

New report suggests there is little support for no-tipping policy and only 20% of Canadian consumers intend to tip more after the pandemic

HALIFAX, NS. (June 24, 2021) – The **Agri-Food Analytics Lab** at **Dalhousie University**, in partnership with **Angus Reid**, is releasing a preliminary report on attitudes and perceptions of tipping habits during COVID-19. This article focuses on how tipping by consumers during a large-scale crisis may be changing, and how this may impact food service providers in Canada.

Previous studies, such as ‘Restaurants post-COVID-19’¹ and news stories reveal the economic and emotional impact to Canadians, their access to foods in grocery stores and their inability to patronize restaurants due to closures. Twelve months on, Canadians are establishing new social norms and this study seeks to understand if perceptions on tipping have changed, if there are long-term behavioral changes and if the pandemic has shifted public opinion on gratuities. Our motivation for investigating this social norm is our concern for those working in an industry hard-hit by the pandemic as it looks to return to ‘normal’. Simultaneously, decolonial, racial and gender equity actions across Canada present a unique opportunity to question what we want to return to.

Recently, a total of 1000 Canadians were surveyed online with 990 respondents asked about their perceptions of tipping behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study introduces a **new framework to interpret the social norm of tipping**. We are associating acts of spending money with yielding a positive feeling, referred to as the ‘warm glow of giving’ which is ‘satisfying one or more core human need’². These acts can create three potential effects contributing to the achievement of ‘warm glow’ which we apply to tipping: feeling connected with those receiving tips (relatedness), perceiving the impact of tips (competence), and feeling free in making one’s choice to tip (autonomy).

Overall perceptions of change

We inquired directly about respondents’ perceptions of their own happiness with tipping practices, their awareness of social pressures, how they might define tipping, and if they anticipate their tipping habits changing because of the pandemic.

Respondents reported on their happiness while tipping during the pandemic. **37% reported ‘Yes, they feel happy tipping’**, with only 10% reporting that they are not happy. Of the remaining half of the respondents, 27% have not thought about it, and 26% feel ambivalent.

¹ Charlebois, S. (2020). New survey on COVID-19 suggests 52% of Canadians intend to avoid restaurants for the foreseeable future. Dalhousie University Faculty of Agriculture.

[https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/COVID%20Restaurants%20Mini-Report%20\(June%202020\)%20EN.pdf](https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/COVID%20Restaurants%20Mini-Report%20(June%202020)%20EN.pdf)

² Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2013). Prosocial Spending and Happiness: Using Money to Benefit Others Pays Off. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413512503>

We asked respondents to define tipping in limited terms. Respondents who feel tipping is or mostly is **generosity** (53.4%) outnumbered slightly those who **feel tipping is or mostly is an obligation** (46.6%). We did not define the terms beforehand, and more analysis of the data is needed to understand if this distinction between the two groups is significant in their behaviors.

Canadians surveyed perceive social expectations of tipping to be changing. In other words, a growing number of Canadians are feeling the pressure of giving a decent tip, more so than before the pandemic. **48% feel that social expectations have increased** compared to 7% who feel that this has decreased. 31% do not perceive any change, while 13% do not pay attention to social expectations.

Following the previous question, we wanted to know if participants anticipate their tipping habits changing. While most Canadians (71%) do not anticipate changing their behaviors, **20% anticipate tipping more they did prior to COVID-19**. Only 3% anticipate moving away from tipping, despite the 7% that previously stated there was social pressure to move away from tipping.

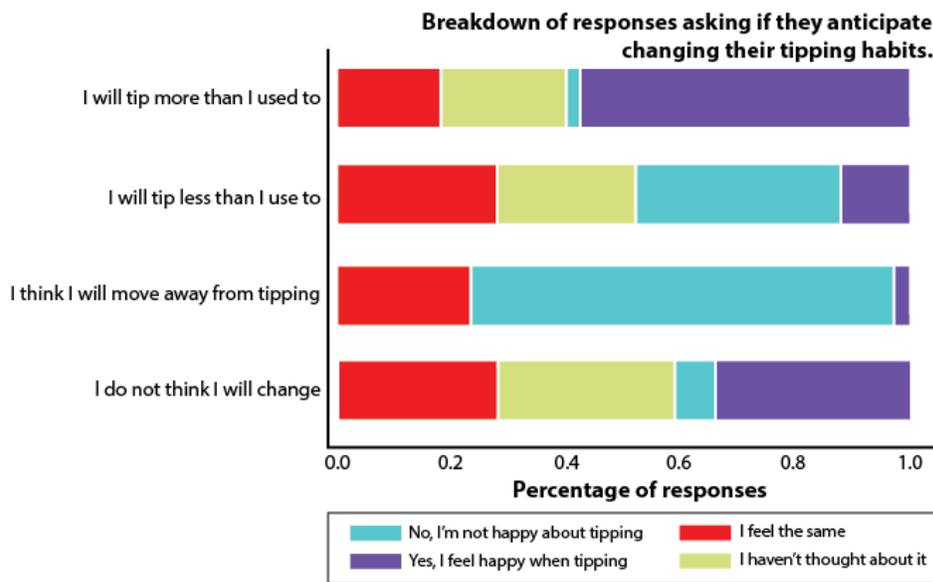


Fig. 1: Answers to question on happiness grouped by answers to anticipating changing their tipping

Looking more deeply at these numbers, of those respondents that felt they anticipate tipping more than they used to (the 20% mentioned previously), **58% of them reported feeling happy when tipping** in contrast with only 2% reporting they are not happy when tipping. While it is too early to come to any conclusions, this alignment with happiness and anticipating tipping more suggests more research is needed to understand what is motivating these respondents.

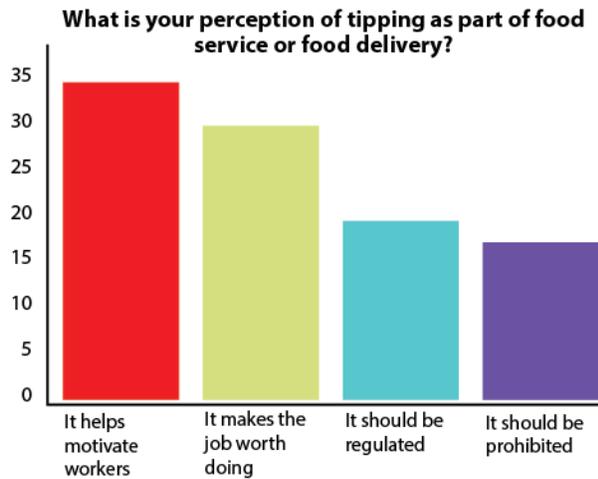


Fig. 4: Respondent’s perceptions of tipping as part of food service or delivery.

To understand how people interpret tip-based employment, we asked for respondents’ perceptions on the purpose of tipping as part of food service or delivery. **34% state that it helps motivate workers** and **30% feel that it makes the job worth doing**. **19% say that it should be regulated** and **17% declare that it should be prohibited**. While only 6% of our respondents’ households depend on tip-based income, this suggests that there are **more people aware of the social issues around tipping**, possibly through previous experience or being informed by other means. Combined, these latter two groups represent 36% of our survey population who feel negatively towards the practice.

Relatedness

We also asked if people tip more in their favorite restaurant, assuming there is a connection through community identity or with people at the restaurant. While nearly 60% said they tip the same amount regardless, nearly **40% of respondents pay higher tips at their favorite restaurant or take out**. While a feeling of connection can be implied, more research is needed to understand what motivates this behavior.

Previous studies have looked at relatedness with regards to behaviors such as tipping, but we wanted to know how personal protective equipment (PPE), such as face masks, may be affecting the food service or food delivery experience. 27% felt they have some connection with those they are tipping and **20% identified feeling really connected despite the mask** in contrast with 31% who did not know or couldn’t tell, and 22% who report feeling no connection at all. Future studies investigating the impact of PPE on tipped income may offer more insight into the latter two numbers to provide more information on how PPE may affect relatedness, particularly with respect to food delivery as the interaction is so brief.

Competence

Linking tips to competence, or the feeling that actions make a difference, we asked how respondents perceive their tips impacting those receiving them. **Nearly 56% felt their tips made some difference** and 27% felt their tips made a big difference to those receiving them. We will be analyzing this data in more depth to see how these perceptions correlate with other behaviors.

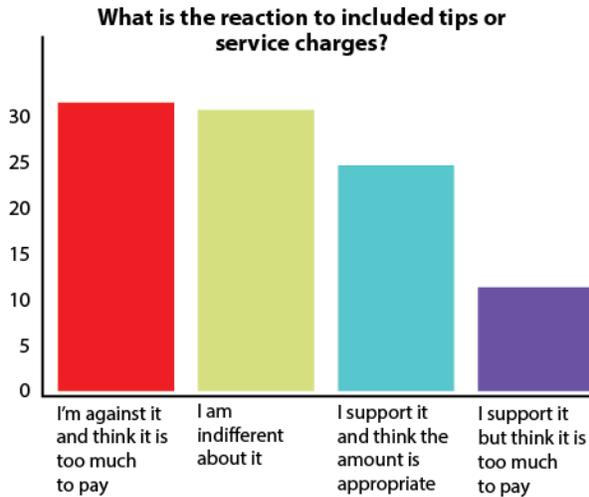


Fig. 3: Responses to the question, 'What is the reaction to included tips or service charges?'

Autonomy

We wanted to understand how recent trends in tipping are affecting attitudes, so we inquired how our survey population feel about suggested tip rates. **53% perceive that they follow their own formula**, 18% appreciate and follow this practice, with a further 5% appreciating it, and tipping more than the suggested amount. A combined 27% react negatively to suggested tipping rates.

When asked about reactions to included tips or service charges, this also shows a considerable population in favor of some change to tipping practice. While a combined 37% are supportive of this idea, **32% are against it**. From our framework, we are linking this reaction to a lack of control or loss of autonomy, which does not provide a reward for those spending money.

Discussion

While there is a recovery underway, we can still see the effects that second and third waves of COVID-19 are having on the Canadian hospitality industry. Restaurants Canada reported in April 2021 that monthly employment for February 2021 was a 902,300, still over 300,000 jobs less than pre-pandemic levels³. With Canadian savings rates prior to the pandemic on average 1.4% of personal disposable income⁴, it is likely that those with tip-dependent incomes have experienced financial stress as a result of the pandemic.

Our framework of 'warm glow' provides us with a means to understand how people feel the sense of reward from tipping and helps us deconstruct tipping as an inherited artifact of colonialist ideals and power structures. While relatedness in tipping provides us with social rewards, it does so within the realm of servitude with a troubling history of racial oppression. Competence, or perceiving the impact of tipping on those receiving tips, relies upon assumed power of those with money and the assumption of the other being in need. Autonomy, or the feeling that there is free choice in tipping amounts, contributes most harmfully by placing financial stability in the hands of others as optional, and dependent upon their good will. **Issues of class, race, gender and sexuality all come into play and have been studied in other publications.**

³ Month by month look at the effects of COVID-19. (2021). Restaurants Canada. http://www.restaurantscanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/infographic_RC_Final.pdf

⁴ Table 36-10-0112-01 Current and capital accounts—Households, Canada, quarterly. (n.d.). Statistics Canada. Retrieved June 4, 2021, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3610011201>

Conclusion

Our study investigated ‘warm glow’ as an indicator of social support for tipping during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. Our study indicates that the majority of Canadians feel benefits from tipping in the form of social relatedness, a feeling of being in control and perceiving that tipping has a positive impact on others. More analysis of our data and previous studies in conjunction with publicly available statistics is needed to understand how these results might translate into long-term behavioral change.

From this survey, it appears that **Canadians expect to continue to tip as plans for reopening and ‘returning to normal’ are realized**. While restaurants are also facing many challenges including higher wages, worker availability, and lower margins, the danger of returning to normal is that it recreates the same marginalizing conditions experienced by those who were hardest hit as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our preliminary results suggest that while the majority feel positively about tipping, there is a considerable population that view tipping negatively, and that social support may be there when the food service industry is ready to change.

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Methodology: A representative survey of Canadians was conducted in April 2021, in partnership with Angus Reid. 990 Canadians participated in this survey.

Margin of Error: +/- 1.3%, 19 times out of 20. Any discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

Research Ethics Certificate: No. 2020-5180.

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