The culture of hospitality: From anecdote to evidence

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Abstract

We examine the nature, magnitude, and generalisability of the effects of the cultural values of hotel guests and hotel workers, as approximated by their countries' scores on Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, on the satisfaction with hotel services, as perceived and reported by hotel guests. The main and interactive effects of the cultural dimensions are modelled and estimated within a multivariate multilevel Bayesian regression model using an empirical data set of 30.000 customer reviews collected from TripAdvisor. The results indicate that cultural dimensions named Indulgence, Individualism, and Power Distance, substantially affect the way in which hotel services are rendered as well as perceived. Focusing more on the estimated effects of the cultural values of hotel workers, which can be managed in practice, the results suggest that hotel workers from countries scoring low on individualism and indulgence seem to be particularly gifted for rendering high quality hotel services. Interestingly, many Asian countries, including Japan, China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam have advantageous values on these two cultural dimensions, which may partly explain the rapid contemporary expansion of their hotel industries. On the other hand, numerous Western world countries, such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, Belgium, Malta and Scandinavian countries score relatively highly on these two dimensions, which suggests that they may be relatively less culturally disposed to providing high-quality hotel services. The insights presented in this study have important implications for the processes of staff recruitment and training in the global hotel industry.

Keywords: culture; hotel services; service quality; customer satisfaction; Hofstede's cultural dimensions

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1. Introduction

The notion that the national identities and cultures of the parties involved in hotel service encounters have an effect on the way in which services are rendered and evaluated, has been studied repeatedly in the literature (Hope, 2004; Jahandideh, Golmohammadi, Meng, O'Gorman & Taheri, 2014; Mok & Armstrong, 1998; Torres, Fu & Lehto, 2014). Most research has been focused on the evaluation side of the encounter, demonstrating that guests from different cultures have different requirements from hotel staff (Prayag & Ryan, 2012), demonstrate different complaint behaviour (Jahandideh et al., 2014; Yuksel, Kilinc & Yuksel, 2006) and tend to evaluate similar hotel services differently (Gao, Li, Liu & Fang, 2018; Radojevic, Stanisic & Stanic, 2017; Radojevic, Stanisic, Stanic & Davidson, 2018). The effects that a hotel worker's national culture has on the quality of services rendered by them, for the most part, remains unclear. The aim of this study is to offer solid and credible empirical evidence on this important issue.

Accordingly, the first question tackled in this study is whether the cultural characteristics of hotel workers systematically affect reported levels of satisfaction with the quality of hotel services they provide. Answering this question appropriately is remarkably challenging with regards to the methodological approach that needs to be employed, since it requires:

1. An empirical data sample of adequate size and geographical scope to ensure the reliability and generalisability of the findings;
2. Appropriate operationalisation of the cultural values of the location of the hotels, as well as that of the countries of origin of the hotel guests;
3. Modelling the effects of all potentially relevant dimensions of culture, along with their pairwise interactions;
4. The use of the appropriate modelling framework (i.e. multilevel regression instead of simple regression);
5. Considering the possibility that cultural dimensions affect various aspects of hotel service differently, and
6. Focusing on the reported levels of satisfaction with the quality of service rendered, rather than on the reported levels of overall satisfaction, as studies typically do.

In consideration of the requirements listed above, we use a publicly available and sizable empirical dataset based on TripAdvisor's online surveys of customer satisfaction with hotel services, compiled by Radojevic, Stanisic and Stanic (2016), operationalise the concept of culture using the widely accepted cultural dimension framework developed by Geert Hofstede (1980), and build a multivariate multilevel model to draw conclusions about the nature of the effects of interest.

Based on the estimates of the main and interactive effects of Hofstede's six cultural dimensions, we proceed to answer the second major question tackled in this study, which is whether certain nations, or clusters of nations, can be regarded as particularly culturally disposed to providing high-quality hotel services.

Understanding the implications of a hotel employee's national culture on the (perceived) quality of services they render is not only valuable to researchers, but is of utmost importance to

hotel managers globally, who can use this knowledge to develop a recruitment strategy that will enhance their guest's satisfaction.

2. Literature review

2.1. Culture

For an immense period of time, the human race was widely dispersed over the globe in the form of relatively isolated tribal groups. This circumstance played a crucial role in creating and maintaining a rich diversity of languages and cultures (Lowie, 1917), many of which are in evidence today. As a product of history, culture is built up over time largely through processes which are beyond the awareness of individuals (Oberg, 1960). For this reason, it is considered "superindividual" (Murdock, 1932) and defined as "the collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). It includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other abilities and habits that people acquire as members of a society (Tylor, 1871). These are passed on from parents to children, and reinforced by major social institutions - schools, churches, businesses, and governments (Kotler & Keller, 2009).

2.1.1. The operationalisation of national culture: Hofstede's framework

The first step towards the development of cultural constructs at the national level was taken by Inkeles and Levinson (1969). Based on an extensive review of then-existing sociological and anthropological literature, they proposed three "standard analytic issues". These analytic issues (nowadays called cultural dimensions) were later confirmed by Geert Hofstede (1980) in his highly influential work "Culture's Consequences". Over the past few decades, Hofstede has further defined, shaped, and promoted the concept of cultural dimensions through subsequent research efforts. His work has inspired much of the cross-cultural research done over the past decades. Of the many currently competing cultural dimensions frameworks (Schwartz, 2006; Inglehart & Baker, 2000), that presented by Hofstede remains the most widely utilised.

The current version of his theoretical framework recognises six distinct cultural dimensions which are, in brief:

1. Power distance – the extent to which less powerful members of society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally;
2. Individualism – the extent of preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families;
3. Masculinity – the extent to which emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life;
4. Uncertainty avoidance – the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations;
5. Long term orientation – the extent to which members of a culture foster virtues oriented toward future rewards – in particular, perseverance and thrift, and
6. Indulgence – the extent to which the gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun is freely allowed.

Based on his empirical research, Hofstede estimated scores for these cultural dimensions for a number of countries, allowing researchers to operationalise the concept of culture. The availability of the empirical scores, along with the framework's clarity, parsimony, and resonance with managers (Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson, 2006), has meant that it has been widely adopted in cross-cultural studies within the fields of tourism and hospitality (Li, 2012).

2.2 The role of culture in the hotel industry

In the hotel industry, guest satisfaction is achieved when perceived service performance exceeds the expectations (often referred to as 'desired service' in the literature) that guests have developed in the "before-travel" stage (Manrai & Manrai, 2011). Culture, as suggested by the literature, can affect both the expectations of hotel service encounters by shaping a guest's wants and expectations, and performance by imbuing hotel workers with various characteristics that may be relevant for rendering of services (Chen, Cheung & Law, 2012).

According to Kotler and Keller (2009), culture has the broadest and deepest effect of all factors that determine a person's wants.[1] The finding that visitors from different countries report different average satisfaction levels after visiting the very same destination is consistent with this premise (Crotts & Erdmann, 2000; Kozak, 2001). Furrer, Liu and Sudharshan (2000) have, furthermore, shown that the relative importance of the dimensions in the SERVQUAL model varies significantly across cultures, with these variations being associated with Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The premise that a customer's cultural background shapes their expectations and evaluation of services is strongly supported by empirical research in the hotel industry (Matzler, Renzl & Rothenberger, 2006; Mok & Armstrong, 1998; Torres et al., 2014).

On the other side, evidence to show that a hotel worker's cultural background affects their performance in the context of the hotel service industry is relatively limited. While the research has repeatedly demonstrated that organisational and personal characteristics play an important role in the development of hospitality culture (Dawson, Abbott & Shoemaker, 2011; Tepeci & Bartlett, 2002), such a solid evidence of the impact of national culture. The rare studies that use estimates of hotel workers' scores on Hofstede's cultural dimensions as explanatory variables have either focused on general customer satisfaction with all aspects hotel services (e.g. Radojevic et al., 2017, 2018) or on organisational performance (e.g. Nazarian, Atkinson & Foroudi, 2017) as outcomes to be explained, which tells us little about their effects on the perceived quality of service as specifically provided by workers.

In addition to exerting their main effects, the values of hotel guests and hotel workers are also expected to interact to create both positive and negative outcomes regarding a guest's satisfaction. Clearly, a significant cultural distance between the two parties can compromise the ability of the management and staff to correctly assess a guest's expectations and wants, which is crucial for the successful provision of a service (Saleh & Ryan, 1991), otherwise causing negative emotions and dissatisfaction in guests (Stauss & Mang, 1999).[2] Some of the culturally-

[1] The other two groups of factors are social and personal.

[2] In addition to the risk that the performance of the local service provider does not meet the expectations of the foreign customer (the term "intercultural provider performance gap" is used), Stauss and Mang (1999) recognise the

imbued differences that may manifest and negatively affect a guest's satisfaction with hotel services are those related to greetings, politeness and the acceptable volume of interaction, gift-giving, tipping, eating and drinking, and a guest's entertainment. It can also be argued that the very same differences may also be perceived by a guest as exotic and charming and thus cause positive reactions. Indeed, empirical studies (Radojevic et al., 2017, 2018) have found that cultural distances in certain of Hofstede's dimensions have significant positive effects on reported levels of satisfaction with hotel service, while the others appear to have nil or a significant negative effect.

The literature review demonstrates that there is not yet any reliable evidence of the effect of a hotel worker's national culture on the quality of services they render, motivating us to tackle this important issue and, thus, fill the existing knowledge gap. Both theory and the available empirical evidence also suggest that, to properly isolate the effect of a hotel worker's culture on the quality of services they render, the statistical model needs to simultaneously account for the effects of the cultural backgrounds of guests, and the potential interactive effects that the cultural characteristics of the two parties may have on service evaluation.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data

For this study, we used a publicly available dataset (Radojevic et al., 2016) based on TripAdvisor's online surveys of customer satisfaction with hotel services. The initial dataset comprised 3,488,473 customer ratings, provided by 2,233,671 unique registered TripAdvisor users of 210 different nationalities, and related to 13,410 hotels located in 80 capital cities around the globe. The ratings represent self-reported encounter-specific customer satisfaction with hotel services and take one of the following numerical values and corresponding descriptive labels: 1 – 'terrible', 2 – 'poor', 3 – 'average', 4 – 'very good' and 5 – 'excellent'. In addition to assigning an overall satisfaction score, reviewers may also evaluate the hotel service against six criteria: 'location', 'cleanliness', 'rooms', 'service', 'sleep quality' and 'value'. They also report the type of travel during the specific encounter as: 'business', 'couple', 'family', 'friends' and 'solo'. The ratings in the sample were all provided between 31 August 2002 and 15 May 2015.

Most importantly for this research, the dataset also contains Geert Hofstede's cultural dimension scores for the 80 countries (for both destination countries and the reviewer's country of origin) for which scores on all the six dimensions are available on his official website (Hofstede, 2010).

For an in-depth description of the initial dataset see Radojevic, Stanisic and Stanic (2017).

2.2. Model

To achieve the goals of this study, we specified and fitted a Bayesian multivariate multilevel regression model. The choice of the modelling technique was motivated by the aim of

possibility that service cannot be fulfilled at the usual performance level because foreign customers do not maintain the role behaviour expected by the domestic supplier, resulting in an "intercultural customer performance gap".

the research and the characteristics of the data. The multilevel modelling approach allowed us to include Hofstede's cultural dimension scores in the model in a way that accounts for the fact that they are only available at the national level. This was crucial for obtaining unbiased estimates of the effects of the cultural dimensions, which are the explanatory variables of main interest in this research. Employing an ordinary (OLS) linear regression instead would, inappropriately, force the projection of Hofstede's national scores onto the level of the individual encounter, as if both a visitor's cultural values and the cultural values prevalent at the destination were measured separately for each encounter. This approach would produce disaggregation error (Brewer & Venaik, 2014; Van de Vijver & Poortinga, 2002) and the estimates of the effects of the cultural dimension scores obtained from such a model would be biased.

The multilevel framework also allowed us to control for the four major systematic effects shown to affect the satisfaction scores: 1) the reviewer, 2) the hotel, 3) the reviewer's nationality and 4) the destination in which the hotel is situated. All four influences are modelled as random effects, as recommended by Radojevic, Stanisic and Stanic (2017). Other factors that are controlled for in the model are the date of review (to account for temporal trends of increases in the scores), and trip type (to account for the fact that for-leisure encounters are rated more favourably than for-business encounters, as found by Radojevic et al. [2018]).

The multivariate approach to multilevel modelling has been chosen to account for the fact that encounter-level satisfaction scores on different criteria are mutually dependent. Namely, during the evaluation process, the overall impression of the quality of hotel services is unsystematically spilled-over across the rating criteria, resulting in highly correlated (mutually contaminated in a sense) rating scores.[3] To obtain unbiased estimates of the effects, it was thus necessary to model the values of all scores and the correlations simultaneously.

The multivariate approach also allows for the possibility that the explanatory variables may affect each rating criterion in a different way - the cultural values may be highly relevant for customer satisfaction on some criteria (e.g. Quality of Service, Cleanliness), while being nearly irrelevant for others (e.g. Quality of Sleep). Generally, the effects of culture are most likely to manifest in human interactions, and therefore we primarily focus on interpreting the effects of the cultural dimension on the 'Quality of Service' dependent variable.

The model is specified using the 'classification notation' (Browne, Goldstein & Rasbash, 2001) as follows:

[3] The spill-over effect is described in (Radojevic et al., 2017). If there were no spill-over effect, conclusions on the levels of service quality by country and region could be drawn based solely on the average values of ratings on the corresponding evaluation criteria.

$$
\begin{aligned}
y_{ci} = x_{ci}\beta_c + u_{c\,visitor(i)}^{(2)} + u_{c\,vis\,national(i),0}^{(3)} + u_{c\,hotel(i)}^{(4)} + u_{c\,destination(i)}^{(5)} \\
+ u_{c\,vis\,national(i),1}^{(3)} Destination\ PDI\ score_i \\
+ u_{c\,vis\,national(i),2}^{(3)} Destination\ IDV\ score_i \\
+ u_{c\,vis\,national(i),3}^{(3)} Destination\ MAS\ score_i \\
+ u_{c\,vis\,national(i),4}^{(3)} Destination\ UAI\ score_i \\
+ u_{c\,vis\,national(i),5}^{(3)} Destination\ LTO\ score_i \\
+ u_{c\,vis\,national(i),6}^{(3)} Destination\ IVR\ score_i + e_{ci}
\end{aligned}
$$

where subscripts *c* and *i* denote individual criteria and encounters, respectively; y_{ci} is the multivariate response (the seven satisfaction scores) variable, $x_{ci}\beta_c$ refers to the fixed part of the model, inclusive of the intercepts, the control variables (date of review and trip type) and the individual effects of cultural dimensions and their pairwise interactions, and u_c stands for a random effect (a random intercept or a random slope).

Given the complexity of the model specified and the computational intensity inherent in Bayesian methods, the model was fit on a random subsample of 30,000 observations drawn from the initial dataset. R software environment for statistical computing (R Core Team, 2018) and its associated software package for Bayesian Multilevel Models Using Stan named *brms* (Bürkner, 2017) were used for model fitting. To facilitate interpretation of the results, scores on each cultural dimension were rescaled to 0-1 range (0 indicating minimal, and 1 indicating maximal observed values among all countries for the corresponding dimensions). According to the potential scale reduction factor (PSRF), a convergence diagnostic recommended by Gelman and Rubin (1992), all 413 model parameters successfully converged after 60,000 iterations. The complete output of the model, including the model syntax and the estimates of the parameters, can be accessed through the following link: https://www.dropbox.com/s/qyiufotpne5bett/Complete%20model%20output.pdf?dl=0

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Model output

For the reasons stated in the previous section, we will primarily focus on the regression coefficients pertaining to the *Quality of Service* dependent variable. These coefficients are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 - Model estimates of fixed effects for the Service response variable

	Effect	***Estimate***	***Est. Error***	***l-95% CI***	***u-95% CI***	***Eff. Sample***	***PSRF***
Control variables	Date of review	0.07	0.01	0.06	0.08	400	1
	Trip type: Solo	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.11	320	1.01
	Trip type: Friends	0.02	0.02	-0.02	0.06	400	1
	Trip type: Couple	0.17	0.02	0.14	0.21	400	1
	Trip type: Family	0.12	0.02	0.08	0.16	400	1
PDI	Visitor's country PDI	0.35*	0.11	0.14	0.55	400	1
	Destination country PDI	-0.09	0.1	-0.28	0.13	400	1
	Visitor's country PDI × Destination country PDI	-0.44*	0.16	-0.76	-0.12	400	1
IDV	Visitor's country IDV	0.27*	0.08	0.12	0.43	290	1
	Destination country IDV	-0.27*	0.09	-0.43	-0.12	400	1.01
	Visitor's country IDV × Destination country IDV	0.02	0.1	-0.17	0.22	392	1
MAS	Visitor's country MAS	-0.12	0.1	-0.32	0.06	389	1
	Destination country MAS	0.13	0.1	-0.09	0.33	400	1.01
	Visitor's country MAS × Destination country MAS	0.02	0.15	-0.3	0.33	400	1
UAI	Visitor's country UAI	0.07	0.08	-0.08	0.22	400	1
	Destination country UAI	0.07	0.08	-0.08	0.23	388	1
	Visitor's country UAI × Destination country UAI	-0.17	0.12	-0.39	0.06	400	1
LTO	Visitor's country LTO	0.04	0.1	-0.15	0.26	400	1
	Destination country LTO	0.12	0.1	-0.1	0.3	400	1
	Visitor's country LTO × Destination country LTO	-0.2	0.17	-0.51	0.12	400	1
IVR	Visitor's country IVR	0.01	0.13	-0.27	0.25	400	1.01
	Destination country IVR	-0.65*	0.14	-0.91	-0.37	400	1
	Visitor's country IVR × Destination country IVR	0.52*	0.22	0.06	0.95	400	1

For easier comprehension of the estimated effects of Hofstede's cultural dimensions on a guest's reported satisfaction with quality of hotel service, the values of ratings scores that are expected to be reported on the associated evaluation criteria under various combinations of cultural values of destination country and guest's country of origin are extracted from the model and shown in Figure 1. A destination country's score on a cultural dimension is shown on the x axis, and a guest's country of origin score on the same cultural dimension is indicated by line colour (red indicates an extremely high score of 1, black a medium score of 0.5 and blue an extremely low score of 0). For each combination of the two values of cultural scores the expected customer ratings can be read on the y axis.

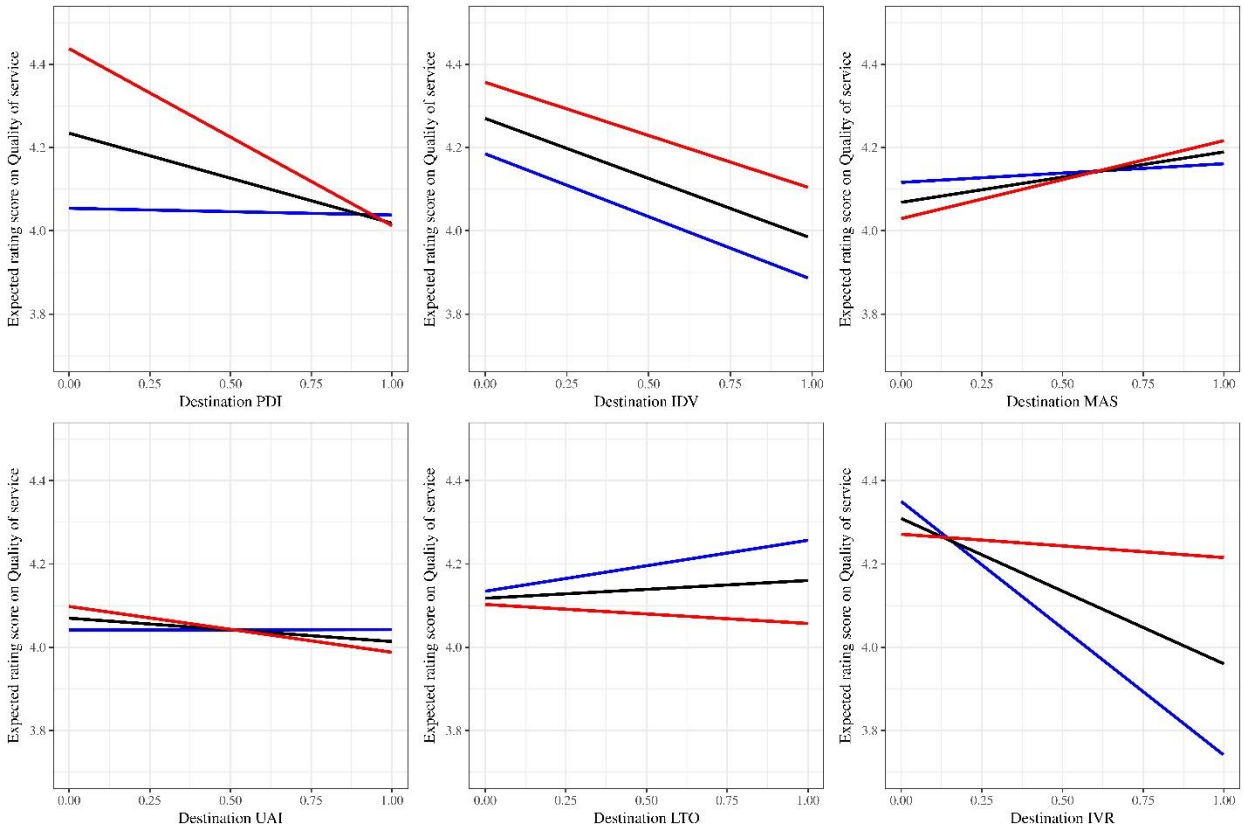

Figure 1 - The effect destination's cultural values on customer satisfaction with quality of hotel services

3.2 Remarks on the interpretation of the results

The first aspect of cultural effects that needs to be accounted for when interpreting the results is their estimated magnitude. This is particularly important in view of the most important methodological limitation of this study, which is the circumstance that foreign hotel workers, who are common in the hotel industry, have cultural values different from those attributed to them in this study, based on the hotel's location. While this limitation may have introduced bias to all coefficient estimates, it is reasonable to assume that stronger, especially statistically significant, effects, as estimated by the model, are relatively less affected, and thus can be regarded as more authentic and robust. The estimated magnitudes of these effects are likely to be somewhat biased, but the estimated directions of their effect (i.e. sign of the regression coefficient) are expected to be correct. Weaker effects, in contrast, should be viewed with more

scepticism, since their estimated magnitudes may be biased to a degree where the direction of the influence is incorrect, and therefore we will focus mainly on strong effects while interpreting the results.

Another aspect of the effects that needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting the results is their consistency. We define consistency as the quality of the direction of effect of a cultural dimension of the destination country being unchanged regardless of the value of a guest' s country of origin score on the corresponding cultural dimension. An effect can have a significant interaction and still be consistent if the sign of the effects is not affected by the interaction. Consistent effects are prioritised over inconsistent effects, since the nature of their influence is clearer and can be generalised over all possible combinations of cultural values, which is crucial given the aim of our study.

Pronounced individualism exerts the most consistent effect of a destination's culture on customer satisfaction with the quality of hotel services. The higher the individualism of the hotel workers, the lower the reported level of a guest's satisfaction, regardless of how individualistic the guests are themselves. Everything else being equal, a hypothetical destination's cultural transformation from pronounced collectivism to pronounced individualism, would be expected to result in a pervasive decrease in satisfaction with hotel service quality of around 0.27 (on a 1 through 5 scale), which is, definitely, of practical significance.

Pronounced indulgence at destination is a consistently negative, and conditionally very strong effect. The magnitude of the effect varies from a dramatic reduction of 0.65, for guests from restrained cultures, to a moderate reduction of 0.13, for guests from high indulgence cultures, indicating that the values of the two parties on this dimension interact.

Pronounced power distance at destination is a consistently negative, and conditionally strong effect. It slightly reduces satisfaction by 0.09, when a guest's power distance is low, but causes a substantial drop in satisfaction by 0.53, when guest's power distance is extremely high, which, again, indicates a significant interaction.

Finally, pronounced masculinity and uncertainty avoidance appear to exert consistent (positive and negative, respectively), but insignificant effects on guest satisfaction, whereas pronounced long-term orientation seems to be capable of slightly affecting a guest's perception of the quality of hotel services, both positively and negatively, depending on their own degree of long-term orientation (the effect is positive for guests with a low and medium degree of long-term orientation, and negative for guests from countries characterised by a high degree of long-term orientation). Considering their relatively small magnitudes, along with their questionable authenticity, the effects of masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation do not call for elaborate interpretation.

3.2.1 Interpretation of the effects of hotel worker's Individualism, Indulgence and Power Distance on the quality of hotel services they render

The finding that collectivistic culture is advantageous for providing high-quality hotel services is highly consistent with the observations offered in the literature.

Yilmaz, Alpkan and Ergun (2005, p.1342) offer the following explanation for this phenomenon:

> *"Unlike individualistic cultures, which value independence and competition, collectivist cultures encourage the subordination of personal interests to the goals of a larger work group and put more emphasis on sharing and cooperation (Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001). Collectivist cultures give priority to supportive organisational practices, interpersonal connectedness, group solidarity, joint responsibility, and harmony (Doney, Cannon & Mullen, 1998; Newman & Nollen, 1996). Out of this cohesion grows a greater proclivity (than individualistic cultures) to exchange information and ideas, (2) support and assist each other, (3) discuss problems openly and constructively (Chen, Meindl & Hui, 1998), and (4) develop commitment to the organisation (Wasti, 2002)."*

Similarly, Reisinger and Dimanche (2010) observe that, in collectivistic societies, "*customer satisfaction often depends* on *trust, caring, shared duty and long-term commitment, such as provision* of *services beyond contract terms, attending* to *all concerns, expressing gratitude for the relationships and rewards loyalty, and placing customer interests at times above those of the firm*".

Manrai and Manrai (2011) suggest that collectivistic societies put relatively more emphasis on courtesy and consideration, whereas individualistic societies are less focused on these aspects of service.

Another important circumstance that needs to be considered is that individualism is the dimension that has the highest positive correlation with national affluence (Hofstede et al., 2010). Because of the relatively greater job opportunities that individuals living in rich countries have, hotels operating there may struggle to attract and retain high quality employees. Conversely, a job in the hotel industry may be much more attractive, lucrative (e.g. tips received from foreigners) and even prestigious for individuals living in poor countries. Seen as a gateway to a better life, the hotel industries operating in poor countries can afford to be highly selective when recruiting staff. Highly motivated and rigorously selected employees may be a significant competitive advantage for countries that score low on individualism.

Koc, Ar and Aydin (2017, p.4) suggest that workers from indulgence-oriented cultures should be better disposed to providing high quality services, because they are more involved in leisure and pleasure activities themselves, and thus can better internalise customer expectations, and should have a deeper understanding of their needs, wants and expectations. People from more restrained cultures, they suggest, may have difficulties understanding and internalising hedonic leisure activities and are, thus, expected to underperform when organising such activities for others. Quite contrary to this proposition, our results demonstrate that, along with collectivism, a culture of restraint, characterised by a high degree of professionalism and work ethics, strong discipline, preference for order and focus on job duties (Hofstede, 2010), is actually the most valuable cultural asset when it comes to providing high quality hotel services. Individuals from cultures of pronounced indulgence, due to their probable lack of the above characteristics, coupled with their strong preferences for leisure and having fun and a tendency to

be overly informal in communication, are, clearly, relatively less gifted at providing hotel services. The strong and significant interactive effect also suggests that a cultural combination of hotel workers being from pronounced indulgence countries and guests from restrained cultures is the single worst possible combination in all six dimensions. The negative interaction, conceivably, occurs because of the likely failure of high indulgence workers to meet the particularly high expectations of service quality that individuals from restrained cultures tend to have.

According to the literature, a pronounced power distance culture among hotel workers is, believed to be disadvantageous with regard to the quality of services they provide, as it leads to unbalanced organisational structure (Nazarian et al., 2017), a less participative stance in decision making, greater reliance on rules and procedures, excessively high levels of subordinate submissiveness, reluctance to take responsibilities outside the immediate scope of one's job and a lack of informal communication (Yilmaz et al., 2005). Our results, however, suggest that, unlike the effects of individualism and indulgence, which seem to directly affect the quality of service, the effect of power distance mainly operates in a guest's perception-/evaluation. Specifically, while a hotel worker's score on power distance is almost completely irrelevant for guests from low power distance cultures, high power distance guests have a strong preference for low power distance hotel workers. The non-bureaucratic and considerate attitude of low power distance workers may impress guests from high power distance cultures. Even though the effect is irrelevant on some occasions, it is well worth noting that, in most intercultural combinations, service provided by low power distance hotel workers will be perceived and evaluated as superior to that provided by high power distance workers. For that reason, along with collectivism and restraint, low power distance may be regarded as advantageous for providing high-quality hotel services.

3.2.2 Assessing culturally-induced human capacity to provide high-quality hotel services

Based on the results above, we proceed to infer the extent to which individual nations may be considered culturally disposed to providing high quality hotel services. To account for the possible measurement error present in the Hofstede's scores, we rely on estimated directions of the effects, rather than on their raw estimates of magnitudes. Specifically, each individual cultural dimension score for a destination is characterised as being either on the advantageous or on the disadvantageous side of the related dimension's spectrum, as implied by the model estimates.

Moreover, to reflect the different levels of scepticism that a researcher may have about the authenticity, generalisability, and practical significance of the estimated effects, we have constructed three different country scores, which are counts of defined criteria met by individual countries. The first score involves two criteria evaluating the two strongest effects originating in performance (individualism is below mid-range and indulgence is below mid-range), the second score includes an additional criteria that evaluates the score on power distance (power distance is below mid-range, individualism is below mid-range and indulgence is below mid-range), and the third score includes one criterion for each of the six Hofstede's dimensions (power distance is

below mid-range, individualism is below mid-range, masculinity is above mid-range, uncertainty avoidance is below mid-range, long-term orientation is above mid-range and indulgence is below mid-range).

Hofstede's scores rescaled to a 0-1 scale and number of conditions met for the countries in the sample are presented in Table 2. Countries are ranked by the first score, within the first score by the second score and lastly by the third score.

Table 2 - Countries in the sample sorted by their culturally-imbued human capacity for providing high-quality hotel services, as implied by the results of the model

		Hofstede's scores rescaled to 0-1 range						Criteria and no. of conditions met (the scores)		
Rank	**Country**	**PDI**	**IDV**	**MAS**	**UAI**	**LTO**	**IVR**	**IDV LOW (<0.5) IVR LOW (<0.5)**	**PDI LOW (<0.5) IDV LOW (<0.5) IVR LOW (<0.5)**	**PDI LOW (<0.5) IDV LOW (<0.5) MAS HIGH (>0.5) UAI LOW (<0.5) LTO HIGH (>0.5) IVR LOW (<0.5)**
1	**Japan**	0.48	0.43	0.95	0.91	0.88	0.42	2	3	5
2	**Pakistan**	0.49	0.03	0.47	0.67	0.48	0.00	2	3	3
3	**Hong Kong**	0.64	0.16	0.55	0.23	0.59	0.17	2	2	5
4	**China**	0.78	0.10	0.64	0.24	0.86	0.24	2	2	5
5	**Lebanon**	0.72	0.35	0.63	0.46	0.10	0.25	2	2	4
6	**India**	0.74	0.46	0.54	0.35	0.49	0.26	2	2	4
7	**Philippines**	0.93	0.25	0.62	0.39	0.24	0.42	2	2	4
8	**Albania**	0.89	0.10	0.79	0.67	0.59	0.15	2	2	4
9	**Indonesia**	0.75	0.03	0.43	0.43	0.60	0.38	2	2	4
10	**Vietnam**	0.66	0.10	0.37	0.24	0.55	0.35	2	2	4
11	**Singapore**	0.71	0.10	0.45	0.00	0.71	0.46	2	2	4
12	**Iraq**	0.94	0.23	0.68	0.84	0.22	0.17	2	2	3
13	**Morocco**	0.66	0.43	0.51	0.65	0.10	0.25	2	2	3
14	**Bangladesh**	0.78	0.10	0.53	0.57	0.45	0.20	2	2	3
15	**Zambia**	0.55	0.29	0.37	0.46	0.27	0.42	2	2	3
16	**Tanzania**	0.66	0.16	0.37	0.46	0.31	0.38	2	2	3
17	**Greece**	0.55	0.29	0.55	1.00	0.43	0.50	2	2	3
18	**South Korea**	0.55	0.08	0.36	0.84	1.00	0.29	2	2	3
19	**Bulgaria**	0.66	0.23	0.37	0.84	0.68	0.16	2	2	3
20	**Taiwan**	0.53	0.06	0.42	0.66	0.93	0.49	2	2	3
21	**Russia**	0.92	0.34	0.33	0.95	0.80	0.20	2	2	3
22	**Croatia**	0.70	0.27	0.37	0.78	0.56	0.33	2	2	3
23	**Portugal**	0.58	0.19	0.27	0.99	0.25	0.33	2	2	2
24	**Spain**	0.52	0.49	0.39	0.85	0.46	0.44	2	2	2
25	**Egypt**	0.66	0.16	0.42	0.78	0.03	0.04	2	2	2
26	**Peru**	0.60	0.05	0.39	0.86	0.22	0.46	2	2	2
27	**Turkey**	0.62	0.32	0.42	0.84	0.44	0.49	2	2	2

28	**Serbia**	0.84	0.16	0.40	0.91	0.50	0.28	2	2	2
29	**Slovenia**	0.67	0.19	0.15	0.87	0.47	0.48	2	2	2
30	**Romania**	0.89	0.23	0.39	0.89	0.50	0.20	2	2	2
31	**Burkina Faso**	0.66	0.04	0.47	0.51	0.24	0.18	2	2	2
32	**Thailand**	0.60	0.10	0.31	0.61	0.29	0.45	2	2	2
33	**Iran**	0.53	0.37	0.40	0.55	0.10	0.40	2	2	2
34	**Jordan**	0.66	0.23	0.42	0.62	0.13	0.43	2	2	2
35	**Libya**	0.78	0.33	0.49	0.65	0.20	0.34	2	2	2
36	**Hungary**	0.39	0.86	0.87	0.80	0.56	0.31	1	2	4
37	**Germany**	0.27	0.70	0.64	0.62	0.82	0.40	1	2	4
38	**Italy**	0.44	0.81	0.68	0.73	0.59	0.30	1	2	4
39	**Argentina**	0.43	0.43	0.54	0.85	0.17	0.62	1	2	3
40	**Trinidad and Tobago**	0.40	0.05	0.56	0.51	0.09	0.80	1	2	3
41	**Lithuania**	0.35	0.61	0.15	0.62	0.81	0.16	1	2	3
42	**Estonia**	0.33	0.61	0.26	0.57	0.81	0.16	1	2	3
43	**Latvia**	0.37	0.73	0.04	0.60	0.68	0.13	1	2	3
44	**Slovakia**	1.00	0.51	1.00	0.47	0.76	0.28	1	1	4
45	**Dominican Republic**	0.61	0.23	0.63	0.40	0.09	0.54	1	1	3
46	**Czech Republic**	0.52	0.58	0.55	0.72	0.69	0.29	1	1	3
47	**Poland**	0.64	0.61	0.62	0.92	0.35	0.29	1	1	2
48	**Colombia**	0.63	0.01	0.62	0.78	0.09	0.83	1	1	2
49	**Saudi Arabia**	0.94	0.16	0.58	0.78	0.33	0.52	1	1	2
50	**Mexico**	0.79	0.23	0.67	0.80	0.21	0.97	1	1	2
51	**Venezuela**	0.79	0.00	0.72	0.74	0.13	1.00	1	1	2
52	**Nigeria**	0.78	0.23	0.58	0.51	0.09	0.84	1	1	2
53	**Mozambique**	0.83	0.04	0.35	0.39	0.07	0.80	1	1	2
54	**Cape Verde**	0.72	0.10	0.11	0.35	0.08	0.83	1	1	2
55	**Malaysia**	1.00	0.18	0.47	0.30	0.39	0.57	1	1	2
56	**France**	0.64	0.75	0.40	0.85	0.61	0.48	1	1	2
57	**Uruguay**	0.56	0.30	0.35	0.99	0.23	0.53	1	1	1
58	**Chile**	0.58	0.14	0.24	0.85	0.28	0.68	1	1	1
59	**El Salvador**	0.62	0.09	0.37	0.93	0.17	0.89	1	1	1
60	**Brazil**	0.65	0.33	0.46	0.74	0.42	0.59	1	1	1
61	**Ghana**	0.78	0.04	0.37	0.62	0.00	0.72	1	1	1
62	**Angola**	0.81	0.08	0.16	0.57	0.11	0.83	1	1	1

63	**New Zealand**	0.12	0.85	0.56	0.45	0.30	0.75	0	1	3
64	**Ireland**	0.19	0.73	0.66	0.29	0.21	0.65	0	1	3
65	**Australia**	0.28	0.99	0.59	0.47	0.18	0.71	0	1	3
66	**South Africa**	0.43	0.67	0.61	0.45	0.31	0.63	0	1	3
67	**United Kingdom**	0.27	0.97	0.64	0.29	0.49	0.69	0	1	3
68	**United States**	0.33	1.00	0.60	0.41	0.23	0.68	0	1	3
69	**Austria**	0.00	0.54	0.78	0.67	0.58	0.63	0	1	3
70	**Switzerland**	0.26	0.71	0.68	0.54	0.73	0.66	0	1	3
71	**Netherlands**	0.30	0.86	0.09	0.49	0.66	0.68	0	1	3
72	**Sweden**	0.22	0.75	0.00	0.23	0.51	0.78	0	1	3
73	**Norway**	0.22	0.72	0.03	0.46	0.32	0.55	0	1	2
74	**Iceland**	0.21	0.61	0.05	0.46	0.25	0.67	0	1	2
75	**Canada**	0.31	0.86	0.49	0.43	0.33	0.68	0	1	2
76	**Denmark**	0.08	0.78	0.12	0.16	0.32	0.70	0	1	2
77	**Luxembourg**	0.33	0.61	0.47	0.67	0.63	0.56	0	1	2
78	**Finland**	0.25	0.65	0.22	0.55	0.35	0.57	0	1	1
79	**Belgium**	0.61	0.80	0.52	0.93	0.81	0.57	0	0	2
80	**Malta**	0.51	0.59	0.44	0.96	0.45	0.66	0	0	0

Remarkably, the first seven places are held exclusively by Asian countries. Moreover, out of the 15 top countries, 12 are in Asia, and out of the 25 bottom countries, none are in Asia. This is a direct result of the circumstance that Asian countries, overall, score low on individualism and indulgence, having an advantageous combination of the average scores on these two dimensions when compared to the rest of the world (see Figure 2). In contrast, due to their cultural combination of high individualism and high indulgence, Western world's countries occupy the very bottom of the table and are not represented among the top 15 countries.

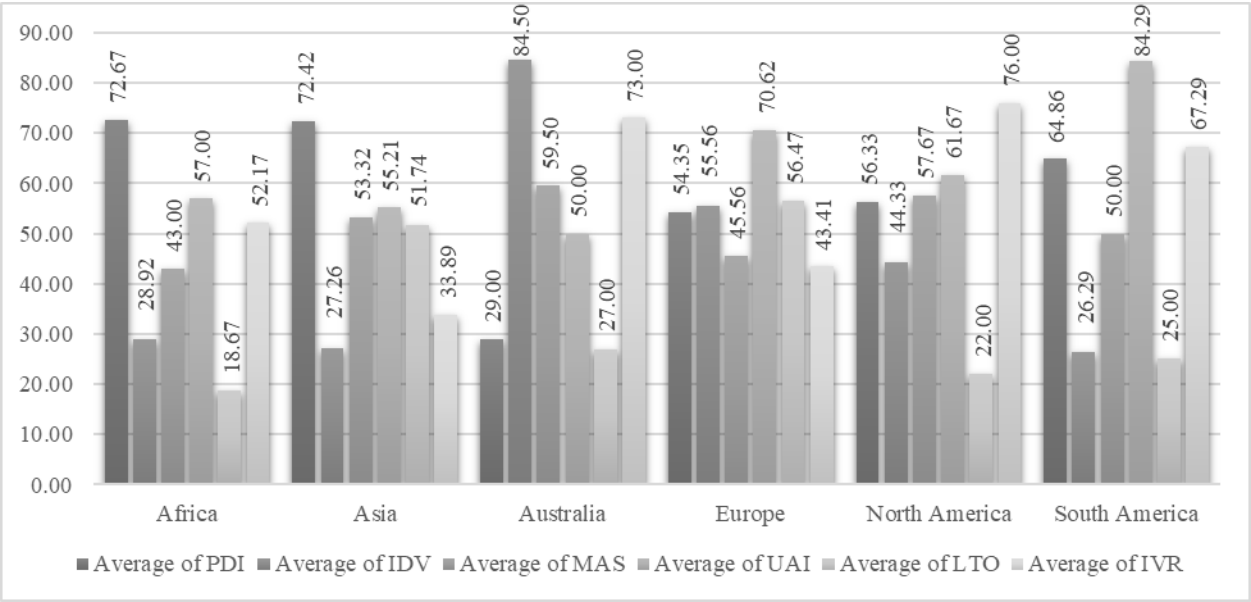

Figure 2 - Average values of scores on the six Hofstede's cultural dimensions by continent

The literature repeatedly reports a delineation between hospitality culture in Asia and the Western world (Manrai & Manrai, 2011; Tsang & Ap, 2007), whereby the Asian hospitality culture consistently receives compliments for the excellence of its hotel service (Piuchan & Pang, 2015; Sucher, Pusiran & Chon, 2013; Tan, Cherapanukorn, Kim & Chon, 2014). Some practitioners, including McBride (2010), even claim that 'good service is in Asia's DNA'. The results presented herein suggest that the delineation between Asia and the West, which may have been perceived by some readers as overly stereotypical and based primarily on anecdotal, rather than empirical evidence, is indeed highly relevant in the context of the hotel services industry.

We also note that the rankings of the individual countries are consistent with their respective portrayals in the scientific and professional literature. For instance, Japan, as the top ranked nation, is well known for their unique approach to hospitality, termed 'omotenashi' (Ikeda, 2012, p. 145). Omotenashi implies an employee's intrinsic motivation (Sato & Al-alsheikh, 2014, p. 1) to provide fantastic service, from the core of the heart without expectation of any return (Belal, Shirahada & Kosaka, 2013, p. 29), making guests feel relaxed without interruption (World Tourism Organisation and Korea Culture & Tourism Institute, 2016, p. 76).

3.3. Justification of the modelling approach in the light of the results

At this point, we can additionally clarify the need to employ the complex statistical model described in the methodology section, as a pragmatic reader may be wondering whether the conclusions about the levels of service quality by country and region could have been drawn based solely on the average values of ratings on the corresponding evaluation criteria. Such a comparison of average values is inappropriate because of the presence of the spill-over effect described in Section 3.3. For instance, Asian countries, aggregately, have a lower average score on the service quality criteria than Australia, European and North American countries (4.08 as compared to 4.10, 4.17 and 4.20, respectively). This observation is misleading, however, since the average scores for service quality for the later regions are inflated by the satisfaction spill-over from their relatively higher scores on other evaluation criteria, primarily from location, cleanliness and value. Similarly, it can be noted from looking at the average values of rating scores on service quality criterion by country that Japan, which is identified as the most gifted nation for providing high quality hotel services, nominally ranks just above the average for this criterion, well below Malta, which is identified as the least disposed nation. This simple method doesn't make it obvious that Japan's score on service quality is considerably lowered by its low scores on other criteria, mainly the quality of rooms (e.g. 'ryokan' and 'minshuku' are unique and authentic Japanese types of accommodation that may be considered overly basic by international guests), while Malta's score on the same criteria is inflated by spill-over by generally relatively high scores on all other criteria, especially location and sleep quality criteria (Valletta occupies a small geographical area, with most hotels within walking distance of the city centre).

4. Conclusions

The main finding of the study is that, after accounting for all major factors affecting a guest's satisfaction, the services of hotel staff in countries characterised by pronounced collectivism and restraint consistently receive more favourable guest ratings that those provided in countries characterised by pronounced individualism and indulgence. Assuming that hotel workers are mainly locals, this finding translates into the proposition that individuals raised in the collectivistic and restrained societies which prevail in most Asian countries, are relatively more culturally disposed to providing high-quality hotel services than individuals from the Western world. While this proposition has been repeatedly deliberated in the literature, it has been mainly supported by personal experience or anecdotal evidence. This study is the first to provide solid and credible empirical evidence for such a proposition.

4.1. Implications for practitioners

Our findings have important implications for hotel HR managers. Specifically, the findings suggest that hotels operating in countries that have high economic standards, but are not particularly culturally disposed to providing high-quality hotel services (the UK, US, Switzerland, Belgium, Finland, Luxemburg, France, Denmark, Canada, Norway, Sweden etc.) should aim to hire more workers from the less developed countries that have a cultural edge as regards providing hotel services (Pakistan, China, India, Lebanon, Philippines, Albania, Indonesia, Vietnam). On the other hand, hotels operating in highly developed countries where individuals are culturally disposed for providing high quality hotel services, such as Japan, Hong

Kong or Singapore should mainly rely on local workers and resist the temptation to hire less costly staff from countries that are not particularly disposed to this type of job, because the savings in labour costs may be outweighed by a decrease in revenue caused by a reduction in the quality of services provided.

We should also note that our findings are by no means limited to national cultures. HR managers working in the hotel industry can use questionnaires to identify and hire the candidates who score highly on collectivism and restraint, regardless of their national culture, to boost the quality of their services.

In addition to these two criteria, hotels with a significant proportion of guests from countries characterised by pronounced power distance, such as Slovakia, Malaysia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Philippines, or Russia should, due to the observed negative interaction in the power distance dimension, preferentially hire workers not originating from these countries, or workers with less pronounced power distance in general, to avoid potential problems in communication between the two parties.

4.2. Limitations and recommendations for future research

The key methodological limitation of our study is the assumption that employees of the hotels are locals. While this assumption may hold for some countries, for most developed countries it is violated to the extent which may significantly affect the reliability of the results presented in this study. To improve the reliability of the results, future studies should consider assigning country-specific weights within the regression model that would be equal to the estimated percentages of domestic workers in the hotel industries of their respective capital cities.

Finally, the results presented in this study are likely to be specific to the non-managerial staff in the hotel industry. Managerial positions in the hotel industry may require a different combination of cultural and personal characteristics. At best, the results may be applicable to the hospitality industry, but certainly should not be generalised to assess a nation's culturally-induced disposition for providing high-quality services in other industries. For instance, as noted by Nazarian et al. (2017), the UK's national culture is characterised by a low power distance, which empowers employees, high individualism, which encourages individual responsibility and innovation, high masculinity, which indicates a high level of commitment to work and drive for success, and low uncertainty avoidance, which is associated with an employee's propensity to try new things, which is likely to make their organisations extremely agile and allow their employees to provide superb service in numerous service industries where those qualities are advantageous, such as the financial industry or education.

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