



How motivations for tipping vary with occupational differences in descriptive tipping norms



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ABSTRACT

The current study attempts to replicate a previous study in this journal reporting that the effects of tipping motives varied across more and less frequently tipped occupations. Results support most, but not all, of the original findings using different measures and more control variables than those used in the original study. Specific findings include the following: (i) future-service motives are positively related to likelihood of tipping only rarely tipped occupations, (ii) social-esteem motives are negatively related to the likelihood of tipping rarely and occasionally (but not often) tipped occupations, (iii) duty motives are positively related to likelihood of tipping only often tipped occupations, (iv) reciprocity motives are positively related to likelihood of tipping only occasionally and often (but not rarely) tipped occupations, and (v) altruism motives are positively related to likelihood of tipping all occupations, but especially occasionally tipped ones.

1. Introduction

Consumers around the world often leave gifts of money (aka, tips) to service workers who have served them. Though the frequency of tipping and typical tip amounts vary across service occupations, those receiving at least occasional tips include airport porters, appliance delivery men, baristas, bartenders, casino dealers, doormen, golf caddies, hairstylists, hotel maids, parking valets, pizza delivery drivers, taxicab drivers, tour guides, and waiters/waitresses (Star, 1988). Statistics on the total amount tipped across service professions around the world do not exist, but estimates place the amount tipped to food service workers in the United States alone at over \$45 billion a year (Azar, 2011).

In addition to being pervasive and economically important, tipping is a complex and theoretically rich behavior that intrigues economists because it is an unnecessary, and therefore, irrational payment (Azar, 2007; Lynn, 2006). Thus, one frequently studied question about tipping is: What motivates this behavior? Scholars have identified numerous potential goals or motives for tipping, but five stand out – (1) to help service workers, (2) to gain or keep good (or preferential) service in the future, (3) to gain or keep the esteem (approval, liking and admiration) of others, (4) to reward good service, and (5) to fulfill a social duty or obligation (see Azar, 2005, 2008, 2010; Becker et al., 2012; Lynn, 2009, 2015a,b; Saunders and Lynn, 2010; Whalen et al., 2014). Researchers have found substantial support for the effects of these motives on tipping (see Lynn, 2015a, for a review) and have begun to study the generalizability of those effects across situations (Becker et al., 2012), occupations (Lynn, 2015b), and cultures (Azar, 2010).

In one such study published in this journal, Lynn (2016a) asked a diverse U.S. sample about their likelihood of tipping 21 service providers

and their motives/reasons for tipping restaurant waiters/waitresses. He used the mean of the tipping-likelihood measure to reflect descriptive tipping norms for that occupation in analyses using occupation as the unit of analysis. He also used those means to classify the occupations as rarely, occasionally and frequently tipped and then created indices of tipping likelihood for each category of occupations, which he used as dependent variables in repeated measures analyses at the individual-level. Predictor variables were obtained from the self-reported tipping motives. Lynn found four factors underlying those motives and created indices of each – with five items reflecting social-esteem/future-service motives, one item reflecting reciprocity motives, two items reflecting duty motives, and two items reflecting altruistic motives.

Lynn's (2016a) analyses of these data indicated that:

- (i) tipping likelihood increased with individual differences in social-esteem and future-service motives for rarely and occasionally tipped occupations, but not for frequently tipped occupations - such that the occupation-level impact of these motives decreased at a marginally increasing rate with occupational tipping likelihood,
- (ii) tipping likelihood increased with individual differences in duty motives for frequently tipped occupations, but not for rarely or occasionally tipped occupations - such that the occupation-level impact of this motive increased at a linear rate with occupational tipping likelihood,
- (iii) tipping likelihood increased with individual differences in altruistic motives for all occupations, but most strongly for occasionally tipped occupations - such that the occupation-level impact of this motive increased at a marginally increasing rate with occupational tipping likelihood, and

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2018.09.003>

Received 16 June 2018; Received in revised form 8 September 2018; Accepted 9 September 2018

Available online 11 September 2018

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(iv) tipping likelihood decreased with individual differences in reciprocity motives for rarely tipped occupations, but not for occasionally or frequently tipped occupations - such that the occupation-level impact of this motive increased at a linear rate with occupational tipping likelihood.

Lynn's (2016a) findings that the motives underlying tipping varied with occupational tipping norms have important implications about the validity of self-reported tipping motives, the theoretical boundary conditions of those motives' effects, the processes underlying the development and spread of tipping norms, and the most effective strategies for increasing tips as discussed in the study article. However, Lynn's findings stand alone, may be specific to the measures he used, and may be confounded by other individual and occupational differences. Accordingly, the current study attempts to replicate those findings using alternative measures and more control variables as explained below.

2. Methodological refinements

2.1. Alternative measures

This study attempts to conceptually replicate Lynn's (2016a) findings using alternative measures of both descriptive tipping norms and individual differences in tipping motives. First, Lynn measured occupational differences in descriptive tipping norms with the mean self-reported likelihood of tipping for each of the occupations. The current study uses mean ratings of how many others tip each occupation instead. Occupational differences in average ratings of own and others likelihood of tipping are highly correlated ($r = 0.97$, see footnote 3 in Lynn, 2016b), so this change is unlikely to affect the results, but the ratings used here are a more direct measure of perceived descriptive norms. Second, Lynn measured individual differences in the motives for tipping a specific occupation – restaurant waiters and waitresses. The current study uses ratings of motives for tipping “across a variety of service situations” instead. This change makes the contextual scope of the motivation measures more consistent with that of the behavioral tipping measures.

2.2. Individual-level confound and control

This study also measures and controls for individual differences in response style that might have confounded Lynn's (2016a) results. Lynn had subjects rate the likelihood of tipping a variety of different occupations and their agreement with a variety of different tipping motivation statements. This leaves the relationships of tipping likelihood with various tipping motives open to confounding by a form of measurement bias called “standard deviation (SD) response-style.” SD response-style is an individual difference in the tendency to disperse vs. cluster ratings of multiple stimuli (Greenleaf, 1992a). Individual differences in this response style have many potential causes – including differences in (i) time and care devoted to the survey (Krosnik, 1991), (ii) the tendency to use the mid-points vs end-points of scales (Greenleaf, 1992b), and (iii) various cognitive styles such as perceptual leveling vs sharpening, complex vs simple conceptual articulation, and abstract vs concrete conceptual complexity (see Kozhevnikov, 2007).

For ratings that are roughly normally distributed, individual differences in SD response-style will systematically bias ratings of stimuli that are moderately to strongly different from the average of the rated stimulus set by pulling the ratings in toward the average among those who cluster ratings and by pushing them further away from the average among those who disperse ratings. However, ratings of stimuli at or near the average of the rated stimulus set will be less consistently biased because those who cluster ratings will leave them bunched at the average and those who disperse ratings will push some above and others below the average with the direction of bias for a particular near-average stimulus varying across respondents.

In Lynn's (2016a) study, this response style could have positively biased the correlations of less (more) strongly endorsed motivations for tipping with the likelihood of tipping less (more) frequently tipped occupations and negatively biased the correlations of less (more) strongly endorsed motivations for tipping with the likelihood of tipping more (less) frequently tipped occupations. This differential bias may explain some of the occupation differences in tipping motive effects found by Lynn (2016a). For example, it may have strengthened/created the positive effect of social-esteem and future-service motives (which probably had below average endorsement – see Lynn, 2009, 2015b) on tipping of rarely tipped occupations while weakening/eliminating the effect of these motives on tipping of frequently tipped occupations. Accordingly, SD response style was measured and controlled for in the main analyses of this study.

2.3. Occupation-level confounds and controls

Finally, this study tests and controls for the effects of several occupational characteristics that may have confounded Lynn's (2016a) results. Lynn's usage of mean occupational likelihood of being tipped to operationalize descriptive tipping norms assumed that there were no other systematic differences between rarely, occasionally and frequently tipped occupations. However, in a different study, Lynn (2016b) found that occupational differences in the likelihood of being tipped were reliably and, in some cases, strongly related to numerous characteristics of the occupations. For example, he found that people in the U.S. are more likely to tip occupations whose services they use frequently, whose service quality customers can monitor and evaluate more easily than can managers, whose income, skill, and needed judgment (i.e., occupational status) were low, and whose workers were less happy than their customers at the time of service delivery. Given these later findings, it is unclear if the occupational differences in the effects of various tipping motives reported by Lynn (2016a) are due to occupational differences in tipping likelihood as Lynn (2016a) suggests or to occupational differences in frequency of use, customer monitoring advantage, status, or other characteristics. Fortunately, Lynn (2016b) provided scores on these and many other occupational characteristics for all of the 21 occupations in the current study. Those measures were used to test and control for potential confounds of descriptive tipping norms (i.e., tipping likelihood) in the analyses of the current study.

3. Method

As part of a larger, multi-study, online survey, participants were asked to: (i) indicate how often they tipped various service providers when those workers provide good service, (ii) indicate how many other people tip various service providers when those workers provide good service, and (iii) agree or disagree with statements reflecting motives for, and attitudes toward, tipping. The sample and questions are described in more detail below.

3.1. Sample

Six-hundred twenty-five Amazon.com Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers completed an online survey about tipping in exchange for a small monetary payment. However, a few respondents failed to answer every question, so sample sizes vary slightly across the analyses reported below. [Note: Analysis of the data began only after all responses were obtained; sample size was not determined post-hoc.] Respondents were not representative of the U.S. population, but were geo-demographically diverse. Based on end-of-survey geodemographic questions, they came from 50 states/territories of the United States and their ages ranged from 19 to 74 with a mean of 39 years and a standard deviation of 12.5 years. Seventy-seven percent were white, 46 percent were male, 57 percent had a four-year-college, graduate, or professional degree, 20

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