

The Cross-Cultural Differences of Tourists and Evaluation of Uncertainty Avoidance Index

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Abstract

The topic “cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior” has been emphasized in numerous research studies both in marketing and related specific studies like consumer decision making, complaining behavior, etc. The impact of cultures on consumer behavior is apparent in entire areas of services, particularly in travel and tourism. The decision to prefer a destination is dominated before travel. In accordance with the socio cultural properties, the prospective tourist weight the advantages and disadvantages of undertaking the travel to a specific destination. The instability of political situation and chaotic events like, terror certainly don't pull or create any kind of attraction. Tourists with cross-cultural differences act and respond differently to the conditions. Some societies are more tolerant to uncertainty and some or not. In this article, the researcher tries to analyze this issue within the scope of Uncertainty Avoidance Index that has been studied and developed by Hofstede.

Keyword: Cross-cultural difference, Uncertainty Avoidance, Before-Travel Decisions

Cross-Cultural Attributes and How They Affect Travelling

Tourists bearing sociocultural and psychological attributes, sustain certain beliefs and preconceived opinions about the destinations they would be travelling to. Regarding those senses and perception, they either decide upon a destination or not. After their decision to travel, during their visit as well, they develop a point of view for the destination as affirmative or negative. Tourists are enclosed by the social environment when arriving a destination. To many extents they cannot avoid contact with local residents (Fan, et al. 2017: 357). Therefore, their point of view is not only about the place but also for the residents too.

Managing the cross-cultural impacts that result from tourists has involved two major approaches. One of these is to focus on the resource being visited, the supply-side approach, the other having been to concentrate on the visitor or the demand side (Garrod, 2003: quoted from Mason, 2006: 346). As Manrai & Manrai, (2011: 28) stated the tourist behaviors are classified into three overall domains: 1) Before-Travel; 2) During-Travel; and, 3) After-Travel. Next. This study concentrated on the cross-cultural attributes affecting the visitor before travel mainly concentrates on the before-travel decisions and opinions rather than the travel duration or after-travel. The cross-cultural attributes of tourists have an impact on pre-travel decisions especially on evaluating the destination as secure or not. Unfortunately, the ongoing terror attacks and instability of peace environment, bring the risk factor forward. Thus the travelers eliminate the destinations that they link to risk. They disregard entirely the places that could be associated with any kind of fear and uncertainty. As leisure travel is not a mandatory activity, no traveler would be willing for an activity that could cause any harm.

Hofstede Dimensions

Initially Hofstede started analyzing the multicultural components of 40 countries which led him to conclude with main four dimensions: individualism, power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Afterwards assessing 66 nations, Hofstede enhanced his study and expanded the dimensions based on five main constructs.

Hofstede (1980) argued that people carry “mental programs” that are developed and reinforced through their experience, and that these “mental programs” contain a component of national culture. After analyzing the data from more than 40 countries, Hofstede (1980) concluded that these mental programs denote the existence of four underlying value dimensions along which these countries could be positioned into culture areas (Hofstede, 1980).

These four dimensions in detail are (Hofstede, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1985):

1. **power distance**, i.e. the extent of power inequality among members of an organizational society;
2. **uncertainty avoidance**, i.e. the extent to which members of an organizational society feel threatened by and try to avoid future uncertainty or ambiguous situations;
3. **individualism and collectivism**, which describes the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that is reflected in the way people live together; and
4. **masculinity and femininity**, i.e. the extent of roles division between sexes to which people in a society put different emphasis on work goals and assertiveness as opposed to personal goals and nurturance.

With a collection of primary and secondary data, Hofstede (1980, 2001) assessed 66 nations, forming cultural index scores and ordinal rankings for five constructs. Concisely they are: power distance (a tolerance for class differences in society); individualism (the degree to which welfare of individualism is valued more than the group); masculinity (achievement orientation, competition and materialism); uncertainty avoidance (intolerance for risk); and later long-term orientation (stability, thrift, respect for tradition, and future oriented) the Confucian dynamic of long-term short-term orientation) which he contends effectively to distinguish people from various nations (Mazanec, et al., 2015: 299-300).

In the 2000s, research by Bulgarian scholar Michael Minkov using data from the World Values Survey (Minkov, 2007) allowed a new calculation of the fifth, and the addition of a sixth dimension (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010: quoted from Hofstede, G. 2011: 8). The six dimensions are labelled as below:

1. **Power Distance**, related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequality;
2. **Uncertainty Avoidance**, related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future;
3. **Individualism versus Collectivism**, related to the integration of individuals into primary groups;
4. **Masculinity versus Femininity**, related to the division of emotional roles between women and men;
5. **Long Term versus Short Term Orientation**, related to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the future or the present and past.
6. **Indulgence versus Restraint**, related to the gratification versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life.

Hofstede's study is one of the extensively used among international management and marketing scholars. Further studies have shown Hofstede's cultural measure to be generalizable across multiple contexts and societies (e.g., Furrer, Liu, & Sudharshan, 2000; Mattila, 1999). Moreover, Clark (1990) discussed that Hofstede's measure might justify many cultural differences among individuals, suggesting that such measure might also prove usefulness for assessing ethnic differences in different settings.

Hofstede's national culture dimensions are common to many in academia, consulting, and management, providing guidance for understanding differences in the “collective mental programming of people” (Hofstede, 1980) and for determining organizational structure and administrative practices.

The works of Hofstede have been widely applied by researchers in a variety of settings (e.g., Smeds, 1997; Albers-Miller and Gelb, 1996). Robbins (1994) described Hofstede's work as “...to date, the most valuable framework to help managers better understand differences between national cultures”. Goodwin (1997) emphasized that, while there have been other studies making large-scale comparisons of values across cultures (e.g., Schwartz, 1994), these studies have “...yet to have the impact of Hofstede's work”.

Whilst Hofstede's measure of cultural values has been extensively used, several researchers (e.g., McSweeney, 2002) also questioned about the validity of these cultural measures. Hofstede's research has not escaped criticism, too. Despite the fact that I do not agree with all of the criticisms, but they need to be evaluated for the sake of completeness. It should also be recognised that Hofstede's work has been subject to some criticism (e.g., Kağıtçıbaşı, 1994; Schwartz, 1994).

For instance they noted that major problem of Hofstede's work that the measurement was at the country rather than at the individual level. Research that utilises Hofstede's cultural dimensions must be assessed in light of these potential limitations. Some other doubts for Hofstede's works are: the scales are criticized because of their item composition, because they are not independent, and because some critics believe they are inappropriately labeled (Dorfman & Howell 1988; Jaeger, 1986; Roberts & Boyacığullar, 1984; Robinson, 1983; Triandis 1982). House et al. argued that Hofstede's rankings of nations by "dimensions of culture" remain subject to the psychometric and interpretative limitations and are around thirty years old. Clearly, these rankings need to be updated using validated measures - preferably based on multiple methods. (Robert House, Norman Wright, and Ram N. Aditya, 1999).

As Hofstede suggested that “...my theory of cultural differentiation is like a product of research laboratory, which awaits the efforts of development technicians to elaborate it into something of particular use” (2001: 462). Therefore even though Hofstede had brought out a very useful study, further analyses of these cultural measures are needed to determine their validity. As the importance of detecting cultural differences in the management context is quite crucial, more accuracy will bring better results and enhance data collection.

Work on national culture of Hofstede proposed strongly that decisions regarding organizational practices should be made on the base of scores for a country across four national culture dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity). The understanding that all people are culturally conditioned (e.g. Hofstede, 1980) and that culture influences how salespeople in subsidiary countries respond to sales practices offers home office management with suitable caution in developing sales practices across its domain (Murphy, 1999). It also suggested that knowledge of the cultural similarities and differences across countries provides an awareness of where sales practices can be efficiently transferred.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) Dimension of Hofstede and How It Could Be Applied for Travelling

Uncertainty Avoidance refers to the extent to which people are made nervous by situations they consider to be unstructured, unclear, or unpredictable, and the extent to which they try to avoid such situations by adopting strict codes of behavior and beliefs in absolute truths (Stohl, 1993: quoted from Merkin, 2006: 214). As per Hofstede (2001) called attention to, uncertainty is to risk as anxiety is to fear. Societies with greater uncertainty avoidance tend to feel threatened by ambiguity. Meanwhile, in societies with low uncertainty avoidance, ambiguity is much more tolerated (Murphy, 1999: 42).

The travelers' decision to exclude the places that they are uncertain about is quite expected. However, though the sociocultural attributes of the travelers are determinative on how they react to destinations' uncertainty perception and can be diverse interculturally. Some cultures may be more tolerant to uncertainty than others.

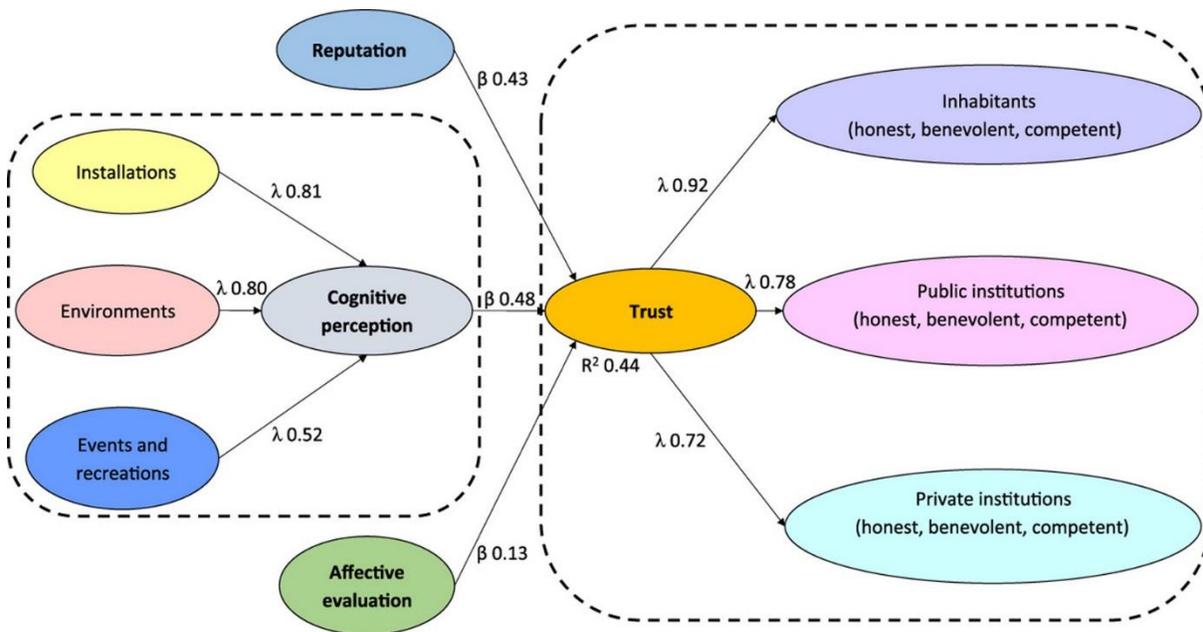
Artigas et al., (2017) mentioned 3 main point of view in his hypothesis as placed below (Please see Figure 1). One of the hypothesis is the better the tourist's cognitive perception, the greater his/her trust towards the tourist destination will be. Taking an eager interest in another culture becomes crucial to form an opinion and develop an understanding about the destination. When culture as an influence on outbound tourist motivation or the impacts of tourism is considered, the value system is the most important factor. Such influence may be described as culture shaping outbound travel motivation (Gee & Sola, 1997: 243).

The trust that Artigas et al., (2017) identified is about public institutions, private institutions and inhabitants whether they are honest, benevolent and competent or not. Trust is also influenced by affective evaluation and reputation. Visitors are likely to have varying interests in the culture of the visited community (Gee & Sola, 1997: 243).

Therefore according to their interests their evaluation will also vary.

Figure1. Hypothesis:

1. The better the reputation of the tourist destination, the more trust tourists will place in it.
2. The better the tourist's cognitive perception, the greater his/her trust towards the tourist destination will be.
3. The better the affective evaluation the tourist makes, the greater his or her trust towards the tourist destination will be.



(Artigas, et al. 2017)

A tourist destination may have many good, comfortable, convenient facilities, and even entertaining activities programmed for tourists, but they will all be useless if the place does not manage to form a virtuous cycle with a good reputation and connect this cycle in turn to trust towards the location. (Artigas, et al, 2017: 8)

The reputation might be influenced by the risks and the chaotic situations that the destinations carry. Some culture are more tolerant to risk and uncertainty and some are intolerant. The way they perceive the risk and the extent they tolerate determine their choice of travel.

Hofstede (1980, 2001) cultivated a study in which he came up with a dimension of uncertainty avoidance for different cultures. He gave scores to different countries for their level of uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede et al. (2010) listed Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) scores for 76 countries; they have a tendency to to be higher in East and Central European countries, in Latin countries, in Japan and in German speaking countries, lower in English speaking, Nordic and Chinese culture countries.

Table 1. Ten Differences Between Weak- and Strong- Uncertainty Avoidance Societies

| Weak Uncertainty Avoidance | Strong Uncertainty Avoidance |
|--|---|
| The uncertainty inherent in life is accepted and each day is taken as it comes | The uncertainty inherent in life is felt as a continuous threat that must be fought |
| Ease, lower stress, self-control, low anxiety | Higher stress, emotionality, anxiety, neuroticism |
| Higher scores on subjective health and wellbeing | Lower scores on subjective health and well-being |
| Tolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is curious | Intolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is dangerous |
| Comfortable with ambiguity and chaos | Need for clarity and structure |
| Teachers may say ‘I don’t know’ | Teachers supposed to have all the answers |
| Changing jobs no problem | Staying in jobs even if disliked |
| Dislike of rules - written or unwritten | Emotional need for rules – even if not obeyed |
| In politics, citizens feel and are seen as competent towards authorities | In politics, citizens feel and are seen as incompetent towards authorities |
| In religion, philosophy and science: relativism and empiricism | In religion, philosophy and science: belief in ultimate truths and grand theories |

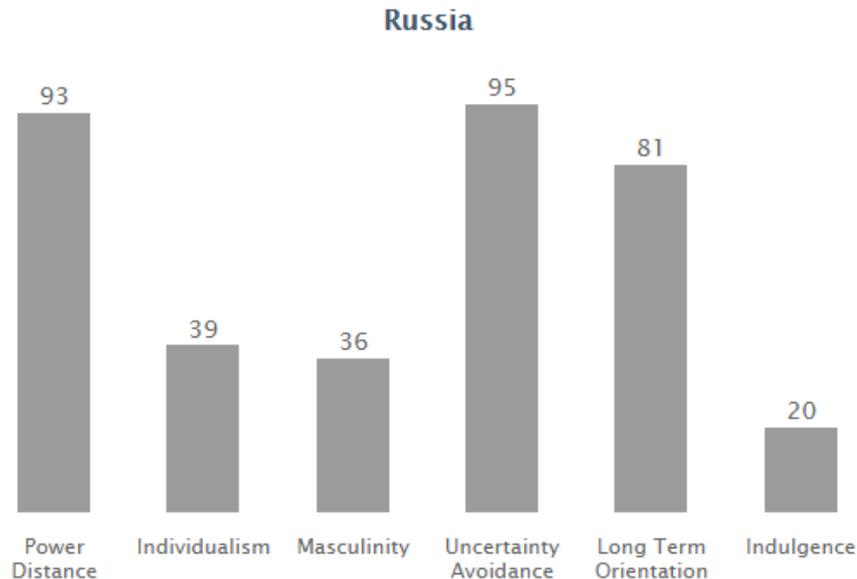
Source: Samovar, et al. 2012: 25

As we see from the table, being comfortable with ambiguity and chaos is acceptable in low UA cultures, whereas in high UA cultures, there is a strong need for clarity. Therefore it wouldn't be difficult to point out that residents of the countries with high UA scores would have a preference for the destinations that they would feel confident and safe.

Putting Russian Tourists Under the Scope

Below is the chart of Russia including the UAI score taken as a reference from Hofstede's study.

Chart 1. Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Scores for Russia



Source: <https://geert-hofstede.com/russia.html> (April 17, 2017)

Russia is one of the countries with a high Uncertainty Avoidance Index. The dimension Uncertainty Avoidance has to do with the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown circumstances and have generated beliefs and institutions that attempt to avoid these. Scoring 95 from this dimension, Russians impression can be defined as very much threatened by ambiguous situations (<https://geert-hofstede.com/russia.html>, April 17, 2017)

Specifically, high UAI cultures are not comfortable with unstructured situations. They prize structure; they feel threatened by the unknown and the ambiguous. On the other hand, medium UAI cultures willingly take more risk than high UAI cultures. Risk has been identified as a major concern for international travelers (Yavaş, 1990: taken from Moneya & Crotts, 2003: 194).

Russia is one of the main source of market for Turkey inbound travel. Russia substantially has high UA score. Considering the high scores of country, Russian tourists would tend to travel to familiar countries that they have been to and avoid change and new destinations. The major contrast here is the risk factor that Turkey have been to. After the downing of Russian plane, the political relations of both country has encountered a strong tension. The terror attacks that occurred in Turkey also hindered tourism industry in general including the Russian tourists as well. The tensed up relations and the political tension have yielded to a positive light starting last year. The first Russian charter plane carrying tourists to Turkey since Moscow lifted travel sanctions imposed after the shooting down of a Russian jet on Nov. 24, 2015 landed in the Mediterranean resort of Antalya on Sept. 2, 2016 (Putin said Russia sees the manifestations of terrorism faced by Turkey and extends its condolences in this regard. The Russian president said the tourist flow from Russia to Turkey is a significant factor for the Turkish economy and this direction is very popular with Russian tourists. "Hundreds of thousands, millions of Russian citizens have vacationed in Turkey and have found the situation there very favorable and very friendly. We all know that, I vacationed in Turkey many times when I did not work here in Moscow, in the Kremlin, and I have the best feelings and memories from those vacations," Putin declared (Interfax, Russia & FSU General News, 3/10/2017) After these positive developments, the Russian tourists started leaning towards Turkey again.

Furthermore, according to Hofstede (2011: 10) UA scores are not related to risk. It is not risk avoidance but rather, how one deals with ambiguity. It designates to what degree a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations that can be novel, unknown, surprising, and different from usual.

Even there have been significant incidents that left a negative mark. Russian tourists regardless of the risk factors started travelling to Turkey. As Turkey is one of the destinations that they are familiar of, turned out to be a missed point of arrival. According to a report released by the Association of Tour Operators in Russia (ATOR), half of Russia's holidaymakers have chosen Turkey as their top travel destination in 2017 (Hürriyet Daily News, 2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion we can definitely underline the cross-cultural differences of societies and the various impacts on travelling decisions. This article tried to highlight that the dimensions of Hofstede can be applied to travelling decisions of tourists. This article is limited as it only focuses on the dimension uncertainty avoidance index with one example of Russia which has a high UAI. Further studies can be developed within this perspective studying and comparing other dimensions and other countries.

As Hofstede (2011: 22) pointed out culture change basic enough to invalidate the country dimension index rankings, or even the relevance of the dimensional model, will need either a much longer period – say, 50 to 100 years – or extremely dramatic outside events. Many differences between national cultures at the end of the 20th century were already recognizable in the years 1900, 1800 and 1700 if not earlier. There is no reason why they should not play a role until 2100 or beyond.

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