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Abstract

The author reports the results of an exploratory study concerning the importance placed on attributes of hotel selection by Japanese and American guests and cultural differences between these two groups, which represent the largest market for Korean international tourist hotels. The findings suggest that Hofstede's (1960) four dimensions of cultural values can be used to help marketers better understand their guest's hotel selection criteria.

Keywords

cultural values, organizations, marketing, hospitality administration and management, international business

Japanese, U.S. tourists: Culture and hotel selections

by Minho Cho

The author reports the results of an exploratory study concerning the importance placed on attributes of hotel selection by Japanese and American guests and cultural differences between these two groups, which represent the largest markets for Korean international tourist hotels. The findings suggest that Hofstede's (1980) four dimensions of cultural values can be used to help marketers better understand their guest's hotel selection criteria.

As the number of tourists crossing international borders has continued to increase, a great deal of interest has been expressed in cross-cultural analysis of the behavior of international tourists. One major area of research regarding international tourist behavior is the effect that national cultural characteristics have on tourist behavior.¹

An understanding of national cultural characteristics and differences by international tourist marketers could be used to help make tourism products compatible with what customers want. Certain

attributes of the hotel product itself have a strong influence on the guests' selection of hotels.

Previous research has looked into these attributes, but the current literature indicates a lack of research on the effect of the guest's cultural background on his choice of hotels. Instead of focusing on just the attributes of the hotel, the hotelier should also understand the cultural characteristics of his target market and design the hotel product to meet the expectations and needs of potential guests.

In order to explore these characteristics, it is helpful to employ a more general concept of culture that transcends national boundaries, rather than define culture on a nation-by-nation basis. Clark urges that nations be characterized by specific behavioral variables that can replace national identity variables when conducting cross-cultural marketing studies.²

The Korean hotel market has become increasingly competitive, as

international tourism to the Republic has grown. The Seoul Olympics in 1988 sparked a dramatic upsurge in hotel development: the number of tourist hotels in Korea has increased by 350 percent during the past 20 years.³ In order to compete in this marketplace, international hoteliers in Korea must understand how culture and design products and amenities that attract and satisfy tourists from targeted cultures affect their guests' behavior.

Historically Japan and the United States have been the two largest suppliers of tourists to Korea. Table 1 shows trip-related

characteristics of Japanese and American pleasure tourists visiting Korea. Japanese tourists tend to choose Korea as their primary destination, while one-third of American tourists visit Korea as part of a multi-country tour. Japanese tourists stay three to four days, which is about a third of the time an American tourist stays, and spend a third of their trip budget on shopping, while American tourists spend about a third of their trip budget on accommodations. These different characteristics alone show that there is quite a distinction between the two markets. Korean hoteliers will continue to play host

Table 1
Trip-related characteristics
of Japanese and American pleasure tourists
(1990 – 1998 average)

		Japanese	Americans
Transit route (percent)	Multiple destinations (including Korea)	2.5	36.7
	Single destination (Korea only)	97.5	63.3
Number of visits (percent)	One	43.0	42.0
	Two	13.5	17.0
	Three	7.0	8.6
	Four or more	36.5	32.4
Length of stay	Days	3.5	11.3
Expenditure per person (US\$)	Transportation	105.80	170.60
	Accommodation	342.60	583.10
	Shopping	562.10	277.20
	Other	504.60	447.90
	Total	1,515.10	1,478.80

Source: Foreign Visitors Survey, *Korea National Tourism Organization*, 1990–1998; Annual Statistical Report on Tourism, *Korea National Tourism Organization*, 1990–1998.

to both of these groups in coming years, and must make a conscious effort to understand the cultural characteristics of both in order to better serve them.

This study will assess the importance placed on different product attributes and use Hofstede's cultural framework to examine the cultural characteristics of Japanese and American pleasure tourists and the effect of both of these factors on hotel selection.

Culture influences behavior

Marketers must exercise care in analyzing consumer buying behavior which is never simple. The cultural characteristics of the consumer exert broad and deep influences on their behavior. Cultural values have long been recognized as a powerful force shaping the consumer's motivation, lifestyle, and product choices.⁴

Recently calls for greater standardization of international marketing programs have escalated despite the fact that the question of how culture moderates consumer behavior remains largely unanswered. Both managers and researchers have proclaimed that the need for a greater cross-cultural understanding of consumer behavior is essential for improving international marketing programs.⁵ Samli attempted to develop an international consumer behavior model emphasizing culture and indicated that international companies can develop their marketing strategies more successfully to understand different cultures.⁶

Product attribute importance may be used to determine certain cultural measures that may provide a link between cultural values and consumer choices. Value differences may be reflected in differences in product attribute importance.⁷ In Tse, Wong, and Tan's study, five Asian cultures were found to assign varying levels of importance to perceived attributes of clothing. Hong Kong Chinese and Singaporeans considered aesthetic attributes to be the most importance, while Japanese, Koreans, and Taiwanese placed more importance on instrumental attributes.⁸

Top needs are similar

A recent study by McCleary, Choi, and Weaver described similarities and differences between the importance Korean and American business travelers place on various characteristics when selecting a hotel. There was very little difference in the importance placed on the top four selection criteria by two samples. Cleanliness was ranked first by both. Safety and security, friendly service, and comfortable mattress and pillow occupied the next three ranks, but not in the same order between the samples.⁹

However, a considerable difference, arbitrarily defined as at least a five-rank difference between the samples, was found. For example, the availability of non-smoking rooms, concierge floors, and a family restaurant were more important to the U. S. sample than to the Korean sample, while convenient to business, convenient to

downtown, laundry service, and in-room mini-bar were more important to the Korean sample than to the U.S. sample. While this research is pertinent to consumer marketing, little, if any, of it addresses the impact of culture beyond nationality on hotel selection.

Hofstede's study analyzed questionnaires from 117,000 IBM employees in 53 countries, and identified four cultural characteristics that seem relevant to consumer behavior. These characteristics are described as power distance (high or low), individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, and uncertainty avoidance (high or low).¹⁰ Although Hofstede's research was conducted within an organizational setting, the characteristics he identifies have been associated with consumer behavior as well as with work-related activities.¹¹

These four cultural characteristics have been employed in studies on the quality of work-life and in marketing studies.¹² Studies comparing consumer behavior related to specific products in different cultures, employing Hofstede's classification, are limited in the hospitality industry.

Huang, Hung, and Wu developed 11 scenarios to measure the intent to complain about unsatisfactory hotel service on the part of both Japanese and American guests. It was found that American guests have a stronger desire to complain, and to discontinue their patronage, than do Japanese guests.¹³ This study attempted to employ Hofstede's four dimensions of

cultural values to explain the differences in intent to complain between Japanese and American guests.

Service ranks high

Power distance describes the extent to which a culture fosters social inequality. Cultures high in power distance tend to emphasize the importance of prestige and wealth in shaping boundaries between social and economic classes such as rich or poor.¹⁴ Therefore, in high power distance cultures, maintaining and increasing power is a source of satisfaction to consumers. Social consciousness is high, and customers are motivated by the need to conform to those in the social class to which they aspire. Relating the aspects of cultural power distance to hotel selection, it appears that the attributes of service level and reputation (prestige) of hotel are the best fit for power distance. Customers from cultures with a large power distance may regard a high standard of service and reputation (prestige) of the hotel as more important than would customers from cultures with a smaller power distance.

Individualism is an aspect of culture that pertains to people's tendency to value personal and individual time, freedom, and experiences. In contrast, cultures that emphasize collectivism exhibit patterns of group or collective thinking and acting.¹⁵ In terms of hotel selection attributes, customers from cultures which highly value individualism prefer features that emphasize variety

and individual gratification, while guests from cultures which highly value the collective will seek features that reinforce group membership and affiliation.

The dimension of masculinity versus femininity describes the extent to which a society holds values traditionally regarded as predominantly masculine or feminine. Examples of masculine values include the importance of competitiveness, visible recognition or acclaim, and speed. Examples of feminine values include concern for the weak, helping others, and interpersonal relationships.¹⁶

This cultural dimension describes the contrast between objective and subjective measures of service quality. Customers from cultures with strong masculine values may regard objective service measures such as completeness of customer requests, and speed and accuracy of service as important. In contrast, customers from cultures with strong feminine values may consider more subjective measures such as willingness to help customers in a friendly and honest manner, and concern for guest problems, as more important.

The uncertainty avoidance dimension describes the cultural pattern of seeking stability, predictability, and stress-free situations rather than change and new experiences.¹⁷ Customers from a culture with high uncertainty avoidance will focus on avoiding risk, while customers from a culture with a low level of uncertainty avoidance will be more

active risk-takers. Customers from cultures high in uncertainty avoidance consider attributes of security and dependency that help to prevent or reduce perceived risk more important than do customers from cultures low in uncertainty avoidance.

Cultures are different

The sample was made up of tourists from the United States and Japan, which were chosen for two reasons. First, the U. S. and Japan are the two major sources of inbound international tourism for Korea (See Table 2). Second, American and Japanese cultures differ greatly from each other, and the behavior of tourists from these cultures is likely to be very different from that of tourists from the other.¹⁸

Respondents were recruited in the lobbies of 10 relatively high-priced international tourist hotels such as the Hotel Shilla, Sheraton Walker Hill Towers and Resorts, Hyatt International, and Hotel Lotte in Korea. Fifty responses from each of 10 hotels in each country were sought (500 total from each country). Potential respondents were asked their nationality, the purpose of their travel (pleasure or business), and their willingness to participate in this study. Since the sample selection had multiple screenings, a total of 236 responses from American guests (47.2 percent) and 239 responses from Japanese guests (47.8 percent) were collected.

To test for differences between

Table 2
Top 10 source countries for Korean tourism
(1990 – 1998 Average)

Ranking	Country	Number of visitors (In thousands)	Percentage
1	Japan	1,586.00	44.8 %
2	USA	357.78	10.1 %
3	Taiwan	169.78	4.8 %
4	Philippines	147.11	4.2 %
5	China	130.67	3.7 %
6	Russia	114.33	3.2 %
7	Hong Kong	112.89	3.2 %
8	Thailand	58.78	1.7 %
9	England	43.89	1.2 %
10	Singapore	43.11	1.2 %

Source: Korean Tourism Yearbook, Korea Tourism Development Institute, 1990–1999

the samples, a chi-square test was applied to the demographic categories. Table 3 shows the demographic characteristics of both samples along with the results of the chi-square test. There was no significance difference in marital status between the two samples. However, there were significant differences at the 0.01 levels in each of the other categories.

The U. S. sample was made up primarily of males; male respondents represented 56.1 percent of the Japanese sample, and 74.6 percent of the U. S. group. Respondents in the 20 to 29 and 30 to 39 year old groups made up approximately two-thirds of both samples: 61 percent for the Japanese sample and 65.6 percent for the U. S. The U. S. sample, however, had a higher percentage of respondents in the 30 to 39 and 50 to 59 year old groups. Both samples showed a high level of education, but the U. S. sample had

a larger percentage of respondents with graduate degrees (24 percent) compared with the Japanese sample (6 percent).

Attributes were grouped

The questionnaire consisted of hotel selection attributes grouped according to Hofstede's four cultural dimensions. Scholars such as Atkinson,¹⁹ Cadotte and Turgeon,²⁰ Callan,²¹ Knuston,²² and Lewis²³ were major contributors in the hotel selection attributes research; their studies were reviewed in order to make up a master list of these attributes. As lists from these different studies were combined, it was found that certain attributes were duplicated and others were the same even though the terminology differed from author to author. The master list was condensed by eliminating duplication and by standardizing terminology. Then the

Table 3
Study participant demographics

Demographic characteristics	Japanese No.	%	American No.	%	Total No.	%	Chi-square Significance Level
Sex							.0000
Male	134	56.1	176	74.6	310	65.3	
Female	105	43.9	60	25.4	165	34.7	
Marital Status							.0820
Married	129	54.0	124	52.5	253	53.3	
Single	110	46.0	112	47.5	222	46.7	
Age							.0000
Younger than 20	20	8.5	5	2.2	25	5.3	
20 to 29	100	41.8	61	25.8	161	33.9	
30 to 39	46	19.2	94	39.8	140	29.5	
40 to 49	36	15.1	30	12.7	66	13.9	
50 to 59	24	10.0	37	15.7	61	12.8	
60 and older	13	5.4	9	3.8	22	4.6	
Education							.0000
No HS diploma	13	5.4	None	—	13	2.7	
HS diploma	86	36.0	37	15.7	123	25.9	
College degree	134	56.1	141	59.7	275	57.9	
Graduate degree	6	2.5	58	24.6	64	13.5	

remaining attributes were grouped according to Hofstede's four cultural dimensions.

Selection attributes were grouped into seven categories as shown in Table 4. Power distance encompasses the level of service offered (the higher the level of service, the more appeal to a high-power-distance culture) and the reputation or prestige of the hotel. The dimension of individualism vs. collectivism was described by the attribute known as belongingness. Masculinity vs. femininity was reflected in the guest's prioritization of objective or subjective measures of service quality, and security and dependency represented uncertainty avoidance.

These seven categories were presented to the guest as seven questions, translated into English and Japanese. Since the original language of the questions was English, the questions were translated into Japanese and then back into English to ensure that the meanings were the same in both languages.

Importance is rated

Respondents from each of the two target cultures were asked to evaluate the categories of attributes in terms of their importance when selecting a hotel. Respondents were handed a printed questionnaire which they filled out personally. Interviewers stood by to

Table 4
Hotel selection attributes

Hofstede's cultural dimension	Category of attributes	Examples of attributes
Power distance	Level of service	VIP treatment Elegant dining Courtesy transportation
	Reputations (prestige)	Specific star rating Specific crown grading Uniforms attesting employees' status
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Belongingness	Unified room rates including various services Leisure entertainment and restaurant facilities for group
Masculinity	Objective service measures	Completeness of guest requests Speed and accuracy of service
Femininity	Subjective service measures	Staff's willingness to help guests with friendliness and honesty Staff's concern for guest's problems
Uncertainty	Security	Awareness of hotel location Safety of hotel
	Dependency	Native hotel brand Employee's ability to speak guest's language

explain items which were unclear using a script which had been validated through the translation-back-translation process. Interviewers who were fluent in Japanese or English were trained to describe items well to ensure against interviewer bias. The importance of each category of attributes was measured on a five-point Likert scale with 5 being very important and 1 being very unimportant.

T-tests were used to determine whether statistically significant differences exist between the U. S. and Japanese samples. Results of the t-tests are given in Table 5.

Power distance exists

Generally speaking, Japanese tourists tend to show a larger power distance, lower individualism, stronger uncertainty avoidance, and tend toward a more masculine response than do tourists from the U. S. sample. These findings are similar to those of previous studies that have used Hofstede's four cultural dimensions, even though Hofstede's work was used in a different perspective.

This study found that when selecting a hotel, Japanese guests show a larger power distance than do American guests. In terms of this

study, Japanese guests regard a hotel's prestige and reputation as more important than do Americans, and tend to select a hotel with a higher standard of service than do Americans. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies. Kale and Barnes found that culture can have an impact on cross-national personal selling interactions: specifically, power distance will affect the style of both the seller and buyer in a sales transaction.²⁴ In a society with large power distance, such as Japan, the seller is considered "little more than a beggar."²⁵ The seller must therefore be respectful and subservient to prospective buyers in a society with large power distance.

A unique characteristic of the consumer behavior of Japanese

tourists compared with American tourists is that the Japanese are much more conscious of social status.²⁶ This cultural quirk was reflected in the importance placed on attributes of hotel selection. Japanese guests consider a high level of service and the reputation or prestige of the hotel to be more important attributes of hotel selection than do American guests. The mean scores of Japanese respondents on level of service and reputation were 3.62 and 3.54 respectively, while the mean scores of American respondents on level of service and reputation were 3.11 and 3.33, respectively.

The scores of Japanese respondents on upscale services such as VIP treatment, elegant dining, and courtesy transportation, and the

Table 5
Importance placed on the attributes of hotel selection

Hofstede's cultural dimension	Category of attributes	Japan Mean (SD)	United States Mean (SD)	T-value (significance)
Power distance	Level of service . .	3.62 (1.29)	3.11 (1.26)	4.32 (.000) ^a
	Reputation	3.54 (1.07)	3.33 (1.18)	1.99 (.48) ^a
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Belongingness . . .	3.88 (0.97)	3.48 (0.96)	-4.55 (.000) ^a
Masculinity	Objective measures	3.94 (1.08)	3.75 (0.92)	2.12 (.034) ^a
Femininity	Subjective measures	4.27 (0.98)	4.37 (0.77)	-1.30 (.194)
Uncertainty	Security	4.20 (0.88)	3.99 (1.14)	2.83 (.005) ^a
	Dependence	3.28 (1.10)	2.85 (1.29)	3.90 (.000) ^a

Note: Categories of attributes are measured on a 5-point Likert scale:

1=very unimportant, 5=very important.

^a: Statistically significant at .05 level.

reputation or prestige illustrated by specific star rating, crown grading, and wearing uniforms designating the status of staff members are higher than those of American respondents. Since Japanese guests respond more strongly to features and attributes related to social status, a marketing strategy appealing to the social image and prestige of the guest would be much more appropriate for the Japanese market than it would for the U. S. market.

Dichotomy exists

This study found that Japanese guests regard individualism with much less importance than do Americans, even when selecting a hotel. This also reflects the findings of previous studies. In researching the link between brand image and culture in order to provide multinational companies with a framework for selecting brand strategies, Roth found that brand image strategies emphasizing group membership and affiliation were successful in cultures which highly value collectivism (e.g., Asian countries, including Japan).²⁷

The collectivism-individualism dichotomy is one of the most noticeable cultural gaps between Japanese and Americans. Japanese tourists, by nature, are not individualists, and are not adventurous in their own right. Japanese tourists emphasize collectivism, and there is strong pressure to conform to the group.²⁸ One observable behavior related to this cultural trait is the polite inexplicitness of Japanese

tourists, which is motivated by the desire not to humiliate, offend, or disturb the harmony of the group.²⁹

In the hotel selecting process, Japanese guests consider an inclusive group rate which covers auxiliary services, leisure activities, entertainment, and dining for their entire group as a very important attribute, while American guests do not. The mean score of Japanese respondents on belongingness was 3.88, while the mean score of American respondents on belongingness was 3.48. Hoteliers should therefore develop elaborate standardized hotel packages and facilities that can accommodate group activities for their Japanese guests. This strategy will serve to keep the Japanese group together during their stay and avoid separating them, causing discomfort. On the other hand, such elaborate packages and group facilities are not appealing to American tourists, who seek options that will fulfill their need for variety and individual satisfaction.

Other factors vague

Results were somewhat vague regarding the masculine-feminine factors that in this study were linked to objective vs. subjective measures of service quality. Japanese guests seem to place a higher importance on objective measures such as completeness, speed, and accuracy than do American guests. The mean score of Japanese respondents on objective service measures was 3.94, while the mean score of American

respondents on objective service measures was 3.75. Within the framework of this study, this result indicates that Japanese guests exhibit a more masculine behavior set than do Americans.

There was no difference between Japanese and Americans, however, in the degree of importance placed on more subjective measures such as a willingness to help guests and concern for the guests' problems. Since there is no statistically significant difference on the "feminine" dimension between the two samples, it is difficult to draw a conclusion as to which culture is more masculine or more feminine. This may stem from the nature of the hotel industry itself, in which subjective aspects – service measured by how the guest feels rather than by more objective measures of time or accuracy – is of paramount importance.

As shown in Table 5, the most important of the seven hotel selection attributes tested in this survey was that of the staff's willingness to help guests and empathize with their problems. Even though there was no statistically significant difference between Japanese and American respondents on this question, it is telling that this is the most important factor for selecting a hotel for guests from both cultures. This result points to the necessity of staff training which will instill the proper attitude in customer-contact employees. Hotels catering mostly to Japanese guests may desire to emphasize technical skills that ensure the objective standards of

service quality (timeliness, accuracy) are met, but hotels catering to either or both markets must ensure that their staff has a willing, helpful, and empathetic attitude.

Uncertainty exists

The final cultural trait studied here was that of uncertainty. Japanese guests tend to avoid uncertainty to a greater degree than do American guests. As with previous results, this reflects the results of other studies. Hofstede found that the quality of work life is affected by culture.³⁰ In a society that shows little aversion to uncertainty, such as the U. S., high quality of work life is expressed in a willingness to take personal risks, but in a highly uncertainty-averse society such as Japan, high quality of work life is expressed by a desire for personal security.

Ahmed and Krohn described another behavioral difference between Japanese and American consumers: that of conscious uncertainty avoidance.³¹ They point out that marketers catering to Japanese guests must meet the safety concerns of these guests, and emphasize the aspect of including psychological safety when designing travel product offerings. Ahmed and Krohn also mention the dependence of Japanese tourists, who demand constant attention and care, and cited the large number of Japanese-owned hotels in Hawaii as evidence of the Japanese belief that only Japanese can fully meet the needs of other Japanese.³²

This cultural difference was

also evident in this study. Japanese guests consider security and dependence as more important when selecting a hotel than do American guests. The mean scores of Japanese respondents on security and dependency were 4.20 and 3.28, respectively, while the mean scores of American respondents on security and dependency were 3.99 and 2.85, respectively. Both security, illustrated by awareness of the hotel's location and the safety features of the hotel, and dependence, illustrated by the preference for a hotel brand from their own country and staff which can communicate in their own language, earned higher importance scores from Japanese respondents than from American respondents.

Hoteliers must recognize that security is of paramount importance to Japanese guests, and should consider providing Japanese guests with oral and written assurance of security, and citing security records for the hotel and its surrounding area in promotional materials. They should also recognize that, more so than Americans, Japanese guests prefer Japanese hotel brands and want to be served by staff who speak their own language. However, Americans may assume that they can communicate in English anywhere they go since it is the international language. This may cause American respondents to place less importance on dependency than do Japanese respondents when selecting a hotel.

Strategies must vary

This study has investigated the importance placed on attributes of hotel selection and identified cultural characteristics of Japanese and American guests who make up the major market segments for Korean international tourist hotels. It has also attempted to employ Hofstede's four dimensions of cultural values to explain differences in importance of attributes of hotel selection as perceived by different cultures. The results indicated that Hofstede's cultural dimensions could be used to help us better understand guests' hotel selection.

Results showed that Japanese guests have larger power distance, collectivism, masculinity, and strong uncertainty avoidance when compared with American guests. Japanese guests regard high levels of service and reputation (prestige) as more important attributes of hotel selection than do American guests. Room rates that include various services, leisure activities, entertainment, and dining for the group are more important attributes of hotel selection for Japanese than for American guests. In addition, Japanese guests regard objective measures of service quality, such as timeliness and accuracy, more important than do American guests. Finally, Japanese guests consider security and dependence as more important than do American guests.

Based on these results, it can be seen that a uniform marketing strategy will not satisfy guests from

different cultures since there are certain differences in the level of importance given to attributes of hotel selection. Marketing strategies that overlooks cultural differences and assumes similarities across cultures are at best ineffective, and at worst could actually bring about a loss of business. Appreciation of the unique cultural characteristics of guests and adjustment of marketing strategies to stress the importance of attributes of hotel selection could be a differentiating tool to attract guests from different cultures.

Culture has influence

Although hotel selection attributes were arbitrarily grouped into seven categories according to Hofstede's four cultural dimensions, the results of this study are likely to confirm to a certain extent the results obtained in previous studies that employed Hofstede's description of four cultural characteristics.

However, it should also be noted that a discrepancy in demographics between the two samples might affect the results of this study. McCleary, et. al., mentioned that the value of demographics in segmenting and predicting consumer behavior is often questioned.³³ Therefore, the differences in importance placed on various attributes of hotel selection between these samples are probably more closely related to cultural differences as described by Hofstede's dimensions than by minor differences in sample demographics.

Hospitality scholars in

marketing should focus greater attention on cross-cultural marketing issues. Despite the constraints involving cross-cultural research, further conceptualization and empirical investigation into cultural issues in the hospitality industry will advance development in this important area.

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