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## Restaurant clients' tipping behavior and its stimulus on hospitality's service reliability in Kenya: A food and beverage service quality approach

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### Abstract

Tipping is thought to have adverse negative effects on food service reliability within the global hospitality's restaurant business. This is because of the general belief that tipping could be the origin of selective and discriminatory service, with an inclination toward clients who are believed to tip thus compromising service quality hence reliability. Therefore the purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between tipping and food service reliability in hospitality's restaurant operations in Kenya. Descriptive research survey design was adopted while respondents constituted food service clients and managers, who were selected via simple random sampling as well as purposive sampling respectively, with a sample size of 384 respondents. The study established a statistical significant relationship between the IV – tipping and the DV – food service reliability ( $P < 0.05$ ), thus rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there is a significant relationship between tipping and food service reliability.

**Keywords:** Incentives, rewards, social norm, service quality

### 1. Introduction

Tipping is a common practice in many countries of the world, exclusively in the service industry including hospitality and tourism. A handful of researchers on this topic have had the view that the currently experienced widespread act of tipping within the extensive services industry began in the mid ages, when lords chose to give their servants a few extra coins as tokens of gratitude [21]. As a result therefore, tipping has gradually undergone through a transformative phase, as an incentive as well as a social norm related with behaving in a socially and globally acceptable manner [18]. And thus today, tipping is commonly practiced in some countries of the world on the basis of three pillars; as an incentive for improved future service [14; 13; 19; 13; 15], as a reward for excellent service [24; 13; 14; 7; 3 and 17] and ultimately as a social norm [13; 8; 26 and 17].

Service quality on the other hand is a novel and therefore recent concept [6] and refers to consumers' opinion of overall peculiarity and preeminence of services [23]. Nemer [22] as well as Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Barry [22] emphasize the importance of service quality and confirm the significance of this subject in the context of global research. Therefore the same subject has become of great importance in its application in the study of not only hospitality service quality but also the restaurant food service quality. However, Lillicrap & Cousins, [12] as well as Davies, Ioannis & Alcott [2] asserts that restaurant food services are highly variable, and therefore the requisite for managers to have a concern over standardized quality across the various shifts, days of the week and ultimately across similar business categories. The variability nature as experienced across and within the hospitality's restaurant business may be attributed partly to the tipping act among other factors outside the scope of this study.

Two schools of thoughts have been presented by two scholars, who carried out investigations in the field of service quality and therefore yielded models that are currently employed in studies on this topic. Gronroos [6] found out that quality comprises of two components, technical quality which consist of sociability, valence and waiting time – and functional quality which refers to what was delivered [23]. On the other hand, Parasuraman, Zeithmal & Berry [2] developed the Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model which comprise of five dimensions; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance as well as empathy. SERVQUAL model has been proven to be the best [19; 11] and therefore applied by

majority of scholarly studies on this topic [1; 16; 25; 7; 29; 5] and thus was chosen for this study.

According to Wang [27] as well as Wang and Lynn [28], the practice of restaurant tipping is assumed to give room for customers to provide not only incentives to food servers [27] but also serves as an avenue for rewarding excellent food service, in addition to social approval [13; 14; 15]. Thus studies on this topic have yielded the assumption that restaurant food service clients are in a better position to recompense and monitor the quality of restaurant food services through tipping. However, the assumptions of the positive effects of tipping on service quality may not be the reality in practice, especially within the food and beverage service sections of the hospitality industry. This is based on the observed scenario of the current tipping act, which has seriously been abused by food servers to the extent of compromising the restaurant food service reliability, thus the origin of restaurant service failures [22]. Thus the tipping behavior of hospitality services clients is thought to have negative infinite effects on the overall restaurant food service quality and particularly on the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model including service reliability. This study therefore was to investigate the influence of tipping on restaurant food and beverage service quality, with a particular focus on the reliability dimension of restaurant service.

**2. Materials and Methods**

The study employed descriptive research survey design which is concerned with describing situations on the basis of respondents' responses and examining their relationships [8]. According to Gall, Gall & Borg [4], scientific disciplines, especially social sciences and psychology use descriptive research survey design method to obtain a general overview of the subject, and therefore impeccably fits in its application within this study. Further, this design was chosen in relation to its ability and appropriateness in fact finding to yield accurate information [10] on the relationship between tipping and restaurant service reliability.

The area of study under investigation was Kisumu County, the former administrative districts of Nyanza province [9] in Western parts of the country. For purposes of this study, a census of all the star-rated hotels within Kisumu County was carried out. Simple random sampling was employed in the selection of clients since it yielded a sample that is representative of the population [20]. This method ensured inclusivity of all the respondents of the population hence minimized biasness [20] in the process of respondent selection.

Further, a questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents on the relationship between tipping and reliability of food services. The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information [10] and was administered to 384 sampled restaurant clients within the selected hotels in Kisumu County.

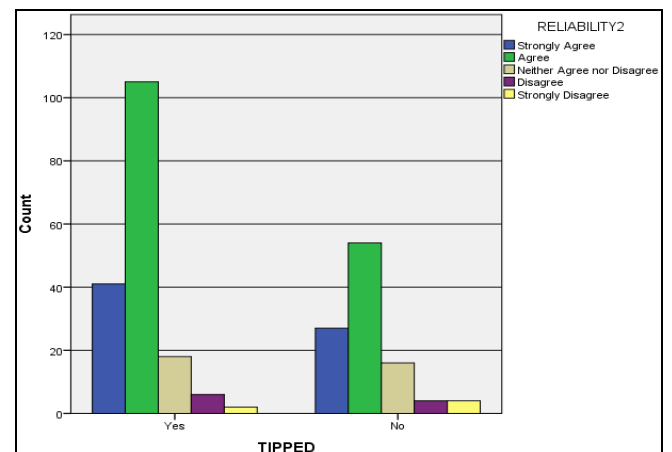
**3. Results**

Generally, the study sought to investigate the effect of hospitality's restaurant tipping on food service reliability. On a five point likert scale, respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement. The data thereof was analyzed and presented as in frequency table 1.1 below.

**Table 1.1:** Respondents' frequency table on reliability of service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	68	24.5	24.5	24.5
Agree	159	57.4	57.4	81.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	34	12.3	12.3	94.2
Disagree	10	3.6	3.6	97.8
Strongly Disagree	6	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	277	100.0	100.0	

The results show that 159 respondents (57.4%) indicated that they agree that restaurant tipping has an effect on restaurants' food service reliability, 68 respondents (24.5%) indicated they strongly agree while 34 respondents (12.3%) indicated they neither agree nor disagree. On the other hand, 10 respondents (3.6%) indicated they disagree that tipping has an effect on restaurant food service reliability while 6 respondents (2.2%) indicated they strongly disagree that tipping has an effect on food service reliability. Generally therefore, majority of respondents (227, 81.9%) indicated that tipping has an effect on food service reliability against 16 (5.8%) respondents who indicated otherwise. Further, data was analyzed in relation to respondents tipping behavior against food service reliability. The results were presented as shown in figure 1.1 below.



**Fig 1.1:** Respondents' tipping behavior in relation to service reliability

The study yielded results indicating more than 100 respondents who gave out tips strongly agree that tipping directly affects food service reliability while 40 respondents indicated that they agree. However less than 5 respondents and slightly more than 5 respondents were found to strongly disagree and disagree respectively that restaurant tipping has an effect of food service reliability, although they had also given tips to the food service staff.

On the other hand, the second band of respondents constituted those who failed to give out tips to the food service staff; out of which slightly more than 50 respondents were found to agree that tipping has an influence on food service reliability, while around 30 respondents were found to strongly agree. Nonetheless, almost 5 respondents were found to strongly agree and agree respectively that tipping has no effect on food service reliability. The study results shows that majority of respondents, irrespective of whether

they gave out tips to the food service staff or not, were found to agree that hospitality's restaurant tipping behavior has an effect on the resultant food service reliability. In order to test the relationship between the independent and dependent variable (tipping and food service reliability), the study sought to investigate statistical difference between restaurant tipping behavior and food service reliability as

well as the statistical significance between restaurant tipping and food service reliability. A Multivariate Analysis Of Variance (MANOVA) was applied in the analysis of data to investigate statistical difference between restaurant tipping behavior and food service reliability and the output was as shown in table 1.2 below.

**Table 1.2:** Respondents' Multivariate tests on tipping against service reliability

	Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
TIPPING	Pillai's Trace	.292	5.316	16.000	1080.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.716	5.905	16.000	816.336	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	.387	6.416	16.000	1062.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	.357	24.116 <sup>e</sup>	4.000	270.000	.000

From the study results, there was a statistical significant difference in the restaurants' food service reliability based on the restaurant clientele tipping behavior ( $F = 5.91$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ; Wilks' Lambda = 0.716). The study results gave a P – value of  $0.000 < 0.05$  (Wilks' Lambda Sig.) and thus reliability of food service quality was found to be significantly dependent on the tipping behavior of restaurant food service clients ( $P < 0.05$ ).

In order to confirm Respondents' Multivariate tests above, an alpha correction was made using Bonferroni correction for purposes of accounting for the multiple ANOVAs run during data analysis (MANOVA) and the results on the respondents' tests between-subjects were as presented in table 1.3 below.

**Table 1.3:** Respondents Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIPPING	Problem Solving	77.699	4	19.425	9.240	.000
	Serve as Expected	47.793	4	11.948	19.340	.000
	Time Promised	43.790	4	10.948	17.487	.000
	Accurate Bills	49.313	4	12.328	7.920	.000

The study results shows that tipping has a statistical significant effects on the waiters sincere interest in solving problems ( $F = 9.24$ ), waiters performance of service as expected ( $F = 19.34$ ), waiters provision of service to clients at the time promised ( $F = 17.487$ ) and waiter presentation of error-free bills ( $F = 7.92$ ); thus yielding  $P < 0.05$ .

Further, in order for the study to establish the statistical significance between restaurant tipping and food service reliability, multiple regression was applied in the analysis of data and the results presented in table 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6 below.

**Table 1.4:** Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.538 <sup>a</sup>	.290	.282	.71389

a. Predictors: (Constant), NOMRS, REWARDS, INCENTIVES

The study yielded R value = 0.538, which indicates a good level of prediction of the relationship between tipping and food service reliability. Further, the study gave R Square value (coefficient of determination) = 0.29 and thus the independent variable – tipping- explains 29.0% of the

variability of the dependent variable –food service reliability. Additionally, the multiple regression yielded the multiple regression ANOVA table as presented in table 1.5 below.

**Table 1.5:** Multiple Regression ANOVA table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	56.812	3	18.937	37.159	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	139.130	273	.510		
	Total	195.942	276			

a. Dependent Variable: RELIABILITY  
 b. Predictors: (Constant), NORMS, REWARDS, INCENTIVES

The results indicate F ratio (3,139.942) in the ANOVA table to be 37.159, with P value (Significance) = 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Since  $P < 0.05$ , the regression model on the relationship between tipping and restaurant food service

reliability confirms the presence of a good fit of the data. Finally, the multiple regression gave regression coefficients table as shown in table 1.6 below.

**Table 1.6:** Multiple Regression Coefficients table

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.919	.123		7.491	.000	.677	1.160
	Rewards	.343	.057	.394	5.973	.000	.230	.455
	Incentives	.117	.067	.123	1.743	.082	-.015	.248
	Norms	.078	.049	.099	1.596	.112	-.018	.175

a. Dependent Variable: RELIABILITY

The study gave varying significance for the three components of tipping; with rewards upon perception of service which gave  $P$  value = 0.000, incentives for improved future service gave a  $P$  value = 0.082 and the social norms of tipping gave  $P$  value of 0.112.

#### 4. Discussion

Majority of respondents (227, 81.9%) indicated that tipping has an effect on food service reliability. This is a clear indication that restaurant tipping is yet among the many tools that may be used by hospitality clients to enhance food service quality and specifically food service reliability. As a result therefore, hospitality restaurant clients have an upper hand in the food service quality control through the act of tipping, with the main objective of ensuring standardized food service reliability and maintenance of the same within the hotels' restaurant operations. In view of these study results, it is indeed a confirmation ( $P < 0.05$ ) of the tipping effect on enhanced food servers' sincere interest in solving problems associated with service quality ( $F = 9.24$ ), performance of service as expected ( $F = 19.34$ ), provision of services at the promised time ( $F = 17.487$ ) and presentation of error-free bills ( $F = 7.92$ ).

However, tipping in itself may not be the best methodology of communication and the eventual decision making tool by the hospitality managers on matters related to food and beverage service reliability. This could be evidenced by the study's second band of respondents who failed to give out tips to the food service staff, even though (50 agreed while 30 strongly agreed) they were found to support the philosophy on the positive effect of tipping on food service reliability. Thus irrespective of whether restaurant clients give out tips, majority of the respondents confirms that hospitality's restaurant tipping behavior has a positive effect on the resultant food service reliability and ultimately the general restaurant food service quality. However, the study did not confirm the effects of lack of tipping or smaller tips [13; 14 and 15] to the food service reliability.

For purposes of testing the null hypothesis of the study, the findings confirm the presence of statistically significant difference (Wilks' Lambda = 0.716) in the restaurants' food service reliability based on the restaurant clientele tipping behavior. This is indeed an endorsement that reliability of food service quality was found to be significantly dependent on the tipping behavior of restaurant food service clients ( $P < 0.05$ ). Thus, food service reliability was found to be highly dependent and therefore enhanced by the tipping behavior of the restaurant clients. It may therefore be generalized that the magnitude of the tip might have a direct effect on the magnitude of restaurant food service reliability [13; 14 and 15], although the study failed to investigate deeper on this aspect of relationships between the two study variables. Moreover, the researcher engaged multiple regression analysis in the hypothesis testing and the results from the regression ANOVA table shows that the regression model

on the relationship between tipping and restaurant food service reliability is a good fit for testing the data ( $P < 0.05$ ). The relationship between the three variables forming the independent variable - tipping - gave different significance. The relationship between rewards upon perception of service of tipping and food service reliability was found to be significant ( $P < 0.05$ ). This implies that rewards upon perception of service of tipping positively influences restaurant food service reliability thus resulting in to food service quality. Thus, rewards could be said of having a direct influence on the performance of food servers by enhancing food servers' sincere interests in solving problems that could lead to the low rating of food service reliability hence quality. Similarly, rewards upon perception of service of tipping enhances food servers' performance of service as expected by the client, provision of food services at the time promised both on the menu and the server according to estimated cooking time, and ensuring raising and presentation of error-free, genuine and reliable restaurant bills to the customers. This study results are similar to Lynn findings [13 and 14] which established a positive relationship between tipping as a reward upon perception of service and the general service quality.

On the other hand though, the multiple regression output on the basis of the relationship between incentives for improved future service of tipping as well as between the social norms of tipping and food service reliability was found to be insignificant ( $P > 0.05$ ). Thus focusing on the effect of tipping as an incentive for improved future service and the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, there is no effect whatsoever of the tipping behavior of hotel restaurant clients on the basis of incentives towards improved future service relative to the resultant food service reliability hence quality. This implies that prior tipping will not enhance the food servers' sincere interests in solving problems, performance of service as expected, provision of service at promised time nor billing and presentation of error-free bills. Similarly, the relationship between the social norms of tipping will not enhance restaurant food service reliability. This is in disagreement with the study findings by Jeremy [8] and Lynn [13; 14; and 15] which established a significant positive relationship between tipping and social norms as well as incentives for improved future service, where the study established a higher propensity of tipping among regular than non-regular patrons. However generally, restaurant tipping was found to have a significant effect on the resultant food service reliability ( $P < 0.05$ ), thus implying that food service reliability hence quality is dependent on restaurant tipping.

#### 5. Conclusion

Restaurant tipping is a key tool in enhancing food service reliability. Although the tipping behavior is poorly grounded within the policies of many countries of the world especially



in the African and developing world context, the act may be effectively utilized by hotel managers to curb the ever increasing food and beverage service failures. This is on the basis of this study finding that there is a significant relationship between tipping and food service reliability, leading to the study to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant relationship between restaurant tipping and food service reliability within the hospitality industry in Kenya.

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