

# *Studying the Restaurant Tipping Dilemma: The triangular structure of tipping stakeholders*

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## Introduction

This case study tries to investigate and identify the perceptions and positions that tipping practices gave to the process' stakeholders in restaurants sector (Customers, Employers/ Management, and Servers). Tipping, it comes in almost as many forms according restaurant concepts. It is sometimes referred to as gratuity or a service fee (Mealey, 2016). Willen claimed that tipping is a practice that most customers hate. It makes no economic sense, does little to improve service quality (2015). On the other hand, tipping is considered the significant parts of restaurant employees' wages and accounts for more than half of their income (Azar and Yossi, 2008). The capacity of tipping is not constrained to supplementing the server's income (Lynn and Thomas-Haysbert, 2003). This force the servers to strive to get tip from customers, also, tipping practice may settle highly competitive working environment among customers and in turn, more stress and jealousy they may suffer. The following Figure shows that, tipping stakeholders experience both the positive and negative impacts of tipping practices, subsequently, it may seem that all the stakeholders have the same positions, BUT, the degree of impact of tipping practices on the involved stakeholders vary significantly. The impact' degree of the tipping practices shaped the stakeholders in critical positions that affected negatively on the entire cycle [the dining experience of the customers, the expected hospitality behavior and attitude of the servers, and the controlling role of employers] that in turn, changed the real expected perceptions and attitudes of the involved stakeholders and created the dilemma of tipping in restaurants.

This raises all sorts questions, the main question, what are the factors that make the customers leave sums of money (tips) for other people especially they already have paid for their meals and that action affects their wallets? The question from another perspective, as long as tipping is "optional" -according to Willen (2015), why most of the customers hate it? How do tipping practices affect the dining experience of the customers? Other questions arise in servers' area, what are the servers' perception of tipping practices? And, what is the general perception of customers' tipping behavior? In such stressed, jealous and highly competitive working environment, how will the servers' behaviors and attitudes look like when interacting with cus-

tomers and with each others?

While, managers empowered tipping in light of the fact that the practice permitted them to pay lower wages or even take a cut of their representatives' tips or charge servers for the benefit to work and get tips (Lu-in Wang, 2014). additional questions arise include: How employers are affected by tipping practices? What are the positions of tipping practices' stakeholders during the process?

Subsequently, tipping as a general practice is both widely accepted and questionable. It has provoked vigorous debate and even legal prohibition.

## Review of Literature

Tipping is a widespread practice in many service sectors. Tipping is one of the significant parts of restaurant employees' wages and accounts for more than half of their income (Azar and Yossi, 2008). Many of workers in the service sector commonly tipped are barbers, bartenders, concierges, cruise cabin stewards, delivery drivers, doormen, exotic dancers, golf caddies, hotel servants, musicians, parking valets, porters, restaurant waiters, taxicab drivers, and tour guides (Star, 1988). The word "tip" itself has an ambiguous history according to Lynn et al. (1993). In the beginning and before going deeply in the topic, some claims about how the word "tip" has been originated are shown in Table 1.

Tipping was presented as a uniquely imported from Europe amid the late nineteenth century. Tipping was initially presented in the United States in the late nineteenth century and disagreements over its desirability continue to this day (Palmer, 2013).

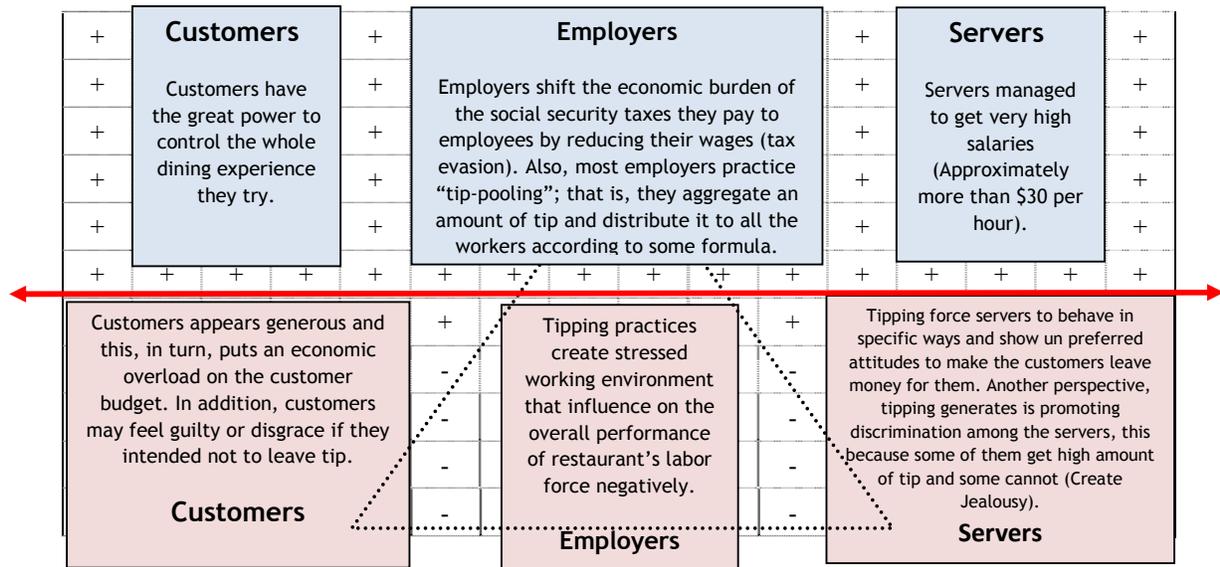
Although, tipping is forbidden in some countries, like Russia and Japan, while in other countries, it is the sole source of waitstaff's income. In Europe many restaurants add a service charge automatically to the bill (Mealey, 2016). In the US, it's mandatory in most American restaurants (Willen, 2015) and left to the discretion of the dining patron. The practice took hold in large part because it served the economic interests of parties who exerted social pressure to reinforce its observance. Many restaurant servers in the United States receive wages below the Federal national minimum wage standards which force them to rely heavily on tips for their standard income (Lin and Namasivayam, 2011). Azar (2011) evaluated that despite the fact that the amounts given by a single customer to any one worker are typically modest, the total amount tipped to all workers is substantial with

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Figure 1

## The Triangular Structure of Tipping Dilemma



Source: The Researchers

one estimate placing the annual tips to food workers in the United States alone at over \$40 billion. The normal and accepted tipping norm in restaurants is between 15 and 20 percent of the total meal bill (Gatta, 2009). However, customers may not generally tip according to the standard of 15-20% of the bill each time they dine at restaurants.

The next sections will analyze and discuss the tipping practices reasons from customers' perspectives and also the servers' perceptions of customers tipping behavior.

### Tipping Reasons: Customers' perspective

Individuals relate tipping to service quality. The most common explanation, people give for why they tip is to reward good service. However, in their study about Gratitude and Gratuity Lynn and McCall (2000) found that service quality is not a solid clarification for tipping,

nor is it the main component that influences tipping behavior. Studies that have found a positive relationship between service customer ratings and tip size have nevertheless noted that the relationship is "very little" and "weaker than most people would expect" and even "so weak as to be meaningless" (Lynn, 2001). Another reason for expecting customers to do this can be found in a psychological theory called "equity theory." This theory is similar to the norm of reciprocity in positing that people are socialized to put more into their relationships with others the more they get out of those relationships (Walster, Berscheid & Walster, 1973). The theory suggests that consumers will feel some psychological pressure to leave larger tips the better the service they receive (Lynn & Graves, 1996). Table 2 shed the light on some different reasons that may serve in answering the question – what are the reasons that make the customers leave an extra amount of money for others?

Table 1

### Origin of Tip Term

	Origin	Meaning	Reference
1	The Dutch word "Tippen"	Tap or tapping sound of a coin on the table or tapped against a glass to get the server's attention.	Schein et al., 1984
2	The Latin word "Stips"	Derived from stipend.	Azar, 2004
3	The gypsies' phrase "Tipper me your money"	Give me your money.	Azar, 2004
4	The English phrase "to insure promptitude"	Used by London coffee house customers to write on the notes for waitress with coins attached during 18th century.	Schein et al., 1984

Source: Shrestha (2010)

**Table 2**

**Tipping Reasons: Customers Perspective**

	The reason	The results	Authors
1	Social and Psychological Motivations	Individuals tip so as to conform to the social norm, because ignoring a norm causes people to feel bad about themselves.	Lu-in Wang, 2014.
2	Awareness of Servers' Wage	Customer' awareness that lower paid laborers depended on tips for their employments expanded the customer' sentiments of commitment.	Lynn, 2013.
3	Custom/ Social Norm	The custom by spreading the view that it ought to be taken after, individuals tip keeping in mind the end goal to conform to the social standard, in light of the fact that defying some standard causes individuals to feel terrible about themselves.	Lu-in Wang, 2014.
4	Positive Image	The good feelings related with doing a decent deed and the positive picture related with being a tipper.	Whaley and O'Neill, 2011.
5	Good Service	Eating parties that rate the service exceedingly leave bigger tips than the individuals who rate the administration less very	Lynn and McCall, 2000; Brewster, 2013.
6	Gratitude	To show appreciation for a server's endeavors, or to show empathy for a worker's meager conditions.	Shamir, 1984.
7	Guilt	The level of internalized feeling blames and disgraces individuals experienced vary across countries, influencing the standards like tipping also.	Conlin et al., 2003; Whaley and O'Neill, 2011; Namasivayam, 2011.
8	Organizational Settings	The restaurant attributes. Price, music, noise level, friendly staff, service speed, parking, décor, cleanliness, food, restaurant types, and menu variety.	Liu, 2008; Ramseook-Munhurrun, 2012; Lynn, 2013.
9	Cost of the Meal/ Bill Size	The price may increase the tip measure of customers if the cost/bill was seen to be of lower an incentive than what they would pay when at home in light of the fact that the tip they would pay would likewise be of lower an incentive to them constraining their hazard and costs.	Lynn and Thomas-Haysbert, 2003; Fisher, 2009.
10	Food Quality	Food quality likewise has been considered as a critical determinant in connection to return to and tipping aim.	Sulek and Hensley, 2004.
11	Friendliness of Server	A critical indicator of the tip measure, server friendliness is a tolerably solid indicator of tipping.	Lynn, 1996; 2003; Dewald, 2003.
12	Customer Patronage Frequency	The regular patrons of a restaurant construct their tips in light of bill size more than do new or rare benefactors, perhaps because they are more acquainted with the 15 to 20 percent eatery tipping standard. They likewise tend to leave bigger normal tips than do occasional benefactors.	Lynn and Grassman, 1990; Lynn and McCall, 2000.
13	Miscellaneous	Liquor consumption and metropolitan area size.	Conlin et al, 2003; Sanchez, 2002; Lynn and Lynn, 2004.
14	Customer Income and Age	Other control factors that altogether influenced the tip sum were age and income, while gender and education had next to zero effect on the tip sum.	Lynn and Lynn, 2004; Thomas-Haysbert, 2003.
15	Server Personality and Physical Attractiveness	Physical elements of servers are observed to be two central point clients use to tip the servers.	Lynn and Simons, 2000; Hornik, 1992.
16	Dining Party Size	Large dining parties leave littler rate tips than do little eating parties.	Freeman et al., 1975; Lynn and Latane, 1984.
17	Payment Method	Restaurant patrons paying with credit cards generally leave larger bill-adjusted or percentage tips than do those paying with cash money.	Lynn and Latane, 1984; Garrity and Degelman, 1990; Lynn and Mynier, 1993
18	Server Sex	It's found a significant interaction amongst server and customer sex with the end goal that women tipped more than men when the server was male however not when the server was female. These discoveries recommend that tipping is influenced by the elements of sexual fascination.	Conlin et al, 2003
19	Server Compliment	Customers leave significantly bigger tips when the server complimented their request decision compared to when the server did not.	Seiter, 2007

## Server Perceptions of Customer Tipping Behavior

What servers think about the clients' tipping conduct has drawn the attention of numerous researchers (Liu, 2008; Gatta, 2009; McCall and Lynn, 2009; Lin and Namasivayam, 2011). Using field perception and brief studies, Barkan (2004) found that not only could servers accurately predict the size of the tip they would get from specific customers, but also, they would act in a way that would guarantee their figured forecasts. Many customers assume that a tip is optional, not realizing that servers are paid close to nothing in salary. Restaurant managers are allowed to pay as little as \$2.13 an hour (vs. the current minimum of \$7.25 for other workers) on the assumption that patrons will make up the difference in tips (Willen, 2015).

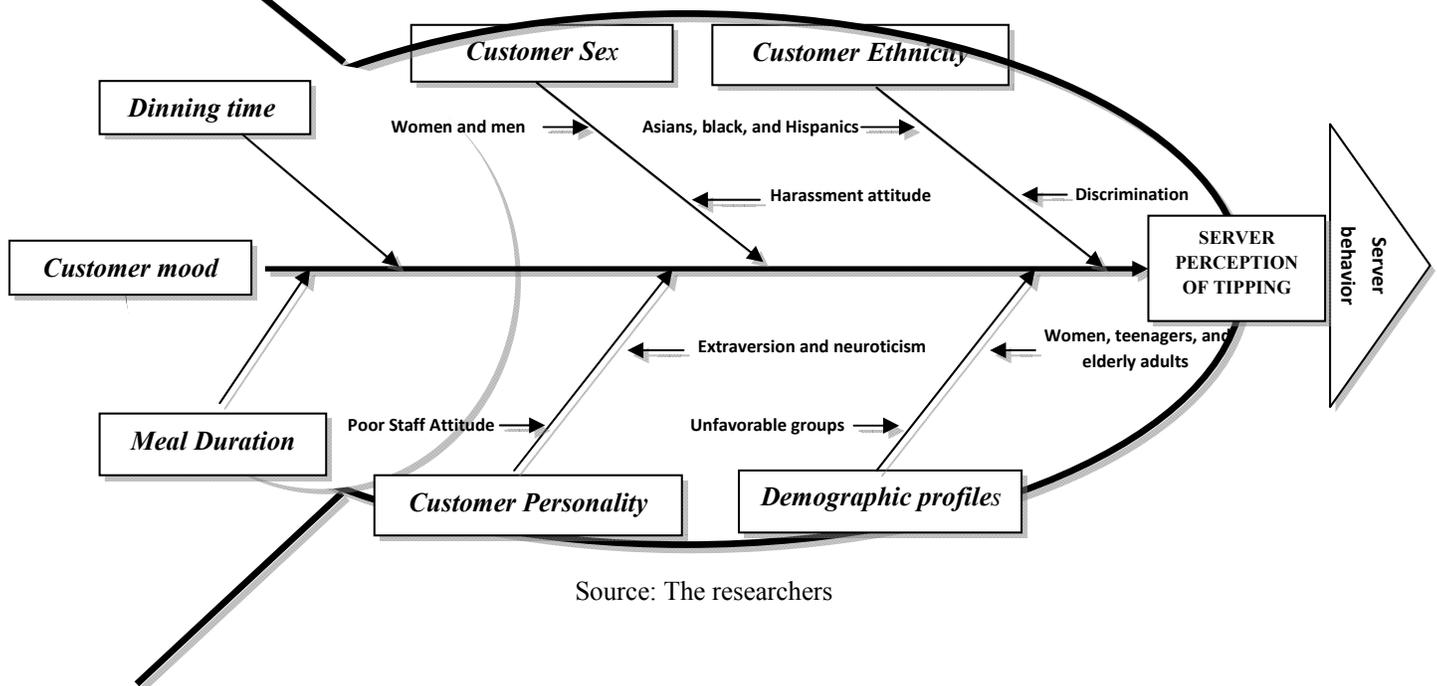
Server perceptions of customer tipping behavior motivate servers to provide superior or inferior service based on the expected tip they will receive (Barkan, 2004). Nevertheless, inexhaustible evidence shows that servers regularly hold stereotypes about specific group tipping practices, frequently paired with stereotypes about their behavior generally as customers, that can impact the level or sort of service provided to members of stereotyped groups (Lu-in Wang, 2014). Understanding

server perceptions on customer tipping behavior affected by customers differences (McCall and Lynn, 2009) and how such perceptions of servers leads to a possible discrimination in providing good quality of service (Brewster, 2009; Liu, 2008). One such example is stereotyping customers of various ethnic groups, customer sex and demographic profiles of customers, and so on which is not new to servers (Mallinson and Brewster, 2005). The proposed relationships and the expected results are summarized in Diagram 1. In a survey of 200 restaurant servers, almost 50% of the respondents confessed to giving poor service to guests that they perceived as bad tippers. Also, about 93% of the servers demonstrated that they give better service to those customers that they perceive to be good tippers (Brewster, 2013). While these findings indicated that server discrimination is unavoidable.

Discrimination toward certain groups of people by servers is problematic for managers in many ways. Guests who get poor service as a result of their nationality, ethnicity or gender are probably going to spread negative word of mouth and unlikely to be repeat customers (Fernandez, 2004).

Here, some of the determinants that shape the server perception of customer tipping behavior; customer ethnicity, customer sex, demographic profiles, meal duration, personality type.

**Diagram 1**  
**Determinants of Server Perceptions of Customer Tipping Behavior**



Source: The researchers

**Customer Ethnicity:** Asians, blacks, and Hispanics are broadly seen inside the U.S. restaurant industry to be poor tippers (McCall and Lynn 2009). Lynn has found that blacks and Hispanics are indeed less familiar than whites with the injunctive norm of tipping 15 to 20 percent of the bill in restaurants (Lynn, 2004; 2006), and that this norm awareness partially mediates black–white and Hispanic–white differences in restaurant tipping (Lynn, 2011; 2014). Clary (1999) and Anonymous (1999) said that at a Restaurant in Florida a 15 percent gratuity/ tip had been added even though no similar charges were added to the bill of nearby customers. A restaurant owner/manager give an explanation “you, black people don’t tip well”, these words and the actions they were meant to explain, were widely reported in the nation’s print and broadcast media.

**Customer Sex:** Men sometimes leave larger tips than do women (Crusco and Wetzel, 1984; Lynn and Latane, 1984) and waitresses sometimes receive larger tips than do waiters (Davis, et al, 1998).

**Demographic profiles:** Servers were found to show favoritism to serve customers based on the demographic profiles of customers. Past studies indicated ladies, adolescents, elderly adults, and large parties to be perceived as unfavorable customers by servers (Harris, 1995; Maynard and Mupandawana, 2009; McCall and Lynn, 2009). Furthermore, race has been perceived as one of the elements for servers to show favoritism. In fact, previous results showed Caucasian customers being favored over African Americans, Asians, and Hispanic customers (Lynn, 2004; Rusche and Brewster, 2008). Since minority customers were viewed as less favorable by servers.

**Meal Duration:** The restaurant dining experience can be characterized as a six- stage process that includes pre-arrival, post-arrival, preprocess, in-process, post-process, and table turnover (Kimes, 2008). Meal duration begins when the customer is first seated and ends once the customer pays the bill. In Kimes study, meal duration is defined from preprocess to post-process. There is an abundance of researching concerning the importance of the dining process and its relationship to customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, and restaurant financial performance. Thus, the relationship of tipping and meal duration could prove to be robust.

**Customer Personality:** While various reviews have been conducted about tipping, the relationship between personality type and tip amount has not been extensively tested. Lynn (2009) attempted to relate extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism to the magnitude of tipping.

It is exhibited that levels of national extraversion and psychoticism are identified with standard tip amounts. Those countries whose population displayed extraversion also saw tipping size increased with national extraversion. On the other hand, tipping size decreased with increased levels of psychoticism. It is important to note that Lynn used secondary national data about personality traits and tipping norms to draw conclusions.

## Introduction to Data

### a. Data Collection

The theoretical framework provides informative data for what make customers leave tip for servers? What would the customer tipping behavior look like during the service encountering process? From which we conclude that our explained theoretical tipping behavior does appear to be fully effective. On the other hand, concerning the server perceptions of customer tipping behavior, the researcher collected actual data capturing the servers’ attitudes and behaviors in certain specific conditions, among the conditions recorded was the following:

- Group size (number of people on the table),
- Demographic characteristics of the group size (gender & age),
- Courses (number of courses the participant had),
- The time, the food is ordered (daytime, night, and late night),
- Customer ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, and Hispanic), and
- Tip (dollar and cents amount that the participant left as a tip).

The design of the data collection process stems from straight forward observation recording. This study was conducted in a restaurant (Restaurant & Bar) that marries modern dining with classic Italian cuisine, located at a convenient location in Washington Dc area. All data collection was performed on either a Friday or Saturday night between the hours of 4pm to 11pm in the summer time (May and June).

It worthy to mention that the researcher got a training in the examined X restaurant and this helped him a lot to get a trustful information from the servers about their tip amount and also to catch their attitude from a close and outstanding point.

The restaurant in which the data was collected does serve food and drinks and employ the use of cash in addition to the use of credit card machines. Also, all data collection is in the form of food and drinks ordered on the customer table not on the bar and also in cash transactions. The total number of the servers working in X restaurant in weekends is 11 servers.

### b. Descriptive Statistics

Each observation tried to catch both the customer and servers’ behavioral attitude and body language (even hints and signs) at the encountering time (order time and paying time) and the behavioral attitudes of both of them was into:

*In the case of customer;*

- (1) Gratitude, (2) Thankfulness, and (3) Arrogance.

*In the case of server;*

- Gratitude, (2) Thankfulness, and (3) Begging.

Table 3 shows a summary of the data collected.

The theoretical results indicate that percent tip depends NOT only on service quality but also on a variety of other factors, including the customer ethnicity, age, group size, the number of customers at table,

**Table 3**

**A Summary of the Data Collected**

Recorded Data	A summary of Customers Data												Behavioral Attitude Types (#)		
	Order Time	No. of Customers at Table	No. of Male	No. of Female	Number of Dishes Ordered	Meal Duration	Approx. Age Range	Tip Amount	Customer Ethnicity				Gratitude	Thankfulness	Arrogance
									White	Black	Asians	Hispanics			
Average	4pm-11pm	4.07	2.65	2.79	1.98	2.08	29	4.75	42	39	30	18	17	18	8
Maximum	4pm-11pm	14	8	7	5	6	70	50	50	41	34	23	26	22	11
Minimum	4pm-11pm	1	0	0	1	0.45	15	0	22	15	11	6	9	13	4
<p>The summary of the collected data shows that the average of customers' number on the table is around 4 customers, and mostly their sex is female with average 2.79, while their dining experience at the X restaurant takes about 2 hours and may extend to 6 hours at maximum, also the maximum amount of tip they leave for the servers is \$ 50, the type of customers that may leave nothing for the servers as a tip is the category of young age group as - the data shows that the younger age level is 15 years old. In addition to, the mentioned factors that affect the tip amount, there is also the ethnicity of the customers that influence significantly and control the customers attitudes. Thus, (the behavioral attitude) of certain group of customers this time affects not on the tip amount but affects emotionally on the servers' attitude to the degree that make the servers un willing to serve them and a void their tables (servers' perceived impact).</p>												Servers' Perceived Impact Level			
												Gratitude	Thankfulness	Begging	
												3	5	3	
												9	10	5	
												1	4	1	

and customer-server interactions. Concerning the empirical results, the following figure explains the summary of the empirical data collected in table 3, the collected data processed and analyzed using the tipping points methods correlation. The fixed points method tends to identify what will the behavioral attitude of the customer look like in case the mentioned tipping points are existing, and in turn observing and exploring the perceived impact level of the servers. Figure 2 shows the correlation that created by the estimated tipping points (number of customers at the table, the customers' sex and number, number of dishes ordered, the meal duration, and the customer ethnicity) the results reached that there is a relationship between the customer's behavioral attitudes (grateful, thankful, or arrogant) and the servers perceived level (grateful, thankful, or in a begging position) AT certain tipping points.

One explanation for this phenomenon is the fact that the different actions of customers whether what is related with the behavioral attitude (Arrogance) or what is related with the tipping actions (none or few amount of tip) makes the servers unwilling to serve those types and groups of customers. See the following figure 2 that shows the correlation between servers' perception and customer's attitude.

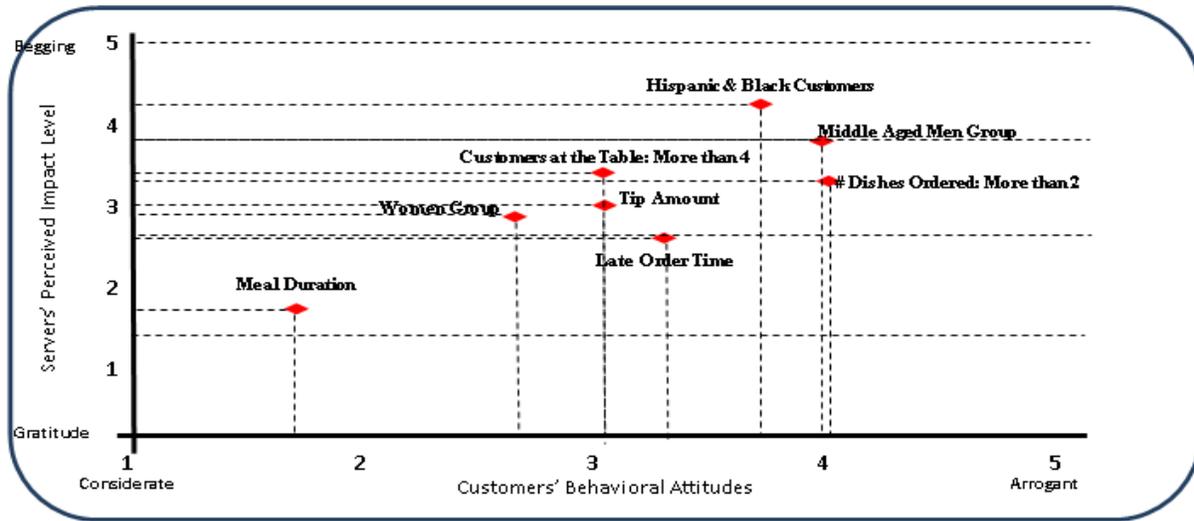
**Conclusion**

In fact, tipping may not be entirely irrational, and its economic justification rests on the very triangular structure. It imposes on the relationship among firm, customer, and server that promote discrimination. Figure 2 shows that tipping practices' stakeholders are shaped the involved stakeholders in three different positions reflects the tipping impacts on their lives as following;

**Vantage Position (Customers):** The highly customized nature of restaurant services makes it difficult for management to fully monitor and control the quality of waiters' and waitresses' efforts to serve their customers, so these quality control tasks are left up to customers via the institution of tipping (Lynn & Sturman, 2010). Tipping provides a way to monitor and improve service quality by delegating to customers the function of assessing and rewarding the service received. In this situation, the customer is better positioned to assess service quality and provide incentives to the server (Azar, 2004). On the other hand, customers' tipping practices affect negatively on the customers budget specified for dining, and this may hurt the customer experience in the restaurant whether financially or psychologically. Concerning

**Figure 2**

**The Correlation between Servers' Perception and Customer's Attitude**



psychological impacts, it appears that the customer will follow the following patterns;

*Before dining experience:*

- It affects the customers' decisions to go to a certain restaurant,
- It affects the customers' selection of dishes, where the customers may not choose some dishes in order to be able to pay a tip.

*During dining experience:*

- If the customer kept his mind engaging with some questions; Should I leave tip for the servers, and how much? What if I did not leave (my image)? In this case, he/ she will not enjoy their dining out at all.

*After dining experience:* If the customer is very sensitive to how the servers will see him/ her if he/ she did not leave a tip for them, this will make the customer select to follow one way of the following;

- Make another budget for tipping,
- Walk to another restaurant.

**Control Position (Employers):** Management play the primary role in controlling the quality of service provided by its workers, motivational factors that can vary in each restaurant and each period. It remains the manager's responsibility to ensure that high standards of service are maintained and organizational goals are met. The industry also welcomed the tipping practice because it helped cut down labor cost and other incentives, and lowered the direct monitoring of the employees while improving the quality of service, incorporating its cost of doing so into the price it charges customers (Azar, 2004).

On the other hand, many employers may lose the power of the team work advantage in the restaurant's work environment because of jealousy and competition that may arise among servers, as according

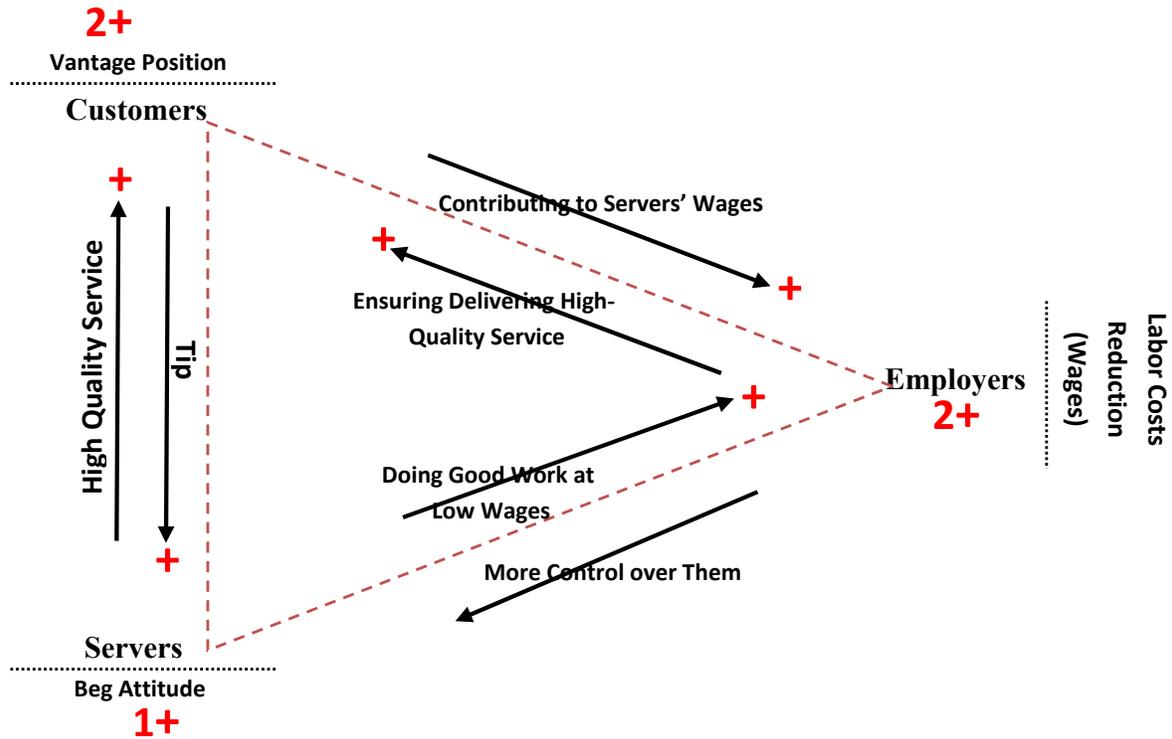
to Willen, some groups of servers get tip more than others e.g., females more than males, white more than blacks (2015), and the pretty women make more than all. Also, these sequences in addition to some inadequate management actions (favoritism or prejudice) with/ against some servers make the work environment more stressful and without doubt affect negatively on the servers' performance, then the dining experience of customers and then on the restaurants image.

**Beg Position (Servers):** away from the financial benefits of tipping for the servers, tipping creates unpleasant, stressful work environment for the servers. Tipping negatively influences motivation. Tipping is an incentive that push servers to put extra efforts at providing a good service in the restaurant. In a restaurant, there are some sections that have the advantages of area (the front or vantage area) or exceed in the number of tables and chairs, such sections are the prey that servers seek to catch where more money for them, and this may force the servers to beg both the management and the customer to get many tables to serve or to get tip respectively. Thus, workers intending to enter this job must be multi-skilled servers, have the generic, vocational, and soft skills that enable them to perform their duties accurately, deal with the customers and coworkers in a way that suit them.

*The empirical results show that the most cases the customer shows up in the restaurants create a tipping point that pose the servers to follow a certain behavior and shows up a begging attitude. Servers admit that they try to avoid being assigned to tables occupied by members of groups that are stereotyped as bad tippers, and that they are less likely or motivated to provide them with good service. Types of customer cases that servers try to avoid;*

Figure 2

### Triangular structure of tipping stakeholders



Source: The researchers

<i>Number of customers at the table:</i>	More than 4
<i>The customers' sex number:</i>	Middle aged male groups – men more than women
<i>Number of dishes ordered:</i>	More than 2
<i>The customer ethnicity:</i>	Hispanic & Black Customers
<i>The meal duration:</i>	Equal or less 45 minutes
<i>The meal time:</i>	Daytime

tices also do not establish the notion of work team, as tipping promotes jealousy among servers, according to Willen (2015), tipping is influenced by prejudice. Studies have shown that female servers get tip more than males, that pretty women make more than other women, and that whites make more than blacks. (Willen, 2015).

Here, opponents' voice that's why I'm proposing that we abolish tipping. Just get rid of it entirely. Here are some reasons to ban the begging bowls (tipping):

Tipping systems believe that it increases status and power differences between guest and server, while further weakening the social nature of the server/customer relationship. It also makes the service quality chaotic topic because it depends to a large extent on the friendliness of the worker who seeks to get a good tip. Furthermore, tipping weakens the service worker's commitment to an organization, which promotes self-serving behaviors in the workplace (Lynn et al., 1993). Another reason contributes significantly in weakening the servers' commitment is the ongoing highly competitive working environment, in which servers are required to strive to get good amount of tipping in order to compensate their low wages, tipping prac-

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