

# *Identification and Analysis of Cultural Dimensions in Event Management: Understanding Food and Etiquette*

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**Abstract:** In the international business industry, although not be recognized as the very first consideration, cultural dimension has become a significant point because of the increasing communication and global culture transformation. However the importance of culture in business, particularly tourism industry is lack of research and exploration. In response to the urgent demand of cultural dimension analysis in event management, it is important to identify and analyze the cultural dimension of event management and how it influences the successful business development. With regards of this, the paper aims to explore two major factors in cross-culture business by briefly describe the features of two factors and detailed analysis of their importance, as well as illustration and analysis the linkage between culture dimension and service dimension. Meanwhile specific service quality – culture relationship are displayed. This report may be useful for event or even hospitality managers who are interested in managing international market to generate a brief understanding of effect of cultural dimension toward tourism industry. It may be also helpful to encourage academic research of event and service management in different cultural conditions.

## **1. Introduction**

With the increase of cross cultural communication in the international business especially tourism field, the ability of managing cultural diversity is a crucial aspect for the tourism and event industry. Regarding of the significance of cultural dimension in the industry, the purpose of this paper is to identify two crucial factors of cultural dimension which have great impact on event management. The two key cultural factors are food and etiquette. Food is regarded as “a culinary history from antiquity to the present” while the diversity etiquette from different cultures is essential to international business. The judgment of foods, their methods of preparation, and manner of consumption on social criteria of gastronomic merit is daily increasing in the world, which influence various fields in different ways. Additionally, etiquette has great power in different cultures or even different races. The importance of food and etiquette urged its study not only in daily life but also in business fields. In purpose of analyzing these two factors, the essay will start with cultural diversity background and an overview of food and etiquette, following by reasons of their birth from aspects of history, philosophy and geography. Furthermore, the relationship and importance of food and etiquette to events will be illustrated and evaluated in detail respectively. After that the implication of these two cultural factors to the event industry will be analyzed before the conclusion.

## 2. Cultural dimensions Theory

Cultural Dimensions Theory is a framework used to understand the differences in culture across countries. Outside of sociology, it is also applicable to fields such as cross-cultural psychology, international management, and cross-cultural communication. Cultural dimensions are widely used to understand etiquette and facilitate communication across cultures in areas ranging from business to diplomacy<sup>[1]</sup>.

The theory, there are 6 dimensions respectfully: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation, Indulgence vs. Restraint. This paper focuses on the analysis of Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism and collectivism, Long-term Orientation in event area.

### 2.1. Power Distance

The power distance index describes the extent to which the less powerful members of an organization or institution — such as a family — accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. In cultures with a large power distance, weak customers are more likely to tolerate failure from powerful service providers. Additionally, there are significant negative relationships between power distance and reliability and between power distance and responsiveness. In cultures with large power distance, such a distance is both expected and desired. Because tangibles help to maintain such a distance, they are important in the service quality evaluation process of weak customers. Weak customers also accord a great importance to be assured in their service relations with more powerful service providers.

### 2.2. Uncertainty Avoidance

In frequent service situations, uncertainty from the possibility of failure has to be reduced by the guarantee of a quick solution to problems. There are significant differences in how different cultures tolerate and deal with uncertainty. Societies with high uncertainty avoidance tend to establish clear rules and procedures, provide greater job security, do not tolerate deviations from perspectives and behaviors, and rely more on absolute knowledge and expert ratings to avoid the threat posed by uncertainty and ambiguity. Conversely, low-uncertainty avoidance societies are more open and flexible, more receptive to change and uncertainty, and more emphasis on individual freedom and innovation.

This difference in cultural dimensions not only affects the way individuals think and behave, but also affects the way organizations are managed, their communication strategies, and the way society as a whole operates. Therefore, understanding and respecting the degree of uncertainty avoidance across cultures in areas such as cross-cultural communication, international business, education, etc., is essential to promote effective communication and cooperation.

### 2.3. Individualism – Collectivism

It depicts the associations individuals involve in different culture. In individualistic societies, individuals only take care of themselves and their immediate family whereas in collectivistic cultures, human beings are involved in groups that take care of them in return for loyalty.

Consumers in upper level of individualism cultures are considered to be extra self-centered as well as independent. As a result of their force and self-responsibility value, individualists command efficiency from others individuals. Thus they individualists require high-quality services. Individualists often choose to keep distances with service suppliers in their relationships. Tangible

products are possible methods to limit their distances when interacting with service providers.

## 2.4. Long-term Orientation

In cultures with a long-term orientation, long-term relationships with service providers are expected. In these cultures, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy are extremely crucial. This makes event managers easier to address target customers and possible marketing strategies toward different customers. However, there are boundaries of their study. The tested variables are limited, the importance and dimensions of service quality may vary from different cultures, the changes in cultures and service expectations demand further study.

## 2.5. Cultural dimensions in service quality

Service quality dimensions are considered to be direct service quality measurement. The identification of five widely accepted dimensions of service quality are: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy. Among these dimensions, reliability is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Assurance is the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. Empathy is the caring, individualized attention provided to the customer; and tangibles are the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. The service quality dimension is a pluralistic concept used to measure and evaluate the quality of service provided by service providers. These dimensions reflect the customer's perception and evaluation of the service from different perspectives. Here are some common quality of service dimensions:

**Materiality:** This relates to the physical facilities, equipment, appearance of communication materials, and the appearance of employees. For example, the decoration and cleanliness of the restaurant, as well as the neatness of the staff's uniforms.

**Reliability:** refers to the ability of a service provider to reliably and accurately perform the promised service. Customers expect service providers to consistently deliver high-quality service and respond quickly when needed.

**Responsiveness:** This involves the ability of a business to serve its customers quickly and effectively. The ability to quickly resolve customer inquiries, requests, or complaints is critical to the customer experience<sup>[2]</sup>.

**Guarantee:** This has to do with the knowledge, competence, courtesy, and integrity of the service staff. Service personnel need to have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their services, while showing respect, understanding and friendliness to enhance customer trust.

**Empathy:** It refers to the ability of enterprises to genuinely care about customers, understand their feelings, and understand their actual needs to meet them. This requires employees to be aware of the needs of their customers and to respond sensitively to them.

These dimensions provide a comprehensive perspective for evaluating service quality. Different industries and types of services may have different focuses, but in general, these dimensions together constitute the overall perception of service quality by customers. Some of the determinants of customer expectations of services are customers' personal needs: physical, social and psychological. These determinants are strongly influenced by the social and cultural environment of customers. Thus, culture has an important influence on service quality expectations and relative importance of its five dimensions.

### 3. Overview of Two Crucial Factors of Culture

The opportunities and difficulties of cross-cultural management are depicted by the management of cultural diversity in work groups which include representatives from two or more cultures. He emphasize that the successful management of cultural diversity may create economic profits. Therefore the industry's ability to "attract, retain, and motivate people from different cultures can give it competitive advantages in cost structures, structures, creativity, problem solving, and adapting to change". In business relationships, culture-specific communication styles may also result in attitudes that affect the assessor-client relationship, immediacy of compliance, and ultimately the entire response process and interpretation procedures.

#### 3.1. Food

It is known to all that food culture has various difference all over the world, scholars have represented an approximate section of food culture which are Near East, Middle East and North Africa, India, Italy, China, Great Britain. One of the reasons that result the diversity of food may be the agriculture and geography differences of every cultural destination. "Man in an industrial or postindustrial culture is tempted to recognize a fundamental 'naturalness' in agricultural activities, which, given our experience, we consider 'traditional'".

Food culture which includes aspects like table manner, tableware, dining etiquette can be considered as a reflection of general ethic, behavior and characteristics. For example, Most Asian choice of tableware is chopstick and the dining habit of Asian are eating together from big plate and bowl in the centre of table. By contrast, the common tableware in western countries is knives and forks, which are used to deal with individual plate of food in front of every single person. In this case, the general feature of individualism and ambition of most westerner may be showed by the food culture.

From the above it is clear that the massive culture meanings of food urge the consideration of it to event. Additionally, the feature of daily supplies that it could be connected with every single event is also an important reason for the study. The 'meal experience' may be defined as both tangible and intangible chains of events that a customer experiences in a certain situation.

#### 3.2. Etiquette

In the field of tourism and event, cultural etiquette refers to customs, attitudes, manners, moral and behavior in the tourism activities. Although etiquette in tourism exists in various areas, the most important one may be considered to be the business etiquette. For the case of tourism industry, the understanding of cultural etiquette is very important because of the ongoing international cooperation between different areas.

Many Asian have the common etiquette like senior respect, rank worship, group priority and number superstitions. Those all needs enough understanding and preparation in order to avoid any offence situation.

Despite of the typical Asian etiquette, the cultural manners in Middle East and Africa are crucial as well. With regards of this type of etiquette, some rules should be carefully treated in order to maintain a good business relationship. The rules vary from greetings to eating manners. Misunderstanding of etiquette may easily cause unpleasant or even irremediable situation if lack of understanding.

## 4. Importance of Understanding Food and Etiquette

Many events overlook the demand of cultural awareness development and understanding of the key sectors. The reasons why studying food culture and etiquette to contribute the event industry may mainly include two essential and connective parts: respect and relationship development, as well as attraction and economic benefits improvement. First of all, the understanding and estimation toward a person's eating habits and etiquette can to some extent show the organizers respect to the event attendee, which may result in goodwill emphasis and further cooperation. The importance of study cultural etiquette in business relationships are clear. It includes support network establishment, team player reputation achievement and corporate culture acknowledgement. For example, the Chinese made etiquette a key element in the foundation of their culture from long ago, and now the learning and following of graceful manners are turned into a life-long discipline. There are lots of etiquette in China and a great amount of them are too complex that on the higher levels of society ritual masters are necessitated to provide advice about when and how to obey them. Failure or mistake of ritual performance will be a serious matter.

With regards to the tourism attraction aspect, the diversity of food in different destination could be considered as an important feature of events such as the well-known International Gourmet Festival in Malaysia. The festival is a unique event with invitation of high-society community to test foods prepared by top 5-star hotels in the country. The success of this event does not only appear in establishing a culinary tourism destination image of Malaysia, but also constructing good relationships with global famous brands such as Mercedes-Benz and Cannon. One way to boost the benefits of tourism is to enlarge the economic linkages by increasing the amount of local food used in the industry. With the attraction and partnership, the distinctness of economic profits that obtained from this event is predictable<sup>[3]</sup>.

However, the sustainability and efficiency of supply food and etiquette factors in event management has been suspected. While there are many categories of events and while there is interest in triple bottom line reporting, the real interest is on return on investment. The strongest motivator of event is still money. Emphasis of managing event is on facilities, hard business skills such as accounting, business finance, not the soft skills such as sensitivity to different cultures.

It is important to not only focus on the research of cultural differences but also concentrate to the very substance of event management: the economic benefit. In order to achieve the objectives of establish the destination image as a world class event target, the following issues are key concerns as well: the ambition of build the chief and most extraordinary facilities; the understanding of "financial underpinnings" of event management; the development of flexible and transferable event strategies projects; and understanding of various aspects of sponsorship.

## 5. Implication for Event Management

For many people the only significant intercultural experience in their lives is one involving them as a tourist encountering the host nationality. The self-motivated intercultural education about etiquette and food may help the tourism industry to clearly identify the tourism behavior and common characteristics of any region. Moreover, it has influence in tourism satisfaction.

### 5.1. Behavior

Predictable behavior patterns are based upon a form of mental projecting called values, which are firmly over time and result in approximately alike behaviors across similar circumstances. Considered to be a part of value, etiquette are inside of people's minds. It is a method of acting toward certain situations. Furthermore, both formal and informal behavior, are set up around specific etiquette that

symbolizes the “hierarchical relationships” between people in many Asian countries. The rituals of etiquette are not simple surface appearances of proper behavior. They embody the Asian concept of “cosmology, ethics, morality, and the law, and applied to everyone”. Even though there is tremendous economic and social gap between the Asian elites and the great amount of peasants, the same philosophical principles are still the basic of their manners and ethics, the same or may similar symbols and rituals are still shared by the group of people in the same cultural background<sup>[4]</sup>.

## 5.2. Satisfaction

Cross-cultural and service quality research supports the theory that culture impacts customer satisfaction from a variety of service settings. Satisfaction is regarding to be a complex concept that a variety of attempts have been made to analyze it. Tourist satisfaction is “dependent on pro-travel favorability toward the destination visited, which contributes to post-travel favorability toward the destination visited”. However, there is no guarantee for the initial favorability of satisfaction. Moreover, he mentions experiences that leave the tourist a little unsatisfied, if without fulfilled motives and plans, will “engender higher post-travel evaluations” and more return visits than experiences with the highest satisfaction feelings. Satisfaction depends on how much people assess the result of the exchange of money and the importance of it in the first place. Serious concerns about satisfaction include “hygiene, comfort, meals, and transportation” and so on<sup>[5]</sup>.

Satisfaction with hosts is a serious element of tourist experience in tourism events. Service providers and tourists are in close contact. Perception of hosts has a great impact on the entire tourism satisfaction and may affect the desire of repeat visitation. As a result, the psychological and physical performance of hosts should be examined in order to obtain tourist’s positive responses. The consideration of differing dimensions of satisfaction is essential in any discussion of tourist satisfaction

In the concept of food supply in event, the service which represents one of the main characteristics of product delivery is offered to tourists as a high contact service. In addition, during the service delivery process, the assessment of tourist pleasure can be realized in terms of satisfaction about social contact between tourists and hosts. Besides, the satisfaction with a tourist-service provider contact rest on the quality of services offered to tourists. That is to say, from the perspective of satisfaction, cultural dimension, particularly food services has a firmly connection with the tourist satisfaction. This may greatly affect the visitation rate and goodwill of event in certain destination<sup>[6]</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

With the general knowledge of culture and service quality dimension, the importance of awareness of culture orientation and experience dominate logic seems more reasonable. When operating in global ventures or multi-ethnic areas, firms must understand and be attentive to the cultural diversity of their customers. The concept of "experience-centric services" involves companies proactively enhancing customer experiences to differentiate their products and service quality. Service evaluation at events has been explored as well, in order to be applied to characterize service for every consumer to promote positive experiences, nevertheless, the study concerning culture aspect demands more information from literature.

Moreover, customers with different cultural background have different point of view about service quality. Such as she mentions core values of Western customers are tangible cues from physical environment, fun and enjoyment, while Asian customer’s value structures tend to reflect duty in life.

Similarly, the magisterially facilitated consumer-to-consumer (C-to-C) interaction is growing to be important in addressing the potentially constructive influence on clients. And the marketing knowledge of C-to-C is especially valuable for creating high level of customer satisfaction and

faithful client. Yet, in event management area, there is not enough utilization of service management theories via client-centric culture.

This paper begins with a basic study of cultural dimension theory. It aims to satisfy the fundamental economic requirements of event management through the description and analysis of two key concepts. In the procedure of exploration, the main points of food and etiquette in cultural aspects are represented in the first part, and then the reasons and significance of these two elements are demonstrated with analysis. In the following part, two implications that contribute the development of event management are illustrated and assessed with theoretical evidences.

Although lack of enough attention in events industry, the influence of cultural differences is notable and the concern of the cultural dimension are necessary in a variety of aspects. The impacts of culture on tourism could be emphasized and examined by applying academic approaches and knowledge from various resources.

As an overlooked element in the previous event management researches, the further influence of cultural dimension is still a question to the tourism study. However, the proved significance of food and etiquette in affecting tourism behavior and satisfaction is undeniable to the industry. No matter how the situations will change in the future, cultural aspects may have great value of exploring the positive power of in event management promotion for a long time.

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