

Understanding Perceptions of Leaders by Video Vignettes

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Video vignettes are one form of virtualized vignettes that may build upon traditional text vignettes and enable research participants to see and experience a unique scenario that is better translated visually rather than through a written text.

Keywords: video vignettes ; virtual vignette ; leader ; leadership

1. Introduction

Vignettes are often used in research with human subjects to describe a scenario or event that the research participants are meant to consider and respond to. A vignette description often includes multidimensional stimuli containing a brief description of the person, object, or situation, or any combination of these ^[1]. Typically, vignettes are fictive descriptions with specific references and contexts. This enables the researcher to have a higher degree of control over the narrative and stimuli ^[2] compared to survey item creations that can be heavily influenced by bias and mood. These vignettes are designed to elicit certain kinds of reactions and judgments, which researchers can then record for analysis ^[3].

The multidimensional aspect of vignettes allows for adaptability to a range of disciplines and approaches. Vignettes have been used to instruct and improve training- or program-related outcomes, such as improving educational leadership ^{[4][5]} and medical acceptability ^{[6][7]}. Vignettes are particularly effective in gauging perceptions and thoughts that are otherwise difficult to understand. For example, vignettes can be used to explore the experiences and values of young people ^[8]. Vignettes have been used to approach research topics, such as trauma and abuse, that would be otherwise unethical to manipulate ^[9], and they can also be adapted for both qualitative and quantitative research designs ^[10]. Lastly, vignettes possess internal validity if the topic directly relates to the variables of interest ^[8].

1.1. Understanding Vignettes

Historically, vignettes used in research can be traced back to appearances from Dr. Peter Rossi's research on social stratification ^[11]. Rossi's later publication systematically laid out the factorial survey approach to study human judgment. The idea is that a person's description of a vignette could be manipulated by changing its objects, diction, or contexts, therefore providing several variations to study how participants would respond ^[12]. Since the main component of such factorial surveys are the vignettes, researchers typically break vignettes down into levels and dimensions, which are like values and variables ^[13].

1.1.1. Advantages of Vignettes

Vignettes provide specific advantages when seeking human judgment from the detailed reactions and answers from participants, compared to using traditional survey methods. First, the vignette descriptions are concrete and detailed. Though fictive, these descriptions are purposeful and meant to depict realistic events that may even replicate actual real-life situations and contexts. Researchers can carefully tailor the descriptions to fit the scope and needs of their study. Second, participants are not fully aware of the manipulations in the vignettes used to study their judgments. The data gathered from vignettes are arguably less susceptible to social desirability bias. Third, vignettes allow researchers to focus on the specific variables or determinants leading to the human judgments of their participants.

1.1.2. Benefits of Virtual and Video Vignettes

One of the drawbacks of using vignettes in research is that they are traditionally written and presented as text, thus relying on the reading skill, attentiveness, and, at times, the imagination of the participant ^[2]. However, utilizing technology and the virtualization of vignettes circumvents these drawbacks, and allows the scenario to be presented in a virtual space or world with visual and auditory cues. Video vignettes specifically provide multimodal benefits related to the study compared

to other vignette types. Although video vignettes can be costly as they require hiring actors and recording, they are still less costly than having in-person experiments ^[14]. Most modern technology has video capabilities, so participants can access the videos on most handheld devices with internet access, including cellphones and tablets. The videos can also be replayed and paused according to the users' preferences. Furthermore, video vignettes can present scenarios that may normally be difficult to describe or be misinterpreted in a written vignette ^{[14][15]}. Video vignettes can provide visual, aural, and emotional cues for the viewers ^[16]. Video methods can also capture human movement and presentation. This enables a viewer to see social cues, gestures, mannerisms, and effects more clearly than they would reading a passage or interpreting a picture ^{[17][18]}. Video vignettes also provide visual representation of the leaders' mannerisms and attire, whose attributes are portrayed by an actor, rather than being meticulously described. Participants are all viewing the same videos with less room for interpretation, as compared to a written or pictorial vignette. In addition, participants can utilize their observation skills to make judgments ^[15]. The use of video vignettes also has potential for measuring the outcomes of interventions across different populations ^[9]. More importantly, a video vignette may be useful for relaying information that would be otherwise too difficult or overt to express in a written text.

Some other specific benefits that video vignettes provide are higher fidelity and media richness compared to alternative approaches such as traditional observations or surveys with written vignettes ^[19]. Higher fidelity refers to the multimedia approach video vignettes employ to create a more engaging experience for participants. When compared to text-based descriptions in written vignettes or surveys that maintain an equivalent level of clarity and description, participants can experience less fatigue watching and listening to a video and are therefore less likely misinterpret the events ^[20].

Additionally, video vignettes provide advantages to people with language and cultural differences. Participants whose primary language or cultural background is different from that of the text may not understand certain words, colloquial phrases, or the context being applied. A video vignette can effectively communicate more detailed information by incorporating elements such as setting, body language, nonverbal gestures, and tone ^[21].

Media richness refers to how different media can impact the depth of comprehension and facilitate effective communication. The media richness theory proposes that various communication media vary in their ability to facilitate changes in viewers' understanding ^[22]. Video vignettes offer higher levels of richness, which better facilitate changes in their viewers' understanding.

2. Understand Perceptions of Leaders by Video Vignettes

Given the potential impact workplace leaders have on the internal and external outcomes of their organization, it is important to understand what impacts the perceptions others have about workplace leaders. What is related to a leader being perceived more favorably and as more effective? Other researchers have also sought to understand this concept of favorable perceptions of leaders. In one example, a cross-cultural study across 40 countries, managers selected the most important leadership competencies required for organizational success as resourcefulness, change management, and relationship management ^[23]. However, other characteristics may also influence people's perceptions of successful leadership, which may not be as clearly tied to business performance. Gender expression (i.e., how one exhibits their gender through their appearance and behavior) is a lesser explored trait ^[24] that may play a role in how a leader is perceived.

Existing research on gender-related expectations towards leaders has focused on female leaders. For example, female leaders who demonstrate agentic leadership who were rated as less likable and less effective than agentic male leaders ^[25]. The role congruity theory suggests that these unfavorable perceptions towards female leaders may be motivated by a perceived incongruity between female gender roles and the stereotypically masculine leader role ^{[26][27][28][29]}.

2.1. Gender Expression in Leaders

Empirical studies evaluating gender congruence in males have demonstrated preliminary findings in support of the assertion. For example, male participants evaluated a male leader with a lower-pitched, more masculine voice more favorably than a male leader with a higher-pitched, more feminine voice ^{[30][31][32]}. Another experiment found that male participants evaluated gender-role congruent male leaders as more effective than gender-role incongruent male leaders ^[24]. It is important to note that given the age of the study, there may be valuable social and cultural differences that would be important to understand in a modern workplace context.

2.2. Expected Masculinity in Leaders

For one to perceive and evaluate a feminine leader less favorably than a masculine one, one must hold certain gendered expectations that drive these attitudes [33].

The theory of traditional masculinity ideology offers a theoretical explanation of why individuals may expect masculinity from male leaders. It posits that we are socialized to expect masculinity from men [34]. These norms are reinforced through social learning, such that men who display masculine traits receive rewards, such as social acceptance, and that failing to display masculinity results in punishment, such as bullying [35]. Essentially, those who hold these traditional ideologies believe that men should adhere to socially and culturally defined masculine roles, appearances, and behaviors.

To examine these expectations, scholars assessed the level of masculinity and femininity participants expect from an ideal leader. According to the theory of implicit leadership, individuals develop prototypes of what a good leader looks like and acts like [36]. These prototypes include traits one expects from an ideal leader [37]. When an individual encounters a leader who does not meet these expectations, that leader is perceived less favorably [38]. Scholars believe that having a gender-related expectation that an ideal leader possesses masculine traits will influence the relationship between the type of leader depicted and perceptions of that leader. This means that a male leader depicted as having a masculine gender expression will be perceived as more likable and more effective, which will be enhanced by the rater's personal archetype of an ideal leader (i.e., ideal leaders being more masculine and less feminine).

Another gender expectation that participants may hold is a broader inclination towards gender conformity. This is the individualized expectation that people act in accordance with the norms of their gender. Gender conformity manifests in several ways, such as behavior in social situations or physical appearance [39]. Scholars assert that individuals who have stronger expectations of others regarding conforming to gender norms will be influenced by these expectations in their perception of the leader. The relationship between viewing a male leader depicted as masculine and the improved perceptions of likability and effectiveness will be further increased by individuals' own expectations towards gender-conforming behaviors.

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