

# The Cultural Background of Customers and its Impact on their Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions towards Touristic Services

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**Abstract**— The culture of a community is the real determinant of the behavior in that community and on its lifestyle, it is the source of the ideas, customs, values, traditions and arts. The impact of culture goes into the daily details of every individuals in the community and directly affects their behavior, and the way they act or think. Therefore; the cultural background of every customer or client plays major role in evaluating the service provided to him. Therefore; to know and understand the role played by different cultures in evaluating the level of the service is very substantial for every organization or supplier.

As by means of understanding the customer's culture the organization can provide services most favored and best liked by customers. This research aims at studying the impact of the tourists' cultural background on his satisfaction towards the offered services by relying on Hofstede's Cultural Dimension :

1. Power distance.
2. Uncertainty avoidance.
3. Individualism vs. collectivism.
4. Masculinity vs. femininity.
5. Long- vs. short-terms orientation.

We tried, in this study, to understand the role the cultural background plays in determining the level of customers' satisfaction towards the offered touristic services, then, examining its impact on their behavioral intentions about the services in North Africa countries (Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania).

The study concluded with a set of results that stressed the presence of a great difference in evaluation made by customers who have different backgrounds about the touristic services, which emphasizing the significance of the cultural dimensions in evaluating the services. Therefore; the study suggested some recommendations, the most significant of them is the employees engage in providing such services should grasp well the cultural issues of their customers, in addition to the importance of focusing on the training of the employees in tourism sector on how to deal with customers of different cultures.

**Index Terms**— Cultural Background of Customers ,Satisfaction , Behavioral Intentions ,Touristic Services

## I. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry has witnessed a great growth in the recent years with customers coming from different nationalities and cultures to the Arab states, as result of that and under the current acceleration into globalization of the companies specialized in services. It became very important these companies to show more awareness to the central role the cultural values play in evaluating services (Tsang, 2007). In fact; there are a number of studies concluded that the cultural factors play a substantial role in evaluation of those services by customers (Stauss & Mang, 1999). Also; the customers' cultural background influences their expectations in terms of service quality (Donthu & Yoo, 1998). The customers of western cultures depend on the sensual aspects available in the environment in which the service provided to evaluate the quality of the services, being easy to perceive and assess, while the Asian-culture customers rely noticeably on the moral aspects to assess the service rather than the sensual ones (Mattila, 1999).

Therefore; understanding the cultural factors in evaluating the services can provide significant data for the tourism sector and international market, contribute in identifying the necessary sources of this sector, besides; identifying the impact of cultural variation and difference on the customers' behavior, can contribute in building a model and designing cultural training programs directed to the employees of the tourism sector. Accordingly; the main goal of this research is to identify the degree and type of difference of evaluation of tourist services in the five North African countries.

The social roles and expectations of the customers in connection to the service vary according to the difference of the cultures, therefore; the first hypothesis of this research is that there is a variation between people in terms of evaluating touristic service. Despite the noticeable progress this sector witnessed in general during the recent years, but it is not accompanied with development in the specialized research domain, i.e., the research conducted in this area is still very few and confined to limited levels. The supplier or provider of the service applies some service theories, makes many changes to the type of the offered services without subjecting these theories to study about to what extent the local or foreign customer accepts the services. It is well known that the cultural background of every individuals determines his behavior and the way he acts and deals with persons and events. In touristic domain specifically some studies concluded that cultural factors play major role in customers' evaluation of provided services.

The study conducted by Pucik and Kats indicated that the customers' expectations towards the service differ according

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to their cultures Pucik & Kats, 1986). Riddle pointed out the companies that are able to achieve a competitive position in the service domain are the ones that can take into consideration the cultural differences of their customers. Thus; we can say the background of every customer is very important in the process of evaluating the service, then, specify the degree of customer's satisfaction. In case this study proved to be correct, this may contribute in raising the level of service, in general, by means of classifying the customers according to their cultural backgrounds, and provide the service to the appropriate group of them in way agrees with their needs and peculiarities (Riddle, 1992).

Undoubtedly; the concept of customer's satisfaction is significant in the service domain. This could noticeably affect the performance within the service domain, and its outputs. That is; this concept reflects individuals' viewpoints towards their consumptive experiences. The researchers began studying the factors influence the customers' satisfaction in the service sector, from among these factors are the individual's culture or customer's culture, being the factor that define the way he deals with the service supplier, then, define the way he evaluates that service. Therefore; the main goal of this study is to identify the impact of the cultural background of every customer in the course of his evaluation of the services provided in the touristic sector, and, in return; understand the role different cultures play in the process of evaluation.

### II. CULTURE

Culture is the intellectual concepts that has an effect on the relationships between people, environment and time. Broadly; culture means everything people invented, transferred, and inherited socially. Hofstede defined culture as an interactive whole of general characteristics that influence the response of a group of people towards their environment. Hofstede emphasized that culture includes value system represent the real and actual structure of culture (Hofstede, 1984). Recently; Solomon defined the culture as a mixture of values, desires, impressions, and behaviors people learn from their own community (Solomon, 2002). While Giddens indicated that there is no community without culture or language, as to be human is to have culture (Giddens, 1993).

Some studies found that culture affects the manifestations of internal and external relationships (Lalonde, 2004). Berscheid (1995) revealed that the roles played by people when dealing with others, and the traditions, way of understanding, expectations all these are determined by culture (Berscheid, 1995). Thompson's theory of culture describes different modes and models of social solidarity that formulate people's perspectives, influence their judgment, also; the theory states that people interact with different events according to the way through which they view their community, and according to the legitimacy attributed to the constitutions and laws. The cultural theory consists of two significant elements (Thompson, 1990) :

**First** : a theoretical belief that from sticking to a peculiar type of social relationships result a distinct method to see the world, and through which understand the behaviors of the people. This may lead to committing to a certain point of

view, and caused what is called cultural bias, which, in return, may allow an equal type of social relationship to grow.

**Second** : the second element of culture depends on two basic dimensions : the group and the network. The group represents the social limits of every community, while the network means a set of rules and regulations govern the relationship between people. Therefore; this element of culture determine four cultural group : hierarchical group, equalitarian group, destiny group, and individual group. Thompson explained these dimensions as follows : the group refers to the content through which the individual engages in a specific groups. As far as there is more integration, the individual shall have the ability to determine the group to engage in. The network refers to the degree to frame the life of the individual by means of conceptions externally imposed. The more these conceptions are bound and broad these imposed conceptions be, the life of the person tends to be less open to individuals discussions (Thompson, 1990).

The cultural theory declares that the difference between the types of networks or the group is a job the social organization assumes. It affects the way through which those groups of networks see the world, strengthening the beliefs and viewpoints. There are two different types of culture theory. The first type is the stability which reveals that individuals seek to be bound to themselves to different organizations of the same type (cultural bias) in all their life aspects whether in their workplace or social life. The second type of the cultural theory is the transferability which alleges that individuals may associated with specific organization according to their different social classes in different stages of life. This shows different patterns of cultural bias in different contexts and atmospheres throughout their life.

By applying the cultural theory in the context of the current study, it could be said that a customer of high social relationships can stick to his habits, and cultural biases, then, goes to expand his social relationships when dealing with others. That simply means he cannot deal with others without thinking in his future relationships regardless to the type of these relations (whether social or financial). The significance of studying culture became evident in the wake of the international competition and the globalization of businesses. The cultural factors are key in determining the customer's behavior, and because the touristic services is provided and consumed relying on the personal communication between the customer and the service supplier. These factors inevitably affect the customers' attitudes and their evaluating the components and elements of the service, subsequently; the social roles and the customers' expectations related to the service vary according to their different cultures (Mattila, 1999).

### III. DIMENSIONS OF NATIONAL CULTURES

#### 3 -1 Power Distance Indication

Power distance is the extent within which the low-power member in the organizations and institutions (such as family) accept the power/authority to be unequivocally distributed. The cultures that permit a low power distance, as well as accept more consultative and democratic power relations, expects that people widely engage in relationships with each

other regardless of their official status. And the subordinates are more comfortable, in decision-making process, with those who are in charge, as they claim the right to participate in, and criticize; this process. The subordinates recognize the power of others relying on their official hierarchical positions. Thus; the power distance indication, which Hofstede defines, doesn't reflect an objective difference in power distribution, but reflects the way through which people perceive the power difference.

### 3 -2 Individualism vs. collectivism

It denotes the extent of people integrating in groups, as in the individualistic communities, the focus is on the personal accomplishment and individual's rights, therefore; it is expected people to fight for their rights, families' rights, choose their affiliations, while in collectivistic communities, individuals usually act as members of a firmly connected group or organization. The word collectivism in this sense has no political meaning, it refers to a group, not a state. Where people is a big extended family, it is a protection in return of unquestionable allegiance.

### 3 -3 Uncertainty avoidance indication

This indication reflects the pursuance of the community members to handle the anxiety through reducing the uncertainty. People, in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, tend to be more emotional, they seek to limit the unfamiliar circumstances and unusual, and to move forward gradually with the changes by means of planning and enforcing the rules, laws and organizational regulations, in return; people in cultures with low uncertainty avoidance accept the unarranged situations, changing environments, and feel comfortable towards that, and try to have as few rules as possible, in general; they are more enduring to change.

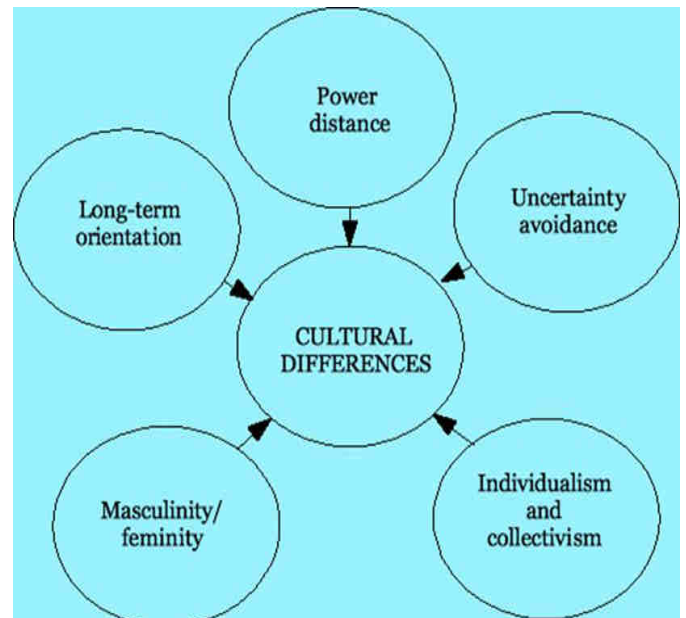
### 3 - 4 Masculinity vs. femininity

It denotes the distribution of emotional roles between the genders. It expresses itself in the masculine cultural values such competition, firmness, aspiration, power. While the feminine cultures lays more value to the relationships and the life quality. In the masculine cultures the differences in the roles played by two sexes are more exciting, and less flexibility in the feminine cultures.

Whereas males and females have the same values, along with emphasis on the modesty and guardianship, besides the prohibition of sex in many cultures, particularly the male's sexual activity. Due to the clear generalizations between two sexes in the terminology used by Hofstede, this dimension is mostly re-named by users of Hofstede's works, for instance; the "quantity" of life re-named to become "quality" of life.

### 3 -5 Long- vs. short-term orientation

First it was called "Confucius dynamic", it describes the temporal horizon of communities. The long-term orientation societies lay great importance into future, enhance the realistic value directed towards rewards, including the sustainability, saving, ability to adaptation in the short-term orientated societies. Further; they associate the supported values with past and present, such as constancy, respect of traditions, face-saving, reciprocity, and commitment to social obligations.



Hofstede's (1980 and 2001) renowned five - dimensional measure of cultural values

## IV. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CULTURES IN TERMS OF VALUE DIMENSIONS

The fifth dimensions model introduced by Hofstede allows the international comparison between cultures to be held. i.e. the comparative research.

4 -1 The power distance indication shows very high degree in Latin, Asian, African and Arab countries. On the other hand, English- and German-speaking countries privilege with lesser power distance. For example; United States has 40 degree on the Hofstede's cultural scale comparing to Guatemala which has very high power distance of 95, very low in Israel with 13. In Europe the power distance is lesser in the northern countries, and higher in the southern and eastern territories. For instance; it is 68 in Poland, 57 in Spain, 31 in Sweden, and 35 in United Kingdom.

4 -2 For Individualism indication, there are a noticeable gap between the developed western countries and the underdeveloped eastern countries. North America and Europe are of high individualism along with relatively high degree, as Canada and Hungary have 80. In return; Asia, Africa and Latin America countries have the advantage of strong collectivism, as Colombia records only 13 points on individualism scale, and 14 points for Indonesia. Totally obvious variation is manifested when comparing two countries, for instance, Guatemala has 6 points against 91 points for United States, and Japan and Arab countries have average value in this dimension.

4 -3 The uncertainty avoidance distinguished with higher degrees in Latin countries and south and east Europe including the German-speaking countries, while Japan is lesser than the English-culture countries, north Europe countries, and Chinese-culture countries. Nonetheless, there are few countries with low degree in this indication, such as Germany which privileges with high degree amount to (65),

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Belgium with (94), comparing to Sweden (29), or Denmark (23), though they are geographically adjacent.

4 -5 Masculinity is very less in north Europe countries, as Norway records (8), Sweden (5) degree only on MAS scores, on the other hand; Japan records high degrees (95), but in Europe countries like Hungary, Austria, and Switzerland the effect of German culture is obvious. In English-culture countries the degree of masculinity is relatively high and amounts to 66 in United Kingdom, while Latin countries show conflicting degree, as Venezuela hits 73 degree and Chile 28 degree only.

4 -6 Normally; there are high degree in the long-term orientation in East Asia, i.e., China records 118, Hong Kong 96, Japan 88 on the Hofstede's cultural scale. The degrees in eastern and western Europe is average, low in the English-culture countries, Muslim countries, Africa, and Latin America, though there is little data on this dimension.

### V. CORRELATIONS OF VALUE AND DIFFERENCES OF OTHER COUNTRIES

The researchers combined some countries together by comparing their degrees of values with the differences of other countries, such as the geographical proximity, common language, historical background relevant to the religious bonds, beliefs, and practices, besides; the joint philosophical impacts and the identical political systems. In other words, everything is included in defining the culture of any nation. For example, reducing the power distance is associated with consultative political practices and fair income, while rise of power distance is associated with bribery, corruption, inequality in income distribution. The individualism is positively associated with social mobilization and national wealth. In fact, when a country becomes richer, its culture becomes more inclining to individualism.

Another example of correlation introduced by Sigma Two Group in 2003. They studied the relationship between the cultural dimensions of nations and the prevailing faiths. In average, nations of catholic majority showed high levels in uncertainty avoidance, and the power distance is relatively high, the masculinity is average, with relative rise in individualism. In nations of atheistic majority the uncertainty avoidance is high, with very high power distance, average in masculinity, and great drop in individualism (Hofstede, 2011).

From the Hofstede results we find that in Malaysia, Panama, and Guatemala there is strong variation in power, while in Austria and Israel there is little differentiation in power and wealth distribution, additionally United States, Australia and United Kingdom classified as individualistic, while Panama and Venezuela are classified as collectivistic rather than individualistic. In respect of masculinity, Japan, Austria and Venezuela hit high in masculinity indications, while Scandinavian countries, like Sweden; are feminine society in the sense that the women in those societies have authority equals or excels the man's authority. Greece, Portugal, and Guatemala are high in the uncertainty avoidance. In contrary, we find nations like Singapore and Denmark are low in terms of uncertainty avoidance. Finally; Asian nations, such as

China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan characterize with long-term orientation, but still Pakistan, Canada, and the Philippines are short-term orientation.

Despite the family is the cornerstone of societies distinguished with collectivity, though the other groups in the society are not less significance. By groups we mean the tribe, friends, workmates, believers of the same faith, the political and social groups (Triandis, 1989). Concerning culture and traditions in the Arab world, they indicate that it is a collective society where the members share all the available resources, as in such society the allegiance is mainly based on faith or religion, accordingly the loyalty and devotion of every individuals to his family and tribe is determined. Arab people believe in destiny to be part of their religion, as well as they believe in the act of god as it is inseparable for the whole nation of Islam (Hopkins & Kahani, 2004).

For Hofstede's five cultural dimensions, the Maghreb states are part of Arab states (Hofstede, 2001), such as Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. All these countries are distinguished with high rates of collectivism, low rate of individualism (Tai & Chan, 2001). Therefore; the Maghreb states achieved high rate in the cultural dimensions, the difference of power is above the international average, which denotes inequality of power and wealth distribution in Arab societies. For the uncertainty avoidance, the Maghreb states recorded low rate towards uncertainty and acceptance of change (Hofstede, 2001). In the terms of the masculinity, the indication (52) showed that the role the woman plays in those societies is very limited. Finally; the rate of short- and long-term orientation is not available for Arab states, but Hofstede indicated that the long-term orientation is negative in terms of the collective groups, and positive concerning the power distance. Accordingly; the long-term orientation is high in Arab states, where the power distance is high (80), the individualism is low (38). In conclusion, Hofstede research conducted in (1980, 1991, 2001) pointed out that Arab states has high rate of long-term orientation, collectivism, and power distance.

### VI. EMPLOYEES' SATISFACTION

Customer's satisfaction is the basis of service quality, the real determinant for success of the service organization on the long run (Oliver, 1981). Since 1970s the research established the concept of customer' satisfaction (Oliver, 1997). The researchers and scholars are unanimous in that the satisfaction results from comparing the performance of product or service to the personal expectations of the customer. sThis could be brought close to mind according to the following equation :

**Customer' satisfaction = Real performance of service - customer's expectations (Oliver, 1980).**

Therefore; the significance of concept of (customer's expectations) was discussed, with focus on many good research. For instance (Kasper et al, 1999) defined the expectations as what the customer feels towards the service that the supplier provides to him, to meet his specific needs. As result, the expectations of the customer set some standards, after experiencing the service, to what should be compared to the successive results (Zeithaml et al, 1991).

LeBoeuf stated that the customer comes with certain expectations about the products and services, and when the service surpassed his expectations, he evaluates the service as positive, while the evaluation is negative when the service fails to meet the expectations as he realizes that the quality of the service is poor (LeBoeuf, 1987).

On this strength, the customer's evaluation of the quality of the service is influenced by his expectations (Olson, 1977, Gaster, 1995). The more evaluation agrees with the expectations, the more satisfied is the customer (Parasuraman et al, 1985).

## VII. BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

The behavioral intentions could be positive or negative. The positive ones associated with the ability of the service supplier to encourage the customers to promote the service by using positive speech about the supplier (or the service). As a result; the loyalty of the customer towards the service (or the service supplier) builds up, and the customer becomes ready to pay more money against the service. The behavioral intentions are a result of non-satisfaction of customer, it comes as a negative reaction against the offered service, leading the customer to badly feels about the service, turns to another supplier, or reduces his spending on the service (Parasuraman et al, 1994). From among the most significant behavioral intentions largely used in evaluation process of pre-consumption :

7- 1 Customer's intention to recommend the service to others.  
7- 2 The intention to return to the service supplier again.  
Some studies suggest that the customers are ready to give advice to others to use the product or service if it is of good quality, and in the same time their allegiance to the service will be enhanced. Parasuraman and Zeithaml realized that when the customer looks negatively to the service, he will not recommend it to others(Parasuraman et al, 1994).

## VIII. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CULTURE, SERVICE QUALITY, CUSTOMER' SATISFACTION, AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

Since last decade, a number of researchers began studying how the cultural dimensions affect the customer' satisfaction and the quality of service. The mechanism through which the customers in United States and Japan evaluate the touristic and hotel services is examined. The results showed that there are different behavioral dimensions in the two countries, and clear-cut cultural variations related to these dimensions are identified. Further; the effect of culture on the different patterns of the evaluation of the service is handled. The researchers explained the cultural variations between western customers and their Asian counterparts in terms of individualism versus collectivism and power distance, in particular. The results of the study indicated that the customer of western cultural background tend to evaluate the tangible things more than their Asian counterparts who depend, in evaluating the service, on the method of how they are treated (Mattila, 1999).

Donthu and Yoo studied the impact of customers' cultural attitude on the expectations of the service quality by using SERVQUAL scale. Both researchers found that there is a

causative relationship between power distance factor and supplier' response factor. They also noticed that there is a positive relationship between individualism and individual's emotional behavior (Donthu &Yoo, 1998). In a recent study by Tsang, he revealed that there are cultural variations between western tourists and Asian ones in terms of their evaluation of the service quality provided to them. According to a study conducted on a sample of international customers visiting Hong Kong, it is found that Asian customers displayed low rates of satisfaction towards their relationships with the service supplier comparing to the western counterparts. For the Asian tourists, the personal relationship was the basic factor in their evaluation, while the western customers focus on accessing the service directly regardless to the relationships, they pay much care to effectiveness and time more than the relation with the supplier (Tsang, 2007). Moreover, Furrer and Sudharshan indicated that the customer's trust greatly affects the behavioral intentions towards the services, the supplier, or both of them. Specifically; customers of noticeably collectivistic cultures try to avoid the uncertainty and tend to praise the service supplier, while customers of highly individualistic cultures incline to change and do not hesitate to criticize, and complain from; the services of low quality (Furrer & Sudharshan, 2000). From this, the impact of cultural variations on the behavioral intentions has been examined in three cultural groups : English-origin group, Asian group, and European group. The author found out that the three groups were different in terms of behavioral intentions. Particularly; the English and European tourists showed loyalty to the service more than Asians, and the English group had inclination to pay against the service comparing to the Asians and Europeans.

## IX. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main goal of this study is to research whether there is a difference in the impressions and conceptions of the customers towards touristic services. We illustrated in this research that the evaluation of such services differs according to the difference of customers' culture. The results of this research agreed with a set of previous studies that underlined the significance of the cultural dimensions in evaluating the services. Thus, customers of different cultures evaluate their experiences differently. They were more tolerable when dealing with the service suppliers and displayed high rate of satisfaction.

We can state that the results of the research include considerable advices and recommendations for tourism sector in Maghreb states, as the ability of the administration of tourism to manage the cultural differences, and to identify the methods of dealing with the employees and customers of different cultural backgrounds contributes in raising the rate of satisfaction among customers. The main reason behind decline of customers' satisfaction is attributed basically to the failure in understanding the different cultures of customers, accordingly; the failure to realize the expectations of them. The impact of the culture is a substantial factor the employees should pay attention to, not only to develop their ability and professional knowledge in terms of the cultural differences, but also help avoiding or restricting the tension when dealing with others. Further; to build the mutual trust between the

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employees of tourism sector and the foreign customers of different cultural values (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

The current results showed that there is a difference and variation in evaluation of the customers from different cultural backgrounds to the touristic services. Therefore; it is important, from an administrative perspective; the employees to have a high sense towards the cultural issues of their customers. The previous studies and research in tourism and hotel services underlined the significance of training to be offered to the employees of tourism sector on how to deal with customers from different cultures. For example Reisinger and Turner proved that the cultural training program can help the employees to understand their customers' cultures, enhance their trust to understand and deal with other cultures. On the long run, employees of tourism in Maghreb states, by means of effective training, will be able understand their foreign customers, and subsequently; fulfill their aspirations and interests, and that will positively reflect on the tourism industry in these states (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

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