

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CULTURE AND QUALITY PERCEPTIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE QUALITY MANAGEMENT

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of Hofstede's culture dimensions on service quality perceptions.

Design/ methodology/approach: Correlation analysis was used to estimate the relationship between culture-dependent consumers' expectations and estimated service quality requirements according to the SERVQUAL scale. In order to test the hypotheses, a questionnaire survey has been carried out to gather empirical data. The online questionnaire set up for this study consists of two parts. The first part is demographic information, while the second part collects the main information required for running the main analyses. Since the objective of this study is to explore the role of cultural differences in perception of service quality, the attitudes towards particular service quality dimensions have been measured by a five-point Likert scale. Each measurement variable varies from 1 to 5, among which 5 means very positive, 4 positive, 3 neutral, 2 negative, and 1 very negative. The completed questionnaires were the basis of the study and have been used in the analysis of data by using correlation coefficient (V-Cramer's coefficient) analysis. The reliability test used was Cronbach's alpha. For all research variables, values were higher than 0.8. Cronbach's alpha showed high internal consistency, which implies that the measures are reliable and the evaluation instrument is appropriate for use in research.

Findings: The influence of cultural values on the fulfilment of consumers' expectations has been analysed with V-Cramer's Correlation Coefficient. The correlation between all investigated culture dimensions and SERVQUAL dimensions is statistically significant because the χ^2 -values are higher than the critical value. The characteristic features of service quality typical for a given dimension of culture have been distinguished on the basis of a previous literature review. All research hypotheses are accepted. There is a positive correlation between positive customers' experiences and the SERVQUAL quality dimensions typical for collectivistic values (H1), high power distance (H2), high motivation towards achievement and success (H3), high uncertainty avoidance (H4), and short-term orientation (H5). The research results revealed that consideration of culture-dependent dimensions, connected with service quality management, positively influences consumers' experiences.

Research limitations/implications: The significant influence of cultural values related to Hofstede's culture dimensions on the perception of service quality was confirmed on the example of young Polish customers. There are some limitations of this study related to the limited sample. Moreover, the empirical data were collected only in Poland. A future study should try to validate and generalise the results of this study by using a larger sample and taking into account the expectations of customers from other countries.

Originality/value: Previous studies provide evidence that culture has an impact on service quality. However, there has been no research on the effect of culture on service quality, which is a significant gap in the literature. This study attempts to fill this gap by investigating the relationships between Hofstede's dimensions of culture and service quality requirements according to the SERVQUAL scale.

Keywords: Hofstede's culture dimensions, service quality management, quality perception, service quality requirements, SERVQUAL

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Culture is believed to be one of the most influential factors to shape individual values and to affect behaviour. There were various studies focused on the effect of cultural dimensions on service quality, and the results indicated the effects of cultural dimensions on service quality both positively and negatively depending on dimensions (Laroche et al., 2004; Wen et al., 2009; Kastanakis, Voyer, 2014; Donthu, Yoo, 1998; Furrer et al., 2000; Karami et al., 2016; Djekic et al., 2016; Choi et al., 2021; Shavitt, Barnes, 2020; Hassan, Wood, 2020; Hejaili et al., 2009; Basfirinci, Mitra, 2025; Bouranta et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2008; Morgeson et al., 2025; Kilbourne et al., 2004; Diallo et al., 2018). Cultural variation results from different cultural values and affects perceptions and experiences that play an important role in consumers' attitude behaviours and satisfaction.

Lovelock and Yip (1996) distinguish between three categories of services: a) people-processing services that involve tangible actions to customers in person, b) possession-processing services that involve tangible actions to physical objects, and c) information-based services that depend on collecting, manipulating, interpreting, and transmitting data to create value. People-processing services necessarily involve a high degree of contact with service personnel and facilities. Therefore, there is a need for segmentation to adapt these services to local cultures. On the contrary, possession-processing and information-based services have the potential to be much lower contact in nature, so they can be standardised at the global level. That is, it is when services involve a high degree of interaction between customers and service personnel that cultural elements have the greatest influence.

Previous studies provide evidence that culture has an impact on service quality. However, there is no investigation on the effect of culture on service quality, and thus, significant gaps exist in the literature. This study tries to close this gap by investigating the relationships between dimensions of culture proposed by Hofstede and service quality requirements according to the SERVQUAL scale.

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of Hofstede's culture dimensions on service quality perceptions.

This study takes into consideration Hofstede's (2010) culture dimensions, including individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, motivation towards achievement and success (previously masculinity and femininity dimension), short-term and long-term orientation, and investigates their influence on consumers' attitudes towards service quality according to the SERVQUAL scale (Minkov and Kaasa, 2022).

The study is structured as follows. After this introduction, the theoretical foundations and literature review have been presented. The next section details the methodological procedures, followed by an analysis of data, and defines the dimensions of the proposed framework and its indicators. Then the results of research have been presented and discussed. Finally, conclusions and suggestions for the continuation of the research have been presented, limitations are described, and theoretical and practical implications are explored.

2. Theoretical background

Culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape the behaviours and attitudes of individuals and organisations (Hofstede, 1998). This study is based on the theory of cultural aspects developed by Geert Hofstede (1980), which identifies five cultural aspects that shape the behaviour and values of individuals and organisations of different cultures.

Traditional service quality assessment is based on the famous SERVQUAL model and proposes five dimensions of quality evaluation: Responsiveness, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, and Reliability (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The SERVQUAL model has been widely cited as one main mechanism by which to evaluate the level of service quality offered to customers of a service. Reliability is concerned with the dependable and accurate performance of the service. Assurance relates to the knowledge and courteousness of the service provider as well as their ability to inspire trust and confidence in the customer. Tangibles refer to the appearance of the service scape and the physical facilities and materials. Empathy measures the extent to which the service provider offers caring and individualised attention. The final SERVQUAL dimension of responsiveness refers to the willingness of the service provider to provide efficient and prompt service (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Previous studies across a range of service quality industries have shown that there is a significant link between cultural dimensions and service quality expectations. There is evidence to suggest that the dimensions of culture have a significant influence on a consumer's perception of service quality. Douthu and Yoo (1998) have conducted research to test the effect of culture on bank consumers' expectations of service quality. Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL instrument have been applied in their study. Their study results show that customers who are short-term orientated, individualistic, low on power distance, and high on uncertainty avoidance have higher service quality expectations, and low

power distance consumers have higher expectations of reliability and responsiveness while individualistic customers have higher expectations of empathy and assurance. There is a negative correlation between power distance and responsiveness and reliability. This correlation is related to the fact that in cultures with high power distance, the customer tends to suffer poor delivered services because he respects the expertise of the more powerful provider.

Mattila (1999) examined cultural differences between Western and Asian customers in terms of individualism, power distance, and high versus low-context communication in personalised service and pleasant physical environments in luxury hotels. In her study she found out that Western customers rely on the tangible cues of physical environment and value the dimensions of service that are related to pleasure more than those of Asian background. This study finds out that Hofstede's power distance and individualism dimensions are related to the three dimensions mentioned above in evaluating the service quality of luxurious hotels. A managerial finding that could be taken into consideration is that when evaluating the hotel service quality, Western customers are relatively low on power distance, are more individualistic, and focus more on tangible elements of the physical environment than people from Asia, who score higher on power distance and collectivism. Personal interaction with the service provider is more appreciated by Asian people (Mattila 1999).

Furrer, Liu, and Sudharshan (2000) investigated the relationships between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and SERVQUAL dimensions in banking service. They argued that the importance of SERVQUAL dimensions varies across people from different cultural backgrounds and produces correlations between all pairs of dimensions of culture (Hofstede 2010) and of service quality (Parasuraman et al. 1988), substantiating positive or negative relationships. Their study focuses on weak and frequent customers served often by female employees. Their results show that power distance, individualism, uncertain avoidance, and long-term orientation have positive or negative relationships with the SERVQUAL dimensions, and masculinity had no significant effect on service quality. Their research also shows the negative correlations between empathy, assurance, and individualism. Moreover, they also stated that due to the self-identity, individualist customers also expect a distance with the service provider, whereas tangibles are considered a means to decrease the closeness of the interaction. So, tangibles and individualism may have a positive correlation.

Tsoukatos and Rand (2007) conducted a study in retail insurance. They focus on infrequent and weak customers served by female employees. Their study investigates the relationships between Hofstede's culture dimensions and four dimensions of the SERVQUAL, excluding tangible in the SERVQUAL instrument. In their study they find that power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance are inversely related to reliability, responsiveness, and assurance, and long-term orientation is only significantly related to reliability.

Kueh and Voon (2007) examined the influence of individual-level cultural dimensions on Generation Y consumers' expectations of service quality. They argue that service quality expectations are positively related to uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation but

negatively related to power distance, with no significant relationships with masculinity and collectivism.

Another study (2013) found that cultural values influenced service quality perceptions. Consequently, cultural dimensions significantly influenced evaluation of service quality. Therefore, using differences in cultural values as a tool for market segmentation could improve understanding of cultural differences among cultures and formulate a better strategy to meet local needs and expectations regarding service quality.

3. Materials and methods

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of Hofstede's culture dimensions (2010) on service quality perception according to the SERVQUAL scale. The cultural dimensions included in this study are individualism, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, motivation towards achievement and success (previously the masculinity and femininity dimension), and long-term or short-term orientation (Minkov, Kaasa, 2022).

Correlation analysis was used to estimate the relationship between culture-dependent consumers' expectations and estimated service quality requirements according to the SERVQUAL scale. One example of Polish customers' experiences is the influence of cultural values connected with Hofstede's culture dimensions on service quality perception, which has been examined.

Poland is considered to be a country with a collectivistic culture (with a score of 47) and a hierarchical society with high power distance (a score of 68). A high score of motivation towards achievement and success (64) indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement, and success. Poland scores 93 on the uncertainty avoidance dimension and thus has a very high preference for avoiding uncertainty. Poland's score of 49 in the term orientation dimension indicates that people prefer a short-term orientation focusing on personal stability (<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison-tool>, 2024).

Based on the literature review and the characteristic dimensions of Polish culture, the following hypotheses were proposed for the causal relationship between cultural values and their influence on consumers' service quality requirements:

- **Hypothesis 1 (H1).** Fulfilment of service quality requirements that reflect collectivistic values is more valuable among Polish consumers than fulfilment of service quality expectations typical for individualistic culture.
- **Hypothesis 2 (H2).** Fulfilment of service quality requirements that reflect high power distance is more valuable among Polish consumers than fulfilment of service quality expectations typical for low power distance.
- **Hypothesis 3 (H3).** Fulfilment of service quality requirements that reflect high motivation towards achievement and success is more valuable among Polish consumers

than fulfilment of service quality expectations typical for low motivation towards achievement and success.

- **Hypothesis 4 (H4).** Fulfilment of service quality requirements that reflect high uncertainty avoidance is more valuable among Polish consumers than fulfilment of service quality expectations typical for low uncertainty avoidance.
- **Hypothesis 5 (H5).** Fulfilment of service quality requirements that reflect short time orientation is more valuable among Polish consumers than fulfilment of service quality expectations typical for long time orientation.

In order to test the hypotheses, a questionnaire survey has been carried out to gather empirical data. The online questionnaire set up for this study consists of two parts. The first part is demographic information, while the second part collects the main information required for running the main analyses. The first section of the questionnaire gathers personal information about the respondents, such as age and gender. The second section of the questionnaire gathers information regarding the information related to all independent variables: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, motivation towards achievement and success, and long-term or short-term orientation.

All survey participants were young people, aged under 26. Each participant of the study was asked to answer the survey questions. The research was conducted on a group of 278 students in January, February, May, and June 2024. The data was collected in the form of a survey carried out on the e-learning website. Each participant of the study was asked to answer the survey questions. Respondents included 48.2% males and 51.8% females. 53.2% of the respondents were ages 19-20, 42.8% were ages 21-24, and 4% were over age 24.

In the questionnaire, respondents determined the acceptance level and their attitudes toward the different attributes of service quality, typical for a particular Hofstede culture dimension.

Since the objective of this study is to explore the role of cultural differences in perception of service quality, the attitudes towards particular service quality dimensions have been measured by a five-point Likert scale. Each measurement variable varies from 1 to 5, among which 5 means very positive, 4 positive, 3 neutral, 2 negative, and 1 very negative. Correlation analysis was used to estimate the relationship between culture-dependent consumers' expectations and estimated service quality requirements according to the SERVQUAL scale. The completed questionnaires were the basis of the study and have been used in the analysis of data by using correlation coefficient (V-Cramer's coefficient) analysis. The reliability test used was Cronbach's alpha. For all research variables, values were higher than 0.8. Cronbach's alpha showed high internal consistency, which implies that the measures are reliable and the evaluation instrument is appropriate for use in research.

4. Results and discussion

The influence of cultural values on the fulfilment of consumers' expectations regarding service quality has been analysed with V-Cramer's Correlation Coefficient. The correlation between all investigated culture dimensions and SERVQUAL dimensions is statistically significant because the χ^2 values are higher than the critical value (7.92). The characteristic features of service quality typical for a given dimension of culture have been distinguished on the basis of a previous literature review. The results have been presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Expected service quality requirements (based on the SERVQUAL) according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions

SERVQUAL quality requirements (according to Hofstede's culture dimensions)	χ^2 – value	V-Cramer's coefficient
Individualism - Reliability - Empathy	8.31	V=0.527
Collectivism - Assurance - Responsiveness	8.27	V=0.783
High power distance -Assurance	8.14	V=0.824
Low power distance -Reliability -Empathy -Tangibles	8.21	V=0.429
High motivation towards achievement and success - Assurance - Responsiveness	8.43	V=0.861
Low motivation towards achievement and success -Empathy -Tangibles	8.36	V=0.475
High uncertainty avoidance - Reliability - Responsiveness - Assurance - Empathy	8.62	V=0.986
Low uncertainty avoidance -Tangibles	7.98	V=0.471
Short-term orientation - Assurance - Responsiveness	8.12	V=0.759
Long-term orientation - Reliability	8.17	V=0.412

Source: own study.

Regarding the first analysed cultural dimension (individualism-collectivism), service quality requirements that put emphasis on elements connected with the expression of collectivistic values are more accepted among surveyed consumers (V=0.783) than service attributes, which

emphasise characteristics related to individualistic values ($V=0.527$). Additionally, for surveyed consumers, more valuable are services that have features connected with high power distance ($V=0.824$) than services that highlight quality assessment elements reflected in low power distance ($V=0.429$).

The results also confirm that service quality attributes connected with high motivation towards achievement and success are more attractive for consumers ($V=0.861$) than service quality attributes that have features related to low motivation towards achievement and success ($V=0.475$).

Essential for customers' expectation fulfilment is consideration of service quality assessment characteristics, which reflect high uncertainty avoidance ($V=0.986$). Such services are more attractive for surveyed consumers than services that contain elements reflected in values typical for low uncertainty avoidance cultures ($V=0.471$). The obtained results indicate that Polish consumers prefer the fulfilment of service quality requirements that reflect values connected with short-term orientation ($V=0.759$) over the fulfilment of service quality requirements that contain elements typical for long-term orientation ($V=0.412$).

According to the conducted analysis, service quality management, which takes into consideration cultural values and reflects culture dimensions typical for a particular cultural group, has a positive influence on consumers' experiences. The difference in quality acceptance level and consumers' positive attitudes is especially considerable in the case of uncertainty avoidance. Poland is a country with a very high level of uncertainty avoidance, and this fact has its manifestation in research results. The highest acceptance level among surveyed consumers has service quality attributes that emphasise values connected with strong uncertainty avoidance. Therefore, the lowest correlation coefficient reflects a small acceptance level in the case of service quality characteristics that emphasise values connected with low uncertainty avoidance. Also, the results related to high power distance and high motivation towards achievement and success confirm that specific service quality requirements, which reflect cultural values, have a significant influence on service quality assessment and positive service experiences.

Based on the analysis that was conducted, all considered cultural dimensions typical for Polish culture have a positive influence on service quality assessment. Therefore, all research hypotheses are accepted. There is a positive correlation between positive customers' experiences and SERVQUAL quality dimensions typical for collectivistic values (H1), high power distance (H2), high motivation towards achievement and success (H3), high uncertainty avoidance (H4), and short-term orientation (H5). The research results revealed that consideration of culture-dependent dimensions, connected with service quality management, positively influences consumers' experiences.

5. Conclusions

Findings of this research revealed that cultural dimensions had a direct influence on service quality perception. This research investigated the impact of Hofstede's cultural dimensions on consumers' attitudes towards service quality. One example of Polish consumers' experiences is the significant influence of cultural values on service quality assessment has been confirmed. The high level of acceptance of service quality requirements typical for collectivistic values, high uncertainty avoidance, high motivation towards achievement and success, high power distance, and short-term orientation is the consequence of shaped-in cultural context consumers' expectations.

The evaluation of service quality was significantly influenced by cultural dimensions due to the influence of cultural values on service quality perceptions. By utilising cultural value differences as a means of market segmentation, it could enhance comprehension of cultural differences in culture and create a better plan to meet service quality requirements that are dependent on culture.

There are some limitations of this study related to the limited sample. Moreover, the empirical data were collected only in Poland. A future study should try to validate and generalise the results of this study by using a larger sample and taking into account the expectations of customers from other countries.

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