

QUALITY RESEARCH AND CULTURAL TRENDS: IS THERE A CULTURAL PATTERN THAT FAVORS SERVICE QUALITY RESEARCH?

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ABSTRACT

Based on the key characteristics, contributions, research themes and references of 147 quality and Kano-related research papers published in between 1984 and 2012, Witell, Lofgren and Dahlgaard (2013) summarized and described the time periods for quality-related researches into three noticeable phases of development, namely, Emergence (1984-1999), Exploration (2000-2008), and Explosion (2009-2012). Such a finding aligns logically with the world cultural values taken from the Inglehart-Welzel cultural map from 1981 to 2015 during which various regions of the world, in general, were all moving away from survival values and have become more self-expressive as the world economy transformed itself from industrial to post-industrial economy (Kenney, 2010, p.215). In fact, more and more researches published during the 'Explosion' period (2009-2012) were geared toward researching into intangible services – which, according to Andrii's (2015) research, were all essential in the modern, post-industrial economics system. These service disciplines included, but not limited to, banking and finance, catering and tourism, Internet and telco services, training and education, etc. This paper, hence, attempted to look at such a trend to see if there are any differences between countries that are 'strong in service quality research' (or 'SERVQUAL' research) and with those that are not through determining the differences between the Pearson's correlation coefficients of Hofstede's cultural dimension values (1994; 1997; 2001; 2010) for the list of top 10 countries producing the highest number of service quality related researches as per the research of Wang et al. (2015) and that of all the 70 countries studied by Hofstede. The study revealed that differences in cultural dimensions do exist. Countries that are either on the two extremes, i.e. 'individualistic with small power distances' or 'collectivistic with large power distances', seem to favor more on SERVQUAL research, meaning that countries that are interested in the study of SERVQUAL does not necessarily have weak (large power distance) or dependent (collectivistic) customers as found in other culture-based service quality researches¹.

Keywords: Research trend, SERVQUAL, Hofstede cultural dimensions

Introduction

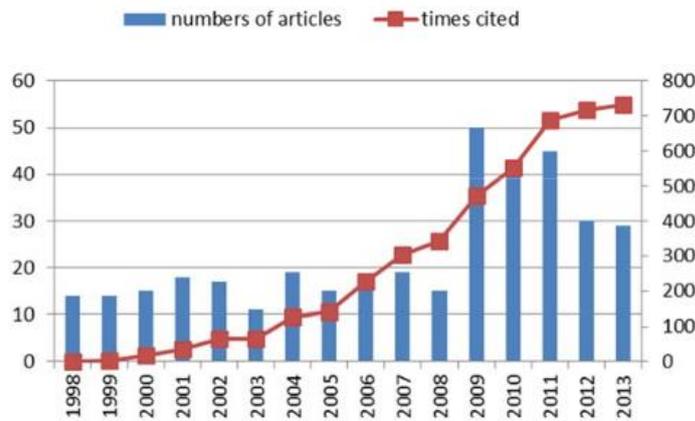
Based on the key characteristics, contributions, research themes and references of 147 service quality and Kano-related research papers published in between 1984 and 2012, Witell, Lofgren and Dahlgaard (2013) summarized and described the time periods for quality-related researches into three noticeable phases of development, namely, Emergence (1984-1999), Exploration (2000-2008), and Explosion (2009-2012). Such a finding aligns logically with the world cultural values taken from the Inglehart-Welzel cultural map from 1981 to 2015, during which various regions of the world were all moving away from survival values in general and have become more self-expressive while the global economy transformed itself from industrial to post-industrial (Kenney, 2010, p.215). In fact, more and more researches published during the 'Explosion' period (2009-2012) were geared toward researching into intangible services – which were found to be essential in the modern, post-industrial economics system (Andrii, 2015). These service disciplines included, but not limited to, banking and finance, catering and tourism, Internet and telecommunication services, training and education, etc. Indeed, service quality is not only crucial to the modern economy but it is found to be antecedent to customer satisfaction, both cumulative and transaction-specific² (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994). In another review of SERVQUAL-related journal papers, Wang et al. (2015) found, after reviewing 367 papers in 167 SCI and SSCI journals, not only that there was a clear boost in the number of service quality-related articles during the years 2009 to 2011, but they also found that the number of citations these papers received has grown even faster (see Figure 1 below), providing grounds that service quality has become a significant research area among other service-related research.

Figure 1. Number of service quality related articles and times cited, 1998-2013 (Wang et al., 2015)

¹ Furrer, Liu, and Sudharshan, (2000) found that there are three strong variables of culture that affects service quality dimensions, namely, 'powerful-weak customers, male-female service providers, and frequent-infrequent service situations' (ibid, p.358).

² Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, and Zeithaml (1993) identified the two conceptualizations of customer satisfaction, namely, transaction-specific and cumulative.

Number of articles and times cited publications (1998-2013)



In fact, research papers on service quality appear not just in a few certain countries, but they appear across the entire world, especially when studies are being replicated to see if the findings from one research are still valid in another market. For instance, when Anderson, Fornell, and Lehmann (1994) found among Swedish consumers that service quality was antecedent to customer satisfaction, the study was also replicated and the findings were echoed with American consumers as the focus (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996; Spreng, Mackenzie & Olshavsky, 1996). And, according to both Wang *et al.* (2015, p.36) and Luor, *et al.* (2015, p.236), the fields of business management and information industry are among the most discussed disciplines of service quality. This probably explains why similar industries in which there is also extensive applications of both business management and information technology knowledge, say the retail banking industry for instance, have also been researched extensively by researchers from many different countries. For example, retail banking markets from every continent have basically been studied (see Table 1 below): From Canada (Cheron, Boidin, & Daghfous, 1999) to Mexico (Batiz-Lazo & Wood, 2001), from the U.K. (Devlin, 1998; Ennew & Binks, 1996; Jayawardhena & Foley, 2000; Howcroft, Hamilton, & Hewer, 2002) to Ireland (Daniel, 1994; Loonam & O'Loughlin, 2008), from Denmark (Mols, 2000; Mols, Buk & Nielsen, 1999) to Finland (Holstius & Kaynak, 1995), from Jordan (Naser, Jamal, & Al-Khatib, 1999) to Ghana (Owusu-frimpong, 1999), from Hong Kong (Li, Zhao, & Lee, 2001; Siu & Mo, 2005; Yiu, Grant, & Edgar, 2007) to South Korea (Cui, Lewis, & Park, 2003) and Indonesia (Alfansi & Sargeant, 2000; Koo & Wati, 2010) and Australia (Al-Hawari & Ward, 2006; Herington & Weaven, 2009; Kaynak & Whiteley, 1999; Lloyd-Walker & Cheung, 1998; Ramsay & Smith, 1999; Sathye, 1999), and even in Poland (Kennington, Hill, & Rakowska, 1996; Polasik & Wisniewski, 2009). There were also comparative studies among or between countries within the industry, say among Germany, the U.K. and the U.S.A. (Meyer *et al.*, 1999) or comparative studies that focus on just the industry within a country, say in the U.K. (Newman & Cowling, 1996) or in Australia (Nielsen, Terry, & Trayler, 1998). Alternative service versions of banking for customers of different religions, say, for Muslim and non-Muslim customers (Haron, Ahmad, & PlanisL, 1994) or services that are explicit for Islamic banking (Naser, Jamal, & Al-Khatib, 1999) have also been considered.

Table 1. Service quality related literature in retail banking

Country	Researcher(s)	Research or paper title
Australia	Al-Hawari & Ward (2006)	The effect of automated service quality on Australian banks' financial performance and the mediating role of customer satisfaction. <i>Marketing Intelligence & Planning</i> , 24(2), 127-147
	Herington & Weaven (2009)	E-retailing by banks: E-service quality and its importance to customer satisfaction. <i>European Journal of Marketing</i> , 43(9/10), 1220-1231
	Kaynak & Whiteley (1999)	Retail bank marketing in Western Australia. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 17(5), 221-232.
	Nielsen, Terry, & Trayler (1998)	Business banking in Australia: A comparison of expectations. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 16(6), 253-263.
	Lloyd-Walker & Cheung (1998)	IT to support service quality excellence in the Australia banking industry. <i>Managing Service Quality</i> , Vol.8, November Issue, 350-358.
	Ramsay & Smith (1999)	Managing customer channel usage in the Australia banking sector. <i>Managerial Auditing Journal</i> , 14(7), 329-338.
	Sathye (1999)	Adoption of Internet banking by Australian consumers: An empirical investigation. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 17(7), 324-334.

Canada	Cheron, Boidin, & Daghfous (1999)	Basic financial services needs of low-income individuals: A comparative study in Canada. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 17(2), 49-60.
Denmark	Mols (2000)	The Internet and services marketing - The case of Danish retail banking. <i>Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy</i> , 10(1), 7-18.
	Mols, Buk & Nielsen (1999)	Distribution channel strategies in Danish retail banking. <i>International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management</i> , 27(1), 37-47.
Finland	Holstius & Kaynak (1995)	Retail banking in Nordic countries: The case of Finland. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 13(8), 10-20
Ghana	Owusu-frimpong (1999)	Patronage behaviour of Ghanaian bank customers. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 17(7), 335-341.
Hong Kong	Li, Zhao, & Lee (2001)	Quality management initiatives in Hong Kong's banking industry: A longitudinal study. <i>Total Quality Management</i> , 12(4), 451-467.
	Siu & Mou (2005)	Measuring service quality in Internet banking: The case of Hong Kong. <i>Journal of International Consumer Marketing</i> , 17(4), pp.99-116
	Yiu, Grant, & Edgar (2007)	Factors affecting the adoption of Internet Banking in Hong Kong - implications for the banking sector. <i>International Journal of Information Management</i> , 27(5), October 2007, 336-351
Indonesia	Alfansi & Sargeant (2000)	Market segmentation in the Indonesian banking sector: the relationship between demographics and desired customer benefits. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 18(2), 64-74.
	Koo & Wati (2010)	Toward an understanding of the mediating role of "trust" in mobile banking service: An empirical test of Indonesia case. <i>Journal of Universal Computer Science</i> , 16(13), 1801-1824
Ireland	Daniel (1994)	Provision of electronic banking in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 17(2), 72-82.
	Loonam & O'Loughlin (2008)	Exploring e-service quality: A study of Irish online banking. <i>Marketing Intelligence & Planning</i> , 26(7), 759-780
Jordan	Naser, Jamal, & Al-Khatib (1999)	Islamic banking: A study of customer satisfaction and preferences in Jordan. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 17(3), 135-150.
Mexico	Batiz-Lazo & Wood (2001)	Management of core capabilities in Mexican and European banks. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 19(2), 89-100
Poland	Kennington, Hill & Rakowska (1996)	Consumer selection criteria for banks in Poland. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 14(4), 12-21.
	Polasik & Wisniewski (2009)	Empirical analysis of internet banking adoption in Poland. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 27(1), 32-52
South Korea	Cui, Lewis, & Park (2003)	Service quality measurement in the banking sector in South Korea. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 21(4), 191-201
United Kingdom	Devlin (1998)	Adding value to service offerings: The case of UK retail financial services. <i>European Journal of Marketing</i> , 32(11/12), 1091-1109.
	Ennew & Binks (1996)	The impact of service quality and service characteristics on customer retention: Small businesses and their banks in the UK. <i>British Journal of Management</i> , Vol.7, 119-230.
	Howcroft, Hamilton, & Hewer (2002)	Consumer attitude and the usage and adoption of home-based banking in the United Kingdom. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , Vol. 20 Issue: 3, pp.111-121
	Jayawardhena & Foley (2000)	Changes in the banking sector - The case of Internet banking in the UK. <i>Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy</i> , Vol.7 No. 2, pp. 120-128.
	Newman & Cowling (1996)	Service quality in retail banking: The experience of two British clearing banks? <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 14(6), 3-11.

The Question: Is there a pattern among countries that favor service quality research?

With such an explosive trend of research in the service quality field in mind, is there a pattern from which countries that produce large numbers of SERVQUAL-related research articles could be derived or explained with respect to the other countries in general? Could we explain such a pattern in terms of Geert Hofstede’s cultural dimensions? If we could, maybe we would be able to provide a ‘look-ahead mechanism’ in terms of what combination of cultural dimensions would provide the spark for the dire need of service quality among consumers and hence trigger researches to be done (and journal papers to be published, of course) in the corresponding service fields in those countries, especially when cultures around the world seems to all move gradually from the ‘survival mode’ (economic success) to become more and more ‘self-expressive’ (human values and satisfaction)(Inglehart, 1997).

Geert Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions

Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede’s (Hofstede, 1994; 1997; 2001) cultural dimensions is a framework for intercultural communication. Originated from an IBM³ research that involved some 80,000 employees in 66 countries back from the 1960s to 1970s, Hofstede defined his first four cultural dimensions as power distance (PDI), individualism (IDV), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), and masculinity (MAS) and added long-term orientation (LTO) in 1987 (Bond *et al.*, 1987), and eventually indulgence versus restraint (IND) in 2010 (Hofstede, *et al.*, 2010) to his final group of six cultural dimensions. Table 2 below shows the corresponding definitions of the six cultural dimensions (Bond, *et al.*, 1987; Hofstede, 1997; Hofstede, *et al.*, 2010).

Table 2. Hofstede’s six cultural dimensions (Bond, *et al.*, 1987; Hofstede, 1997; Hofstede, *et al.*, 2010)

CULTURAL DEMENSIONS	MEANING
Power Distance (PDI)	Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.
Individualism (IDV)	Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family.
Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)	Uncertainty avoidance is the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.
Masculinity (MAS)	Masculinity pertains to societies in which social 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.
Long-term Orientation (LTO)	Long-term orientation is the extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-oriented perspective (fostering virtues like perseverance and thrift) rather than a conventional historic or short-term point of view.
Indulgence (IND)	The Indulgence index is essentially a measure of happiness.

The Investigation

In order to investigate if there exists such a cultural pattern that would favor service quality research with statistical significance, we compared the Hofstede’s cultural dimension values of top 10 countries⁴ of service quality publications found by Wang *et al.* (2015, p.37) (see Table 3 below) with that of all the other 70 countries as reported by Hofstede (in his website, www.geert-hofstede.com) in 2016 (as listed in Table 4 below). Even though it might be argued that these cultural values do change annually and that the top 10 countries with SERVQUAL publications are merely listed in terms of their accumulated number of publications over the years, the cultural values between country pairs or among country groups (i.e. the measured cultural distances) are generally found to be stable (Beugelsdijk, Maseland, & van Hoorn, 2015) and hence we can safely take these cultural values to be absolute rather than relative. In other words, we assume that the Hofstede cultural dimensions among the countries do not vary too much over time as these SERVQUAL publications accumulate.

³ IBM, International Business Machines, <http://www.ibm.com/>

⁴ According to Wang, *et al.* (2015), 52 countries were involved in SERVQUAL publications.

Table 3. Top ten countries of SERVQUAL publications (1998-2013) (Wang *et al.*, 2015, p.37)

Country	Number of articles	%
1. USA	103	28.1
2. TAIWAN *	58	15.8
3. ENGLAND	29	7.9
4. TURKEY	24	6.5
5. PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA*	22	6.0
6. SPAIN	19	5.2
7. BRAZIL	15	4.1
8. SOUTH KOREA*	13	3.5
9. AUSTRALIA	11	3.0
10. GREECE	11	3.0

Table 4. Hofstede's cultural dimensions for 70 countries. Source: www.geert-hofstede.com

CODE	COUNTRY	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO	IND
ARA	Arab countries	80	38	53	68	23	34
ARG	Argentina	49	46	56	86	20	62
AUL	Australia	38	90	61	51	21	71
AUT	Austria	11	55	79	70	60	63
BAN	Bangladesh	80	20	55	60	47	20
BEL	Belgium	65	75	54	94	82	57
BRA	Brazil	69	38	49	76	44	59
BUL	Bulgaria	70	30	40	85	69	16
CAN	Canada	39	80	52	48	36	68
CHL	Chile	63	23	28	86	31	68
CHI	China	80	20	66	30	87	24
COL	Colombia	67	13	64	80	13	83
COS	Costa Rica	35	15	21	86	n/a	n/a
CRO	Croatia	73	33	40	80	58	33
CZE	Czech Rep	57	58	57	74	70	29
DEN	Denmark	18	74	16	23	35	70
ECA	Ecuador	78	8	63	67	n/a	n/a
SAL	El Salvador	66	19	40	94	20	89
EST	Estonia	40	60	30	60	82	16
FIN	Finland	33	63	26	59	38	57
FRA	France	68	71	43	86	63	48
GER	Germany	35	67	66	65	83	40
GBR	Great Britain	35	89	66	35	51	69
GRE	Greece	60	35	57	112	45	50
HOK	Hong Kong	68	25	57	29	61	17
HUN	Hungary	46	80	88	82	58	31
IND	India	77	48	56	40	51	26
IDO	Indonesia	78	14	46	48	62	38

IRA	Iran	58	41	43	59	14	40
IRE	Ireland	28	70	68	35	24	65
ISR	Israel	13	54	47	81	38	n/a
ITA	Italy	50	76	70	75	61	30
JAM	Jamaica	45	39	68	13	n/a	n/a
JPN	Japan	54	46	95	92	88	42
KOR	Korea South	60	18	39	85	100	29
LAT	Latvia	44	70	9	63	69	13
LIT	Lithuania	42	60	19	65	82	16
LUX	Luxembourg	40	60	50	70	64	56
MAL	Malaysia	104	26	50	36	41	57
MLT	Malta	56	59	47	96	47	66
MEX	Mexico	81	30	69	82	24	97
MOR	Morocco	70	46	53	68	14	25
NET	Netherlands	38	80	14	53	67	68
NZL	New Zealand	22	79	58	49	33	75
NOR	Norway	31	69	8	50	35	55
PAK	Pakistan	55	14	50	70	50	0
PAN	Panama	95	11	44	86	n/a	n/a
PER	Peru	64	16	42	87	25	46
PHI	Philippines	94	32	64	44	27	42
POL	Poland	68	60	64	93	38	29
POR	Portugal	63	27	31	104	28	33
ROM	Romania	90	30	42	90	52	20
RUS	Russia	93	39	36	95	81	20
SER	Serbia	86	25	43	92	52	28
SIN	Singapore	74	20	48	8	72	46
SLK	Slovak Rep	104	52	110	51	77	28
SLV	Slovenia	71	27	19	88	49	48
SAW	South Africa	49	65	63	49	n/a	n/a
SPA	Spain	57	51	42	86	48	44
SUR	Suriname	85	47	37	92	n/a	n/a
SWE	Sweden	31	71	5	29	53	78
SWI	Switzerland	34	68	70	58	74	66
TAI	Taiwan	58	17	45	69	93	49
THA	Thailand	64	20	34	64	32	45
TRI	Trinidad & Tobago	47	16	58	55	13	80
TUR	Turkey	66	37	45	85	46	49
USA	U.S.A.	40	91	62	46	26	68
URU	Uruguay	61	36	38	100	26	53

VEN	Venezuela	81	12	73	76	16	100
VIE	Vietnam	70	20	40	30	57	35

Results and Analysis

Pearson’s correlation coefficients were obtained among the Hofstede’s cultural values for (a) the top 10 countries with the highest number of SERVQUAL publications, and that for (b) all 70 countries studied obtained from the Hofstede website (see Table 4 above). Correlation coefficients that are statistically significant are highlighted in yellow in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Correlation table for ‘countries with top 10 SERVQUAL publications (left) vs all 70 countries (right)’

		<i>pdi</i>	<i>idv</i>	<i>mas</i>	<i>uai</i>	<i>lto</i>	<i>ind</i>			<i>pdi</i>	<i>idv</i>	<i>mas</i>	<i>uai</i>	<i>lto</i>	<i>ind</i>
<i>pdi</i>	Pearson Correlation	1.00	-.89	-.66	.48	.42	-.72	<i>pdi</i>	Pearson Correlation	1.00	-.60	.16	.20	.03	-.31
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00	.04	.16	.23	.02		Sig. (2-tailed)		.00	.19	.09	.84	.01
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10		N	70	70	70	70	64	63
<i>idv</i>	Pearson Correlation	-.89	1.00	.74	-.50	-.75	.79	<i>idv</i>	Pearson Correlation	-.60	1.00	.05	-.20	.09	.16
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00		.01	.14	.01	.01		Sig. (2-tailed)	.00		.70	.10	.48	.21
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10		N	70	70	70	70	64	63
<i>mas</i>	Pearson Correlation	-.66	.74	1.00	-.68	-.62	.53	<i>mas</i>	Pearson Correlation	.16	.05	1.00	-.05	.02	.07
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.04	.01		.03	.05	.12		Sig. (2-tailed)	.19	.70		.66	.86	.60
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10		N	70	70	70	70	64	63
<i>uai</i>	Pearson Correlation	.48	-.50	-.68	1.00	.22	-.13	<i>uai</i>	Pearson Correlation	.20	-.20	-.05	1.00	-.04	-.07
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.16	.14	.03		.55	.72		Sig. (2-tailed)	.09	.10	.66		.77	.60
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10		N	70	70	70	70	64	63
<i>lto</i>	Pearson Correlation	.42	-.75	-.62	.22	1.00	-.63	<i>lto</i>	Pearson Correlation	.03	.09	.02	-.04	1.00	-.49
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.23	.01	.05	.55		.05		Sig. (2-tailed)	.84	.48	.86	.77		.00
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10		N	64	64	64	64	64	63
<i>ind</i>	Pearson Correlation	-.72	.79	.53	-.13	-.63	1.00	<i>ind</i>	Pearson Correlation	-.31	.16	.07	-.07	-.49	1.00
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.02	.01	.12	.72	.05			Sig. (2-tailed)	.01	.21	.60	.60	.00	
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10		N	63	63	63	63	63	63

Unlike other studies in which the relationship between culture and service (e-service) quality perceptions were studied (Furrer, Liu, Sudharshan, 2000; Li & Mäntymäki, 2011), our study focused on looking at what kind of country would SERVQUAL research prevail, and not about consumer perceptions on service quality. We summarize the results as follows.

Power Distance (PDI) versus Individualism (IDV). One interesting finding is that countries that made their way into the list of ‘top 10’ as recorded by Wang, *et al.* (2015) have relatively much stronger negative correlation coefficients (-0.89, $p < 0.00$) than the overall value (-0.60, $p < 0.00$), see Table 5 above. This means most countries in the ‘top 10’ are either those with ‘large power distance and low individualism’ or ‘small power distance but highly individualistic’. Those that wander in between, say Italy (PDI=50, IDV=76), Belgium (PDI=65, IDV=75), or even Japan (PDI=54, IDV=46), the Asian country that is so well-known in various aspects of implementing quality control, e.g. House of Quality (Hauser & Clausing, 1993), Mitsubishi’s Quality Function Deployment (QFD) developed in 1972, the world-renowned Toyota Production System (Shingo, 1989), Kanban (Berkeley, 1992), Just-in-time (JIT) manufacturing systems (Sayer, 1986), 5S system (Gapp, Fisher, & Kobayashi, 2008), etc., are not countries where SERVQUAL research might prevail – even if they do implement quality-related concepts extraordinarily well. In other words, the popularity of SERVQUAL publication has nothing to do with the fact that a certain large power distance country may have weak customers who are more likely to tolerate bad services (Furrer, Liu, Sudharshan, 2000, p.363). Countries that exhibit small power distances but highly individualistic in nature also seem to nurture service quality-related studies.

Power Distance (PDI) versus Masculinity (MAS). Correlation coefficients found between power distance (PDI) and masculinity (MAS) for the ‘top 10’ showed a mild to strong, negative, statistically significant relationship (-0.66, $p < 0.04$) whereas such relationship does not exist for the whole group of 70 countries (-0.16, $p < 0.19$). Such a finding could imply that either relatively less masculine countries with large power distances would tend to produce more SERVQUAL-related studies (maybe because these less masculine countries concern more for the not-so-fairly-treated workers working under large power distance environment) or the relatively more masculine, individualistic countries would tend to go for more of these SERVQUAL-related research as they probably aim for winning over other competitors through exhibiting outstanding professionalism. Such an argument is further supported by the fact that a strong negative correlation (-0.72, $p < 0.02$) is also found among power distance (PDI) and indulgence (IND) values in the top 10 SERVQUAL publication countries – which is something not clearly manifesting (-0.31, $p < 0.01$), even though statistically significant, among the overall list of 70. And,

furthermore, as power distance correlates strongly with individualism, we also see such a strong tie (0.74, $p < 0.01$) between individualism (IDV) and masculinity (MAS) among the top 10. Using the same rationale, individualism (IDV) also correlates strongly (0.79, $p < 0.01$) with indulgence (IND) among the top 10, and not with the overall 70.

Masculinity (MAS) versus Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI). The top 10 countries with most SERVQUAL publications also exhibited strong, negative correlations (-0.68, $p < 0.03$) between masculinity (MAS) and uncertainty avoidance (UAI) and which is not found in the overall group of 70 countries. Such a finding reasonably conforms with the expectation that in countries where the lower the uncertainty avoidance, or the less the fear or threat concerning uncertain or unknown situations, the stronger the masculinity (or the quest for professionalism). It also implies that the need for service quality research in high uncertainty avoidance countries could probably be triggered as a result of the dire need for a solution for minimizing customer complaints (or 'threats').

Long-term Orientation (LTO) versus Individualism (IDV) and Masculinity (MAS). While it is known that service quality contributes to long-term relationships and customer retention (Venetis & Ghauri, 2004), our findings here indicated something a little different. Our findings showed that long-term orientation (LTO) maintains strong, negative correlations with both individualism (IDV) (-0.75, $p < 0.01$) as well as masculinity (MAS) (-0.62, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that the 'top 10', instead of always wanting 'a long-term relationship' with customers, seem to be exhibiting two different kinds of characteristics. Among countries in the top 10, those that are low on individualism (or more collectivistic) and less masculine tend to go for long-term orientation (and hence 'retain their customers' through closer people-to-people, more caring, less masculine, relations while making use of the less individualistic customers' dependency on services). Those that are high on individualism and more masculine, tend to attract individualistic customers through showing them their professionalism and innovation. In short, for higher long-term orientation countries among the 'top 10', they are more 'people-first', while for other countries with shorter LTO values, they tend to be more 'service-first'.

Conclusion

In this paper, we started off reviewing the literature on the service quality research trend and we arrived at the question, 'Is there a cultural pattern among countries that favor service quality research?' Through computing the Pearson's correlation coefficients among the Hofstede's cultural dimension values for the 'top 10' SERVQUAL publication countries indicated by Wang, *et al.* (2015) and compared them to that of the 70 countries around the world, we concluded that such a cultural pattern does exist. Countries that are either 'individualistic with small power distances' or 'collectivistic with large power distances' seem to have more SERVQUAL publications. In other words, a country that is interested in SERVQUAL does not necessarily have weak (large power distance) or dependent (collectivistic) customers. Similarly, maybe because of differences in intention that fueled researches on service quality, relatively less masculine countries with large power distances (or countries in which there is huge pressure in the work environment) would tend to produce more SERVQUAL-related studies, just as the more masculine, individualistic countries would probably aim for winning over other national competitors through exhibiting outstanding professionalism. This finding coincided with how long-term orientation in the 'top 10' SERVQUAL publication countries correlate negatively with both individualism and masculinity, too. While service quality is known to be crucial to customer satisfaction (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994) and retention (Venetis & Ghauri, 2004), it is high time we advocated the notion that service quality does not necessarily equate to merely customer satisfaction nor retention, but how nations would make the most out of their own cultures while gaining respect and understanding from the customers who were often incorrectly brainwashed to believe that service quality, regardless of how unreasonable customers' requests might sometimes be, is everything. In fact, when national cultural values do not imply individual values and that only 2 to 4 percent of the variance in individual values is said to be explained by Hofstede's national differences (Gerhart, and Fang, 2005), service quality studies in these 'top 10' nations should be geared toward promoting appreciation of the efforts made by the service industries, and not just a reflection of quality from the side of the consumers or customers. After all, the interpretation of every single idea changes with time, be it politeness (Cheng, 2015a), political stance (Cheng, 2015b), freedom (Cheng, Yau & Ho, 2016), or management thoughts (Cheng & Macapagal, 2016), and while Hofstede's culture dimensions and values are national or 'ecological' in nature and do not necessarily apply to individuals living in countries studied (Brewer & Venaik, 2012; Venaik & Brewer, 2013), service quality research that originates from these countries as a result of their cultural dimension patterns, under certain conditions, could only add unnecessary load to the already overloaded service industry and its workers.

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