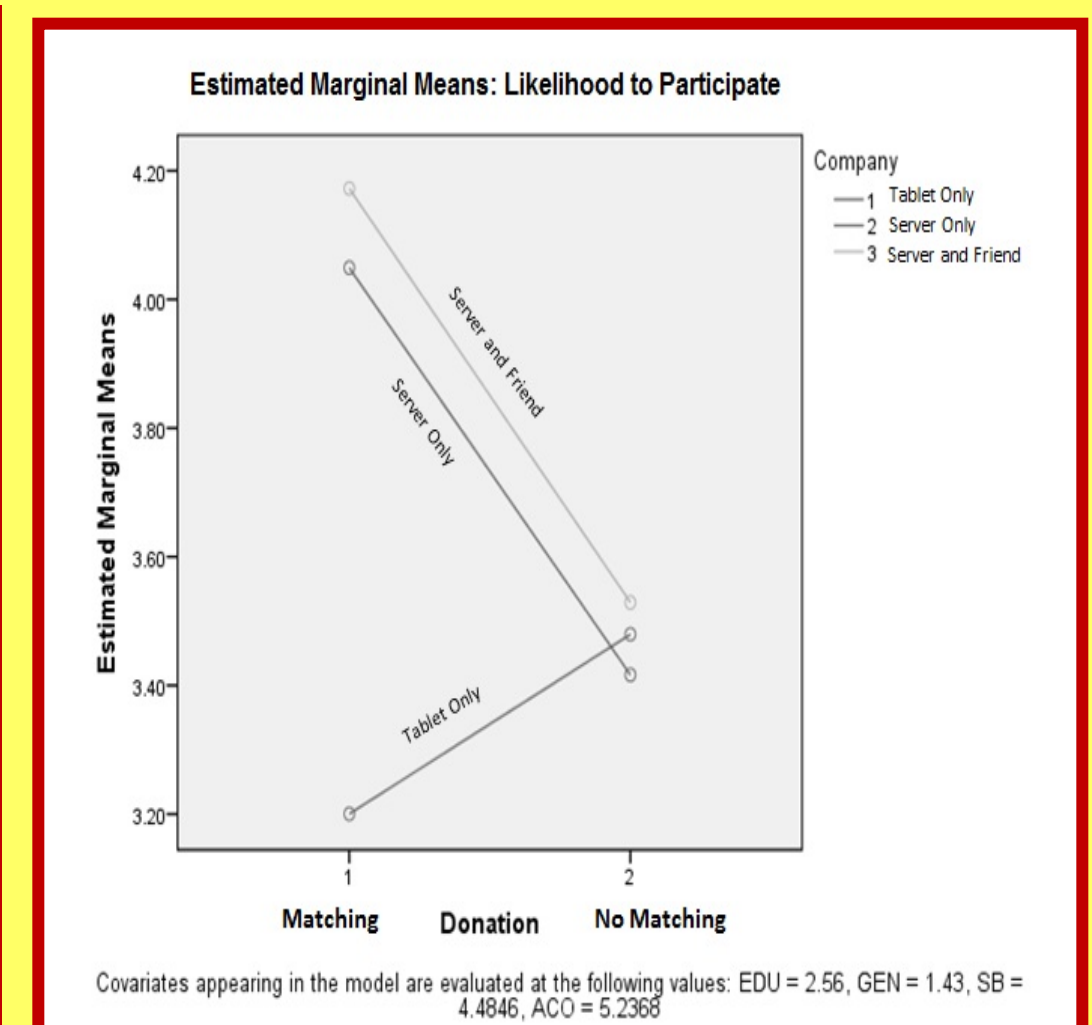
Hypothesis 2: The likelihood of participation in a matching-based cause-related marketing initiative is moderated by the extent to which the decision to participate is visible to others. Specifically, the likelihood to participate will be lower when the solicitation is made via tableside tablet than when it is made in the presence of others.

Design: 2 (matching donation: present or absent) x 3 (others present: tablet only, server only, server and friend) experimental design using scenarios and a survey

Results: H1 supported and H2 supported

Customers were more likely to donate when the restaurant offered to match the donation. This effect was moderated by the presence of others.

Estimated Marginal Means: Likelihood to Participate

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: EDU = 2.56, GEN = 1.43, SB = 4.4846, ACO = 5.2368

Discussion: These results lend support to costly signaling theory. When the donation is conspicuous, making a donation is a way to indicate that one has resources to spare, thereby raising the participant's social status in front of others. Additionally, our results indicated that relationship to the others does not affect the donation. The mere presence of others increased the likelihood to donate.

Implications: The proliferation of tablets, kiosks, and mobile apps and the reduction of face-to-face service may have consequences for consumer outcomes, such as place attachment, customer satisfaction, quality perceptions, and loyalty behaviors. Close attention should be paid to the impact of SST in order to ensure that the positive benefits of such technology are not undermined by unintended negative consequences.