Negative Perceptions of Christian Tippers:

How Widespread are They?

Michael Lynn

Cornell University

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Michael Lynn is the Burton M. Sack Professor of Food and Beverage Management, School of Hotel Administration, 552 Statler Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-6902.  His e-mail address is WML3@cornell.edu; his office phone number is (607) 255-8271; his office fax number is (607)255-1355.

Abstract

An internet survey of a large sample of restaurant waiters and waitresses found that many servers across the United States perceive Christians as bad tippers. This perception is too prevalent to simply ignore. Managers of tipped employees who must serve Christian customers and Christians concerned about the public image of their faith should both strive to learn whether the perceptions are accurate and, if they are accurate, which subset or subsets of Christians tip poorly and why. Such information would inform efforts to change inaccurate perceptions via corrective informational campaigns directed toward servers or to identifying those subsets of Christians who tip poorly and encourage them to tip more generously.

Keywords:  Christians, religion, tipping, pro-social behavior

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"I give God 10%, why do you get 18?"  Pastor Alois Bell wrote these words on a restaurant check after crossing out the eighteen percent gratuity that had been added to the bill (Palmer, 2013). When her server posted a picture of the check and message on the internet in January of 2013, it created a whirlwind of articles, blogs, and comments about Christian tippers. A sense of the content of these posts can be gathered from the following sample of titles:

*"Holier-than-thou pastor refuses to tip waitress and then gets her*

*fired."*

- Maresa Brown, thestir.csafemom.com

*"Pastor does not tip. Waitress fired. God yawns."*

- thebitchywaiter.blogspot,com

*"Waitress-stiffing pastor simply said what many Christians think and do."*

- Valerie Tarico, awaypoint.wordpress.com

*"Another cheapskate Christian."*

- Bruce Gerencser, brucegerencser.net

*"Why are Christians such bad tippers?"*

- Karen Swallow Prior, www.christianitytoday.com

This negative publicity did not help the image of Christians or Christianity, but it may ultimately prove beneficial by bringing questions about Christian tipping into the open where they can be examined and dealt with as appropriate.

The aftermath of Pastor Alois Bell's message to, and stiffing of, her waitress called attention to long standing perceptions among at least some service workers that Christians are bad tippers. However, it is not clear how widespread those perceptions really are. Numerous statements about how badly Christians tip can be found on the internet (Lynn and Katz, 2013), but that fact says little about the prevalence of the expressed perceptions, because there are over two million servers in the United States and an even larger number of former servers, so a miniscule percentage of them could generate hundreds or even thousands of such statements. One unpublished report of a survey of 197 restaurant servers from a single undisclosed metropolitan area claimed that churchgoers were perceived as poor tippers, but the reported data did not permit an assessment of the magnitude or prevalence of this perception (Caudill, 2004). Furthermore, the limited geographic area sampled raises serious questions about the generalizability of the study's finding.

Knowing how prevalent perceptions of Christians as bad tippers are would be useful to both managers of tipped employees and to Christians themselves. Both groups could use the knowledge to better assess how big a problem this perception poses and how much attention to give this issue. Therefore, I sought to discover this information via a large internet survey of restaurant waiters and waitresses. The survey included questions about the servers' work histories, their perceptions of various customer groups' tipping generosity, and their own geo-demographic characteristics. The methodological

details of this study are described below, followed by analyses of the data to identify the extent and predictors of servers' perceptions that Christians are bad tippers.

<div align="center">Method</div>

<u>Sample</u>

Several different writers of restaurant server blogs were asked, and agreed, to post a link to the survey and to encourage their readers employed as waiters/waitresses to complete it. In addition, the end of the survey asked respondents to encourage other servers they knew to complete the survey. This recruitment method yielded 714 respondents who (i) reported being currently employed as a waiter or waitress at a tipping type restaurant in the United States, (ii) completed the survey, (iii) indicated in a series of end-of-survey questions that they took the survey seriously, read each question carefully, and answered as honestly and accurately as they could, and (iv) followed directions on one question designed to identify who was and was not reading questions carefully. However, ten respondents did not answer the question about Christian tippers, so only 704 observations were useable. Missing values on other variables used as predictors were replaced with the mean or mode as appropriate, except for region, which was treated by adding a dummy variable for missing data on this dimension. Descriptive statistics for the sample are presented in Table 1.

<u>Work History Question</u>

In addition to screening questions about current employment, respondents were asked two relevant work history questions – "At how many restaurants have you worked as a restaurant waiter or waitress?" and "For how many years have you worked as a

restaurant waiter or waitress?" The eleven drop-down response options for both questions ranged from 0 to 10 or more.

Perception of Christian Tippers Question

Respondents were asked to indicate "what kind of tippers you have found" Christians and each of 23 other customer groups to be using the following scale: 1 = very bad tippers, 2 = below average tippers, 3 = average tippers, 4 = above average tippers, 5 = very good tippers, and 6 = don't know. Don't know responses were recoded as average tippers for the analyses.

Demographic Questions

Respondents were asked to indicate their birth year (used to calculate age), sex (female=1, male =0),  race (recoded as white =1 and non-white =0), marital status (married =1, unmarried =0), and state of residence (coded into regional categories  -- Midwest, South, West, Northeast, and Missing).

Results

Descriptive statistics for the variables used in this paper are presented in Table 1. Of particular interest is the frequency distribution of perceptions of Christian tippers, which is presented in Figure 1.  While fifty-two percent of the servers in this sample did not consider Christians poor tippers, thirty-three percent thought they were below average tippers and another fifteen percent thought Christians were very bad tippers. The mean rating of Christian tippers was 2.41, which was reliably smaller than the value (of 3) for average tippers (t (703) = -19.61, p < .001).

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Insert Figure 1 and Tables 1-3 about here

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An analysis of variance with perception of Christian tippers as the dependent variable and number of restaurants worked at, number of years as a server, age, sex, marital status, race, and region as predictors produced a significant effect only for region (see Tables 2). Although servers from all regions of the country perceived Christian tippers as significantly below average tippers, those from the  South had more negative perceptions of Christian tippers than did servers from the West and Northeast while those from the Northeast had more favorable perceptions than those from the South and the Midwest (see Table 3).

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that a sizable percentage of servers across the United States perceive Christians as below average tippers or worse. The sample procedure was not random and the resulting sample of surveyed servers was not representative of the population of restaurant servers in the United States, so the precise descriptive statistics in this study should not be generalized to that population. However, the sampling procedure did not have an obvious bias that would clearly inflate or deflate perceptions of Christian tippers. For example, the survey was presented as a generic survey of waiters and waitresses and included many questions on other issues. It was not presented as a study of Christian tippers, which might have disproportionately attracted those who had negative views and wanted to share them. Furthermore, server's

perceptions of Christian tippers proved to be decidedly negative and robust across different levels of server work experience, different demographic characteristics of the servers, and even different geographic regions, so the data clearly indicate that the perception of Christians as bad tippers is pervasive even if they do not permit a more precise conclusion.

The perception that Christians are bad tippers poses a problem for service managers seeking to attract, motivate and retain tipped employees to serve Christian customers (Lynn and Katz, 2013) as well as for Christians who want others to have favorable impressions of their religious faith (Prior, 2013; Reaper, 2013). The finding that this perception of Christians as bad tippers is held by a large percentage of servers across the United States means that the problems it creates are sizable and need to be addressed. Too many servers share this perception to simply ignore it. The current findings do not, however, help to identify what should be done to address this perception and its attendant problems – that depends on whether the perceptions are accurate and, if they are accurate, which subset or subsets of Christians tip poorly and why. Inaccurate perceptions must be dealt with via corrective informational campaigns directed toward servers, while accurate perceptions need to be dealt with by identifying the poor Christian tippers and encouraging them to tip more generously.

The fact that servers believe Christians tip poorly is not evidence that they actually do so. Sub-normative tips and public displays of faith are both rare and the co-occurrence of such rare events has been shown to create illusory correlations in people's minds (Smith, 1991), so servers may perceive a relationship between religious faith and tipping where none exists. Furthermore, the apparent hypocrisy of Christians who tip

poorly may make such cases stand out, which would enhance servers' perception of an illusory correlation (Smith, 1991).

Claims about Christian tipping need to be verified or disproven with empirical evidence, but I could find only three, inconclusive studies examining this topic. One exit-survey of patrons leaving five restaurants in Virginia found that regular attendance at religious services did not predict tipping (Grossman and Parrett, 2011). A second internet-survey found that worship frequency was negatively related to the sizes of hypothetical restaurant tips after controlling for appropriate demographic variables (Lynn, Jabbour and Kim, 2012). A third internet-survey found that Christians claimed they would tip smaller amounts than did Jews or the unreligious, but that the vast majority of Christians claimed they would tip at or above the normative 15 percent of bill size (Lynn and Katz, 2013). The latter study also found that those who attended worship services frequently claimed to tip slightly larger amounts than did less frequent worshippers when the service was bad, but not when the service was good. These mixed and even contradictory results are difficult to interpret and matters are further complicated by study limitations, such as the fact that the first of the studies employed only a binomial measure of religious service attendance and the third of the studies did not control for respondents' education levels. Thus, more research is needed to assess the accuracy of servers' perceptions that Christians as a group tip poorly.

Furthermore, if perceptions of bad Christian tippers are grounded in reality, it seems more likely that a subset of Christians tip poorly than that all do so. Knowing which Christians do and do not tip poorly would help to direct corrective measures more effectively and efficiently. Unfortunately, no study has yet examined the tipping of

different subgroups of Christians to see if one particular type of Christian might be responsible for servers' perceptions of Christian tippers in general. This too is an important issue that should be addressed in future research.

In summary, there is anecdotal evidence that some restaurant servers perceive Christians as bad tippers.  If pervasive, this perception would pose a problem for service managers seeking to attract, motivate and retain tipped employees to serve Christian customers as well as for Christians who want others to have favorable impressions of their religious faith. Unfortunately, it is not clear if those perceptions are widespread enough to be of concern. The main contribution of the current study is to address that uncertainty. The results indicate that Christians' reputation as bad tippers is too pervasive to simply ignore. Managers and religious leaders alike should address this widespread server perception, but they need more information about the actual tipping behavior and motivations of Christians as compared to others in order to do so more effectively. Hopefully, this paper will encourage more hospitality management scholars to study the issue and thereby inform efforts to address this negative perception of Christians.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the variables in the restaurant server survey.

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Treatment of Missing Values |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perception of Christian Tippers | 704 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.4063 | .80345 | Obs. Dropped |
| Number of Restaurants | 704 | 1.00 | 10.00 | 4.8040 | 2.84571 | NA |
| Number of Years | 697 | 0.00 | 10.00 | 7.6643 | 2.88761 | Mean replacement |
| Age | 693 | 19.00 | 61.00 | 32.6870 | 8.91161 | Mean replacement |
| Sex (F = 1, M = 0) | 695 | .00 | 1.00 | .8403 | .36660 | Mode replacement |
| Race (white = 1, non-white = 0) | 697 | .00 | 1.00 | .9125 | .28280 | Mode replacement |
| Married (yes = 1, no = 0) | 695 | .00 | 1.00 | .7381 | .43997 | Mode replacement |
| Midwest  (yes = 1, no = 0) | 704 | .00 | 1.00 | .2088 | .40675 | Separate Category |
| South (yes = 1, no = 0) | 704 | .00 | 1.00 | .3523 | .47802 | Separate Category |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| West (yes = 1, no = 0) | 704 | .00 | 1.00 | .1449 | .35224 | Separate Category |
| Northeast (yes = 1, no = 0) | 704 | .00 | 1.00 | .2131 | .40977 | Separate Category |
| Missing Region (yes =1, no = 0) | 704 | .00 | 1.00 | .0810 | .27298 | NA |

Table 2. Results of an analysis of variance on perceptions of Christian tippers.

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected Model | 14.134[a] | 10 | 1.413 | 2.228 | .015 |
| Intercept | 111.766 | 1 | 111.766 | 176.160 | .000 |
| Number of Restaurants | .827 | 1 | .827 | 1.303 | .254 |
| Number of Years | .087 | 1 | .087 | .137 | .711 |
| Age | .983 | 1 | .983 | 1.550 | .214 |
| Sex | 1.134 | 1 | 1.134 | 1.787 | .182 |
| Married | .465 | 1 | .465 | .733 | .392 |
| Race | .000 | 1 | .000 | .000 | .989 |
| Region | 10.936 | 4 | 2.734 | 4.309 | .002 |
| Error | 439.678 | 693 | | | |
| Total | 4530.000 | 704 | | | |
| Corrected Total | 453.813 | 703 | | | |

a. R Squared = .031 (Adjusted R Squared = .017)

Table 3. Estimated marginal means for perceptions of Christian tippers (1 = very bad tippers, 5 = very good tippers) by region.

| Region | N | Mean* | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| South (a) | 248 | 2.265 $^{d,e}$ | .051 | 2.166 | 2.365 |
| Midwest (b) | 147 | 2.381$^{e}$ | .066 | 2.251 | 2.510 |
| Missing Region (c) | 57 | 2.410 | .106 | 2.202 | 2.618 |
| West (d) | 102 | 2.527 $^{a}$ | .080 | 2.370 | 2.685 |
| Northeast (e) | 150 | 2.581 $^{a,b}$ | .065 | 2.452 | 2.709 |

* Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: number of restaurants = 4.8040, number of years as a server = 7.6643, age = 32.6970, sex = .8423, married = .2585, race = .9134. Superscripts next to a mean  identify the other means that are significantly different from it  at the .05 alpha level.
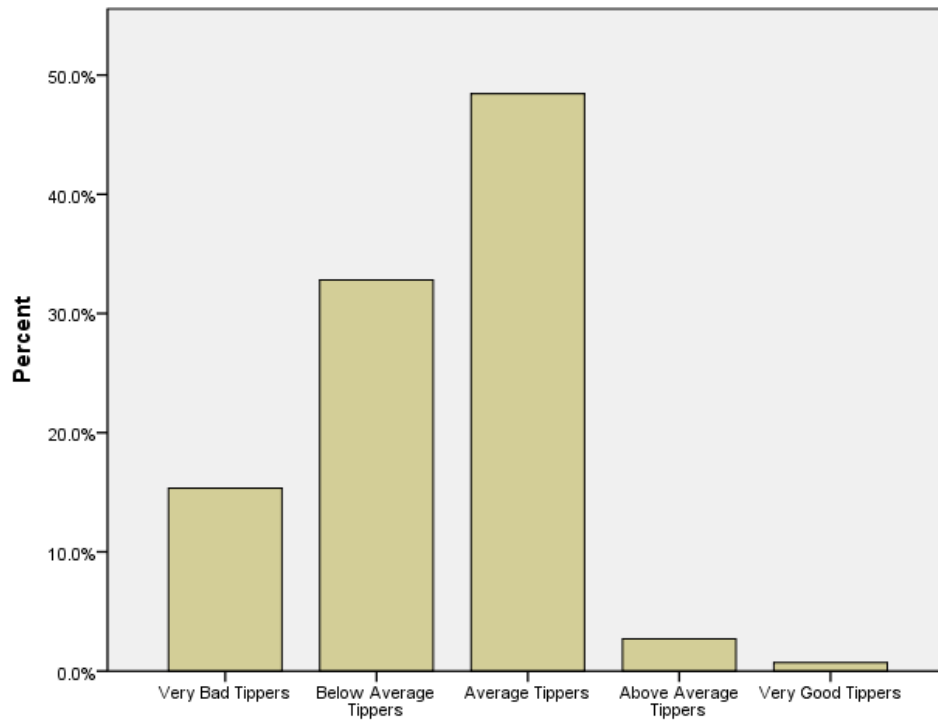
Figure 1. Frequency distribution of servers' perceptions of Christian tippers.

Figure Captions


Figure 1. Frequency distribution of servers' perceptions of Christian tippers.