

Study Finds Computer Animations Can Significantly Impact Verdicts in Complex Cases

March 2007

Researchers presented 186 mock jurors with arguments and evidence in one of two cases, one involving a plane crash and the other involving an auto accident. Both cases involved a corporate defendant. In each case, mock jurors were divided into four groups and saw either both sides, neither side, or one side present an animation (as opposed to a still diagram) of a key aspect of the incident as part of the arguments. For both the plane crash and the auto accident, the mock jurors found the animations to be significantly more vivid than the diagrams.

The evidence in the plane crash case tended to favor the defense. When the parties were evenly matched in terms of visual evidence, only about one third of the mock jurors voted in favor of the plaintiff. However, when only the plaintiff used animation (and the defendant used a still diagram), the mock jurors were significantly more likely to vote in favor of the plaintiff, as shown in the chart below.

In contrast, use of an animation had no discernable effect on verdicts in the auto accident case. Because the auto accident involved a familiar scenario, the researchers suggest that most of the mock jurors could easily imagine the event and the animation added little persuasive value beyond a still diagram. In contrast, the plane crash involved an unfamiliar scenario, difficult for most jurors to mentally reconstruct, such that the animation likely dominated the mock jurors' imagination of what had happened.

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Source: Meghan A. Dunn, et al., *The Jury Persuaded (and Not): Computer Animation in the Courtroom*, 28 LAW & POLICY 228 (2006).

