

Would you like to add a gratuity? When explicit requests hamper tipping

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Abstract

Many service providers explicitly ask customers for a tip. This may create social pressure, thus resulting in lower tips. Building on the theory of psychological reactance, we propose that an explicit request to tip has a detrimental impact on tip size. Across two studies, a field experiment and an online experiment, we test this effect and examine how the physical presence of the server moderates this relationship. We find that an explicit request to tip negatively affects tip size, while server's physical presence alleviates this effect. The findings also show that social pressure hampers perceived control, which in turn has a detrimental effect on tip size. In light of these findings, service providers might want to revisit their strategies to enhance tipping.

Keywords: tipping, social pressure, perceived control, revenue maximization, service encounters

Highlights

- Explicit request to tip has a negative effect on tip size
- Server's physical presence alleviates the negative effects of an explicit request
- Social pressure reduces customers' perceived control
- The higher customers' perceived control, the higher the tip size

1 Introduction

Tipping is a common practice in many societies. In the US, tipping generates over \$45 billion in annual revenue (Azar, 2011). In restaurants, the tip size typically varies between 10% and 20% of the total bill (Karabas et al., 2020). Recently, many service companies have witnessed heated debates over the advantages and disadvantages of tipping, with some even suggesting the suppression of tipping (Infante, 2015). However, recent reports suggest that tipping increases total revenue across different service segments (Glasheen, 2020; Hadas, 2020). Compared to compulsory service charges, tipping reduces the perceived cost of eating out and thus increases demand (Lynn, 2016). More importantly, the benefits of tipping go beyond economic gains. For instance, customer satisfaction seems to be higher under tipping systems than compulsory service charges (Lynn, 2018).

The need to tip and the culture for tipping are lower in most European countries (Gössling, 2021). In the UK, for instance, tipping is not expected in the way it is in the US (Azar, 2007a). All staff in the UK, must by law, be paid at least the National Minimum Wage and an employer is not allowed to use tips to top up wages to reach the legal minimum. Having said that, there are 165,000 businesses in the hospitality, leisure and service sectors in the UK where tipping is still common, with about 3.2 million people employed (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Thus, even though the tipping culture is not as well-established as in the US, it is an important factor for businesses operating in these sectors.

The effectiveness of various tipping systems has been a topic of continuous controversy among practitioners and academics. Previous studies have explored whether providing “gratuity guidelines” or explicitly asking customers to add gratuity is effective (e.g., Chandar et al., 2019; Karniouchina et al., 2008; Warren et al., 2021). Prior research has mainly focused on customers’ motivations to tip, thus overlooking psychological factors that affect tip size (Shih et al., 2016). Drawing on the theory of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966), this study

proposes that an explicit request to tip entails a threat to the customer's autonomy. We empirically test this detrimental impact on tip size. We also explore the mediating effects of social pressure and perceived control. Finally, we demonstrate that the physical presence of the server is a boundary condition (i.e., a situation that amplifies or limits the proposed relationship) for the explicit request effect.

The paper offers three theoretical contributions. First, it contributes to the literature on tipping by uncovering a new conceptual path, i.e., the effect of an explicit request on tip size. Contrary to common belief, the study findings show that an explicit (vs. non-explicit) request negatively affects tip size. Second, this study adopts a novel theoretical approach to explain customers' tipping behavior, i.e., the theory of psychological reactance. While social pressure has a negative impact on tip size, ensuring that consumers feel that they have control over the situation results in higher tips. Third, this work enriches our current understanding of tipping by unveiling an important boundary condition, i.e., the role of physical presence.

From a managerial standpoint, this study presents actionable levers for managers in terms of revenue maximization. According to our findings, service providers should eliminate explicit requests in order to boost tip size. Additionally, they should devote special attention to the personal interaction between the customer and the frontline employee.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Tipping

Tipping can be defined as voluntary payments for the service provided (Karabas et al., 2020). Originating in England, tipping dates back to the days when guests were expected to give an amount of money to the host's servants for extra service (Chandar et al., 2019). At that time, guests used to tip in advance to ensure better service and to show their appreciation. Nowadays, customers tip after they have experienced the service, and it is common that they determine the

tip size based on service quality. From the equity theory perspective, this should imply a balanced exchange: the guest has a memorable service encounter, and the service provider receives rewards for his/her effort (Whaley et al., 2014; Lynn, 2015; Bove et al., 2009). Recent studies suggest that customers may tip to comply with social norms (Azar, 2007b; Lynn, 2011; Whaley *et al.*, 2014). Social norms refer to actions over which people have control and are supported by shared expectations about what should or should not be done in different social situations (Bicchieri & Muldoon, 2011). Therefore, not tipping may induce psychological imbalance, creating a sense of guilt or embarrassment. Conversely, tipping may enhance psychological utility – a satisfaction or happiness derived from an action – so that customers experience positive emotions through tipping (Azar, 2010). For instance, presenting themselves as generous people is one of the benefits that customers derive from tipping (Azar, 2004). Since anticipated positive emotions influence subsequent behaviors (Bagozzi et al., 2006), psychological benefits and emotions emerge as main drivers of tipping behavior (Azar, 2004; Azar, 2010).

While previous research has mainly focused on motives behind customers' tipping behavior (Azar, 2010; Lynn, 2015; Whaley et al., 2014), the relevant question is not only whether customers tip or not, but also the tip size itself. Existing literature has identified a number of factors that influence tip size, such as the intensity of the server's interaction with customers (e.g., Hornik, 1992; Jacob & Guéguen, 2012; Jacob & Guéguen, 2014; Lynn & Simons, 2000; Shih et al., 2019), payment methods (e.g., Parrett, 2006), gratuity guidelines (e.g., Karniouchina et al., 2008; Khadjavi, 2017; Seiter et al., 2011), and default options (Zarrabian, 2019; Haggag & Paci, 2014). Table 1 presents a summary of the main findings regarding the determinants of tip size. There are four main categories: i) servers' interaction with customers; ii) donation and gratuity guidelines; iii) default options; iv) tip requests.

[Table 1 here]

As shown in Table 1, research on the effects of tip requests on tip size is limited and demonstrates contrary findings (Warren et al., 2021; Karabas et al., 2020). In a beauty service context, Warren et al. (2021) reveal that requesting tips before service completion negatively affects tip size. Similarly, Karabas et al. (2020) show that asking customers if they want to leave a tip before receiving their order leads to increased irritation, which reduces the likelihood of returning. However, the authors did not test the direct effect of tip requests on tip size. Warren et al. (2021) also call for future research to investigate how the visibility of a tip request affects the service outcome. For example, if an employee walks away from the tip/payment device while the customer completes the transaction, is the tip request considered less manipulative than if the employee is present when the customer decides on the tip amount? To answer this question, the current research tests the effect of an explicit request to tip on tip size and whether the server's physical presence affects the intensity of this effect.

2.2 Explicit requests

As electronic payments become the dominant form of payment, the average consumer is more familiar with electronic screens and prompts (Hoover, 2019). With these electronic payment systems, consumers experience further decision-making tasks (i.e., how much to tip the service provider) (Haggag & Paci, 2014; Hoover, 2019). In face-to-face service encounters, some providers explicitly ask customers whether they wish to tip. Despite being a common practice, there is scant academic evidence on how such a request affects tipping behavior. In this paper, we focus on electronic explicit requests, that is, when the question "Would you like to add a gratuity" is shown on the screen of a card machine.

A range of studies have investigated the effect of tip recommendations on tip size (Alexander, Boone & Lynn, 2020; Haggag & Paci, 2014; Hoover, 2019). Zarrabian (2019), for example, demonstrates that larger tip suggestions induce higher tips in a fast-casual dining context,

adding over 12% in tips to a restaurant. Similarly, Bernritter et al. (2017) found that self-persuasion (i.e., when customers are asked to generate pro-tipping arguments themselves) is more effective than direct persuasion (i.e., when customers are exposed to specific arguments) in increasing the tip size. However, direct persuasion can trigger defensive responses. Being told how much to tip may lead to customers feeling that their freedom to tip is threatened (Strohmetz & Rind, 2001). Such perceptions can result in psychological reactance.

The theory of psychological reactance was introduced by Brehm in 1966. It builds on the concept of “free behaviors” and suggests that people may react negatively to attempted social influence. According to Brehm and Brehm (2013), when individuals perceive certain actions as a threat to their freedom, they avoid engaging in that action. Although this theory has been widely used to explain customer behavior in the services marketing literature, the findings are mixed. For example, increasing the tip suggestion (e.g., from 15 to 25 percent) positively affects tip size, whilst no effects of psychological reactance were found (Hoover, 2019). Similarly, Alexander, Boone and Lynn (2020) demonstrate that larger tip recommendations have a positive effect on customers’ tipping behavior. In contrast, Zarrabian (2019) states that very high tip suggestions may induce some reactance, thus nullifying the positive effects of tip suggestions. Haggag and Paci (2014) show that high tip suggestions increase the likelihood of tipping \$0 by about 50% due to psychological reactance. Specifically, manipulated actions to induce high tips seem to lead to adverse reactions. When an individual’s perceived control or freedom is threatened, it leads to a negative response (Lee & Lee, 2009).

Although different from default options and tip recommendations, explicit requests also attempt to influence customer behavior. In line with Haggag and Paci (2014), we argue that any strategy threatening customers’ freedom to tip might have a reverse effect on tip size. Therefore, we propose that explicit requests will have a negative impact on tip size. Formally,

H1: An explicit request to tip has a negative effect on tip size.

2.3 Physical presence

The magnitude of the effect of an explicit request on tip size may vary depending on the frontline employee's behavior. A number of studies suggest that frontline employees play a key role in influencing customer choices (e.g., Huneke et al., 2015; Woisetschläger et al., 2016; Davis et al., 1998). For instance, customers are willing to leave larger tips if the service provider introduces him/herself by name (Garrity & Degelman, 1990); uses the customer's native language (Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013); has physical contact with the customer (Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986; Lynn et al., 1998; Guéguen & Jacob, 2005); or is in close proximity when taking orders (Jacob & Guéguen, 2012). Conversely, the physical presence of the frontline employee during the payment stage can hamper customers' willingness to tip. Tipping and donations share similar characteristics (Azar, 2011). For instance, in the context of door-to-door charitable giving, DellaVigna et al. (2012) report that when potential donors are exposed to an unsolicited donation request, their willingness to donate decreases. However, when the solicitor is physically present, individuals become more willing to donate. In a restaurant setting, the server can either stand physically close to the table or leave the customer alone so they can make the payment (and tipping) in private. Similar to the door-to-door donation context, when an explicit request is coupled with the physical presence of the server during the payment stage, it may induce the demand-driven approach on customers, thus, prompting them to tip. Formally,

H1a: The physical presence of the server alleviates the negative effect of an explicit request to tip on tip size.

2.4 The psychological mechanism: serial mediation of social pressure and perceived control

Psychological factors underlie customers' tipping behavior (Azar, 2010). Social pressure is one of the psychological mechanisms that may explain tipping (e.g. Azar, 2007a; Lynn & Starbuck, 2015; Whaley et al., 2014). Specifically, social pressure prompts customers to change their attitudes, values or behaviors to conform to social norms (Ajzen, 1991; Carr & Sequeira, 2007). For instance, individuals tend to make more egalitarian choices in the presence of others due to social pressure (Castelli & Tomelleri, 2008; Gunawan & Huarng, 2015). In the tipping literature, social pressure is defined as an uncomfortable feeling that customers experience when they "dodge" from tipping (Azar, 2007a). Indeed, Chandar et al. (2019) suggest that the effect of social norms is diminished without public exposure. However, the effect of social nudges is enhanced as the veil of choice anonymity is removed. Therefore, when customers are explicitly asked whether they wish to tip, the level of social pressure may increase. Thus, we propose that explicitly requesting a tip increases perceived social pressure. Formally,

H2: An explicit request to tip has a positive impact on social pressure.

Having control over one's psychological and physical environment is a basic human need (Skinner, 1995). Perceived control can be defined as the extent to which people believe their internal state and behavior can produce desired effects and avoid undesired effects (Wallston et al., 1987; Skinner, 1995). Perceived control consists of three dimensions: (i) behavioral control - available responses that directly affect or change the characteristics of an event; (ii) cognitive control – the way in which the event is interpreted; and (iii) decisional control – the range of choices available to an individual (Averill, 1973). Perceived control plays a major role in service encounters (Hui & Bateson, 1991; Noone et al., 2012) since customers show a desire for control throughout the service process, including tipping (Guo et al., 2016). Social pressure

may hamper perceived control since it prompts customers to adapt their behavior to conform to social norms (Azar, 2007b). Therefore, we propose that when customers feel socially pressured, their level of perceived control diminishes. Formally,

H3: Social pressure has a negative impact on perceived control.

Low levels of perceived control may have a negative impact on tipping. A number of studies on perceived control report that individuals with high levels of perceived control are more satisfied, committed, involved and motivated (Schulz et al., 1995; Ličen et al., 2016). Empirical evidence further shows that perceived control has a positive effect on physical and psychological well-being (Hui & Bateson, 1991; Noone, 2008). When customers are offered the freedom to choose, the level of perceived control is high (Ertimur, 2008), thus leading to positive outcomes. For instance, endowing customers with a sense of control has a positive impact on their service encounter evaluations (e.g., Mattila & Cranage, 2005). In the pay what you want (PWYW) domain – a strategy that gives customers full control over the price they pay – customers have a stronger intention to purchase and promote the service (Barone et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2009; Stangl et al., 2017). Conversely, low perceived control may result in negative psychological outcomes. Perceived lack of freedom leads to psychological reactance (Brehm & Brehm, 2013), and thus individuals avoid engaging in an action. Therefore, we propose that lower levels of perceived control have a negative impact on tip size. Accordingly, we argue that social pressure and perceived control sequentially mediate the negative effect of explicit requests on tip size. Specifically,

H4: The lower the degree of perceived control, the lower the tip size.

H4a: Social pressure and perceived control serially mediate the impact of an explicit request on tip size.

Our conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 here]

3 Research design

3.1 Study 1

Design, participants and procedure

Study 1 is a field experiment conducted in a mid-scale Asian restaurant in Southern England. The data were collected from January 3 to January 17, 2020. Only guests who paid with a credit card were included as explicit tipping is manipulated through an electronic prompt. The restaurant only serves dinner, hence the time of the meal was similar for all the guests. The currency used in the study is Great British Pounds (GBP), and the final sample consists of 170 respondents (male = 61%).

We employed a 2 (explicit request to tip: yes or no) × 2 (physical presence of the server: yes or no) factorial design. In the explicit request condition, customers saw the following on the payment screen: “Would you like to add gratuity?” with a response option: “yes/no”. If they wanted to tip, they added the tip to the bill and completed the transaction. In the no request condition, there was no such question. In the physical presence condition, servers stayed by the guest’s table until they completed the payment process. In the absence of the physical presence condition, servers stepped away from the guest’s table (e.g., to clean the neighbouring table or to attend other guests) until the payment was processed.

Results and discussion

A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on a sample of 170 participants to examine the effect of an explicit request to tip and the physical presence of a server on the tip size. The average bill did not differ across conditions. The results show a significant negative effect of an explicit request to tip on tip size, $F(1,166) = 11.982; p = 0.001$. The combined effect of an explicit request and physical presence on tip size is also significant, $F(1,166) = 45.679, p = 0.001$, suggesting that the joint effect of those two factors positively affects the tip size (Figure 2). Simple main effects analysis showed that, in an explicit request condition, customers tip more when the server is physically present ($M = 3.39; SD = 1.10; p = 0.021$) than when the server is not physically present ($M = 2.53; SD = 1.12; p = 0.001$). This result suggests that the adverse effect of an explicit request is alleviated with the physical presence of the server.

[Figure 2 here]

To ensure the robustness of the analysis, we conducted a two-way ANOVA with tip size as a percentage of the bill total. The main effect of an explicit request, as well as the combined effect of an explicit request with the physical presence of the server are significant and demonstrate similar patterns to our previous analysis. The results show a significant negative effect of an explicit request on tip percentage, $F(1,166) = 7.549; p = 0.007$. The joint effect of an explicit request and the physical presence is positive and significant, $F(1,166) = 15.897; p = 0.001$, showing that an explicit request coupled with the server being physically present leads to an increase in tip percentage. Simple main effects analysis suggests that the average tip percentage in the explicit request condition is higher in the case of the physical presence of the server ($M = 8.83$ percent; $SD = 3.03; p = 0.038$) compared to the case with no physical presence of the server ($M = 7.14$ percent; $SD = 3.53, p = 0.001$).

To rule out alternative explanations, we also ran a regression analysis with a number of control variables such as gender and bill total. Table 2 presents the results of two regressions, one with tip size (GBP) and one with tip as a percentage of the bill total as dependent variables. Explicit request to tip, the server's physical presence and their interaction are the independent variables.

[Table 2 here]

The value of the adjusted R-square indicates that 26.9% of variance in tip size can be accounted for an explicit request to tip, the server's physical presence and their interaction. The Durbin-Watson $d = 1.673$ is between the two critical values of $1.5 < d < 2.5$, and therefore we can assume that there is no first-order linear auto-correlation in the data.

The results show that an explicit request to tip ($\beta = - 2.18$; $p = 0.001$), the server's physical presence ($\beta = - 1.94$; $p = 0.001$) and their interaction ($\beta = 2.73$; $p = 0.001$) were significant predictors of tip size. The effects of gender ($\beta = 0.14$; ns) and total bill amount ($\beta = 0.01$; ns) on tip size were insignificant.

The regression analysis on tip percentage shows similar findings, with Durbin-Watson $d = 1.965$, indicating that there is no residual correlation. Whilst an explicit request to tip ($\beta = - 6.16$; $p = 0.001$), server's physical presence ($\beta = - 5.52$; $p = 0.001$) and their interaction ($\beta = 7.61$; $p = 0.001$) can predict 24.9% (adjusted R-square) of the variance in the dependent variable, gender ($\beta = 0.10$; ns) and bill total ($\beta = 0.11$; ns) remain insignificant. Taken together, these findings provide support for H1 and H1a.

3.2 Study 2

In Study 1, we found that customers tip less if they are asked to do so or if the server is close by. In other words, the joint effect of an explicit request and physical presence has a positive effect on tip size. In study 2, we conducted an online experiment to investigate the proposed psychological processes behind these effects, namely, social pressure and perceived control.

The online experiment offers tight control, reducing possible confounding factors that are difficult to isolate in the field (Gneezy, 2017).

Design, sample and procedure

Participants were recruited via Prolific.co. Compared to other survey platforms, Prolific.co is more reliable and transparent with a representative participant population (Palan & Schitter, 2018). A total of three hundred and thirty-three participants (female = 58.9%; $M_{\text{age}} = 38.4$) completed the survey and passed the attention check question: “Please read the following statement carefully and choose “*Strongly Disagree*”: The sky is blue”. The sample included full-time and part-time employees (60.9%), self-employed individuals (9.6%) and currently unemployed individuals (29.5%) (i.e., students and retired people).

Study 2 replicates the same four conditions as in Study 1. Specifically, participants were to imagine that they were going to dine at a casual, average quality, sit-down restaurant with two of their colleagues. We controlled for the satisfaction level as follows: “You are satisfied with the food and service”. The bill amount (GBP 37.40) was the average amount from Study 1. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (see Appendix A). After reading the scenario, participants were asked whether they would like to tip and, if yes, how much. There was an open box where participants could explain their decision.

Next, participants were exposed to social pressure and perceived control scales (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). The social pressure measure was adapted from Whaley et al. (2014) to reflect the situational perspective of social pressure (Chekroun, 2008). Situational social pressure refers to the ways in which individuals change their behavior to meet the demands of a social environment, i.e., the presence of others (Yanchuk, 2005). The scale contains six items ($\alpha = 0.836$). The social pressure measurement was followed by the statements of perceived self-control, e.g., “In this scenario, I am satisfied with the amount of control I have over my tipping decisions” and “In this scenario, I have control over the

decisions to whom I tip” ($\alpha = 0.853$) (Schulz et al., 1995; Paulhus & Van Selst, 1990). The items were adapted to fit the context of the study. Appendix B shows the measurement scales.

Manipulation checks

To ensure that the manipulations of an explicit request and physical presence were successful, we included two questions on a 5-point Likert scale: 1) To what extent do you perceive you have been explicitly asked to tip? (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely likely); 2) Was the server in close proximity at the moment of payment? (1 = definitely not; 5 = definitely yes). We performed a one-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test whether there were significant differences in the mean scores of perceived explicit request and perceived physical presence across the four conditions. The results show that manipulation checks worked as intended. In the explicit request groups, respondents indicated higher levels of agreement of being explicitly asked to tip ($M = 4.16$) compared to the groups with the non-explicit request ($M = 2.14$) ($p = 0.001$). Similarly, the groups with the physical presence indicated that the server was close by at the moment of payment ($M = 3.86$) contrarily to those in the absence of the physical presence group ($M = 1.79$) ($p = 0.001$).

Results and discussion

In line with the field experiment, the results of a two-way ANOVA show that there is a significant main effect of explicit request on tip size $F(1,329) = 4.862$; $p = 0.028$. The joint effect of an explicit request and physical presence on tip size is also significant ($F(1,329) = 11.202$; $p = 0.001$). The interaction effect shows an increase in the tip size, meaning that the physical presence alleviates the negative effect of an explicit request on the tip size (Figure 3). These results align with DellaVigna et al. (2012) and offer additional support for H1 and H1a. DellaVigna et al. (2012) found that charity campaigns, which involve flyers requesting people to donate followed by the solicitor’s physical presence, increase the amount of donations. The authors state that the cost of saying no to a solicitor in person raises a negative utility from the

interaction. As a result, a majority of donors give more than they would have liked to. Following this reasoning, it can be assumed that the server's physical presence is particularly effective because it reinforces the effect of explicit requests on the payment device.

[Figure 3 here]

To test the moderated mediation model, we run model 85 in Hayes Process macro with 5,000 bootstrap samples. If the indirect effect of X on Y through M is moderated by W, this means that mediation of the effect of X on Y is moderated, a phenomenon called moderated mediation (Hayes, 2018). According to Edwards (2009) and Hayes (2015) moderated mediation, compared to mediated moderation, is more interesting and meaningful. The results show that an explicit request to tip increases social pressure ($\beta = 0.46$; $SE = 0.21$; $t(333) = 2.18$; $p = 0.029$), and the effect is stronger when the server is physically present ($\beta = 1.03$; $SE = 0.17$; $t(333) = 7.63$; $p = 0.001$). In turn, social pressure decreases perceived control ($\beta = -0.91$; $SE = 0.29$; $t(333) = -3.27$; $p = 0.001$). Of note, explicit request has a direct negative effect on perceived control ($\beta = -0.17$; $SE = 0.14$; $t(333) = -2.40$; $p = 0.016$), which is also amplified by the physical presence of the server ($\beta = 0.55$; $SE = 0.14$; $t(333) = 3.85$; $p = 0.001$). Overall, these results provide support for H2 and H3.

Further, we test the proposed serial mediation. We specified an explicit request to tip as the independent variable, social pressure and perceived control as the mediating variables and tip size as the dependent variable. The results show a significant serial indirect effect of explicit request on tip size through social pressure and perceived control ($\beta = -1.34$; $CI = [-2.084; -0.667]$). In this serial mediation, social pressure has a negative effect on tip size ($\beta = -0.25$; $SE = 0.10$; $t(333) = -2.41$; $p = 0.016$), while perceived control has a positive effect on tip size ($\beta = 0.48$; $SE = 0.09$; $t(333) = 5.34$; $p = 0.001$). After introducing the two mediators, the main direct effect is no longer significant ($\beta = -0.32$; $p = ns$), suggesting a full mediation (Hayes, 2018). Therefore, H4 and H4a are supported. Moreover, the findings also show that the

moderated mediation indices were significant for both social pressure (95%, CI [0.129; 0.305] and perceived control (95%, CI [- 1.815; - 0.557]), meaning that an explicit request to tip and the server's physical presence jointly increase the feeling of social pressure and decrease perceived control which in turn affects the tip size. Figure 4 visualizes the relationships and the estimated coefficients.

[Figure 4 here]

Overall, the findings reveal interesting but somehow complicated effects of the server's physical presence on other variables and their relationships. Specifically, based on our previous studies and additional analyses (Table 3 and Table 4), we demonstrate that the effect of physical presence is threefold. Physical presence directly increases perceived social pressure ($\beta = 0.67$; $p = 0.001$). It also amplifies the effect of an explicit request on social pressure ($\beta = 1.03$; $p = 0.001$). However, physical presence reduces the negative effects of social pressure ($\beta = 0.58$; $p = 0.011$) (and perceived control ($\beta = 0.34$; $p = 0.009$)) on tip size.

[Table 3 here]

[Table 4 here]

The explanation reflects the nature of social pressure in this specific context: *effective pressure* and *reactance*. When there is either an explicit request to tip or physical presence of the server, customers are motivated to resist perceived social pressure, i.e., displaying *reactance* – (Brehm & Brehm, 2013; Matland & Murray, 2013), hence, having a negative effect on tip size. However, when both factors occur simultaneously, physical presence amplifies the impact of an explicit request to tip, creating an *effective pressure*. In other words, *effective pressure* increases the moral costs of deviating from the tipping norm in the presence of others (Alpizar & Martinsson, 2013). The physical presence of a server amplifies the value of others' approval, therefore, reducing but not eliminating the negative effect of an explicit request on tip size.

4 Discussion and conclusion

Tipping has become a common practice across different service sectors leading to significant revenue gains for businesses (Whaley & Costen, 2019). Previous research shows that social influence, both in terms of compliance and pressure, is one of the main motivations for tipping (Whaley et al., 2011). However, very little is known about the psychological mechanisms that underlie server-customer interactions and how such dynamics affect tip size.

This study investigates the effect of an explicit request to tip on tip size. Businesses often employ tipping methods that involve explicitly asking customers whether they wish to tip (i.e., “Would you like to add a gratuity” on the screen of the card machine), which may create social pressure and lead to a lack of perceived control. Drawing upon the theory of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966), we argue that an attempt to influence customers’ decisions by explicitly requesting a tip poses a threat to perceived freedom of choice. As a result, the customer may react negatively with a possible detrimental impact on tip size. Across a field study and an online experiment, we first demonstrate that tip size is smaller when there is an explicit request to tip. However, the negative effect is alleviated with the physical presence of the server. This effect is congruent with the findings of DellaVigna et al. (2012), where an unsolicited donation request paired with the solicitor's physical presence induced individuals to give to charities even if they did not want to. Study 2 unveils the psychological mechanisms behind this effect. An explicit request to tip triggers social pressure, which is amplified by the physical presence of the server. Experiencing high social pressure during the payment process leads to a decrease in perceived control, which negatively affects the tip size. In other words, social pressure has a detrimental effect on perceived control. Low levels of perceived control, in turn, have a negative effect on tip size. Previous studies examining the effects of tip request on tip size mainly focused on tip sequence (i.e., before vs. after the service) (Warren et al.,

2021), while our study provides a clear understanding of the psychological effects behind this relationship.

Moreover, our findings reveal the threefold effect of the server's physical presence (i) it directly increases social pressure to tip, (ii) it amplifies the effect of explicit tip requests on social pressure to tip, and (iii) reduces the negative effect of social pressure (and) perceived control on tip size. An explicit request to tip and physical presence, together, create "*effective pressure*", hence, the reduction in tip size is smaller compared to the reduced tip amount when either of these factors occurs individually, creating a "*reactance*".

Theoretically, this study offers three specific contributions. First, we propose (and empirically support) a novel conceptual path showing that an explicit request, contrary to general wisdom, lessens tip size. This is due to increased social pressure, which reduces perceived control. Prior research on tip size has mainly focused on observable determinants of tip size such as the server's interaction with the customer (e.g., Jacob & Guéguen, 2012; Lynn & Mynier, 1993), the use of gratuity guidelines (e.g., Seiter, 2011), and default tip options and tip recommendations (e.g., Chandar et al., 2019; Haggag & Paci, 2014; Zarrabian, 2019). Therefore, this study enriches tipping research by introducing a new contingency factor, i.e., an explicit tipping request. Second, this study applies the theory of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966) to the context of tipping. This theory suggests that the lower the level of perceived control, the lower the customer's intention to engage in action (Brehm & Brehm, 2013; Haggag & Paci, 2014; Zarrabian, 2019). Accordingly, our findings show that when perceived control is hampered by social pressure, the tip size decreases. Han and Kim (2010) propose that perceived control has a direct effect on customers' behavioral intentions. This is in line with previous research suggesting that perceived control is an important antecedent of tipping amount (Haggag & Paci, 2014; Zarrabian, 2019). More specifically, Haggag and Paci (2014) demonstrate that a strategy that provides customers with options (i.e., tip size) enhances

perceived control, thus leading to a higher willingness to tip. Third, our work adds further insight into physical proximity during service encounters. We identify a relevant boundary condition, i.e., the role of the physical presence of the server. Our findings provide further evidence on how physical presence can trigger various outcomes at different stages of service delivery. For instance, close proximity while taking orders may result in greater tipping (Jacob & Guéguen, 2012). Similarly, Lynn and Mynier (1993) demonstrate the benefits of physical closeness in service encounters. Conversely, our findings indicate that the physical presence of the server during the payment process increases the tip size only when paired with an explicit request. In light of this finding, service providers should revisit their strategies to enhance tips. Specifically, servers may consider distancing themselves from the customer during the payment process. This would release social pressure and enhance perceived freedom over the situation. Eliminating explicit requests and related social pressure might also lead to positive outcomes in the long run. Service encounters signalling perceived control are important for customer retention (Noone et al., 2012). To achieve this, frontline employees need to be properly trained to avoid social pressure during the payment process.

This study offers several avenues for future research. Tipping is certainly affected by cultural norms and geographical boundaries. Such norms influence customers' attitudes and behavior, including expectations and motivation for tipping (Ferguson et al., 2017). In contrast to the majority of studies conducted in the US, the current study offers an understanding of tipping dynamics in the UK, where the culture of tipping is weaker and tips are not expected. Cultural norms may act as another boundary condition. Thus, future studies should test the effect of explicit requests across cultures with different tipping norms. Finally, this study focused on the negative effects of the server's physical presence during the payment stage. However, according to previous research, the server's close proximity to the customer induces perceptions of warmth (Jacob & Guéguen, 2012; Lynn, Le, & Sherwyn, 1998; Simon, Moses & Vincent,

2021). Future studies should explore whether perceived warmth during the order taking process extends to the payment stage.

Finally, the current study is not without limitations. First, social pressure and perceived control were only examined in an online setting. While this experimental setting allows for tight control (Gneezy, 2017), the psychological mechanisms are not analyzed in the field. The empirical context for both studies is the restaurant industry, so careful considerations should be made when extending our recommendations to other service domains.

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Table 1. Main determinants of tip size

Themes	Authors	Setting	Key determinants	Main findings
Servers' interaction with customers	Lynn and Mynier (1993)	Restaurants	Server posture.	-Squatting down next to the table increases the size of the tip the server receives.
	Jacob and Guéguen (2012)	Restaurant	Server distance.	- Short distance between waitresses and patrons is associated with greater tipping.
Donation and gratuity guidelines	Khadjavi (2017)	Hair salon	Indirect reciprocity; Charitable giving; Donations.	-The voluntary act of a hairdresser in collecting donations increased the size of the tip received.
	Karniouchina et al. (2008)	Restaurant	Gratuity guidelines.	-Compared to educational guidelines, calculation guidelines positively affected the size of the tip.
	Seiter (2011)	Restaurant	Gratuity guidelines.	-Calculation guidelines have a favorable effect on tip size.
Default options/Tip recommendations	Haggag and Paci (2014)	Taxi	Default options.	-Higher default suggestions (20percent/25percent/30percent versus 15percent/20percent/25percent) result in higher average tip size.
	Zarrabian (2019)	Restaurant	Default tip suggestions.	-Higher bottom suggestions for the tip amount through percentages causes individuals to tip more.
	Hoover (2019)	Taxi	Defaults; Suggestions.	-Switching from a tip suggestion screen of 15, 20 and 25 percent to a relatively higher tipping screen of 20, 25 and 30 percent caused a statistically significant increase in tip size.
	Chandar et al. (2019)	Taxi	Social preferences; Tip amount; Tip recommendations.	-There is a modest effect of default options on tip size, with average tips as a percentage of the fare increase by 2.5% between the lowest and highest default options; -Default options are less influential when the tipping decision is made privately.
	Alexander et al. (2021)	App-based laundry pick up, cleaning and delivery	Tip recommendations; Tip amounts; Satisfaction.	-Tip recommendations positively affect tip size in that larger tip suggestions increase the amounts left by customers.
Tip requests	Karabas et al. (2020)	Restaurant	Tip request; Return intention; Customer irritation.	- There is a negative impact of presenting a tip request on return intentions, with customer irritation as the underlying mechanism.
	Warren et al. (2021)	Restaurant & Beauty service	Tip request sequence; Manipulativeness; Tipping.	- Findings reveal that requesting a tip before (vs. after) completing a service leads to smaller tips, reduced return intentions, diminished word-of-mouth intentions, and lower online ratings.
	Own study	Restaurant	Explicit request; Physical presence; Social pressure; Perceived control.	- Explicit request has a negative effect on tip size. The physical presence of waiters mitigates the negative impact of this effect. - Social pressure decreases perceived control, which negatively affects tip size.

Table 2. Predictors of tip size and tip as percentage of total bill

Model	β	Std. Coefficients	t	Sig.	Model	β	Std. Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.933		7.009	0.000	(Constant)	18.205		13.541	0.000
Total bill	0.019	0.082	1.382	0.169	Total bill	0.117	0.097	0.664	0.510
Gender	0.149	0.046	0.650	0.517	Gender	0.103	0.098	0.707	0.483
Server's physical presence	-1.944	-0.603	-6.428	0.000	Server's physical presence	-5.528	-0.530	-5.454	0.000
Explicit request to tip	-2.183	-0.678	-7.150	0.000	Explicit request to tip	-6.167	-0.592	-6.055	0.000
Interaction effect ER*PP	2.738	0.733	6.335	0.000	Interaction effect ER*PP	7.612	0.630	5.308	0.000
<i>R-squared</i>	0.291				<i>R-squared</i>	0.271			
<i>Adjusted R-squared</i>	0.269				<i>Adjusted R-squared</i>	0.249			

Dependent Variable: Tip size

Dependent Variable: Tip as percentage of total bill

Table 3. The effect of the physical presence of a server on social pressure

Model	β	Std. Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.298		7.412	0.001
Server's physical presence	0.672	0.227	4.247	0.001

Dependent Variable: Social pressure

Table 4. Interaction effect of the physical presence of a server with social pressure and perceived control

Model	β	Std. Coefficients	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.482		8.057	0.001
Social pressure	-0.317	-0.248	-7.499	0.001
Perceived control	0.269	0.256	2.159	0.031
Server's physical presence	-2.160	-0.425	-3.074	0.002
Interaction SP*PP	0.586	0.739	4.316	0.011
Interaction PC*PP	0.346	0.331	2.610	0.009

Dependent Variable: Tip size

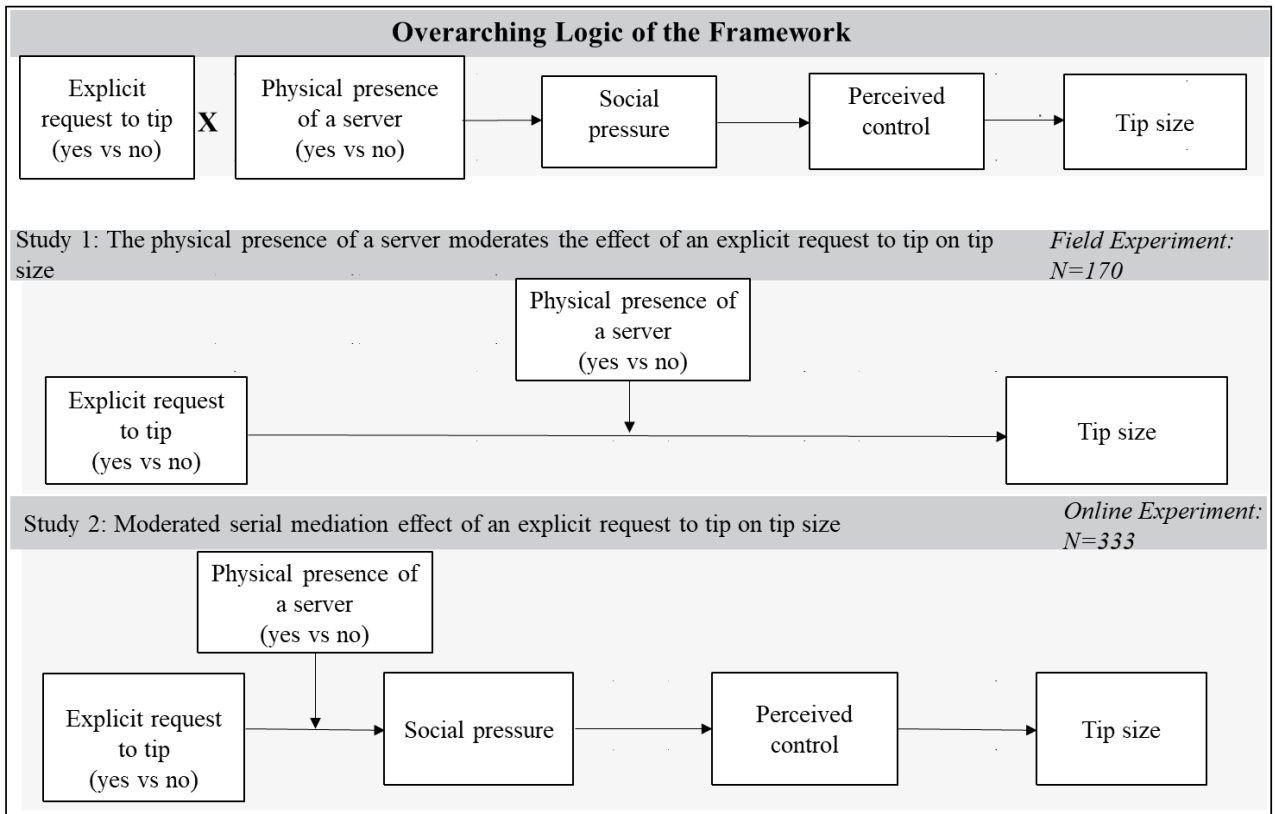


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

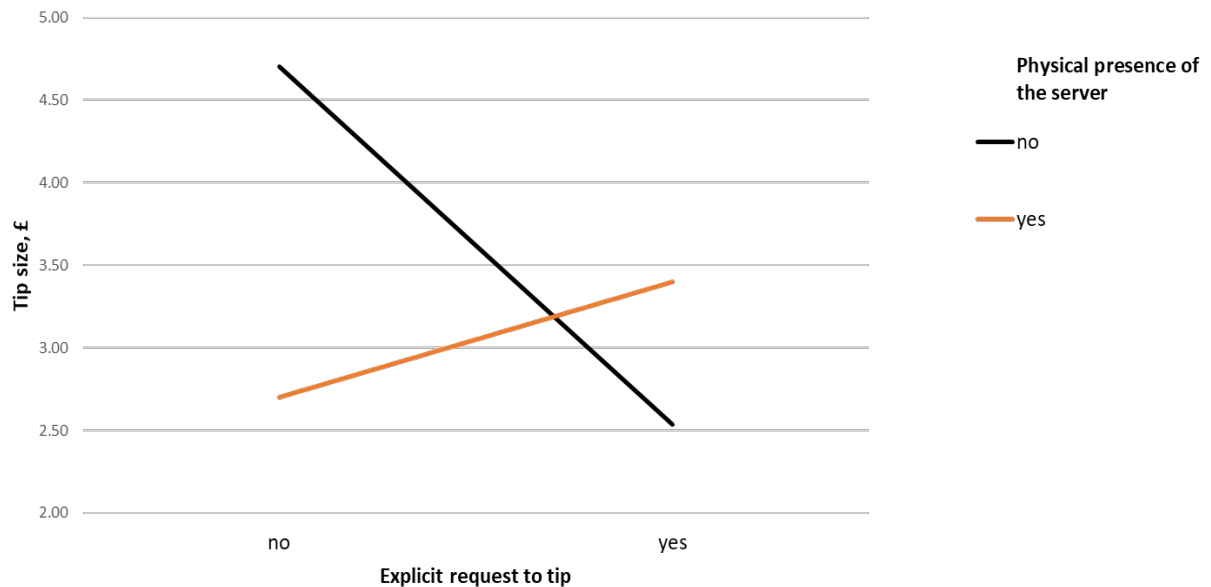


Figure 2. Interaction effect of explicit request to tip and physical presence of the server

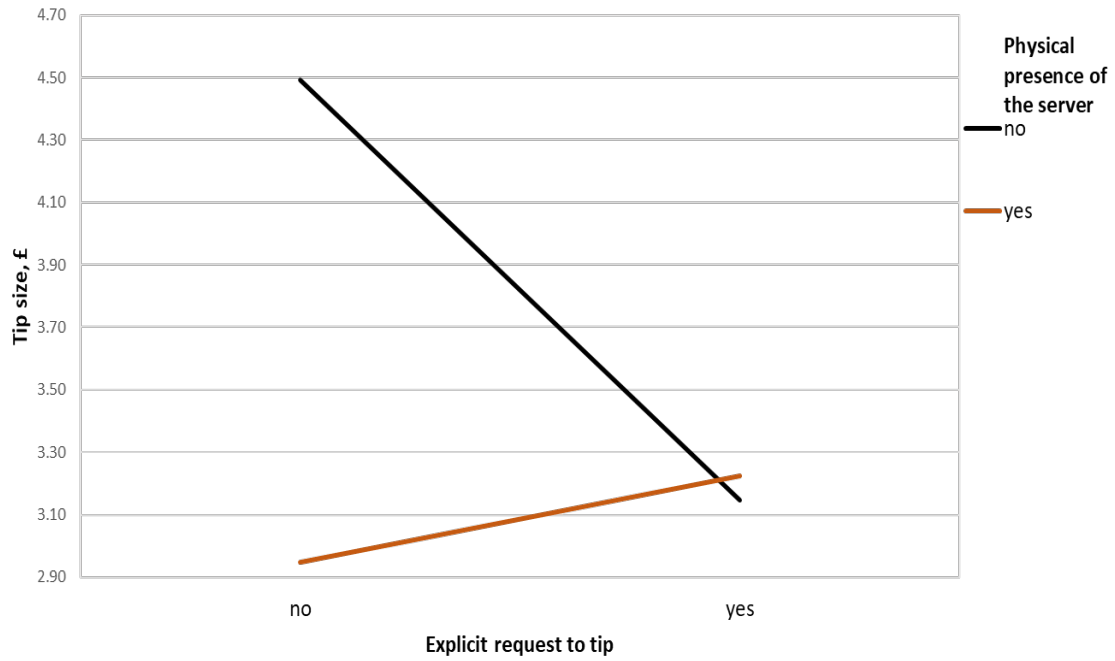


Figure 3. Tip size at different levels of physical presence and explicit request

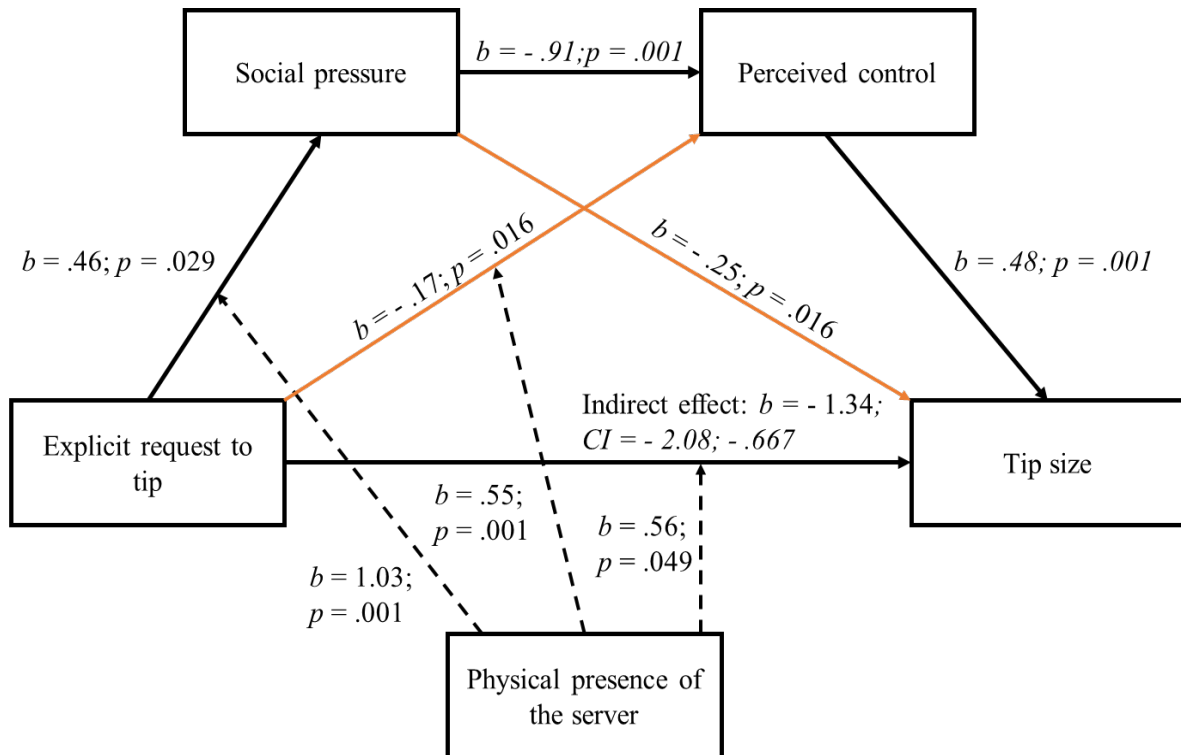


Figure 4. Moderated serial mediation effect of an explicit request to tip on tip size

Appendices

Appendix A. Four conditions of Study 2

- Condition 1
An explicit request to tip x a physical presence of the waiter
*“Imagine you and two of your colleagues dined at a casual, average quality, sit-down restaurant. You are satisfied with the food and service. You ask for the bill and pay by a credit card. **When the server hands you the card reader there is a question on the screen “Would you like to add gratuity?”. The waiter stands by the table and is aware of your decision.** The total amount of your bill is £37.40.”*
- Condition 2
An explicit request to tip x **no** physical presence of the waiter
*“Imagine you and two of your colleagues dined at a casual, average quality, sit-down restaurant. You are satisfied with the food and service. You ask for the bill and pay by a credit card. **When the server hands you the card reader there is a question on the screen “Would you like to add gratuity?”. The waiter steps away (e.g., cleaning the neighbouring table) to give you some space.** The total amount of your bill is £37.40.”*
- Condition 3
No explicit request to tip x physical presence of the waiter
*“Imagine you and two of your colleagues dined at a casual, average quality, sit-down restaurant. You are satisfied with the food and service. You ask for the bill and pay by a credit card. **The server hands you the card reader and stands by the table, waiting for the payment completion.** The total amount of your bill is £37.40.”*
- Condition 4
No explicit request to tip x **no** physical presence of the waiter
*“Imagine you and two of your colleagues dined at a casual, average quality, sit-down restaurant. You are satisfied with the food and service. You ask for the bill and pay by card. **The server hands you the card reader and steps away (e.g., cleaning the neighbouring table) to give you some space.** The total amount of your bill is £37.40.”*

Appendix B. Measurement scales

Scale items	Cronbach's Alpha
Social pressure	0.836
In this scenario, I feel pressured to tip	
In this scenario, I'll tip more given that I am having dinner with others who are not close friends	
In this scenario, the server's presence is influencing my tipping amount	
In this scenario, the presence of others that are not close friends is influencing my tipping amount	
In this scenario, it seems like I am expected to tip	
In this scenario, I will tip to impress	
Perceived control	0.853
In this scenario, I am satisfied with the amount of control I have over my tipping decisions	
In this scenario, I would feel comfortable when paying the bill	
In this scenario, I feel in control of my tipping behavior	
In this scenario, I have control over the decisions to whom I tip	
In this scenario, I can easily decide not to tip	