

The Influence of Value Orientations on Service Quality Perceptions in a Mono-Cultural Context: An Empirical Study of Malay University Students

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ABSTRAK

Kajian hubungan mutu perkhidmatan dan nilai-budaya telah secara tradisi menggunakan kaedah antara budaya untuk membuktikan kesannya. Tujuan kajian ini ialah untuk menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan yang penting dalam sesuatu budaya dan perbezaan ini mempunyai implikasi terdapat reka bentuk, penyediaan dan mutu perkhidmatan. Selaras dengan pendirian ini, kajian ini menyelidiki nilai-budaya dalam konteks suatu kumpulan budaya tertentu. Kajian melibatkan seramai 712 siswa-siswi Bumiputera sebuah universiti tempatan telah menghasilkan 2 gugusan nilai yang signifikan. Analisis varian menunjukkan bahawa gugusan 'True Traditionalists' dan 'Transitory Traditionalists' memperlihatkan kesan yang berbeza kepada dimensi mutu perkhidmatan. Hasil kajian menyokong pendirian bahawa kajian hubungan budaya-mutu perkhidmatan mestilah juga fokus kepada perbezaan dalam sesuatu budaya.

ABSTRACT

Service quality and culture studies have traditionally used polar opposite cultures to make their case. This paper argues that these cultural extremes conceal significant variations in culture and has implications for service design, delivery and quality. The study explores the existence of value variations within ostensibly homogenous groups. It is posited that the knowledge of these spectrum of value orientations will enhance the service marketers' ability to 'situate' services as they enter new markets or introduce service innovations. A study conducted among 712 Malay university students produced 2 significantly different value clusters. Variance analysis showed that these clusters labeled as True Traditionalist and Transitory Traditionalist have significantly different impact on service quality dimensions. The findings support the argument that service quality and culture studies must examine between as well as within culture variations.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid extension of service products to global markets has invoked the question of situating the services in the local cultural and social environment (Matilla 1999; Stauss and Mang 1999). Besides the highly general and stylized characterisation of national groups that followed Hofstede's seminal work, service managers have little to go on in designing and localizing their services. The globalisation of service products and inherent intangibility and human interactivity that marks most services has sharply raised the potential for service product failures.

There is, therefore, a growing interest in understanding the interaction between the national and sub-national cultural influences and service products. Concomitantly, there is a noticeable burst of research examining the culture-service nexus in regions other than Europe and North America (Winstedt 1997; Stauss and Mang 1999). Traditionally, this meant the need to understand the cultures of the European and Asians.

Reflecting this need Anderson and Fornell (1994) in their 'consumer satisfaction research prospectus' called for more systematic investigation

into the variations in satisfaction across nations. Due to the interactive and intangible nature of services, cultural expectations play an important role in predisposing the customers towards the consumption experience and their attention and reaction to cues in the service environment. It strongly influences the values that customers are likely to assign to specific service attributes, the perception of the characteristics of the service providers and the strength of their reaction to the presence or absence of the attributes (Matilla 1999).

Since their appeal, there have been several studies to examine the influence of culture on customer satisfaction (Winsted 1997; Donthu and Yoo 1998; Matilla 1999). Despite the obvious role of culture in service quality, the understanding is still rather nascent. As services become more global, there is need to develop better understanding of the influence of different cultures on different dimensions of service quality.

The research thus far has exclusively focused on national and ethnic groups/cultural groups. Because these groups are distinct and commonly become the basis of marketing decisions, they are selected as the natural units of observation. While broad cultural categories still form the basis of global market segmentation, the cultural stereotyping often conceal significant variations within groups that allow for finer segmentation (Matilla 1999). Yet, much of the culture and service quality research relies on the most notable cultural denomination, the national culture. Additionally, the focus of culture-service quality interaction study has been on polar opposite cultures. The national cultural classifications and distinctions conceal much of the distinct cultural sub-groups. These subgroups evince variations, which range from shades of the main culture to vastly different cultural preferences within supposedly homogenous cultures. As more evidence of culture-service quality nexus becomes available, the question is no longer of the connection between the two but rather the expansion of research to even ostensibly monocultural environments. There is need, therefore, to look for cultural variations within supposedly homogenous cultural groups.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Of particular interest within the service quality research stream has been the interaction between

the service provider and the customer. The dominant service quality model places the customer expectation as the subjective standard by which a customer evaluates the service performance (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry 1993). Although the explanatory role of customer expectations in service quality assessment has been questioned, it still is accepted as providing valuable means to judge performance assessments by the customer (Cronin and Taylor 1992). The expectation itself is a product of a complex number of factors. The values or cultural orientations of the customer are believed to provide the broadest framework to understand expectations. Consequently, a new stream of research has begun to explore the role of culture in expectation formation and how different cultural orientations impact their evaluation of the various elements in the service performance. Winsted (1997) succinctly brings out the conceptual link between service encounters and social encounters through the following observation;

"Because service encounters are social encounters, rules and expectations related to services encounters should vary considerably according to culture, yet very little guidance has been provided regarding the influence of culture on perceptions of service provision" (p.106).

Many writers have argued for the need for goods and services to be adapted to the different local cultures. Alden, Hoyer and Lee (1993) showed how the use of humour in advertising must be carefully vetted for offensive elements when applied cross-culturally. Generally, the cultural comparisons have been between cultures that can be characterised as polar opposites like the Japanese and the Americans. Winsted (1997) studied the influence of the cultural values on the service quality expectations and evaluations. She found that the Americans expected egalitarianism in service and higher degree of personalisation while their Japanese counterpart preferred more formality in treatment. Malhotra, Ugaldó, Agarwal and Baalbaki's (1994) study is among the few studies on the cultural dimensions of developing and developed countries and their effect on the service quality dimensions. They found that the value orientations as measured via Hofstede's 5 dimensional continua had a significant bearing on the service quality evaluations of the respondents. The findings

point toward the need to localise in international marketing. Donthu and Yoo (1998) examined the effect of cultural values captured via Hofstede's five dimensional scales and the SERQUAL dimensions of reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness and tangibles. On most of the service quality dimensions there were statistically significant differences in their evaluations of the retail banking services. Although people processing services are posited as most susceptible to cultural effects (Furrer, Ben and Sudharshan 2000), Matilla (1999) explored the impact of culture on hedonic services. The experience rich services permit the cultural nuances to play a greater role than in other forms of services. Accordingly, it was reported that Western and Non-western business travelers responded to different service cues. Generally it was found that Asian travelers paid more attention to non-tangible and nonverbal cues more than their western counterpart. However, the study also highlighted and alerted attention to the variations possible within otherwise monolithic cultures. Stauss and Mang (1999) tested the hypothesis that inter-cultural service encounters are more problematic than intra-cultural encounters using critical incident method. Interestingly, the results confirmed the reverse. Intra-cultural encounters were more problematic than the inter-cultural ones. The study also used somewhat polar cultures in testing this hypothesis.

Furrer *et al.* (2000) provide a recent study of the impact of culture on service quality. They studied the cultural orientations of American, Asian and European students. They developed a cultural service quality index that captured the interaction between the service quality dimensions and the cultural dimensions. They showed how the groups of students could be segmented on the basis of their cultural proclivities and the service quality dimensions of value.

It is apparent that most of the above-mentioned studies have sought to explore the culture-service question using polar opposites cultures. The use of these 'maximally' different cultures is understandable as they enhance the power of the design to test the postulations. The Western vs. Non-Western or American vs. Non-American designs have shown that the culture-service effect is real and must be addressed by global service producers.

What is of significance is that these postulations can be more stringently tested if they are subjected to less extreme cultural varieties. The exploration of the conceptually viable thesis of finer cultural variations and their effect of services evaluations has been put forth by Matilla (1999) who observed that "...consumer experiences do not remain stable across cultures but instead are open to influences of specific cultures". Indeed, the study of this postulation within what is known as homogenous cultures, can open the same advantages to marketers as has been suggested about inter-cultural studies in international marketing. Niche marketing can immensely benefit from the understanding of the differences in what is otherwise believed to be mono-cultural societies, by exploiting the interaction between specific cultural nuances and the sensitivity to specific service dimensions. Where the service attributes can be easily modified, the within culture value orientations can be a basis to customise services for the niche markets.

Problem Statement

From the review of the literature, it is evident that there is a dire need for culture-service studies to examine the role of value orientations within a culturally homogenous context (Winsted 1997; Matilla 1999). The focus on within culture variations in values will add greater credence to the culture-service studies and allow for finer distinctions and their attendant service implications. This study explores this new and potentially fruitful focus question. The central research question is whether there are distinct value orientations within a cultural group.

The Conceptual Framework

The relationship between the service and culture emanates from the basic characteristic of services as intangible and interactive (Shostack 1977; Lovelock and Wright 2002). Because service encounters are essentially social exchanges, the values undoubtedly colour the perception of both parties. Though not directly apparent, values underpin the expectations, biases, preferences, self-confidence etc. of the customers. Though not directly observable, values have been conceptualized along several key dimensions. One such framework is advanced by Hofstede (1980). Hofstede captured the 'collective

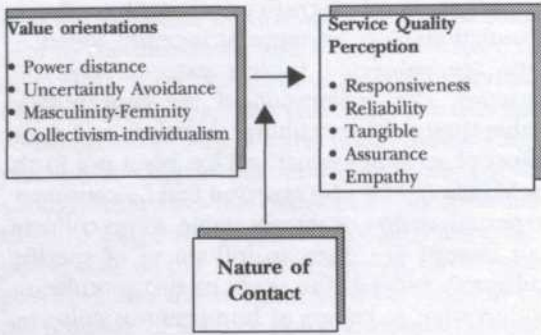


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

programming of the mind' via four value dimensions namely, Power Distance (PD), Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity-femininity and Collectivism-individualism (Fig. 1). Power distance refers to the acceptance of asymmetrical power distributions by members of a group or community. In high PD societies, hierarchy is accepted and may even be revered. In service contexts, PD conditions the perceptions of the status of the service provider and the desired behaviour on the part of the customer. Masculinity-femininity relates to the extent to which strong, aggressive and assertive behaviours are preferred or accepted or desired. Uncertainty avoidance is the aversion to risks and unstructured behaviour situations. The clarity of one's role is desired as opposed to self-development of the roles in any context. Finally, collectivism-individualism indicates the premium placed on self as opposed to the group, be it the society, community or the team. These four dimensions are landmarks of value orientation of any group. The impact of the values on services is eventually felt in the customers' assessment of the service quality itself. The values are expected to impact service quality through the customers' perceptions of the extent of responsiveness, reliability, empathy, assurance and tangibles. These dimensions are susceptible to the preferences and biases that the customer brings into a service encounter. The values tend to affect the customer's position vis-à-vis the service provider by creating mental zones of comfort and discomfort and culturally appropriate roles and behaviours.

However, the interaction between the values and the services is not likely to be the same in all types of service encounter (Chase 1978; Lovelock and Wright 2002: 54). Some services involve high contact between the customer and the

service provider. In high contact services, the extended nature of the social exchange creates more opportunity for values to affect service quality perceptions. In low contact services, the interaction may be short or even momentary. Consequently, the social expectations and value orientations are unlikely to leave much impact.

Research Hypotheses

- H1: There are significantly differing value orientations.
- H2: Value orientations correlate significantly with service quality dimensions.
- H3: The influence of value orientation on the service quality perception is more evident in high contact rather than low contact services.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A cross-sectional correlational study was carried out involving 712 students of UiTM to determine the influence of value orientation of Malay university students on their service quality expectations and perceptions. The Malays have experienced dramatic socio-economic changes over the last two decades. This has introduced and amplified the cultural variations within the Malay community. The current concern about the lack of unity among the Malays is arguably engendered by greater variations in values and consequently, different expectations and assessments. The Malay university students are a close microcosm of the larger Malay society. Therefore, it offers a good setting to test the research question advanced in this study. A representative, though not a random, sample of the student population was obtained for this study from two of the 13 campuses of this university. The main campus represents an urban centre while the East Coast campus captures a more rural background.

To examine the impact of value orientation on service quality expectations, 3 types of university services having different degrees of customer contact were identified. These services range from counseling (high contact) to medical (moderate contact) to library services (low contact) (Table 1). It is well established that not all services allow or require prolonged contact with the customer/user. The influence of the user's value orientation is most likely to matter a great deal in shaping his/her involvement and his/her reaction to the behaviour of the service

TABLE 1
Distribution of the sample

Nature of Service	Sample Size (actual)	Sample Size (planned)
High Contact		
Counseling (S. Alam & Terengganu)	149	200
Moderate Contact		
Medical Care (S. Alam & Terengganu)	273	200
Low Contact		
Library Service (S. Alam & Terengganu)	290	200
Total Sample	712	600

provider in high contact services. Conversely, the influence of value orientation of the student is less likely to impact service quality where the customer and service provider contact is momentary, limited and tangible. The three types of services were used to detect the moderating role of contact in examining the influence of values on service quality perceptions of the students.

Development of the Measurement Instruments

Although the two constructs involved in this study have been defined and measured in many previous studies, a conscious decision was made to review this definition and the performance of these instruments. Hofstede's measures of values were work organisation based. Their relevance and performance in the context of the services and the sector under study in this research are questionable. Therefore, several items were generated for each of the five value dimensions. The item development followed the process suggested by Dunn *et al.* (1994). The items were reviewed by peers familiar with the subject as recommended by Dunn *et al.* (1994). Two academics were required to link the items to the dimension the item appears to measure. Through this process the items that were not identified by the peers as linked to a dimension were dropped. This process of substantive validation is stated by Dunn *et al.* (1994) as the most crucial step in construct validation because substantive convergence should precede statistical convergence.

The value orientations were measured using Hofstede's 5 dimensional instrument (Hofstede 1980,1991). These dimensions are Power-

Distance, Individualism-collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity-femininity and Time Orientation. Although this instrument was developed and used to measure the national values, it has been successfully used to study culture at an individual level (Matilla 1999).

The original measures of value orientation developed by Hofstede were specifically focussed on work-related values. Since this study addresses a university context, the original items were deemed inappropriate. Based on the 5 key value orientation dimensions, 28 items were generated. Only items that passed the substantive validation process were finally accepted for use in the pilot test. The pilot test based on a sample of 30 individuals was collected and the Cronbach Alphas were determined. The measure attained the minimum threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally 1978). In the study however, the reliability coefficients were slightly below the recommended threshold of .7. Collectivity, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and power distance achieved a Cronbach alpha of 0.66, 0.60, 0.63, and 0.60 respectively. Since the Cronbach alphas were only marginally lower than the threshold and the lower Cronbach alphas have been used in organisational studies, we did not think that this would seriously affect the outcome.

The service quality perception was measured using the SERQUAL dimensions (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988). This instrument has five service quality dimensions namely; tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy. Parasuraman *et al.* (1989) viewed service quality as the difference between the perception and the expectation. As Cronin and Taylor (1992) pointed out, the measure of perception itself is sufficient measure of the service without the weighting by expectation attached by the clients. Because Cronin and Taylor's approach yields a simpler measure, we have adopted it for this study. Just like Hofstede's measures, the SERQUAL items are generic items that may be inappropriate for the present educational context. Therefore, the items were developed reflecting the dimensions and put through the same substantive validation process as in the case of value orientation measures. The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 denoting Strongly Disagree. All measures attained a minimum Cronbach Alpha of .60 in the main survey, slightly less than the values obtained during the piloting stage. Though the reliability

coefficients were lower than Nunnally's .70, lower reliabilities have been used in published studies (Hinkin 1995).

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data were collected from two campuses namely, the Shah Alam and the Terengganu campuses. Trained enumerators were positioned at the service centres to identify and sample the respondents (based on the quota sampling method) as they left the service centre after a service encounter. This method allowed for accurate recollection of the experience than at a latter time. They were asked to complete a questionnaire containing the instruments. In the case of the counseling service, the counselors provided the questionnaires to the respondents when the students came in for consultation. This deviation was unavoidable because of the unplanned and irregular nature of the service need. Basic descriptive statistics was used to explore the distributional and locational characteristics of the variables and determine the appropriateness of the statistical techniques given the descriptive properties. Unlike other studies that have used demographic factors to examine the existence and the influence of value orientations on variables of interest, this study follows a method suggested by Furrer *et al.* (2000). Value orientations are composed of unique combinations of the value dimensions. Demographic, ethnic and other common a priori classifications may not necessarily correlate with value orientations. As such, using any one of these a priori groups may result in erroneous findings. Therefore, Furrer *et al.* (2000) suggested that the value groups must be empirically derived through the use of grouping techniques like cluster analysis. Accordingly, cluster analysis was carried out to examine the cluster properties of the respondents. Subsequent analyses of variance (ANOVA) used the value clusters (Traditionalists and Transitory Traditionalists) to examine the relationship between the value clusters and service quality dimensions.

Profile of the Respondents

There is a greater representation of students from the Terengganu campus than from the Shah Alam campus in the sample. This reflects more the accessibility to respondents and the intensity of use of the selected services than anything else.

There is two to one ratio of female to male students. This skewed distribution is reflective of the overall student composition in Universiti Teknologi MARA. From Table 2 it is clear that the respondents are preponderantly Diploma holders. This reflects the general distribution of students and also because these students are given priority for campus housing. They, therefore, are in campuses and presumably, also use the services more than others who are accorded the same privileges.

In keeping with the university's social commitment, the bulk of the respondents fall under the category of the lower income group. The distribution is also influenced by the greater share of the Terengganu campus in the total sample, which attracts students from the East Coast which is a lower income region in Malaysia. The distribution of the sample is weighted slightly in favour of the library services. This is, as explained in the methods section, an outcome of the nature of the use of the library services. Library services are more intensively used as compared with medical and counseling services. The former are dictated by the nature of the campus activity while the latter are peripheral services.

FINDINGS

Intra-Cultural Variations

The correlation matrix in Table 3 displays the specific dynamics of the culture-service quality relationships. All correlation coefficients $> .10$ are significant. The 4 dimensions of the cultural orientations are not strongly correlated, indicating that the dimensions are distinct and not overlapping ones. The highest correlation is between uncertainty avoidance and collective orientation (.410). The correlation between the service quality dimensions and cultural dimensions is of particular interest. Power distance is significantly correlated with all service quality dimensions except responsiveness. However, the correlation values are small or low. This suggests that while the relationship is significant, the impact of this orientation on service quality is quite limited at best. The correlation between the service quality and the cultural orientation dimensions is low. This is to be expected given that this study is focussed on examining relationship between these dimensions within a mono-cultural context. Uncertainty avoidance also displays similar

TABLE 2
Profile of respondents

	No.	%
Campus		
Shah Alam	297	42
Terengganu	415	58
Gender		
Male	234	33
Female	478	67
Programme		
Degree	246	35
Diploma	449	63
Certificate	9	1
Others	8	1
Parents Income*		
<500	167	27
501-1000	224	36
1001 -1500	15	2
1501 -2000	56	9
2001 - 2500	33	5
2501 - 3000	29	5
3001 - 3500	27	4
3501 - 4000	24	4
>4000	47	8
Type of Service		
Counseling	149	21
Medical	273	38
Library	290	41

* n = 622

TABLE 3
Correlation between the service quality and culture variables

No	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Empathy								
2	Assurance	.585**							
3	Responsiveness	.696**	.529**						
4	Tangible	.608**	.523**	.602**					
5	Reliable	.530**	.465**	.581**	.566**				
6	Power Distance	.106**	.108**	.030	.182**	.172**			
7	Uncertainty Avoidance	.121**	.187**	.076*	.174**	.249**	.197**		
8	Masculinity-Femininity	.043	.088*	-.051	.061	.107**	.187**	.295**	
9	Collectivism-Individualism	.217**	.252**	.183**	.282**	.265**	.132**	.410**	.285**

* p<.005, **p<.001 (2-tailed test).

correlation with all service quality dimensions but appears to be relatively more correlated with Reliability. Masculinity is least significantly correlated with the value orientations.

The value orientations of the students were measured via 5 dimensional continua provided by Hofstede (1990) but time orientation items failed to show satisfactory convergence and therefore, have been excluded from further

analysis. It has been argued that since cultural values condition the mind and behaviour in a collective fashion, it should be combined to create recognisable value groups for analysis (Furrer *et al.* 2000). Consequently, it is imperative that the value orientations are understood as a bundle or cluster rather than individual variables. Following in the footsteps of Furrer *et al.* (2000),

the data was cluster analysed to detect groups that have distinctive combinations of the 4 value dimensions. Cluster analysis generated two distinct groups. We have labeled the clusters as True Traditionalist (cluster 1) and Transitory Traditionalist (cluster 2).

The value orientations were measured on a 7-point scale with 1 denoting low and 7 high. Cluster 1, the True Traditionalists display a greater proclivity to the collective interest, appears to accept the appropriacy of greater assertiveness, greater power distance in general relationship and greater aversion to uncertainty. Typical Malay society places a very high premium on collective rather than individualistic interest, the culture can only be classified as feminine in nature with its emphasis on gentleness, decorum and politeness in social encounters and even in disagreement, accepting and also venerating power distance and preferring to avoid uncertainty. The Transitory Traditionalists (cluster 2) scored lower on all dimensions of the

value orientations but in case of Masculinity, it is only marginally lower than their True Traditionalists peers. The Transitory Traditionalists are a group experiencing some dilution of the cultural values that typify the Malay community at large. Based on the evidence from Table 4, we can conclude that there are distinctly differing groups within the Malay student community. Therefore, the 1st hypothesis that there are distinct sub-cultural groups within presumably homogenous groups is supported.

Table 5 provides some answers to the question whether there is significant relationship between the value clusters and the perceptions of service quality. The one-way ANOVA shows that the service quality dimensions differ significantly between the 2 value clusters. This then provides the support for the hypothesis that value orientations influence or have some impact on service quality perceptions. Thus, the second hypothesis is also supported.

TABLE 4
Value clusters

Value Orientations	Clusters	
	True Traditionalists (Means)	Transitory Traditionalist (Means)
Collectivity	6.14 (high)	4.72 (med)
Masculinity	4.69 (med)	3.99 (med)
Power Distance	4.18 (med)	3.90 (med)
Uncertainty Avoidance	5.58 (high)	4.69 (med)
N	417	295

TABLE 5
Influence of cultural clusters on service quality

Service Quality Dimensions	Value Clusters	Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq	Sig
Empathy	Between groups	33.596	1	33.596	.000
	Within group	925.860	710	1.304	
Assurance	Between groups	13.076	1	13.076	.000
	Within group	407.631	710	.574	
Responsiveness	Between groups	18.063	1	18.063	.000
	Within group	763.768	710	1.076	
Tangible	Between groups	37.252	1	37.252	.000
	Within group	742.772	710	1.046	
Reliable	Between groups	42.572	1	42.572	.000
	Within group	724.217	710	1.020	

The last hypothesis advanced was whether the postulated relationship between value orientation and service quality differs given the type of service involved. Multivariate analysis of variance showed that there are no interactions between service type and value orientations. Therefore, the last hypothesis that the relationship between value orientation and service quality will be more distinct in high contact service was not supported.

In summary, the findings of this study support two of the three hypotheses advanced. Significant variations in values can be observed even within such homogenous groups as Malay university students. These variations are not without influence on the service quality dimensions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From a theoretical standpoint, this study expands on the current culture-service quality research by seeking out finer distinctions and how they may be pertinent to service providers. Past researches tended to use cultural extremes or polar opposites to show the effect of culture of service perceptions (Furrer *et al.* 2000; Winsted 1997; Matilla 1999). While this is an admirable approach and design, the design is intended to show the postulated relationship. In fact, it could be argued that the design is too powerful and therefore, the outcome is almost a certainty. This study by examining the same issue in an intra-cultural setting is actually putting the postulation to a much more stringent test than has been the case thus far. By seeking out the relationship between service quality and value orientations intra-culturally, the hypothesis is put to a more stringent test.

The study also provides some evidence of the existence of a spectrum of value orientations (though the range is limited) within an ostensibly homogenous group. Although polar opposite cultures dominate culture-service studies, value orientations within homogenous cultures are equally valid and fruitful areas of scrutiny (Winsted 1997). This study established that there were two cultural clusters. These groups, labeled as Transitory Traditionalists and True Traditionalists, provide a significantly different value profile. While both groups display Malay cultural proclivities, the Transitory Traditionalists is markedly less respectful of old values. The universities have become grounds to question

the wisdom of the old ways. The value profile showed here reflects the changing socio-psychological landscape within the university student population and to some extent, within the society at large. The lack of strongly distinct value orientations among the groups is more a function of the homogeneity of the sample than anything else. If a more heterogeneous sample had been acquired, the value profile would have varied much more than observed in this study.

From a managerial standpoint, the service providers in the public sphere, especially the public tertiary institutions must be more aware of the value orientations and how they impact the many quality initiatives that are currently instituted (Cheong 2000). Students still have and are therefore, likely to display values that place a high premium on collective interests. Therefore, services that explicitly or implicitly require one to show individualistic tendencies may cause significant discomfort or dissonance. Students are likely to feel at ease when doing things together and for the benefit of all rather than self only. Relatively high tolerance for power distance is expected to manifest itself in rather passive, meek and unassertive behaviour. This disposition will prevent effective feedback from the service users. Users are likely to be very cognizant of the structure, hierarchy, order and authority and thus less inclined to question or complaint or provide feedback which is not anonymous. Quite unexpectedly, the respondents have expressed a more masculine interest. This proclivity for assertive behaviour does not quite fit with the other orientations especially power distance and collective interest. Given that the Malay community is in the midst of intense and often acrimonious changes socially and culturally, conflicting behaviour especially among the impressionable population may account for the contradiction (Mastor, Jin and Cooper 2000). Making services changes without understanding the cultural nuances of the users will result in supplier-orientated changes. The interaction between the value orientations and service quality dimensions allows for changes that are aligned with the cultural preferences of the students. Many service innovations have strong implicit value base. Most, if not all innovations were born in Caucasian cultures. The effectiveness of these innovations is implicitly a product of the value orientations of the co-producers or co-creators - the service recipients. Changes that

embody greater egalitarianism or empowerment may actually have the effect of inconveniencing the service users because of their value system. The total quality management initiatives will only be effective if the user values are captured and used to bring about service innovation.

As is customary, some caveats are in order. The measures did not display a high level of reliability as was expected. Improvements and further purification of the measures will enhance the strength the correlations and the clarity of the nomological network. The use of a fairly homogenous sample (Malay university students) probably did restrict the range of value orientations. Perhaps, a more representative mix of the members of the Malay community will display even greater variation in value orientations than is the case here. Future studies should examine the interactions between value orientations and the service quality dimensions in specific service sectors to reveal profitable possibilities in service adaptation.

In summary, the study has shown that there is risk in stereotyping the cultural traits of Non-Western societies and in this particular case, the Malays. There exist significant value variations within ethnic and sub-cultural groups. Recognising this will open up new possibilities for service adaptations, which is necessary to compete in the highly competitive market place as well as the non-competitive public sector. As we move beyond the first round of TQM initiatives, finer distinctions will become a center of focus in further service improvements and adaptations.

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