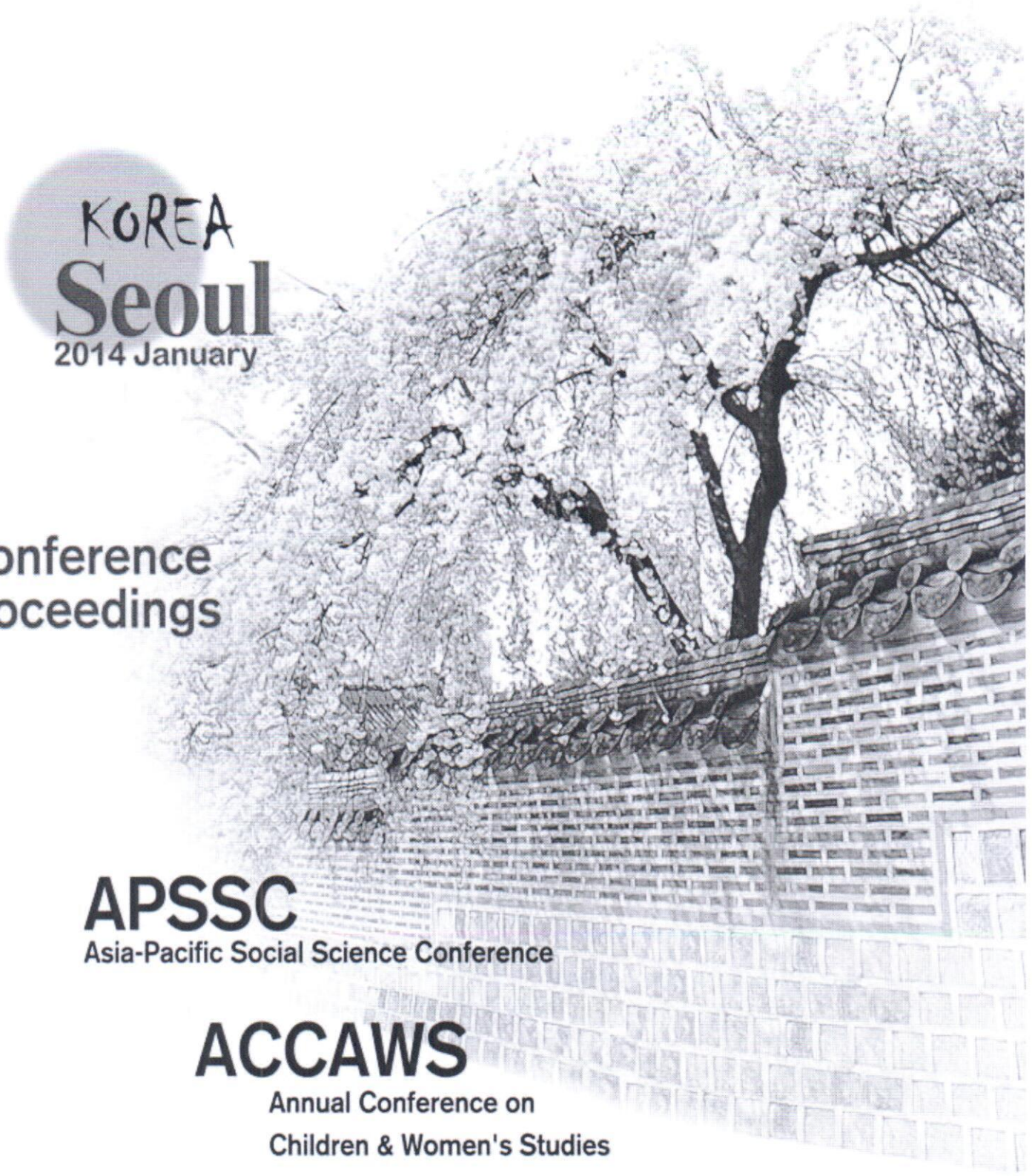


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The Role of Tipping in Server-Customer Interactions in Restaurants

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The Role of Tipping In Server-Customer Interactions In Restaurants

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Abstract

This study aims at exploring the role of tipping in the server-customers interactions in restaurant settings. A qualitative research methodology consisting of documentary analysis, focus group meetings, and interviews was used. Together with 29 documents related to tipping in Turkey, authors content analyzed the data from two focus group meetings (one with restaurant customers and one with current and former servers) and six interviews with current servers of traditional Turkish restaurants located in Antalya. Findings show that customers tipping behaviors are predictable based on some determinants such as perceived service quality, social and psychological factors, bill, quests' characteristics and strategic motivations.

Servers are able to predict the tipping behavior of customers in terms of better tippers and tip size. Servers' predictions lead them to engage in some identifiable behaviors such as excellent service, negative service behaviors, using tactics, and motivation. Those behaviors of servers also affect whether a customer will tip, and how much of tip to leave.

Keywords: Restaurant service, tipping behavior, servers' behavior, Turkey

1. Introduction

Contemporary consumers visit restaurants not only for good food but also for excellent service and a pleasant dining environment [1, 2]. Correspondingly, restaurants offer a context in which service encounters provide opportunities for customers to enjoy interactions with servers, atmosphere and other guests [3].

In service encounters, customers and servers meet and engage in behaviors [4], those, to a certain extent, determine the quality of service [5]. Furthermore, customers' satisfaction with service is also dependent on perceived service quality [6]. In essence, personalized service is one of the most important aspects of these perceptions. Customers not only appreciate the presence of service personalization but also have a tendency to reward it via tipping [7]. In this process, tip is contingent upon service quality perceptions of customers.
However, prior research on tipping in general, and studies on restaurant tipping in particular, suggest that tipping behavior (in restaurants) is determined by a variety of factors.

Presently, the tipping literature offers different explanations for the determinants of tipping behavior depending on the different views on tip. So far, two dominant explanations for why consumers tip have been posited by two divergent views: economic and social psychology [8].

In general terms, economic view hypothesizes that tip relates to service quality and has also associations with future service considerations. An important assertion of social psychological view is that tipping is primarily a social convention and consumers tip because of their desire for compliance with social norms.

In spite of sharing the same assumption that the tipping behavior has some identifiable determinants, the research studies guided by those two views have been conducted mainly in isolation. However, as suggested by some scholars [9], a more complete explanation of tipping behavior in restaurants requires a model that incorporates economic and social psychology views in an integrative research approach. This holistic view forms a theoretical foundation on which the interactive relations between tipping behavior of customers and servers behaviors in service encounters can be investigated. Thus, the current paper aims at exploring the interactions between tipping and servers' behaviors through a qualitative approach. Accordingly, the specific questions of paper are;

- What are the major predictors of restaurant customers tipping behaviors?
- What are the perceptions of servers about the tipping behavior of customers?
- What are the servers' reactions to customers' tipping behaviors?
- How does the tipping behavior of customers relate to servers' reactions?

2. Literature Review

Tipping behavior of customers in restaurants is an outcome of two consecutive decisions. Firstly the customers need to decide on whether to tip [9, 10], and then they make a final decision on how much to tip [11].

Some recent studies [8, 9, 12, 13] documented factors that motivate customers to tip. These factors also have associations with service quality (i.e. rewarding service; insuring future service, controlling service) and social psychological factors (complying with the tipping norm; helping the server, feeling satisfaction from doing the right thing, expressing generosity, impressing others; willingness to be fair; showing empathy for service employees). However, scholars also suggest additional factors that are likely to be associated with customers' characteristics or the consumption episode. For instance, previous research has demonstrated that customers' ethnicity [14, 15], frequency of visits [16, 17, 18], customers' tipping history [19], check amount and alcohol consumption [16] are determinants of tipping behavior.

In addition, two interesting questions have also emerged from the existing research on tipping in restaurants. The first one is whether the servers are able to predict the tipping behavior of customers and how. Existing studies empirically show that servers can understand the relations between several determinants of tipping and customers' tipping behavior, and relying on this information they are able to predict whether they receive a tip or not, and what the size of tip will be. The servers' beliefs about as young and old people tip less than middle aged people; males tip more than females and blacks tip less than whites influence their perceptions of customer groups as better or worse tippers [20]. Similarly, McCall and Lynn [10] revealed that according to servers' perceptions regular customers and males are members of better tippers group while foreigners and teens constitute the group of worse tippers. More specifically, Dombrowski et al. [21] found that customers' demographic characteristics are the major determinants employed by servers in predicting customers' tipping behaviors, thus servers can categorize quests as better or worse tippers based on the style of dress, ethnicity or language spoken and gender. According to Barkan and Israeli [22], tip size can also be predicted by servers by relying on the estimation of check amount in advance while the quests order menu items.

The second question is related to the effect of tipping on the delivery of service. Prior research suggests that the estimations of servers about the tip they receive from customers have also implications for their subsequent behaviors. In response to prospect of receiving a superior or poor tip or nothing, servers may strategically adjust their behaviors during service encounters.

They may engage in service-enhancing behaviors with the belief that delivery of superior service leads to receiving an excellent tip [23]. For instance, recently in Zimbabwe's hotel restaurant context, Mkono [24] found that guests who are expected to tip well receive better service from servers. Conversely, tip may function as an incentive to negative servers' behaviors such as delivery of an inferior service to customers who are perceived to tip less or nothing [11]. For example, servers' perception that black Americans are worse tippers than white Americans causes some negative actions on the servers' part [25]. As stated by Lynn [26], many servers deliver inferior service to black quests. Brewster [20] also emphasizes that servers' behaviors become sensitive to variations in customers' tipping behaviors and one possible consequence of servers' perception is delivery of discriminately inferior service to quests who are commonly perceived to be comparatively inadequate tippers.

Tip also has some motivational effects [23]. Servers derive satisfaction from doing a good job and tip is seen as an indicator of a good job performance [12]. Thus, tips can improve servers' morale and reduce server turnover [27]. A prior research study by Lynn [28] demonstrated that in the restaurants with low sales volume the tip percentage negatively correlated with the servers' turnover rate. Thus, in low volume restaurants, tip is a significant factor that helps retain servers. Tip can also motivate some problematic behaviors of servers [11] such as focusing on their own tables and refusal to attend to other servers' customers; shirking of collective tasks; unwillingness to cooperate with co-workers, and giving the products to customers free of charge.

Servers' behavior during the service encounter further affects the tipping behavior of the customers [24]. A perception of receiving inferior service may lead a restaurant customer to correspondingly reduce the tip size. In fact, customers are aware of the fact that servers are

sensitive to tipping differences. Thus, in order to avoid negative server reactions such as poor service or servers' envy, customers may prefer to give tip as an incentive to insure good service [13]. Furthermore, it is also known that some special treatments of servers have positive impacts on the tip size. In some recent studies, a significant increase in tipping behavior was observed when the customers have been exposed to (i) an altruism-related quote written on the bill [29]; (ii) female servers wearing ornaments [30]; (iii) short interpersonal distance between servers and customer [31]; (iv) compliments from server in the choice of menu items [32]; (v) being touched the fore arm by a female server [33], and (vi) patriotic messages from servers [34].

The foregoing review of literature ends up with four major propositions. Accordingly, the literature on tipping proposes that restaurant customers tipping behaviors are predictable based on some determinants, servers are able to predict the tipping behaviors of customers in terms of who are the tippers and to what extent they tip; servers perceptions are likely to affect their behaviors (e.g. service quality) during service encounters, and finally, servers' behaviors during service encounter have considerable amount of influence on tipping behaviors of customers.

3. Methodology

Studies on tipping have mainly focused on countries such as U.S. where tipping is a social convention [24]. The current study is, alternatively, conducted in Turkey where existence of a clear and well-known tipping norm is questionable. In order to deeply understand the interactive relations between tipping behaviors of restaurant customers and server's behaviors, the current paper takes a qualitative research approach based on the following components:

- Documentary analysis to understand whether there is a clear tipping norm in Turkey and whether Turkish consumers tip in restaurants because of service quality)
- Two focus group meetings (one with restaurant customers, and one with former and current servers) to clarify the existence or non existence of tipping norm; to explore the relationship between service and tipping in the Turkish context, and to understand the role of tip in server-customer interactions in service encounters.
- Semi-structured interviews with current servers of traditional restaurants located in Antalya (a southern city and a well-known international sun and sea tourist destination) to collect data that help us understand the interactions between servers' reactions to tipping and customers' corresponding tipping behaviors.
- Content analysis to obtain themes and categories that explain the customers' tipping behaviors, servers' perceptions of and reactions to tip.

In the documentary analysis stage (the first stage of the qualitative analysis of the current paper), 29 documents related to tipping in Turkey were collected from internet sources, newspapers, professional magazines and research reports. Interestingly, authors could not find any available academic paper about tipping behaviors of Turkish restaurant customers.

Following the documentary analysis, firstly two focus group meetings were organized, and then interviews were conducted. In order to keep the research manageable, the subjects (participants of focus group meetings and interviewees) were selected by purposive sampling method. Indeed, academicians in Tourism Faculty in a mid-scale university in Antalya were invited to focus group meeting as representatives of restaurant customers. The second focus group meeting was held with the participants of Faculty students who are currently or formerly servers in restaurants.

Seven participants attended each focus group meeting. Finally, the semi-structured, face to face interviews with six servers in traditional Turkish restaurants were conducted. The focus group meetings and interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed with permission of the respondents. The focus group meetings lasted approximately 75 minutes, while the interviews were 15 to 30 minutes per interviewer. Tape recorded data and notes were in Turkish and were transcribed in verbatim format right after each focus group or interview to ensure accuracy.

After data collection, the next step in the study was to code and analyze the data and then interpret them. An initial coding scheme was developed by using the previous research findings as a reference in categorizing data. Two researchers read, sorted, reread and recombined the codes until consensus was achieved on the assignment of each code to relevant categories. Subsequently, another independent judge used the original data for re-judgment and reclassification. Finally, two coders and the judge discussed their codes and classifications to verify the emerging themes from coding process. The discrepancies of classification schemes between researchers and judge were resolved by discussion in order to reach consensus. Additionally, researchers conducted a series of interviews with some of the previous focus group participants (six participants) and interviewees (three servers) who judge the results. They agreed that all the themes and categories emerged as a result of coding and classification of data are in parallel with their experiences and thoughts.

4. Findings

Table 1 depicts the results of documentary analysis. According to the information on Table 2, two approaches (economical and hospitality) are identifiable in the documents on tipping in Turkey. When tip is seen as an economical issue, it is conceptualized as a wage or income for servers. In most of the texts where tip is a hospitality issue, recommendations for how to tip in Turkish restaurants is the primary conception of tip. The common point of the documents' approaches to tip is its connection with service quality. Most of the documents clearly highlight the relationship with service quality and tip. Thus, in Turkey, where there is no available academic research on tip, customers' tipping behaviors seem to be influenced by service quality.

Table 1: Results of documentary analysis

Approach to Tip	Conception of Tip	Quotes
An economical issue	Tip is a wage or income Tip is a reward for good service	"Tip should be regarded as a wage, and must be included into the insurance accountings" "Tip is a wage which is voluntarily left by customer who is satisfied with the service"
A hospitality issue	Tip is a reward for good service Tip as a percentage of bill	"Turkish people do not usually prefer giving extra money to the service they get unless it is really and truly satisfying... tipping in restaurants is actually up to service you get" "If you are happy with the foods, service and atmosphere in general you can tip to waiter 10% at the total bill"

Table 2: Profile of participants and interviewees

	Focus group meeting with customers						
Variables	**P1**	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**P6**	**P7**
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female
Age	35	40	49	42	27	26	41
Frequency of visits to restaurants	12	8	6	4	4	10	6
Average spending for eating out (Turkish Lira)	75	50	125	50	40	75	40
	Focus group meeting with current or former servers						
Variables	**P1**	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**P6**	**P7**
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
Age	21	21	23	23	25	21	22
Currently working or not	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Job title	-	Waiter	Waiter	Waiter	Waiter	-	-
Work experience (years)	-	1.5	5	8	4	4	5
	Interviewees						
Variables	**R1**	**R2**	**R3**	**R4**	**R5**	**R6**	
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	
Age	33	24	37	27	32	21	
Department	Service	Service	Service	Service	Service	Service	
Job title	Headwaiter	Waiter	Headwaiter	Waiter	Waiter	Waiter	
Experience (years)	20	4	10	11	5	5	
Education	Secondary School	High school	Secondary School	University	High school	University	

Notes: P means participant; R means respondents

Table 2 provides information about focus group meeting participants and interviewees. The participants of first focus group meeting with restaurant customers are aged between 26 and 49, their frequency of visits to restaurants on a monthly basis varies 4 to 12, and their average spending is between 40 TL to 125 TL (which are doubled when computed as dollar amounts).

Four of them are female. Participants of focus group meeting with current and former servers are all young in their twenties, and five of them are males. Four of them are currently working as a waiter, and most of them has relatively a considerable amount of work experience (from1.5 years to 8 years). All the interviewees are males. They are aged between 21 to 37, and currently working in service department as a headwaiter (2 of them) or a waiter. Their work experiences vary 4 to 20 years, and their education levels are relatively high.

Table 3: Results of analysis of the data from focus group meetings and interviews

Themes	Categories	Quotes
Determinants of tipping	Perceived service quality	"I leave tip if I am truly satisfied with the service experience" (FGP – Customer)
	Guests' characteristics	"Customers do not leave tip if they are exposed to rudeness from servers" (FGP - Server)
	Social factors	"Tip is something like a reward: you have rendered a good service for me and I give you a reward" (FGP – Customer)
	Psychological factors	"I observe that Turkish customers who consume alcohol leave larger tips" (FGP - Server)
	Bill	"The man who probably leaves some tip shows himself with his style of dress and posture" (IR - Server)
	Strategic motivation	"If tip is in question then customers' income level is an important factor" (IR - Server)
Tipping behavior	Decision on whether to tip	"Females rarely tip when they are accompanied by a man" (FGP – Customer)
	Decision on tip size	"If I deliver a friendly service to a frequent guest, he/she feels his home's comfort and this has a positive effect on his/her tipping" (IR - Server)
Servers' behaviors	Excellent service	"When a guest comes with his family he usually leaves some tips" (IR - Server)
	Negative behaviors	"If I observe that other customers in the restaurant are tipping, then I feel compelled to do so" (FGP – Customer)
	Tip tactics	"Leaving tip feels me better, less embarrassed" (FGP – Customer)
	Motivation	"I had a work experience as a former server in a restaurant. Now, I can easily tolerate a kind of deficiency in service, and I think my tendency to tip is very strong" (FGP – Customer)
Servers' predictions	Predicting tippers	"If a guest orders from starters to deserts, we understand that he is going to leave some tip" (FGP - Server)
	Predicting tip size	"If you tip 10% of the bill, a check amounted to 20 TL results in 2 TL tips which are very small. But a check amount of 200 TL with a resulting tip size of 20 TL is too high" (FGP – Customer)
		"Servers provide really a very different service to the guest from whom he can receive some tip" (IR - Server)
		"If a server provide a special interest in my expectations, or present something extra … only then I can think of leaving tip" (FGP – Customer)
		"Changes… remainder of the bill. Servers sometimes bring the remainder all in changes hoping to receive some tip" (FGP – Customer)
		"A server is motivated to provide better service when he is tipped" (IR - Server)
		"A man in a suit probably has a high level of income … People wearing causal outfits… they have lower incomes and they do not leave tip or if they tip, the tip size is too small" (IR - Server)
		"In restaurants where a high level of alcohol consumption exists, 98% of customers leave tip" (IR - Server)
		"Tip motivates me because psychologically I feel that I do my job well" (IR - Server)

Notes: FGP = focus group meeting participant; IR = interview respondent

Table 3 depicts the themes and related categories and Figure 1 show the relationships among them. Content analysis of the data collected through focus group meetings and interviews revealed that four salient themes constitute the concept of tipping in our Turkish sample.

These are determinants of tipping, tipping behavior, servers' predictions and servers' behaviors. As shown on Figure 1, customers tipping behaviors are predictable based on the determinants such as perceived service quality (e.g. satisfaction with personalized service), social and psychological factors (e.g. presence of other customers leaving tip in the consumption episode, accompanying persons who themselves tip, reduction in the feelings of embarrassment, showing empathy to servers), bill (size of bill, number of items ordered), quests' characteristics (e.g. gender, style of dress, alcohol consumption), and strategic motivations (e.g. insuring the good service in the future). Servers are able to predict the tipping behavior of customers and they estimate who are the tippers, and how much those tip relying on their understandings of customers' characteristics such as style of dress and alcohol consumption. Servers' predictions about the tipping behavior of customers lead to some identifiable behaviors such as delivery of excellent service, engaging in negative service behaviors, using tactics, and increasing motivation. Those behaviors of servers also interact with the customers tipping behavior and can influence whether a customer will tip, and how much to tip.

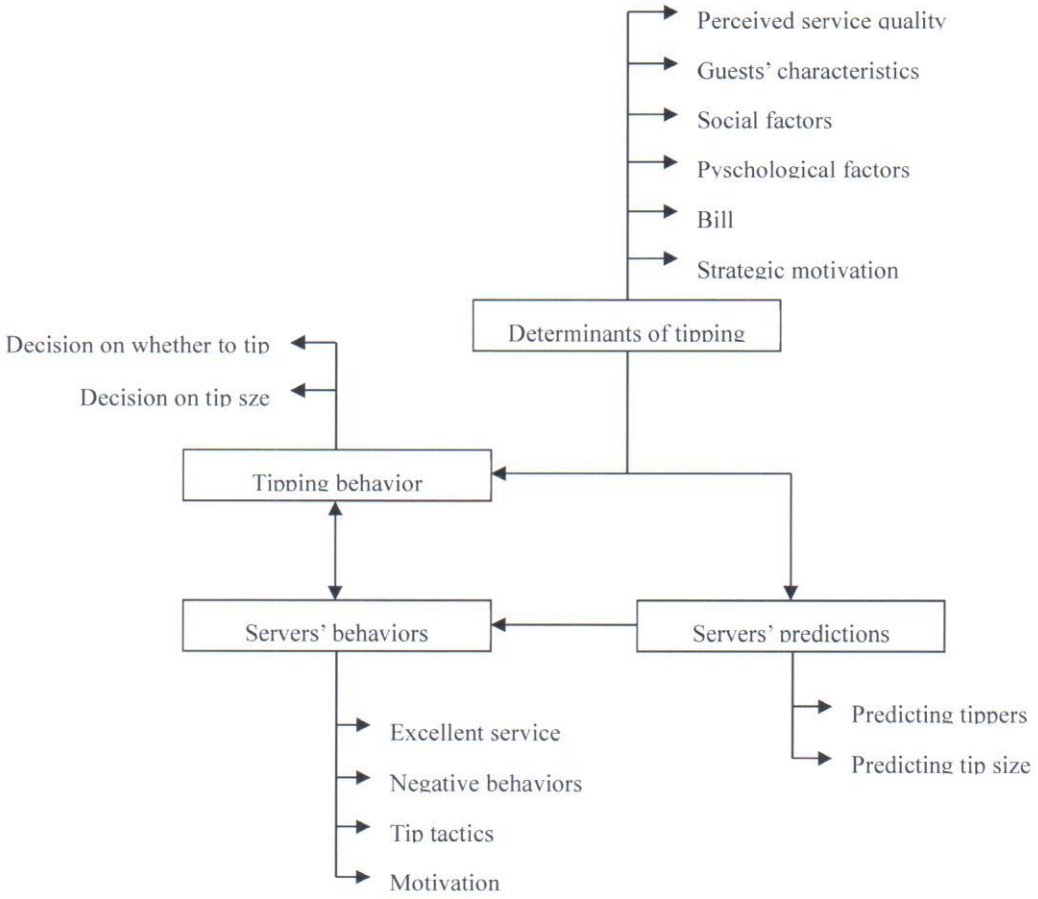


Fig 1: Relations among tipping behavior and servers' behavior

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we offer an explanation for the role of tipping as an intermediary in the interactional relation between customers and servers. Specifically, we argue that servers' predictions and expectations of tips influence the supply of service quality, and service quality influences tipping behaviors of customers, those are consistent with the findings of previous research by Domborwski et al. [21], Kwortnik et al. [23] and Mkono [24]. Thus, tip plays a critical role in the interactional relationship between restaurant customers and servers in which both parties would like to control, at least partly, the other's behaviors. Both parts know and act upon that (i) customers want to receive excellent service and (ii) servers desire to increase their incomes by receiving larger tips. Our explanation is supported by the qualitative data from a revealing a holistic model of tipping behavior in restaurants.

A long lasting debate in the academic literature on tipping has been whether tips are primarily influenced by social psychological factors and demographic characteristics of customers (social psychological view), or primarily by service quality perceptions of tippers (economic view). The model presented in this study includes variables associated with social psychology and economic views. Specifically, the findings of current study emphasize and confirm the dual nature of tipping behavior which has also been demonstrated in the study of Bodvarsson et al. [8]. Specifically, high quality service encourages good tips while simultaneously servers' expectations of receiving excellent tips encourage delivery of high quality service. In essence, customers use tip to exert control over servers' behaviors to ensure service quality while servers adjust the level of service quality to control the customers' tipping behaviors to receive larger tips. The latter issue is also consistent with the findings of Barkan and Israeli [22] who reported that servers may act as managers of tipping and actively engage in behaviors or tactics to ensure receiving the tip size that they have predicted in advance.

As previously stated by Lynn [13], the current study also confirms that tipping influences the motivation of servers as well as the quality of customers' experiences. Tip is a major component of servers' compensation and receiving an excellent tip may lead to a substantial increase in their incomes. Tip has also some important roles for servers because of its motivational aspects as an indicator of doing a good job. Servers believe that they can earn larger tips by delivering excellent service. Servers' prediction and expectation of receiving larger tips from the groups of guests who are known as better tippers lead to an inclination to render personalized service to those groups. Conversely, with the prospect of receiving an inadequate tip, servers may prefer to deliver poor service. Servers' also attempt to minimize economic uncertainty and thus they prefer to avoid waiting for unpredictable tippers [35]. Consequently, tip plays two important roles in the part of servers:

- An additional source of income
- A motivation factor

From consumers' perspective, tip becomes a medium through which customers reward an excellent service or to ensure future service. Restaurant customers recognize that servers rely on tips as a major source of income and they wish to use tip as an incentive to motivate servers to render high quality service. Thus, when tipping functions as an intermediary of interaction between customers and servers in service encounters, it has at least three important roles especially from the perspective of customers who desire to control the service;

- Rewarding service
- Avoiding negative server reactions
- Insuring future service

The findings of the current study have also implications for restaurant managers. Restaurant managers are responsible for delivery of homogeneous service to all customer groups. They should recognize that servers' sensitivity to tipping differences across groups of customers may cause providing excellent service to better tippers while worse tippers receive moderate or poor service from servers. Thus managers are expected to increase the willingness of waiters and waitresses to serve all customers equally. One commonly suggested way is to train servers in providing the best possible service to all customers irrespective of their tipping behavior. Managers also avoid paying less than minimum wage with the assumption that tips make up the rest. Otherwise, such an employee compensation policy may result in heterogeneous service delivery and/or rivalry among servers to receive best possible tip.

The results of this study need to be viewed in light of its limitations. A meaningful limitation of the present study is the degree to which the major themes and categories of tipping identified here is capture the full range of potential factors determining and constituting the tipping behavior and servers' reactions in the restaurants. A second potential limitation is the issue of unqualified generalizability. The sample design was a purposive, convenience sample due to the time and resource constraints. Thus, future research may focus on involving a larger sample with a quantitative survey method to investigate tipping in Turkish restaurants.

On a closing note, it should be underscored that the results reported here provide an empirical validation of the important role that tip plays in the interactions between servers and customers.

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