

Drivers of tipping behavior in the U.S. foodservice industry: A bibliometric analysis and scoping review

Michael Yu ^{1*}, Hwansuk Chris Choi ², Lena Jingen Liang ³, and Sungsoo Kim ⁴

^{1*} Correspondence: School of Hospitality, Food and Tourism Management, University of Guelph, Canada; myu05@uoguelph.ca

² University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada

³ University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, Canada

⁴ Singapore Institute of Technology, Singapore

Abstract: This study comprehensively analyzed customer tipping behavior in foodservice contexts over the past twenty years (2003-2023) in the United States. Utilizing a scoping review approach, the research utilized bibliometric analysis and qualitative synthesis to explore trends and gaps in the literature. Specifically, it mapped the research domain and extracted key themes by statistically examining academic publications. The findings, derived from a refined dataset of 103 articles, revealed the interdisciplinary nature of tipping research, primarily explored by social psychologists and economists. Three main research themes emerged: social psychology and management, economics, and socio-cultural, each offering unique insights into customer tipping behavior. This study not only elucidates the current understanding of tipping practices but also highlights significant research gaps, guiding future scholarly inquiries in this evolving field.

Keywords: Tipping behavior, restaurant industry, social norm, diversity, fairness, consumer behavior

1. Introduction

Originally a custom practiced by European nobility, wealthy Americans vacationing in Europe introduced tipping to the U.S. in the 1800s (Segrave, 1998). Despite initial criticism for perpetuating inequality and encouraging bribery, the practice gradually gained widespread acceptance. Today, tipping has become a normative behavior in U.S. restaurants, where customers offer voluntary payments, known as tips, to service employees. These tips usually represent a modest portion of the overall bill, varying from 10% to 20% (Lynn, 2006). Collectively, tips generated between \$35 to \$60 billion annually for full-service restaurants in the U.S. (Maze, 2023). This substantial sum highlights tipping's critical role in the U.S. foodservice industry as a significant source of income for service employees, a factor influencing the attractiveness and retention of service occupations (Lynn et al., 2011), and a mechanism for business owners to offset wages and maintain lower menu prices to attract customers (Lynn & Brewster, 2018).

However, the underlying rationale for why customers tip is contentious, as its relationship with service quality or future service expectations is tenuous (Azar, 2020). Scholars argue that psychological and social factors more strongly influence tipping behavior within the context of the tipping social norm. The long-standing perpetuation of this discretionary norm has led to valid criticisms of the practice for its inherent unfairness. For instance, tipping can encourage customer and employee discrimination. Physically attractive servers earn more than their less attractive counterparts (e.g., Parret, 2015), and ethnicity influences both the tips that customers leave (e.g., Lynn & Brewster, 2015) and the level of service employees provide (e.g., Lynn et al., 2012).

Despite these concerns, tipping in the U.S. has seen an expansion, often referred to as "tipflation" in the media. This growth has occurred in the rising customary tipping rates, the broadening of contexts where tips are solicited, and the move towards cashless transactions through mobile point-of-sale technology, such as tablets, to prompt customers for tips. Driving factors include shifting economic conditions, increased adoption of digital payment platforms and apps (Warren & Hanson, 2023), and strengthening tipping norms during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lynn, 2023). This expansion has intensified the clash between customer expectations and industry standards, with media reports increasingly describing tipping as less of a discretionary act and more of an expected obligation (e.g., Coy, 2023).

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Prior research has examined specific dimensions of tipping, such as customer motivations (Lynn, 2015), social norms (Lynn, 2021), and economic implications (Azar, 2020), but no comprehensive synthesis that integrates bibliometric analysis of this fragmented knowledge currently exists. This study addresses this gap by systematically mapping and analyzing research themes and trends on customer tipping behavior in U.S. foodservice settings over the past two decades (2003-2023). Recognizing the global diversity of tipping customs (Lynn & Starbuck, 2015) and the unique influence of American policies such as the tipped minimum federal wage (Ross & Welsh, 2019), this study focuses on the American context.

The study employed a scoping review approach, which is particularly suitable for exploring broad, complex, and evolving topics such as tipping behavior in U.S. restaurants (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Unlike systematic reviews that focus on narrowly defined research questions, scoping reviews provide a structured yet flexible method to map the breadth and depth of existing literature, identifying key themes, knowledge gaps, and emerging trends. This approach is especially valuable given the fragmented nature of tipping research, which spans disciplines such as psychology, economics, and hospitality studies. Scoping reviews also allow for more inclusive evidence synthesis, facilitating the identification of patterns across diverse studies while offering a foundation for future, more targeted reviews (Tricco et al., 2018). By incorporating bibliometric analysis alongside the scoping review, this study maps the literature quantitatively while qualitatively synthesizing findings, offering both structure and insight to examine trends, gaps, and key drivers of tipping behavior.

For this study, “tipping behavior” is defined as the voluntary act of customers providing monetary gratuities to service employees in U.S. restaurant settings. This behavior encompasses customer motivations, social norms, contextual influences that drive tipping decisions, and economic and psychological factors that shape the practice.

The paper's structure is organized to guide the reader through the research process. Following the introduction, the methodology section elaborates on the two-step scoping review approach, integrating bibliometric analysis and qualitative synthesis. The bibliometric analysis was conducted using the techniques Aria and Cuccurullo (2017) recommended, while the synthesis is aligned with Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework. The paper adheres to the PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018) for systematic reporting, as illustrated in the PRISMA flowchart (Figure 1).

In short, this study provides a comprehensive and multifaceted view of U.S. foodservice customer tipping behavior over the past two decades. By employing a combination of bibliometric analysis and qualitative synthesis, it unveils critical themes, research gaps, and emerging trends in this domain. The findings offer valuable insights for future studies, contributing significantly to the understanding and optimization of tipping practices within the U.S. foodservice industry.

2. Methodology

A two-step scoping review approach integrating bibliometric analysis and qualitative synthesis was used to explore the drivers of customer tipping behavior in U.S. foodservices over 20 years. The bibliometric analysis used techniques recommended by Aria and Cuccurullo (2017), while the synthesis followed the framework established by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses – Scoping Review Extension (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018), the review process is outlined in Figure 1.

The study adopted a scoping review approach, known for its broader and more flexible methodology than systematic reviews (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This approach is particularly effective in quickly capturing the overall state of research in a field and pinpointing areas that have not been adequately addressed. The methodology involves two pivotal steps. First, bibliometric

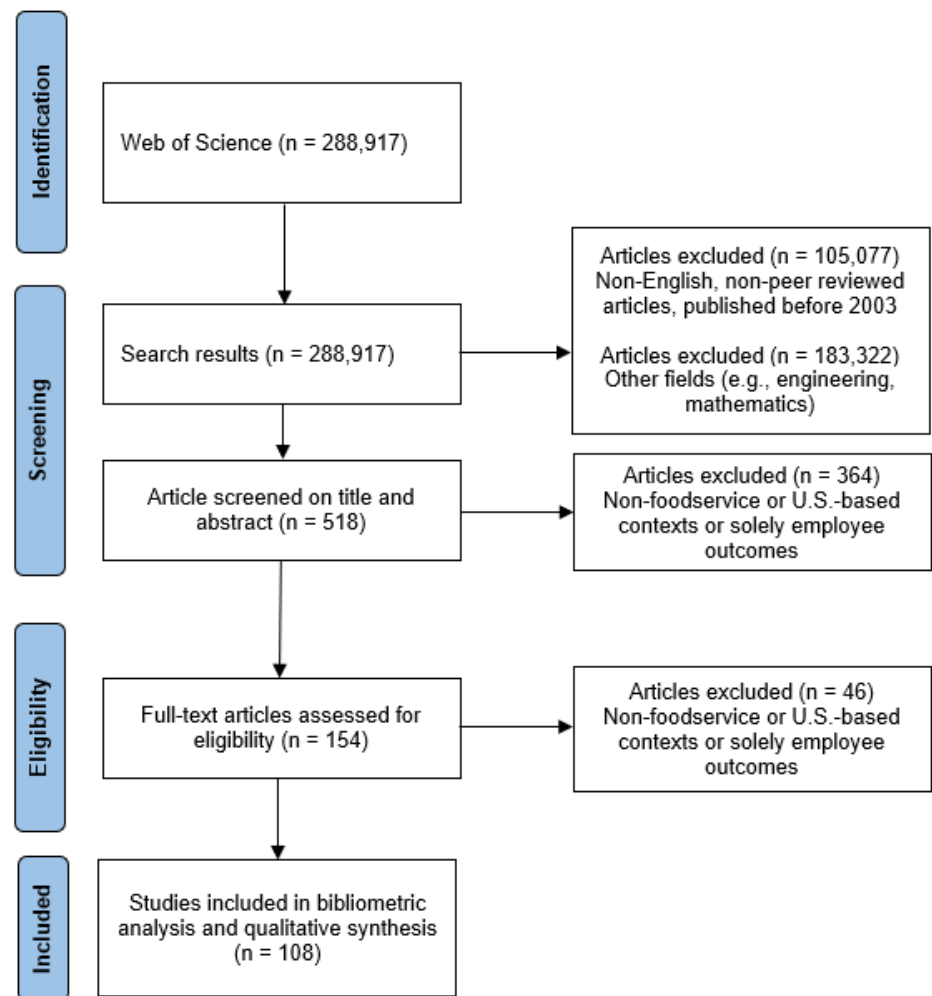


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart

analysis maps the domain and identifies key research themes through statistical tools (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This step is crucial for discerning trends and central topics in the vast expanse of existing literature. Next, a qualitative synthesis of the articles within these themes offers a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the subject matter. This two-pronged approach, blending quantitative and qualitative methods, ensures a comprehensive yet efficient analysis of the research landscape.

Bibliometric analysis served as the study's quantitative foundation, employing the statistical examination of academic publications and their citations to unravel the evolution and progression of the study area. This method, noted for its objective and quantitative robustness, aids in identifying the status, trending topics, and potential future research directions within the field. It includes a descriptive performance analysis of research constituents and science mapping, visualizing the domain's patterns and relationships. Popular science mapping techniques such as co-word analysis and citation analysis were employed to gauge document content through similarity measures of keywords and citation counts. This study utilized citation analysis and bibliographic clustering by coupling with documents as the analysis unit to effectively map current research fronts and thematic similarities (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021).

In the qualitative synthesis stage, the study undertakes an in-depth analysis of the key research themes identified from the bibliometric analysis. Two researchers independently screened the top documents in each thematic cluster to ensure thematic validity based on their localized citation scores. This involved data charting to record essential information such as study and publication

year, publication source, local citation scores, purpose, measures, and key findings (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This meticulous process synthesized the literature on tipping behavior, mapping out the significant contributions and insights in the field.

2.1 Bibliometric analysis

Bibliometrics, a statistical examination of academic publications and their citations, is used to understand the evolution and progression of a study area, revealing patterns and the intellectual structure of a knowledge domain (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This method, noted for its objective quantitative strength, helps identify the status, trending topics, and future research directions within a field. It typically consists of a descriptive performance analysis of research constituents (i.e., authors, institutions, journals) and science mapping, which extracts networks of important elements (e.g., shared references or keywords) to visualize patterns and relationships within the domain (Donthu et al., 2021). Popular science mapping techniques include co-word analysis, which evaluates the content of documents through similarity measures of keywords, and citation analysis, which achieves this indirectly by employing citation counts as indicators of similarity among documents, authors, and journals (Aria & Curccurullo, 2017).

This study utilized citation analysis, specifically bibliographic clustering by coupling, with documents as the analysis unit. This method, effective for mapping current research fronts (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), assumes that publications cited together share thematic similarities, aiding in thematic development analysis (Donthu et al., 2021). Conversely, co-word analysis was discounted due to the unreliability of author keywords and KeyWords Plus data, with a significant portion of documents lacking descriptive keywords and others inaccurately labeled by WoS's algorithm.

2.2 Qualitative synthesis

In the second stage, the major research themes were synthesized based on the documents in those research themes identified from the bibliometric analysis. To ensure thematic validity, two researchers independently screened the top five documents in each thematic cluster based on their localized citation scores, which reflect their influence within the cluster (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Data charting was conducted to record the following information: study and publication year, publication source, local citation scores, purpose, measures, and important findings (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This information was synthesized to map the body of literature on the topic. Data charts of the five most influential documents in each theme based on citation scores are presented in Appendices 1 to 6.

2.3 Literature search strategy

2.3.1 Protocol

The search was conducted on the Web of Science (WoS) database in September 2023. Due to time and practicality, a single database was used (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Recognized for its high-quality social science research data, the WoS offers substantial content overlap with Scopus but with fewer duplicate citations, making it a more efficient option without sacrificing data quality (van Eck & Waltman, 2017).

2.3.2 Query

The query was limited to tipping-related keywords and synonyms such as: "tip*" OR "tipping" OR "gratuity" OR "gratuities" OR "tipping behavior*" OR "tipping behaviour*".

2.3.3 Collection

The initial query yielded 288,917 documents. Refinement to English-language, peer-reviewed articles from 2003 to 2023 reduced the number of documents to 183,840. Further application of WoS's categorical and citation topic filters to exclude unrelated fields (e.g., engineering and

mathematics) resulted in 518 relevant documents. To ensure accuracy, five documents were randomly selected and assessed for relevance to the research questions after applying each filter.

2.3.4 Eligibility Criteria

Two researchers independently conducted a manual screening of the remaining collection, focusing on the titles and abstracts (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). A third researcher reviewed each step of this process to ensure consistency and resolve any discrepancies.

The inclusion criteria for the study were: a) documents must examine customer tipping behavior in foodservice settings, such as restaurants or cafes; b) focus on U.S. populations, including cross-cultural or multi-national studies, provided the U.S. was a part of the investigation; c) conceptual and theoretical papers were accepted if they pertained to U.S. foodservice consumers or integrated prior literature on U.S.-based consumer tipping behavior.

Documents focusing solely on employee outcomes or studies conducted on non-U.S. populations were excluded. When a sample's cultural background was unclear, it was inferred using indicators such as the publication outlet's geographical focus, citations of U.S.-based tipping literature, authors' affiliations, references to U.S. practices or regulations, the recruiting platform's affiliation, and other U.S.-specific references. This procedure resulted in 154 documents.

For the final screening phase, the same criteria were applied to the full texts, focusing on cultural context, often omitted in titles and abstracts. This rigorous process yielded a final dataset of 108 documents. These were converted to plain text and imported into the Biblioshiny application for further analysis.

2.3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved two stages: an initial bibliometric analysis and a qualitative synthesis. The bibliometric analysis was conducted using open-source R software, specifically the Bibliometrix R library and Biblioshiny (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). Descriptive analysis and bibliometric indicators highlighted annual scientific production, key sources, and authors. Main research themes were identified through bibliographic coupling and clustering with documents as the unit of analysis, followed by a qualitative synthesis of the documents within these themes, aligning with methodologies in similar studies (e.g., Pournader et al., 2020).

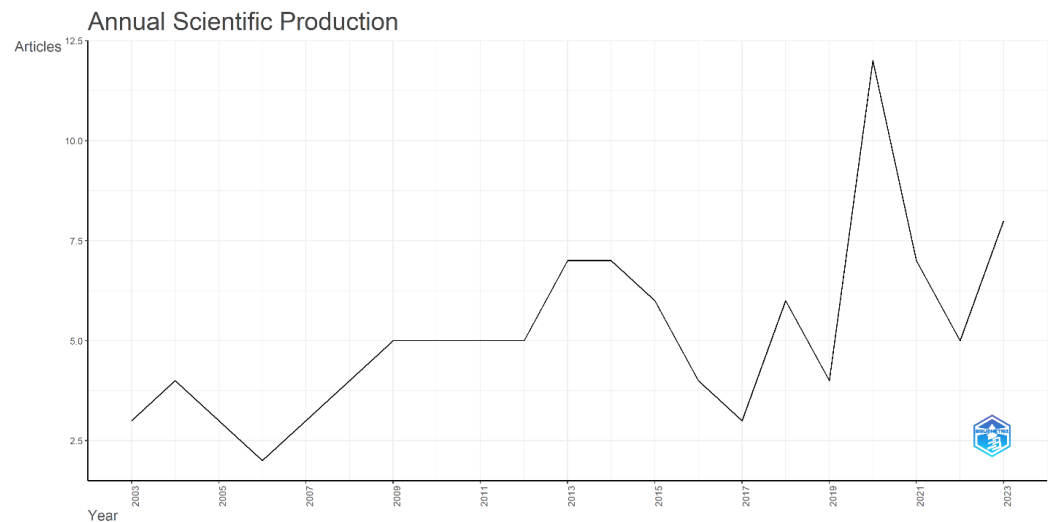
3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Bibliometrics: Performance Analysis

The dataset comprised 108 documents from 39 sources authored by 147 researchers, including ten single-authored publications. Table 1 presents the main information of the dataset. The annual number of publications (Figure 2) was 5.40 articles per year, exhibiting an annual growth rate of 5.03%. Publication activity peaked between 2011 and 2014 and again from 2019 onwards. The former peak may be attributed to several factors: the emergence of new customer-facing technologies such as tableside credit card processing (Doran, 2010), increased focus on consumer spending habits following the 2008 economic recovery, state-level legislative discussions regarding the tipped minimum wage and tip credit systems (Allegretto & Cooper, 2014), and the introduction of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, which raised labor costs for mid to large-sized restaurants and franchises. The latter peak may be due to continued technological evolution through mobile payment apps and contactless payments (Warren et al., 2023) and shifts in dining practices and habits during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Majid et al., 2021), which likely prompted renewed academic interest in understanding how these changes were reflected in tipping behaviors.

Table 1. Primary information about data

Description	Results
Timespan	2003:2023
Sources	39
Documents	108
Annual Growth Rate %	5.03
Document Average Age	9.43
Average citations per doc	18.56
References	2887
<i>Document Contents</i>	
Keywords Plus (ID)	271
Author's Keywords (DE)	225
<i>Authors</i>	
Authors	147
Authors of single-authored docs	10
<i>Author Collaboration</i>	
Single-authored docs	39
Co-Authors per Doc	2.09
<i>Document Types</i>	
Article	106
Review	2

**Figure 2.** Annual scientific production of the collection (*Source: Biblioshiny*)

The most impactful publication sources based on the number of articles published (Figure 3) and the number of local citations (Figure 4) included the Journal of Applied Social Psychology (17 documents, 379 local citations), International Journal of Hospitality Management (15 documents, 165 local citations) and Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics (8 documents, 124 local citations). Local citations refer to instances where both the citing and cited documents are within the collected dataset.

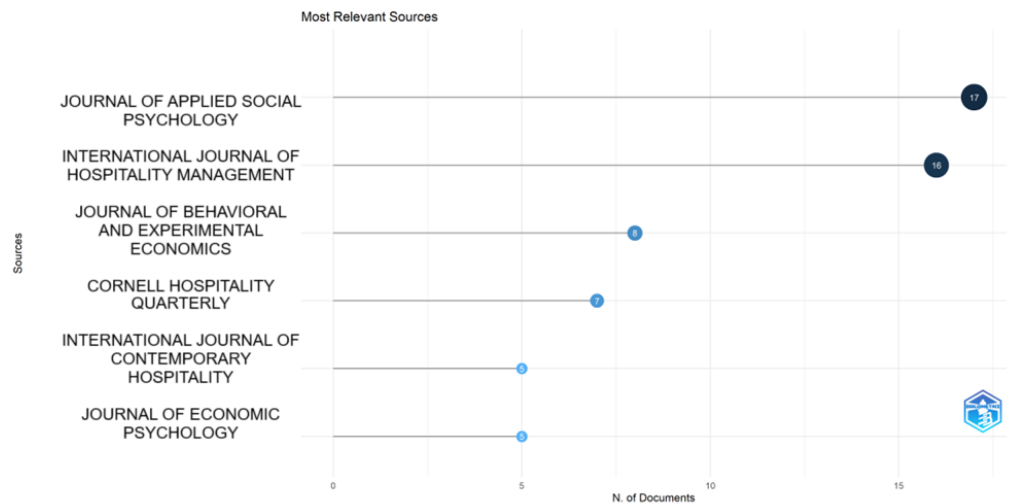


Figure 3. Most relevant sources (Source: Biblioshiny)

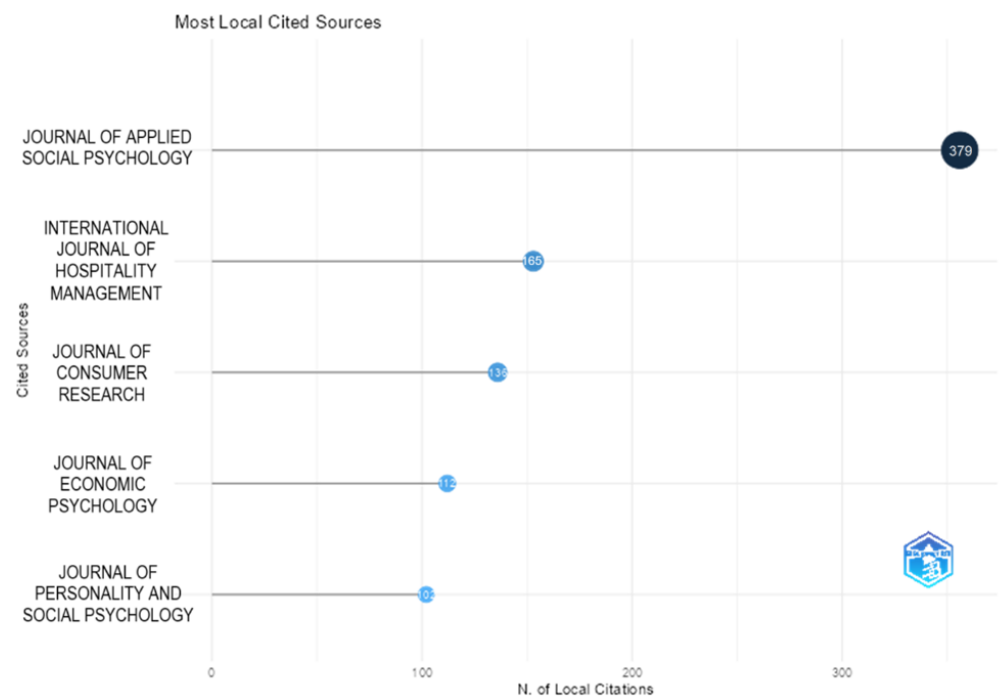


Figure 4. Most locally cited sources (Source: Biblioshiny)

Figure 5 displays the publication summary by journal, highlighting research activity trends. The Journal of Applied Social Psychology was the predominant source until 2013. Post-2013, the publication source diversified, with a notable increase from the management field, especially from the International Journal of Hospitality Management. The publication rate from economic sources has been consistently steady, spread across various journals, with the Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics emerging as the most significant contributor and showing a steady increase in publications on the topic.

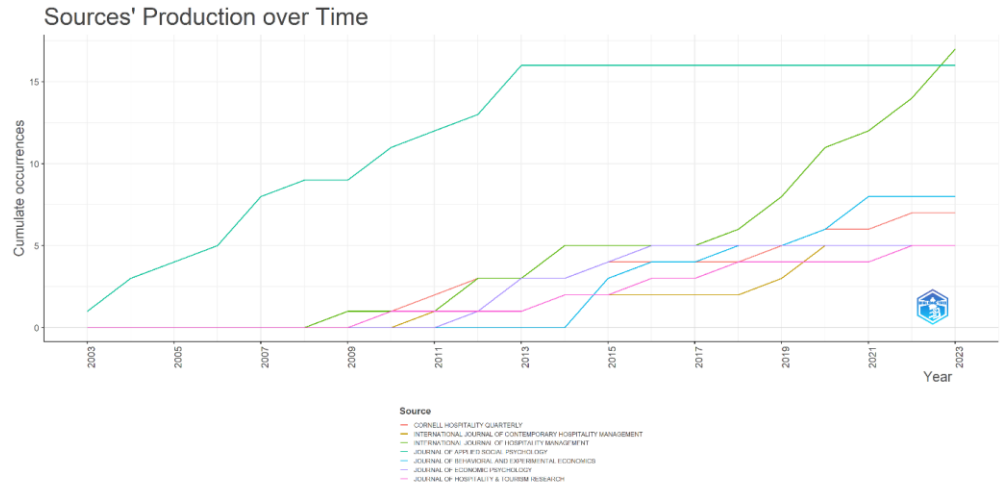


Figure 5. Publication summary by journal (*Source: Biblioshiny*)

Based on their number of publications (Figure 6) and local H-index scores (Figure 7), Michael Lynn (41 articles, H-index: 17) was the most prolific and impactful author on tipping within the analyzed period, followed by Azar Ohar (10 articles, H-index: 9). Other notable authors include Zachary Brewster (8 articles, H-index: 6), John Seiter (8 articles, H-index: 6), and Harry Wager (5, H-index: 4). The local author's H-index measures an author's impact within the collected dataset and refers to how many articles an author has published within the dataset that have been locally cited at least that same number of times (Donthu et al., 2021).

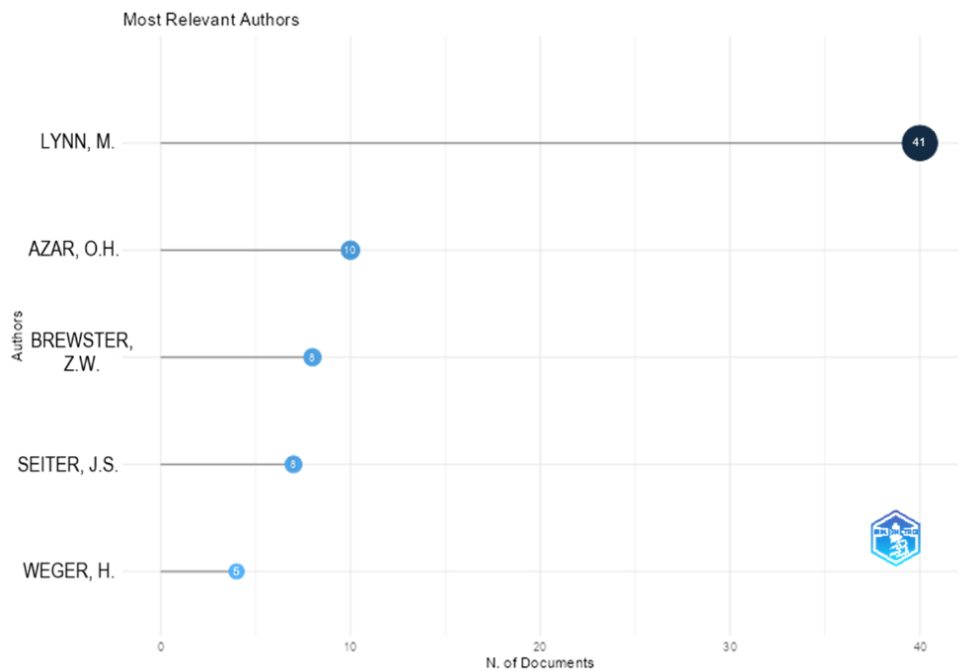


Figure 6. Most relevant authors by publications (*Source: Biblioshiny*)

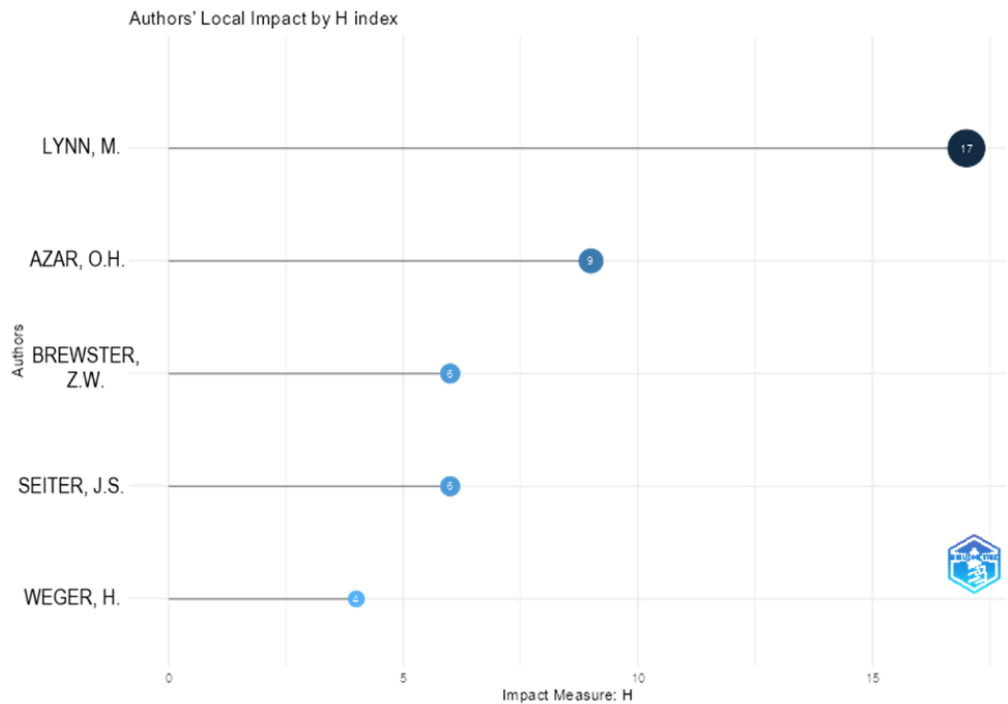


Figure 7. Author's local H-Index (Source: Biblioshiny)

3.2 Science Mapping: Bibliographic Coupling and Qualitative Synthesis

Science mapping was performed through bibliometric clustering by coupling, using documents as the unit of analysis. Bibliometric clustering is done by coupling similar documents based on shared references, indicating a thematic link between them (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The analysis spanned two time periods, between 2003-2013 and 2014-2023, to accommodate the shift in publication activity, particularly as performance analysis highlighted that the previously most impactful journal, the Journal of Applied Social Psychology, ceased publication in 2013.

The results were merged into a single representation because the research focus remained relatively unchanged between the two time periods (Figure 8). In Figure 8, the impact is the degree of influence a thematic cluster has on the domain measured by citation count. At the same time, centrality represents the importance of the theme measured by shared references (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

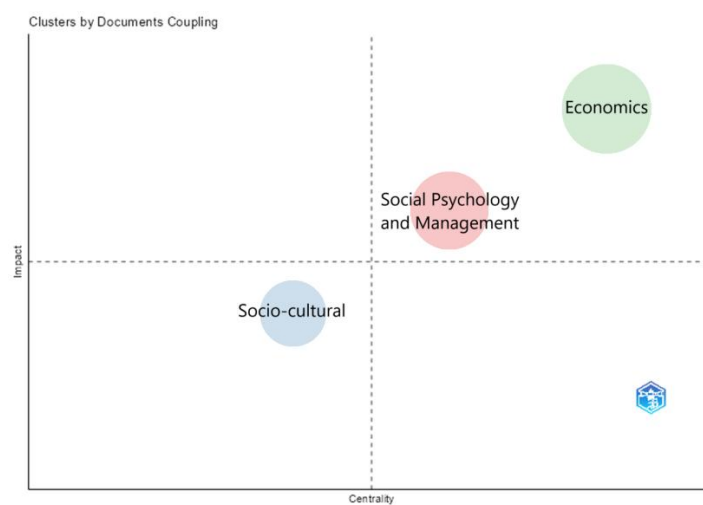


Figure 8. Thematic clusters by document coupling (2003-2023) (Source: Modified from Biblioshiny)

Three primary research themes emerged: (1) social psychology and management, (2) economics, and (3) socio-cultural. A qualitative synthesis of the documents within each thematic cluster identified several subtopics, as described below.

3.3 Social psychology and management

Science mapping was performed through bibliometric clustering by coupling, using documents as the unit of analysis. Bibliometric clustering is done by coupling similar documents based on shared references, indicating a thematic link between them (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The analysis spanned two time periods, between 2003-2013 and 2014-2023, to accommodate the shift in publication activity, particularly as performance analysis highlighted that the previously most impactful journal, the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, ceased publication in 2013.

3.3.1 Consumer characteristics

Lynn and his colleagues contributed significantly to examining the effect of consumer characteristics, particularly the impact of customers' socio-demographic characteristics and their perceptions of servers on tipping amounts or rates. For example, Lynn (2006) identified a stereotypical tipping rate of 15-20% of the total bill consistently observed across variables like ethnicity, age, education, wealth, and region. Notably, tipping behaviors were commonly observed among Caucasian, middle-aged, well-educated, and wealthy consumers living in metropolitan areas. Another study by Lynn et al. (2008) revealed how subjective prejudice against a server's ethnicity can affect tipping amounts. Furthermore, Whaley, Douglas, and Neil (2014) developed a multi-dimensional scale for customer tipping motivations incorporating service quality, social norms, and restaurant quality (cleanliness and food quality).

3.3.2 Servers and businesses

A large area of research focused on the strategies servers and businesses employed to increase customer tipping amounts. These strategies leveraged persuasion and integration principles by appealing to consumers' expectations and emotions.

For server strategies, researchers examined the influence of positive verbal and non-verbal communication behavior on tipping amount. In general, perceived sincerity is critical, as servers who ingratiate are less likable if perceived as having ulterior motives. For example, complimenting customers on their menu choices effectively increased tips for smaller parties but not for larger groups (Seiter & Weger, 2010). Customers also tipped more when addressed by their first name (Seiter & Weger, 2013). Servers who introduced themselves, repeated customers' orders, upsold, and told jokes and/or stories also tended to receive higher tips than those who did not practice these strategies (Lynn, 2009).

The same principle of perceived sincerity applied to non-verbal behaviors. Authentic smiles increased tips, especially in pre-existing service relationships (Bujsic et al., 2004). However, writing messages on receipts yielded different effects depending on the message contents. Drawing a smiley face or writing thank you reduced tips, especially if service failed to meet expectations (Kinard & Kinard, 2013). As these gestures are standard industry practices, customers may view them as superficial or insincere, especially when they do not align with their overall service experience. In contrast, writing patriotic messages increased tipping amounts (Seiter & Grass, 2005). Patriotic messages may enhance the perception of a shared identity or common ground between servers and customers. Leveraging the norm of reciprocity was also an effective strategy to increase tips, such as boxing leftovers (Seiter & Weger, 2018) or leaving small gifts like candies or souvenirs (Frank, 2020).

Strategies for businesses included manipulating the servicescape, like using gold-colored décor, which enhances the perception of perceived status (Lee et al., 2018). Displaying tip

suggestions on receipts can also increase tips (Seiter et al., 2011). However, while customers may tip more, their presence may also lower customer satisfaction (Fan et al., 2022).

3.3.3 Contextual factors

The last stream of research on this theme examined contextual factors outside the restaurants and their employees' control. For instance, the amount of sun and the weather minimally impacted tipping (Flynn & Greenberg, 2012). However, low tippers tipped more than usual during Christmas, and high tippers tipped significantly more (Greenberg, 2014). In times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers were motivated to support small businesses by leaving higher tips for service employees (Majid et al., 2021). Lastly, consumers tended to calculate tips by including sales tax, meaning that tipping rates were significantly influenced by the sales tax rate of their respective states (Ali et al., 2023).

3.4 Economics

Economics was the most significant research theme with the highest levels of centrality and impact. This research theme adopts an interdisciplinary approach, examining tipping as a social norm and integrating insights from psychology, behavioral economics, and social psychology. This theme had several subtopics revolving around the economic explanation for why people tip and the study of pro-social social norms, such as tipping. These include the psychological and social motivations for tipping, the social norm, and the economic utility of tipping motivations.

3.4.1 Psychological and social motivations for tipping

It is generally accepted that people tip because they follow a social norm, with variations depending on individual psychological and social motivations (Azar, 2020). Research from an economic perspective suggests that tipping offers consumers psychological utility, such as a sense of gratification, alongside economic benefits like better service or expectations of improved future service.

Psychological motivations include gaining and avoiding the loss of self-esteem, wanting to feel altruistic, expressing gratitude and rewarding good service, helping the service worker, and desire for reciprocity. In contrast, social motivations include status-seeking, avoidance of disappointment, wanting to appear generous or gain social approval, and fulfilling obligations of duty, i.e., conforming with internalized social norms (e.g., Becker et al., 2012). While research supports the strong influence of tipping norms (e.g., Conlin et al., 2003), when surveyed, consumers tend to report that they tipped more for intrinsic motivations rather than for social reasons (Azar, 2020). Further, personality traits were found to have a minor influence on tipping behavior. However, conscientiousness and openness had a modest effect, with those with high levels of this trait tending to be more likely to follow descriptive norms through the propensity to tip commonly tipped occupations (Lynn, 2021).

3.4.2 The social norm of tipping

Social norms are a significant subtopic in tipping research as the norm of tipping fascinates economists for several reasons. Tips have a significant economic impact, as millions of service workers in the U.S. rely on tips for a large portion of their income (Azar, 2020). Further, tipping challenges traditional economics theory, which assumes that consumers make decisions by logically evaluating all available options before choosing the one that provides the most self-benefit (Conlin et al., 2003). This notion suggests that it is irrational to tip because tipping follows service delivery, meaning the customer is giving away their money without direct or immediate returns. This is particularly puzzling in scenarios such as a single, solo restaurant visit by a non-local customer, where they gain no immediate reputational benefits, and it is improbable that they will return to be served by the same employee. Adding to this puzzle is that service quality had little

influence on tips. On average, customers rated service quality very high, and many customers tipped even when service is poor (Azar, 2009).

These seemingly irrational behaviors can be attributed to the social norm of tipping. Economic models of tipping factor adherence to social norms, as not following the norm may also lead to sanctions, like feelings of unfairness and embarrassment, outweighing the potential savings from not tipping (Azar, 2020). Accordingly, research on social norms is categorized based on social norms as an efficient economic mechanism, different occupations, and the economic utility of tipping.

3.4.3 Social norms for social welfare

Research in this sub-theme focused on whether the social norm of tipping improved social welfare. It aimed to address the market's failure to meet needs beyond the scope of economic transactions through the supplementation of ethical codes and customs. Social welfare is broadly viewed as the collective well-being and satisfaction of individual values (Azar, 2020).

Economists are generally supportive of tipping. Through comprehensive literature reviews of research on tipping, Azar (e.g., 2005; 2020) suggests that the positive psychological benefits of tipping are how the norm has survived. Historically, norms that are costly to follow and offer no benefits tend to disappear over time, meaning that tipping is not solely sustained by the internalized enforcement of the negative feelings associated with violating norms, as argued by some (e.g., Conlin et al., 2003). The historical prevalence of the tipping norm suggests that it benefits society in some manner, and people adhere to it for reasons other than to avoid social disapproval. There is a correlation between higher tipping practices and increased corruption rates across countries, especially where motivations for tipping are given in anticipation of improved future service rather than for rewarding good service (Torfason et al., 2013).

Tipping has been suggested to encourage better service for the customer, as the value provided surpasses the cost of effort from the server while avoiding the difficulties of enforcing formal service quality agreements (e.g., Azar, 2005). Tipping shifts the task of assessing employee performance to customers, addressing the service industry's difficulty in monitoring employees (Azar, 2020). Further, it enables businesses to adjust pricing, offering lower menu prices to attract a broader range of customers while relying on generous tippers to compensate for lower staff wages (Lynn & Brewster, 2018).

However, new technology may have implications for the norm. Warren and Hanson (2023) highlight the new and existing stakeholders impacted by introducing new technology, such as digital point-of-service systems and apps, which shift the act of tipping from post to pre-service provision. Particularly with the introduction of delivery apps, when customers rate service professionals before tipping, it can decrease the amount they tip, a trend that is lessened if customers consider the tip a rewarding benefit for the service professional and is mitigated when they are reminded of their pre-trip ratings (Chen et al., 2023). This subtheme highlights the mutually reinforcing relationship between social norms and economic principles.

Another area of research in this subtheme is on tipping policies, such as tip credits and tipping distribution systems. Under federal and state laws, employers can use a portion of servers' tips as a tip credit to fulfill minimum wage obligations, often resulting in servers receiving a wage below the standard minimum; the allowable tip credit amount varies by state, ranging from \$2.13 to \$7.25 per hour (US Labor Department, 2024). Lynn (2022) found that larger tip credits are linked to higher tipping rates, driven by customers' belief that servers earn below minimum wage and a desire to support their livelihood, reinforcing the altruistic significance of tipping. This serves as a warning against reducing or removing tip credits, as such actions could unintentionally decrease servers' overall income, countering the policy's purpose.

Research supports the traditional practice of voluntary tipping policies for tipping distribution systems. For businesses, consumers perceived restaurants employing voluntary tipping practices to be less expensive and fairer compared to other policies, though they had higher expectations for service (Lynn & Wang, 2013). Online customer ratings further supported this, as restaurants received lower ratings when tipping was replaced with mandatory service charges, especially at less expensive restaurants (Lynn & Brewster, 2018). In addition, consumers motivated by altruism or reciprocity strongly preferred direct tipping over tip-pooling systems, indicating that their willingness to tip is more focused on rewarding service workers they interact with. Arguments for tip-sharing are less compelling among these consumers, as their altruistic and reciprocal motivations for tipping are not as easily extended to staff members outside of their direct experience (Lynn & Ni, 2022). Disclosure by restaurants that they take ownership of tips leads to a decrease in tipping, negative perceptions of the restaurant, and lower customer return intentions, whereas mandatory tip pooling tends to increase tips without affecting customer attitudes or intentions to return and explaining that tip ownership by the restaurant is intended to ensure living wages for employees only partially mitigates these negative effects (Berry & Hoffman, 2023). These findings support the argument that tipping can enhance social welfare because it is perceived as directly supporting service workers and aligns with the customers' motivations and their perceived fairness of the tipping system.

3.4.4 Descriptive norms - Occupational differences in tipping

This subtopic studied the tipping descriptive norm, referring to patterns of behavior commonly observed and typically accepted within a society or group, by examining differences in tipping behavior and expectations for various occupations. In general, customers were inclined to tip more generously in situations where there is a more considerable income disparity between them and the workers and where they can form closer relationships, suggesting that tipping served as a means of providing psychological benefits to consumers through the act of reciprocation and expressing gratitude, thereby enhancing self-esteem (Azar, 2005). Lynn's extensive research indicated that the motivations behind tipping are heavily influenced by social norms, with people tipping more frequently and generously in roles that are less commonly tipped, driven by a mix of altruism and self-esteem (Lynn, 2016). The practice becomes more of a social obligation as tipping norms become entrenched, potentially diminishing the initial altruistic impulse as the cost of tipping to society grows (Lynn, 2016). Furthermore, roles perceived as lower in status or happiness, especially those involving personalized service, see higher tipping rates, as customers can directly evaluate the service (Lynn, 2018). Thus, tipping is not uniformly applied across service roles. Instead, it is shaped by the customer's perceptions and the relational depth they share with the service providers, which varies according to the nature of the occupation.

3.4.5 Service quality and tipping behavior

The tenuous relationship between tipping and perceived service quality is an extensive research area, given tipping's traditional role as a reward for high-quality service. Bodvarsson et al. (2003) discovered that a server's expectation of a tip can influence the level of service they provide, which can affect the actual tip amount, introducing a self-fulfilling aspect to tipping behavior. Azar (2009) investigated the tipping-service puzzle, finding that despite service quality having minimal impact on tipping amounts, customer service ratings can be high, suggesting that this may be due to factors like servers' intrinsic motivation and the potential social cost (e.g., customer complaints). Further expanding on these motivations, Azar (2009) argued that tipping is driven more by social and psychological factors (e.g., social norms, reward activity) than customers' strategic considerations for future service. Lynn et al. (2012) confirmed the tipping-service puzzle across different situations and customer demographics. However, it is somewhat stronger among older and more affluent patrons. Chi et al. (2011) emphasized the role of genuine emotional exchanges,

showing that servers who authentically express their feelings received higher tips than those who engage in superficial emotional displays, underscoring the value of authenticity in customer-server interactions. Overall, consumers are suggested to tip less for economic reasons, such as future-service considerations, and more due to individual social and psychological motivations influenced by the tipping social norm.

3.4.6 Socio-cultural

Socio-cultural was a niche theme with low impact and centrality. It primarily explored socio-cultural factors influencing tipping behavior, focusing on variables like race, gender, and ethnicity. Much of the research on this theme was led by Michael Lynn and Zachary Brewster, who concentrated on the differences in tipping behaviors among various racial and ethnic groups, particularly comparing minority groups with Caucasians. For example, it was found that Hispanics and African Americans, but not Asians, tipped less than Caucasians in restaurants when considering factors like bill size and self-rated service quality (e.g., Lynn, 2013). However, this disparity may be due to a lack of familiarity with the stereotypical 15% to 20% restaurant tipping norm, as showing awareness of this norm can significantly reduce these disparities (e.g., Lynn et al., 2012).

In the latter term, there was a shift towards issues of justice, prejudice, and discrimination of tipping practices. For example, both Caucasian and African American consumers tended to tip African-American servers less than their Caucasian counterparts, even when controlling for service quality, indicating racially discriminatory consequences (Brewster & Lynn, 2014).

Furthermore, tipping may be influenced by racial prejudices, which has discriminatory implications when considering the feedback loop where servers' expectations of tipping amounts influence the quality of service they provide, affecting the actual tips they receive (e.g., Bodvarsson et al., 2003). This suggests that if servers anticipate lower tips from certain groups, such as African American customers, based on previous experiences or societal stereotypes, they might consciously or unconsciously provide a lower level of service. This reduced service quality could result in smaller tips, reinforcing the servers' initial expectations and potentially perpetuating a cycle of discriminatory service and tipping behaviors. This dynamic can significantly influence the findings on racial disparities in tipping and service quality, highlighting the complex interplay between server expectations, service delivery, and customer tipping behavior.

Several studies revealed evidence supporting this negative feedback loop. Due to more frequent experiences of racial discrimination in the marketplace, African American consumers are more likely than Caucasians to reduce tips and lodge complaints in response to unsatisfactory dining experiences, a pattern that aligns with previous findings linking adverse discriminatory experiences to retributive actions (Brewster & Brauer, 2017). African Americans also tend to perceive server attentiveness and promptness less favorably than Caucasian consumers (Lynn & Brewster, 2014). African American consumers also tended to tip less on average than Caucasian customers. However, servers' perceptions of the tipping disparity are significantly influenced by racial bias and work environments with anti-Black sentiments (Brewster & Novak, 2018). This suggests that while there is a real difference in tipping between Black and White customers, it is often exaggerated in the minds of servers who hold prejudiced views or work in racially charged settings.

4. Conclusion

Studying U.S. customer foodservice tipping behavior has garnered substantial academic interest over the past two decades, particularly in the fields of management, behavioral and psychological economics, and social research. This paper identified three key research themes through a bibliometric and scoping review, highlighting research gaps and the direction of future studies.

By utilizing bibliometric analysis, our study illustrated the interdisciplinary nature of the tipping domain, with social psychologists and economists as the primary contributors. This cross-disciplinary collaboration, reflected in shared bibliographic references, fostered mutual enrichment in model and theory development. Among the notable scholars, Michael Lynn stands out for his extensive and prolific contributions across social-psychology, management, and economic perspectives, establishing much of the foundational literature in the field. Similarly, Azar Ofer has made significant contributions, particularly in advancing the economic understanding of tipping behavior.

Since the early 2010s, there has been a noticeable shift in publication trends. Once a leading source, the *Journal of Applied Psychology* has scaled back its focus on tipping. At the same time, hospitality and management journals have increased their output, reflecting a pivot towards management in social psychological research. Nonetheless, economic research has maintained a consistent publication rate.

Three main research themes were identified: social psychology and management, economics, and socio-cultural. Social psychology and management, a foundational theme, explored factors such as consumer characteristics, server roles, and contextual influences on tipping. Economics, the dominant theme, interweaves insights from social psychology and behavioral economics, investigating motivations for tipping and its effectiveness as a social norm and economic mechanism. Socio-cultural was more niche and focused on race, gender, and ethnicity. Latter research focused on fairness and equality, increasingly shaping research priorities and directions within this theme.

The current landscape on U.S. customer foodservice tipping behavior exhibits several research gaps. While not exhaustive, notable gaps are presented in managerial strategies and the impact of technology, sociology, and economics. Moreover, a gap exists in understanding the strategic and financial impacts of tipping practices beyond customer check sizes. For example, tip distribution policies affect employees' and customers' perceptions of a business (e.g., Lynn & Ni, 2022), influencing the organization's reputation and culture. Significant differences in perceived organizational reputation between employees and customers can negatively impact financial performance, though more excellent employee reputation perception can enhance sales (Davies et al., 2010). This area remains largely unexplored, especially when comparing corporate to non-corporate organizations, and could yield insights crucial for developing effective management strategies in diverse organizational settings.

The intersection of technological advancements and tipping behaviors is relatively uncharted territory. The shift from traditional analog forms of tipping towards digital payment platforms and service apps presents a new frontier for examining tipping practices, mainly as tip requests can occur prior to service interactions. Understanding how technology shapes tipping practices and customer, business, and other stakeholder outcomes is crucial (Warren et al., 2023), especially with the introduction of contract delivery workers, who play a significant role in foodservice provision (e.g., Chen et al., 2022). Future research could build upon existing studies on the impact of design choices and the use of digital nudging techniques (e.g., Fan et al., 2022), how digital platforms facilitate or hinder interaction between service providers, customers, and other stakeholders, and the resultant effects on service quality and compensation models.

There is also a need for more comprehensive sociological research into the formation and evolution of tipping norms. This includes a deeper exploration of the societal impacts of tipping, particularly regarding fairness and equality. As societal attitudes towards service industry labor and compensations evolve, understanding the influence of these changes on tipping norms becomes increasingly essential. Further, research related to tipping lacks depth from a sociological perspective beyond the descriptive and injunctive norms. Sociological theories could be integrated to enhance understanding of the complexities between behavior and societal structures. For instance,

structuration theory explains how societal structures and individual actions interact and evolve (Giddens, 1984). Future studies could utilize this framework to better understand how tipping norms are both shaped by and reinforce societal expectations. Norm activation theory explores how personal norms are triggered in specific contexts (Schwartz, 1977); it may provide an alternative explanation to why customers feel compelled to tip based on moral obligations. Labeling theory examines how societal labels influence behavior (Becker, 1963), potentially shedding light on how servers' identities affect tipping decisions and outcomes. Further exploration of these norms and their reflexive interactions could clarify the dual role of tipping as both a descriptive and injunctive norm, deepening our understanding of its complexities within society.

The economic aspects of tipping also require further investment. To understand its positive and negative effects on consumer and employee behavior, it is necessary to reexamine the existing economic models built upon theories related to tipping. Such behavior could offer new insights into the alignment or divergence of economic theories of tipping with current social and technological trends.

This study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the period analyzed encompassing the last 20 years may be limiting, as foundational papers that fall outside of this timeframe and could provide crucial historical context may have been excluded. Further, the dataset used for the bibliometric analysis might be too small to comprehensively represent the domain (Donthu et al., 2021), potentially skewing the influence of specific results. However, the primary aim of this approach was to categorize research into themes to be further validated via a qualitative synthesis. The thematic analysis relied heavily on bibliographic coupling due to the lack of comprehensive keyword information. This necessitated qualitative interpretation for thematic analysis, which introduces a degree of subjectivity. The strengths and weaknesses of the data used reflect these methodological choices. Lastly, the scoping review, which was instrumental in identifying research themes, could have been enriched by a more in-depth analysis of textual content. Such an analysis might have offered deeper insights and a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics within the field of tipping behavior research.

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Appendix 1

Data chart of the top five influential papers in the Social Psychology and Management theme by citations (2003-2013).

Study	Publication source	Local citation score	Purpose	Measures	Key findings
Seiter & Weger (2010)	Journal of Applied Social Psychology	2.0	To examine the effects of generalized compliments, server's sex, and dining party size on tipping behavior.	Tip size, server sex, dining party size, use of compliments	Compliments increased tips. Server's sex had little effect. Sincerity is effective, but dependent on party size.
Lynn et al. (2008)	Journal of Applied Social Psychology	1.5	To examine effects of server and customer race, and their interaction, on tips, controlling for service quality and other factors.	Service, experience, restaurant quality, demographics, dining frequency, party size, bill size, tip amount	Customers tipped African-American servers less than Caucasian servers, with server race effect on tipping moderated by service quality and dining party size.
Lynn (2008)	Journal of Applied Social Psychology	1.2	To identify and test geodemographic differences in knowledge about the injunctive restaurant tipping norm.	Restaurant tipping norm knowledge, demographic information	Knowledge of tipping norms higher among Caucasians, individuals in their 40s-60s, highly educated, wealthy, metropolitan residents, especially in the Northeast. Knowledge varied by race but not by sex.
Seiger & Weger (2013)	Journal of Applied Social Psychology	1.0	To investigate impact of server's form of address and customer's age on tipping behavior.	Tip percentage, form of address, estimated customer age	More informal forms of address resulted in higher tips. Customers prefer more immediate and informal forms of address, but older customers favor more formality.
Flynn & Greenberg (2012)	Journal of Applied Social Psychology	1.0	To empirically test the relationship between sun-shine weather on two years of transaction-level sales data.	Weather data, tipping percentages	No significant relationship between weather (specifically sunshine) and tipping was found, suggesting that tipping is more a result of social norms rather than mood changes induced by weather.

Appendix 2

Data chart of the top five influential papers in the Social Psychology and Management theme by citations (2014-2023)

Study	Publication source	Local citation score	Purpose	Measures	Key findings
Whaley et al. (2014)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	1.88	To develop and test a quantitative scale for measuring consumer motivations for tipping in restaurants.	Service, compliance, server actions, future service concerns, peer pressure, operational factors	Seven factors were identified as underlying components of tipping motivations: Social pressure, process related, server action, future service, social compliance, service received, and behavioral intentions.
Bujsic et al. (2014)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	1.35	To examine how the authenticity of a server's smile and the existence of a service relationship impacts customer tipping behavior.	Intended tipping percentage, perceived authenticity, service relationship, scenario realism	Authentic smiles increased intended tipping percentages, more so in existing service relationships. Authentic smiles had stronger positive impact in pre-existing service relationships. The mere existence of a service relationship did not affect tip size.
Lee et al. (2018)	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	1.33	To explore how the presence of gold-colored service props in restaurants influence customer tipping behavior.	Tipping percentage, perceptions of restaurant status and self-status	Gold-colored service props (bill folders and tablecloths) significantly increased customer tipping percentages. This effect was mediated by the increased perception of restaurant status and self-status.
Ali et al. (2023)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	1.0	To examine the determinants of tipping behavior focusing on factors beyond the server's control.	Sales tax rates, discounts, duration of visit, restaurant busyness, tipped minimum wage rates.	Tipping rates positively related to sales tax rates and elapsed dining time, while negatively related to sales discounts and restaurant busyness.
Frank (2020)	International Journal of Hospitality Management.	0.92	To test if giving a souvenir (a signed playing card) by a table magician increases the frequency and size of tips received.	Group size, tip amount, per-person tip amount, whether a tip was given	Magicians received more frequent and larger tips when providing a souvenir playing card. The study extends previous findings on the effects of gift-giving on tipping, suggesting that different types of gifts beyond candy can be effective in various service industry contexts.

Appendix 3

Data chart of the top five influential papers in the Economics theme by citations (2003-2013)

Study	Publication source	Local citation score	Purpose	Measures	Key findings
Azar (2004)	Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization	2.55	To understand what sustains social norms and how they evolve, using tipping as a case study.	Tipping percentages, social disapproval, utility (e.g., feeling generous, impressing others)	The tipping norm is sustained due to benefits beyond avoiding social disapproval (e.g., feeling generous, impressing others). The model can be applied to other social norms, suggesting that norms which are costly and offer no benefits tend to erode over time.
Lynn (2009)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	2.5	To explore individual differences in consumers' self-attributed motivations or reasons for tipping	Tipping motives (e.g., to reward server, satisfaction) demographics, personality	Tipping provides positive psychological utility. Intrinsic motives associated with larger restaurant tips and higher likelihood of non-restaurant tipping. Self-presentational motives related to smaller restaurant tips.
Azar (2007)	Journal of Applied Social Psychology	1.74	To integrate research on tipping from various disciplines like psychology, economics, hospitality, and tourism, and suggest future research directions.	Bill and tip size, service quality, group size, patronage frequency, tipping prevalence across countries	The average tip aligns closely with the 15% norm of bill size, with bill size being the primary factor in determining tips. Service quality has positive but marginal impact on tips. Tipping prevalence in a country can be predicted by its population characteristics.
Lynn & Sturman (201)	Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research	1.5	To understand how service quality influences tipping behavior, controlling for individual differences in tippers.	Meal type, bill and tip size, bill contribution, type of visit, group size, courses, alcohol consumption, service quality	Results suggest service quality positively influences tipping. Tip size increased by about 2% of the bill for every additional point in service quality rating and variability in how much participants tipped was influenced by service quality.

Drivers of tipping behavior in the U.S. foodservice industry

Conlin et al. (2003)	Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization	1.43	To develop a theoretical framework that explains motivations for tipping and the efficiency of tipping as a behavioral norm.	Bill, tip and party size, type of meal, service quality, demographics, frequency of visit	Tips depend on service quality; however, tipping behavior also influenced by other factors (e.g., group size, day of week, etc.). The norm may be sustained by internalized enforcement (negative feelings from violating norms).
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