

## AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF INFLUENCES ON RETAIL SERVICE QUALITY: A FOCUS ON KUWAIT AND LEBANON

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### **Abstract:**

The Middle East is a growing and lucrative marketplace. This exploratory study examines retail service in Kuwait and Lebanon, regions with long histories of trade. Retail service, however, has not been well documented in this region. To our knowledge, this is the first study that examines customer and salespeople perceptions of service encounters in these countries, in light of their culture, religion, and nationalities. As retailers expand into new markets worldwide, such information is vital to their success. Future research directions are discussed.

### **Article:**

#### INTRODUCTION

Prior to the Gulf War and the 9/11 attacks on the United States, many in the U.S., and other Western countries, knew little about the Middle East. Besides Islamic terrorists primarily conducting operations in Israel and other foreign countries, Westerners generally recognize the Middle East as an oil-rich region, but few have a deeper understanding of the market opportunities in this region (Abbasi and Hollman 1993). The discovery of commercial quantities of oil in several countries of the Gulf Region in the 1930s has enabled the transformation of these nomadic desert societies to the economically and ethnically varied countries of today (Commerce 2001).

For clarity, we refer to the Middle East as all the countries in the region, including the two of primary interest in this study—Kuwait and Lebanon. Gulf Region or Gulf States are generally interchangeable terms referring to the typically oil-rich countries along the Persian Gulf, from Kuwait to the United Arab Emirates and including Iraq and Iran. Lebanon is not a Gulf State. The term “Arab” is a cultural and linguistic definition and not a “racial” definition. It refers to the many peoples in the Middle East and North Africa. While the countries without oil reserves have generally remained relatively poor, the oil-rich Gulf Region economies are diversifying and wealth is spreading beyond the royal families to those in lower socio-economic classes. The growth of the middle class has been significant.

Wealth produced by oil attracts a huge immigrant population to those Middle Eastern countries that have significant oil reserves. This amounts to over 60 percent of the population in Kuwait. Most immigrants to Kuwait originate from the Arab world, from Egypt to Syria, providing doctors, teachers, engineers, office staff, and skilled workers (Russell 2000). Immigrants from

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other parts of Asia fill service jobs, and are in lower economic strata. Additionally, a few European and American expatriates work in the oil, finance and commerce, or defense industries and occupy the upper economic bracket in Kuwait.

In Lebanon, 95 percent of the population is Arab, 4 percent Armenian, and 1 percent other nationalities (Russell 2000). Lebanon is predominantly Muslim (70%) and Christian (30%). Like Kuwait, Lebanon has been faced with war. However, unlike Kuwait, Lebanon has not been as politically stable. Therefore, there has been much less foreign investment in Lebanon.

Growing middle and upper-middle classes have spurred the development of retail stores in many Middle Eastern countries, especially in the Gulf Region. An increasing percentage of the population has traveled to the West, particularly Western Europe and the United States, where retail service has long been stressed. Fast food retailers such as McDonald's and Burger King have particularly popular, but others such as TGI Friday's, Chili's, and Hardee's are also well established and growing (Ramseyer 2001). As global retailers penetrate the Middle East and as customers become more sophisticated, the importance of service increases. While many Western retailers have devoted time and resources to better understand their local customers, venturing into the Middle East presents new and intriguing challenges.

In this study we examine retail service quality (SQ) from the perspectives of both customers and salespeople, across a variety of stores in Kuwait and Lebanon. The results will help global and local retailers better understand their Middle Eastern (preferentially referred to as Gulf Region by those who live there) customers, what their expectations are in terms of retail store service, and how to better manage and train employees to provide a higher level of service.

## BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### *History of the Middle East*

To understand the people of the Middle East one must first understand the importance placed on culture, religion, and nationality. It is on these cornerstones that human relations are based, including employee management and customer relations. It is imperative to first understand that the residents of the Middle East are not strangers to contradiction and conflict. Idiosyncrasies, both ancient and modern, have shaped this region. Since the discovery of oil in the Middle East the region has been in transition. Subsequent increases in revenue have resulted in drastic changes and significant industrialization within these countries (Abbasi and Hollman 1993; Ali 1990; Ali and Al-Shakhis 1986).

Contact with Western countries and corporations improved the standard of living in the Middle East through better education, improved healthcare, greater mobility, and increased communication (Ali 1990; Ali and Al-Shakhis 1986). Western thought, however, often conflicts with Arab culture and religion. Industrialization, while welcome, complicates the duties of employees who strive to achieve modern results while maintaining their traditional values. This duality is not new to the people of the Middle East.

As mentioned, contradiction is an inherent part of Islamic culture. For centuries, these overwhelmingly Muslim people have upheld religious ideals that conflict with political routine (Ali 1990; Ali 1993). Islam affects all aspects of human resource management, including

employer-employee relations, employee reward systems, and retail service encounters. Passages in the Quran, the Islamic holy book, specifically address business transactions from spending habits to financial and management concepts. Different interpretations of the Quran are yet another source of contradiction and are the basis of differences in the culture, as well as other aspects of daily life (Ali 1990).

In addition to religion, nationality probably has the next most significant effect on human relations. Saudi Arabians tend to be more conformist and have high structure needs compared to other Middle East residents. Saudi Arabians are more authoritarian. Kuwaitis are more tribalistic; they are submissive to authority and tradition. In addition, the Kuwaiti people have had more exposure to new ideas and Western culture than their counterparts from other Gulf Region nations (Ali 1988). For example, Kuwaiti organizations were the first to hire employees based on education rather than family connections (Yasin and Stahl 1990). Thus, even though commonly thought by Westerners to be a homogenous culture, the Middle East is characterized by widely varying cultural values that could influence SQ.

### *Retailing*

Although largely neglected by Western retail marketing and consumer behavior scholars (Tuncalp 1988), the Middle East is growing in retail importance (Frumkin 2002). Probably because retailing is a high-service industry, often characterized by small stores, and for other reasons, such as the lack of incentives and ignorance about other cultures and consumer behavior, retailers have been generally reluctant to cross national boundaries – at least very far. However, as home markets have become more saturated, it has become imperative for retailers to expand into new markets. Lately, U.S. retailers, such as Wal-Mart and Walgreens, have expanded into the EU, Japan, and other markets (Drucker 1993; Management Ventures 1998). European retailers, including IKEA, have penetrated the North American markets and other non-European markets (IKEA 2001). Starbucks and Mercedes now have retail stores in Kuwait and other Gulf States (Raven , Welsh, and Al-Bisher 2001; Raven, Welsh, and Al-Mutair 2001).

North American retailers, in fact, may have significant advantages in the Gulf Region for several reasons:

- Many are recognized globally, especially as Gulf Region residents travel and study in North America.
- North American retailers are considered some of the best in the world, especially concerning retail service and product choice.
- Larger North American retailers usually have sophisticated infrastructures in place, including supply and distribution channels.
- Because the retail business is so competitive at home, North American retailers are often very efficient and frequently have lower operating costs than those from other countries.
- North American consumer products are well known throughout the world as good values.

Even though the biggest U.S. retailers are larger than their global competitors, they are typically less international. European retailers have taken the lead in globalization, leaving U.S. retailers far behind (Clarke 2001). European retailers, like their American counterparts, face increasing competition at home. Their response has been to expand their markets to other EU countries. As their home markets mature, Western retailers strategically concentrate on improving service and

convenience to create a competitive advantage. These issues are also important as global retailers expand their markets to other countries, including the Middle East.

### *The Market*

The Middle East is home to ancient civilizations and trading has long been important in this part of the world. Much of the area's needs continue to be secured through imports (Leonidou 1995; Tuncalp 1988). Kuwaiti imports amounted to \$8.1 billion in 2000 and included food, construction materials, vehicles and parts, and clothing. These imports came from the US (22%), Japan (15%), UK (13%), Germany (8%), and Italy (6%) (Moody's 2000). As in many developing countries, retail stores abound in Middle East, but most are rather small. They range from the traditional peddlers on the street, to small sidewalk stores selling spices, to large, western-style department stores. Importantly, there are some marked differences between retailing in the Gulf Region and in Western countries:

- Residents of most Gulf Region countries are Muslim, although there is a wide degree of variance in practice. In the most dogmatic countries, such as Saudi Arabia, religious traditions require separation of genders and modifications to retail physical structures.
- Traditional business practices may still persist. The art of negotiation, or haggling, over prices still exists, but may be inconsistent with modern retailing. Also, most shopping in Saudi Arabia, for example, takes place in the evenings on Thursdays and Fridays (Alawi 1986).
- Westerners are continually advised of the lack of peace in the Gulf Region, especially between Israel and Palestine. To many Westerners, this unrest may falsely be perceived to encompass all of the Middle East.

On the other hand, Middle Eastern customers are increasingly sophisticated in their needs (Leonidou 1996). Many have traveled to important shopping areas around the world, such as Paris, New York, and London. Access to various forms of media, including broadcast, print, and, increasingly, the Internet, provides Middle Eastern customers with knowledge and information.

In addition, many Gulf Region customers have high disposable incomes and the means to buy luxury goods. Income distribution is highly skewed, but average incomes, although modest by Western standards, are mostly disposable incomes, as the Gulf states provide most services and charge little or no taxes, other than the zakat, a tax mandated by Islamic law (Gordon 1999; Zanoayan 1995). The oil-rich Gulf States of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar make up the major market for Western retailers and account for the majority of imports into the region from industrialized countries. As they anticipate a decrease in oil reserves, some countries are diversifying into other economic areas, especially financial institutions (Abbasi and Hollman 1993).

These Gulf States are increasingly heterogeneous in ethnicity and therefore needs. Many natives have hired foreign workers to do the more menial tasks. As a result, much of the population is made up of people from the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and other nearby nations. These people often have very different needs and ways of satisfying them. This presents opportunities for retailers of all types (Abbasi and Hollman 1993). For instance, one retail chain

of 22 stores in the United Arab Emirates employs 37 different nationalities out of about 1000 employees (Welsh 2002).

### *Service Encounters*

Service encounters refer to the period of time during which a consumer directly interacts with a service (Shostack 1985). While service encounters and service satisfaction have been studied to a considerable extent in the U.S., they have been given less emphasis in other countries, especially developing countries. Winsted (1999) found that different cultures do have different expectations of the quality of service encounters. The Consumer Movement, taken for granted in America, is also extending to developing countries, but at different rates (Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu, and Odabasi 1992). Because of this, different quality levels of service encounters may be expected and delivered in developing countries, but will continue to improve (Malhotra et al. 1994).

Naturally, one would assume that service quality affects customer satisfaction. However, while researchers have found quality of service encounters and customer satisfaction to be related, the causal direction has yet to be determined. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1994) suggest that consumer satisfaction seems to be more transaction specific, while the quality of service encounters is focused more on an overall attitude towards service. Both, of course, are important. However, when managing retail sales people, it is especially critical to understand the level and quality of service encounters and how these encounters can be improved.

Measuring the quality of service encounters outside the U.S. has been done to a limited extent. At issue has been the validity of measures used in the U.S. and the industries sampled (cf. Donnelly, Van'T Hull, and Will 2000; Lam 1997; Wetzels, Ruyter, and Lemmink 2000). Little work has been reported comparing customer and salespeople perceptions of service encounters in international retail operations. It is of particular interest due to the expanding role of retailers into the world market and the great potential the Middle East offers. To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind in this area of the world.

## HYPOTHESES

### *National Culture*

Culture can have a major impact on customer service. Culture has long been recognized in the international marketing and management literature as an important variable for predicting behavior, but classifying cultures has taken different approaches. Probably the best-known approach in business literature is the theory of national culture proposed by Geert Hofstede, who identified four main value dimensions affecting cultures, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity (Hofstede 1980). A fifth dimension, long-term orientation, was later added to better explain Chinese cultural values (Hofstede 1994). While culture can apply to a number of organizations and groups, national culture is usually considered a most important influence in cross-national management and is how we use the term in this paper. Hofstede's work over the years has demonstrated the usefulness of the five value dimensions in a number of cross-national studies.

While political boundaries do not define cultures and there are cultural overlaps between nations (Mattila 1999), using national cultures has appeal from a management and segmentation

perspective. Understanding national culture is more than an academic exercise, it can have profound effects on the ability of an international firm to segment markets and allocate resources. Companies wishing to expand globally need information on the cultural differences and similarities of the markets they are entering, if they expect to do so profitably. For instance, a broad understanding of the culture in a prospective market could help a firm design its offerings to better meet the needs of that market. Recently, confirmation that ten cultural clusters of countries exist could reduce the information needed for market entry evaluation (Gupta, Hanges, and Dorfman 2002). The Gupta study identified cultural clusters as South Asia, Anglo, Arab, Germanic Europe, Latin Europe, Eastern Europe, Confucian Asia, Latin America, Sub-Sahara Africa, and Nordic Europe. Countries within these clusters are considered culturally more similar to each other than countries outside the clusters. Classifying countries into cultural clusters has important international segmentation implications.

In developing countries without a strong tradition of consumerism, issues of who should control the service encounter may not be well defined and there may not be recognized quality standards of service encounters. For example, one study examining grocery stores in Israel found a poorly developed service concept which allowed cashiers greater freedom to struggle for control against management's customer service standards (Rafaeli 1989). In fact, arguments between customers and salespeople were not uncommon, especially during busy times (Rafaeli and Sutton 1990).

The Middle East can be considered a unique culture, as it has a unique pattern of life and it is generally uniform within the region, compared to other parts of the globe (Kassem 1989). Lebanon is also a predominantly Muslim culture, but with a very different history from that of the Gulf Region. Both Kuwait and Lebanon undoubtedly have similarities with other Arab cultures, they also differ in some respects. Islam is probably the unifying thread, but oil, and its ramifications, has been a differentiating factor. More than religion alone, the economic benefits of oil reserves have played an important part in developing the current culture of the Gulf Region. While oil revenues rapidly made Kuwait wealthy, cultural changes have been much slower. As a result, traditional tribal cultures vie with modern cultures, creating a unique cultural society. Without the benefits of oil, Lebanon leveraged its location and trading history to become a financial center for the Middle East, until conflict reduced its importance.

Culture plays a role in the perception of SQ (Furrer, Liu, and Sudharshan 2000) and in SQ expectations (Donthu and Yoo 1998). Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) has been related to expectations of service quality (Donthu and Yoo 1998). In the Middle East, most respondents are expected to be from high PDI cultures, but relative PDI may influence expectations of SQ. In addition, retail stores in the Middle East often employ foreign nationals as clerks and salespeople to provide service to customers. People employed in service jobs are often of lower socio-economic class in the Middle East, which could influence their SQ expectations. Kuwaiti national customers can be expected to have higher expectations of SQ than non-Kuwaiti customers, who are typically from less affluent countries such as India, Sri-Lanka, and the Philippines. This leads to our first hypothesis.

H1: Kuwaiti national customers will have greater expectations of service quality than non-Kuwaiti national customers.



While we expect Kuwaiti national customers to have higher expectations of SQ, we expect their perceptions of SQ to be lower than those of non-Kuwaitis, especially those from non-Arab countries. More than their service workers, Kuwaiti nationals have had positions of privilege and been able to be educated in the West and travel to Europe, the United States, and resort destinations. Many have been exposed to the retail service levels offered by these facilities and will probably expect a higher level of service, but perceive they are actually getting less quality, in their home country.

H2: Kuwaiti national customers will have lower perceptions of service quality than will non-Kuwaiti national customers.

Earlier discussion and statistics suggest that Kuwaitis hire employees from other countries to perform retail service functions. While many of these employees have come from cultures broadly similar on Hofstede's dimensions, their roles as employees are likely to result in differences in service quality expectations. In other words, these people are the service deliverers, rather than the customers, so we predict that their service quality expectations will be higher than those of customers. This is expected because service providers (sales people and managers) will likely believe that the services they provide are what the customer really wants.

H3: Employees and customers will differ in their service quality expectations such that employees will expect higher levels of service quality than will customers.

### *Fatalism*

People in the Gulf Region are generally considered to be a high-context culture, in which context determines meaning (Johansson, 2000). High context cultures tend to communicate more on non-verbal levels than do low context cultures, in which the words used have greater meaning than the context in which they are used. High context cultures are usually more homogeneous than low context cultures. In general, high context cultures are also more fatalistic than low context cultures. People with high levels of fatalism do not believe they have much, if any, control over events that affect them and these events are controlled by fate.

Fatalism has been found to differ across cultures and to be related to ways in which people respond to dissatisfaction (Foxman, Raven, and Stem 1990) and to market uncertainty (John et al. 1986). Fatalism is related to the acceptance of technical innovativeness (Tansuhaj et al. 1991). People with higher fatalism perceived greater product risk, suggesting that market entry strategies for technology products need to be modified to account for cultural characteristics. Fatalism seems related to Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance cultural value dimension.

In Arab cultures, where Islam is the dominant religion, fatalism is characterized by the phrase "insha' Allah," "if God wills it" (Rice 1999). In other cultures, fatalism may be expressed by terms like "mañana" or "whatever." While members of national cultures, as described earlier, may have many characteristics in common, there are likely to be individual variations. Thus, even in high context, high fatalistic cultures, such as those in the Gulf Region, individuals may be more or less fatalistic.

In those cultures with high fatalism values, customers may attribute SQ encounters to events and people over which they have little or no control. As a result, expectations of SQ may be lower than in low fatalism cultures. The correlation between expectations of the quality of service

encounters and fatalism is expected to be negative for both customers and employees. The rationale for this direction is that in fatalistic cultures, people's expectations would hinge on factors other than themselves. Customers might, for example, expect that service be dictated by some authority and beyond the control of the salesperson. Likewise, retail employees might believe that service is a function of the corporate bureaucracy and not in their direct control. There may, in fact, be little incentive or reward to offer more than minimum service and that may even be what both customers and employees expect. As explained earlier, contradictions are expected in this culture.

Except for the Europeans, North Americans, and Indians, the other national cultures of our sample, both employees and customers, are usually considered high context cultures (Johansson 2000) with higher scores of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980). Fatalism and uncertainty avoidance appear related (John et al., 1986, Tansuhaj et al. 1991). The fatalistic national cultures tend to belong to similar cultural clusters (Gupta, Hanges, and Dorfman 2002), so we expect them to respond similarly to expectations of SQ. Specifically, we expect individuals scoring higher in fatalism to have lower expectations of SQ than lower fatalism cultures.

Past research suggests more fatalistic people respond less actively to dissatisfaction (Foxman, Raven, and Stem 1990), which we extend to fatalistic respondents perceiving lower service quality. Thus, high fatalism individuals should also perceive service quality as being lower than less fatalistic individuals.

- H4:   a) Individuals with high fatalism values will have lower service quality expectations than those with lower fatalism values.  
      b) Individuals with high fatalism values will have lower service quality perceptions than those with lower fatalism values.

## *Gender*

While gender is not usually considered with culture, gender roles are often culturally defined, such that in each society there is a men's culture and a woman's culture (Hofstede 1991). In traditional cultures characterized by high power distance (PDI) and greater masculinity, gender roles are fairly rigidly defined (Hofstede 1980). We are interested in the cultural differences in gender roles regarding SQ between and within cultures.

The influence of Islam on gender roles is strong, but varies considerably within the Gulf Region. At the extreme, as in Saudi Arabia, segregation of customers by gender may require separate facilities for each, such as schools, banks, and hotels (Kassem 1989). Other Middle Eastern states, including Lebanon, practice gender segregation to a lesser extent, but it still exists. For instance, in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Bahrain, women have been given much more freedom and the societies are not as gender restricted, as are many other countries in this area. Because it is more likely that men will have had more experience in shopping and evaluating service encounters from travel abroad, we expect that men will have greater expectations for retail SQ than women. More conservative Muslims require men, usually relatives, to accompany women in public. As a result, women may take a lesser role in shopping and thus have lower expectations. Women, on the other hand, should perceive retail SQ as greater than men because of their more subservient societal roles. Within a cultural society, men should have greater retail



service expectations, but lower service perceptions than women. However, customer gender might also influence the level of service delivery and confound our expectations.

H5: Gender will influence both service quality expectations and perceptions:

- a. Males will have higher expectations of SQ than females.
- b. Females will have higher perceptions of service quality than males.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Sample*

As part of a larger study, a convenience sample of customers and store employees in Kuwait and Lebanon was surveyed. The questionnaire was in English and completed by hand in the stores. This method resulted in 273 complete and usable customer responses. Employees, primarily salespeople and their managers, were also surveyed in the same stores, resulting in a sample of 178 usable responses. A profile of the customer sample is listed in Table 1 and of the employees in Table 2.

**Table 1. Customer Profile (n=273)**

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender:</b>	
Female	42.5
Male	57.5
<b>Age (years):</b>	
25 and under	21.4
26-35	45.9
36-45	18.5
46-55	8.1
56 and older	6.1
<b>Nationality:</b>	
Kuwaiti	36.0
Indian	18.0
Lebanese	14.7
Egyptian	8.5
Sri Lankan	5.1
Others (21 countries)	17.7
<b>Store in Country:</b>	
Kuwait	85.7
Lebanon	14.3
<b>Store in Location:</b>	
Shopping Center	40.3
On Street	23.8
Separate	34.7

**Table 2. Profile of employees (N=178)**

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Percent</b>
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<b>Gender:</b>	
Female	36.9
Male	63.1
<b>Age (years):</b>	
25 and under	18.9
26-35	50.3
36-45	18.3
46-55	8.6
56 and older	3.9
<b>Nationality:</b>	
Kuwaiti	8.0
Indian	26.9
Lebanese	26.9
Egyptian	5.1
Sri Lankan	6.3
Filipino	6.9
Palestinian	5.7
Others (11 countries)	14.2
<b>Years Employed</b>	
< 5 years	59.6
5-10 years	25.2
> 10 years	15.2

As indicated in Table 1, the retail stores in which the survey was conducted were located in Kuwait (85.7%) and in Lebanon (14.3%). The stores were located in shopping centers (40.3%), on the street (23.8%), and in separate locations (34.7%). More than 100 stores were sampled—most were small in size, although department stores were also sampled. A wide variety of products were offered by the stores, including automotive parts, electronics, travel services, banking products, fashion clothing, sports equipment, food, books, as well as many other products and services. The employees sampled were primarily sales people, but managers and other customer-contact people were also surveyed. The data represent a rather broad spectrum of products, customers, and retail contacts.

### *Measures*

#### SERVQUAL

The primary measure of interest was the quality of service encounters, consisting of expected service and perceived service outcomes. The SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1986; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1988) has a long, well-supported history in the literature. The SERVQUAL model essentially measures the differences (gaps) between customers' expected and perceived SQ. Responses to individual items were marked on Likert type seven-point scales anchored by strongly agree/strongly disagree. The expectations/perceptions items are measured on five dimensions:

- Tangibles – appearance of the physical facilities, personnel, etc.
- Reliability – ability to perform service dependably and accurately
- Responsiveness – willingness to help customers

Assurance – knowledge and ability of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence  
Empathy – caring, individualized attention

Previous studies using the SERVQUAL scale have generally been supportive of the dimensions, but there have been some questions raised (e.g., Cronin and Taylor 1992; Teas 1993). The SERVQUAL instrument has also been used in cross-cultural and cross-industry studies, with generally satisfactory results. Lam (1997) used the SERVQUAL instrument in evaluating patient quality of service encounters in Hong Kong hospitals and found it to be essentially unidimensional, but also reliable. A modified version of SERVQUAL was recently used to determine quality of service in marketing research agencies in the U.K. The authors of that study concluded that notwithstanding the criticisms of the scale, the instrument was successfully applied and may have practical applications (Donnelly, Van'T Hull, and Will 2000). The evidence suggests that the SERVQUAL instrument is a practical way of measuring the quality of service encounters.

### *Fatalism*

Fatalism refers to the level of control people believe they have over outside events. High levels of fatalism suggest people believe they have little control over events affecting their lives. Middle Eastern cultures are generally considered to be more fatalistic than Western societies, especially North Americans (Abbasi and Hollman 1993). Farris and Glenn (1976) developed a scale to tap this dimension. A seven-point Likert scale anchored by strongly disagree / strongly agree was used. The questions asked respondents the extent to which they agreed with the following statements:

- Making plans only brings unhappiness because the plans are hard to fulfill.
- It doesn't make much difference if people elect one or another candidate, for nothing will change.
- With the way things are today, an intelligent person ought to think about the present, without worrying about what is going to happen tomorrow.
- The secret of happiness is not expecting too much out of life and being content with what comes your way.

Studies of fatalism have most often been reported in the sociology literature, where it has been linked to attributions of poverty (Moorman 1999), cross-cultural differences between Lebanese and Portuguese (Abouchedid and Nasser 2002), religious differences in Lebanese students (Nasser and Abouchedid 2001), and race, religiosity, and ethnicity (Jacobson 1999). Fatalism has also been used with Hofstede's value dimensions to compare leadership styles and work-related cultural values in Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Krygystan (Ardichvili 2001). Previous use of the fatalism scale in cross-cultural marketing studies has had mixed results, with reliabilities sometimes marginal (John, Tansuhaj et al. 1986; Foxman, Raven et al. 1990). In this study, we wanted to learn if a relationship exists between fatalism and quality of service

### *National Culture*

National culture was determined by asking respondents their nationality. The countries reported were collapsed into six categories: Kuwait, Other Arab States, Lebanon, India/Sri Lanka/Bangladesh, N. America/Europe, and the Philippines. According to the cultural cluster



<b>Reliability</b>											
<b>4. Expectations Responsiveness</b>	<b>-.36**</b>	<b>.17**</b>	<b>.13*</b>	<b>.6174</b>							
<b>5. Expectations Assurance</b>	<b>-.03</b>	<b>.67**</b>	<b>.73**</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>.6264</b>						
<b>6. Expectations Empathy</b>	<b>-.36**</b>	<b>.15*</b>	<b>.14*</b>	<b>.63**</b>	<b>.14*</b>	<b>.6489</b>					
<b>7. Perceptions Tangibles</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b>.57**</b>	<b>.59**</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>.60**</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.7661</b>				
<b>8. Perceptions Reliability</b>	<b>-.08</b>	<b>.53**</b>	<b>.61**</b>	<b>*.04</b>	<b>.54**</b>	<b>-.01</b>	<b>.70**</b>	<b>.7973</b>			
<b>9. Perceptions Responsiveness</b>	<b>-.23**</b>	<b>.52**</b>	<b>.55**</b>	<b>.22**</b>	<b>.42**</b>	<b>.24**</b>	<b>.48**</b>	<b>.50**</b>	<b>.6930</b>		
<b>10. Perceptions Assurances</b>	<b>-.12</b>	<b>.64**</b>	<b>.65**</b>	<b>-.02</b>	<b>.62**</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>.69**</b>	<b>.80**</b>	<b>.55**</b>	<b>.7639</b>	
<b>11. Perceptions Empathy</b>	<b>-.18**</b>	<b>.42**</b>	<b>.43**</b>	<b>.20**</b>	<b>.39**</b>	<b>.24**</b>	<b>.47**</b>	<b>.54**</b>	<b>.68**</b>	<b>.59**</b>	<b>.7076</b>
<b>Descriptives</b>											
<b># items</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.76</b>	<b>5.91</b>	<b>5.99</b>	<b>4.41</b>	<b>5.79</b>	<b>4.19</b>	<b>5.50</b>	<b>5.48</b>	<b>4.87</b>	<b>5.55</b>	<b>4.88</b>
<b>S.D.</b>	<b>1.28</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>1.09</b>	<b>1.46</b>	<b>1.06</b>	<b>1.34</b>	<b>1.11</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>1.26</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>1.30</b>

\*P<0.05 (2-tailed)

**\*\*P<0.01 (2-tailed)**

**Table 4. Psychometric Analysis of Employee Variables  
Correlations with Standardized Reliability on the Diagonal  
N=178**

	<b>1. Fatalism</b>	<b>2. ExpTan g</b>	<b>3. ExpR el</b>	<b>4. ExpRe sp</b>	<b>5. ExpAs r</b>	<b>6. ExpEm p</b>	<b>7. PerTan g</b>	<b>8. PerR el</b>	<b>9. PerRes p</b>	<b>10. PerAs r</b>	<b>11. PerEm p</b>
<b>1. Fatalism</b>	<b>.6232</b>										
<b>2. Expectations Tangibles</b>	<b>-.20**</b>	<b>.7275</b>									
<b>3. Expectations Reliability</b>	<b>-.24**</b>	<b>.77**</b>	<b>.7674</b>								
<b>4. Expectations Responsiveness</b>	<b>-.24**</b>	<b>.39**</b>	<b>.47**</b>	<b>.7011</b>							
<b>5. Expectations Assurance</b>	<b>-.29**</b>	<b>.81**</b>	<b>.77**</b>	<b>.39**</b>	<b>.7755</b>						
<b>6. Expectations Empathy</b>	<b>-.20**</b>	<b>.39**</b>	<b>.39**</b>	<b>.70**</b>	<b>.40**</b>	<b>.7478</b>					
<b>7. Perceptions Tangibles</b>	<b>-.20**</b>	<b>.71**</b>	<b>.69**</b>	<b>.43**</b>	<b>.64**</b>	<b>.38**</b>	<b>.7264</b>				
<b>8. Perceptions Reliability</b>	<b>-.21**</b>	<b>.70**</b>	<b>.71**</b>	<b>.49**</b>	<b>.68**</b>	<b>.40**</b>	<b>.79**</b>	<b>.7897</b>			
<b>9. Perceptions Responsiveness</b>	<b>-.26**</b>	<b>.61**</b>	<b>.61**</b>	<b>.53**</b>	<b>.62**</b>	<b>.47**</b>	<b>.64**</b>	<b>.73**</b>	<b>.7115</b>		
<b>10. Perceptions Assurances</b>	<b>-.22**</b>	<b>.64**</b>	<b>.66**</b>	<b>.43**</b>	<b>.62**</b>	<b>.46**</b>	<b>.76**</b>	<b>.75**</b>	<b>.74**</b>	<b>.7619</b>	
<b>11. Perceptions Empathy</b>	<b>-.32</b>	<b>.55**</b>	<b>.58**</b>	<b>.54**</b>	<b>.52**</b>	<b>.56**</b>	<b>.56**</b>	<b>.64**</b>	<b>.76**</b>	<b>.67**</b>	<b>.7932</b>
<b># items</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>



<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.75</b>	<b>5.86</b>	<b>5.92</b>	<b>4.88</b>	<b>60.1</b>	<b>4.64</b>	<b>5.58</b>	<b>5.57</b>	<b>5.03</b>	<b>5.68</b>	<b>4.92</b>
<b>S.D.</b>	<b>1.24</b>	<b>1.09</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>1.62</b>	<b>1.16</b>	<b>1.14</b>	<b>1.15</b>	<b>1.20</b>	<b>1.39</b>	<b>1.21</b>	<b>1.40</b>

**\*P<0.05 (2-tailed)**

**\*\*P<0.01 (2-tailed)**

Except for marginal reliability of fatalism, the measures had satisfactory reliability for exploratory work, as suggested by Nunnally (1978), allowing us to proceed with testing the hypotheses, which are discussed in the following sections. The wording of one item in the original 22 - item SERVQUAL scale was slightly modified to fit the context of the sample, but the scales were otherwise unchanged from the original scale.

In the first hypothesis we expected differences between Kuwaiti national customer and non-Kuwaiti customer expectations of service encounter quality. We tested this hypothesis first by Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), then by comparing mean expectations of SQ and Nationality. The ANOVA was significant for each of the expectations elements, suggesting there is a difference in expectations of SQ between nationalities, allowing us to examine the relationships more closely by comparing means of SERVQUAL expectations between national cultures and testing for the direction of difference in Table 5.

**Table 5. Means and t-Tests of Expectations – Comparison with Kuwait**

<b>Country</b>		<b>Ta</b>	<b>Re</b>	<b>Respon</b>	<b>As</b>	<b>E</b>
		<b>ngibility</b>	<b>liability</b>	<b>siveness</b>	<b>surance</b>	<b>mpathy</b>
<b>Kuwait</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>4.1216</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>4.</b>
	<b>689</b>		<b>799</b>		<b>777</b>	<b>0898</b>
<b>Other Arab</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>5.1543</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>4.</b>
	<b>723</b>	<b>P&lt;</b>	<b>901</b>	<b>P&lt;0.00</b>	<b>436</b>	<b>8298</b>
	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>P=</b>	<b>P</b>
					<b>0.004</b>	<b>=0.004</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>3.6818</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>3.</b>
	<b>136</b>	<b>P=</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>P=0.24</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>3818</b>
	<b>0.175</b>	<b>0.780</b>	<b>6</b>		<b>P=</b>	<b>P</b>
					<b>0.850</b>	<b>=0.085</b>
<b>India/Sri Lanka/Bangladesh</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>4.4341</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>3.</b>
	<b>439</b>	<b>P&lt;</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>P=0.15</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>9164</b>
	<b>0.001</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>6</b>		<b>P&lt;</b>	<b>P</b>
					<b>0.001</b>	<b>=0.453</b>
<b>N.America / Europe</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>5.1458</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>4.</b>
	<b>917</b>	<b>P=</b>	<b>028</b>	<b>P=0.02</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>4667</b>
	<b>0.137</b>	<b>0.503</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>P=</b>	<b>P</b>
					<b>0.863</b>	<b>=0.425</b>
<b>Philippine</b>		<b>6.8</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>5.7000</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>5.</b>
<b>s</b>		<b>000</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>P=0.02</b>	<b>000</b>	<b>1600</b>

		<b>P=</b> <b>0.002</b>	<b>P=</b> <b>0.005</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>P=</b> <b>0.057</b>	<b>P</b> <b>=0.090</b>
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The t-tests comparing mean expectation levels between Kuwaiti nationals and non-Kuwaitis do not support Hypothesis 1. On almost every expectation dimension, Kuwaiti nationals seem to expect lower service quality than did other nationalities. The explanation for this may be that since Kuwaitis have a higher percentage of international travel experience than most other nationalities in the Middle East, including the Lebanese, Kuwaiti customers have been exposed to high quality retail service in their travels to Europe and North America and have come to expect much less in their own country. Customers from other cultures, however, may perceive Kuwait as a rich land and thus expect high retail service quality. Shopping malls and stores in Kuwait are newer and reflect a more Western influence as many were built following the Gulf War in 1991. These results may also, in part, reflect the cultural tradition of Kuwaiti nationals to be more submissive to authority and tradition, and thus have lower expectations of retail service employees.

The second hypothesis examined perceptions of service quality. We anticipated that Kuwaiti national customers would perceive retail service quality as lower than other nationalities. The ANOVA indicated there are significant differences between national culture groups and their service quality expectations. This is further examined in Table 6, where Kuwaiti perceptions are compared with other nationalities.

**Table 6. Means and t-Tests of Perceptions – Comparison with Kuwait**

<b>Country</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Tangibilit y</b>	<b>Reliabilit y</b>	<b>Responsivenes s</b>	<b>Assuranc e</b>	<b>Empath y</b>
<b>Kuwait</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>4.8546</b>	<b>4.9102</b>	<b>4.3571</b>	<b>4.9430</b>	<b>4.3214</b>
<b>Other Arab</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>5.8723</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>5.7872</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>5.2819</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>5.8936</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>5.1652</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>5.5917</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>5.2412</b> <b>P=0.126</b>	<b>4.5438</b> <b>P=0.396</b>	<b>5.3438</b> <b>P=0.042</b>	<b>4.5600</b> <b>P=0.243</b>
<b>India/Sri Lanka/Banglades h</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>6.0821</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>6.1284</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>5.5286</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>6.2848</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>5.2896</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>
<b>N.America / Europe</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5.4821</b> <b>P=0.018</b>	<b>5.7429</b> <b>P=0.001</b>	<b>4.5893</b> <b>P=0.579</b>	<b>5.5833</b> <b>P=0.014</b>	<b>4.4001</b> <b>P=0.834</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6.2000</b> <b>P=0.001</b>	<b>6.1200</b> <b>P=0.002</b>	<b>5.2000</b> <b>P=0.060</b>	<b>6.1000</b> <b>P&lt;0.001</b>	<b>6.0400</b> <b>P=0.005</b>

Hypothesis 2 appears to be supported. In all cases, the direction of perceptions indicates Kuwaiti customers have lower perceptions of service quality than do customers of other nationalities and the differences are statistically significant in many cases.

In the third hypothesis, we predicted differences in service quality expectations between customers and employees because retail sales people and clerks mostly tend to be from much less affluent countries than Kuwait. The results are reported in Table 7.

**Table 7. Customer vs. Employee Expectations**

Expectations	Customer Mean	Employee Mean	P of Difference (t-test)
<b>Tangibility</b>	<b>5.9118</b>	<b>5.8643</b>	<b>P=0.662</b>
<b>Reliability</b>	<b>5.6662</b>	<b>5.7056</b>	<b>P=0.691</b>
<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>4.5876</b>	<b>4.7828</b>	<b>P=0.162</b>
<b>Assurance</b>	<b>5.5876</b>	<b>6.0112</b>	<b>P&lt;0.001</b>
<b>Empathy</b>	<b>4.2198</b>	<b>4.6387</b>	<b>P=0.002</b>

There were no significant differences between employees in three of the five SERVQUAL dimensions, but there were differences in the assurances and empathy dimensions, with employee means greater than customer means. These differences suggest that employees anticipate providing higher levels of assurance and empathy than customers expect. The results only partially support the third hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4 suggests differences between high and low fatalism individuals and their expectations and perceptions of service quality. The first part of Hypothesis 4 suggests that individuals with high levels of fatalism will have lower expectations of service quality. This section was tested first with ANOVA and then by comparing the means of expectations (H4a) and perceptions (H4b). The results are reported in Tables 8 and 9.

**Table 8. Mean of Expectations vs. Low/High Fatalism**  
t-Tests of differences between means within country based on Hi/Lo fatalism

Country	Fatalism	N	Tangibility	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
All Countries	Low	269	6.0028*	5.8032**	4.9442***	5.8426**	4.6206***
	High	176	5.7358	5.4979	4.2688	5.5763	4.0319
Kuwait	Low	66	5.1023	5.2558	4.4167*	5.2374	4.3091
	High	46	4.9620	5.1007	3.8297	5.1576	3.8870
Other Arab	Low	54	6.3843	5.9691*	5.2593*	5.9398	4.9778
	High	26	5.9327	5.4487	4.4712	5.5481	4.3692
Lebanon	Low	53	6.1557	5.8585	5.0660**	5.9953*	4.5396**
	High	33	5.8864	5.4313	4.0270	5.4853	3.5706
India/Sri Lanka/Bangladesh	Low	70	6.5321	6.1571	4.9202	6.4085	4.6225
	High	54	6.3380	5.9938	4.7269	6.1435	4.3343
N.America / Europe	Low	18	5.7361	5.7407	5.4875	5.4375	4.9900
	High	4	5.0000	4.8750	4.1250	5.0625	3.8500

<b>Philippines</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6.0500</b>	<b>5.9333</b>	<b>4.8500</b>	<b>6.5500**</b>	<b>4.3600</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5.4583</b>	<b>5.3278</b>	<b>4.2292</b>	<b>5.1042</b>	<b>3.9500</b>

\* P<0.05      \*\* P<0.01      \*\*\* P<0.001

ANOVA suggests significant differences exist between respondents with high and low levels of fatalism and service quality expectations. Table 8 shows the mean expectations of respondents with high and low fatalism levels. For all countries taken together, respondents with high levels of fatalism tend to have lower expectations of service quality than those with low fatalism levels. Kuwaitis had lower expectations of service quality than other nationalities. Hypothesis 4 a. appears to be supported. Since this is an exploratory study, in Table 8 we also looked at differences within national cultures. The hypothesized relationships were consistent across cultures, although many were not statistically significant.

The second part of Hypothesis 4 expects respondents with high fatalism to have lower service quality perceptions than those with low levels of fatalism. ANOVA indicates statistically significant (P<0.10) differences between high and low fatalism scores and service quality perceptions. The perceptions of tangibility and high/low fatalism are marginally related (p=0.083), while the other indicators of service quality perceptions are statistically significant. A comparison of means between high and low fatalism is shown in Table 9. Consistent with our predictions, respondents with higher fatalism scores tended to have lower perceptions of service quality. Except for perceptions of tangibility, the relationships were statistically significant. Kuwaiti nationals had lower perceptions than other nationalities. Table 9 also lists the relationships for individual nations, which are typically consistent with the overall results. Taken together, the results tend to support Hypothesis 4 b, that individuals with higher fatalism values will have lower service quality perceptions than those with lower fatalism values.

**Table 9. Mean of Perceptions vs. Low/High Fatalism**  
t-Tests of differences between means within country based on Hi/Lo fatalism

<b>Country</b>	<b>Fatalism</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Tangibility</b>	<b>Reliability</b>	<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>Assurance</b>	<b>Empathy</b>
<b>All Countries</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>5.6103</b>	<b>5.6395**</b>	<b>5.1320***</b>	<b>5.7289**</b>	<b>4.9819**</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>5.4209</b>	<b>5.3376</b>	<b>4.6285</b>	<b>5.4101</b>	<b>4.5975</b>
<b>Kuwait</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>4.8788</b>	<b>4.9545</b>	<b>4.6212*</b>	<b>5.0492</b>	<b>4.4970</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>4.7609</b>	<b>4.9304</b>	<b>4.0978</b>	<b>4.8678</b>	<b>4.1859</b>
<b>Other Arab</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>5.9630</b>	<b>5.9185</b>	<b>5.5370*</b>	<b>5.9907</b>	<b>5.3925*</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>5.6923</b>	<b>5.5327</b>	<b>4.7981</b>	<b>5.6827</b>	<b>4.7538</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>5.8208***</b>	<b>5.6311***</b>	<b>5.0660***</b>	<b>5.7736***</b>	<b>4.9358***</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>5.1201</b>	<b>4.8368</b>	<b>4.0809</b>	<b>4.9559</b>	<b>3.9647</b>
<b>India/Sri Lanka/Bangladesh</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>5.9577</b>	<b>6.0944</b>	<b>5.4390</b>	<b>6.2054</b>	<b>5.2521</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>6.1188</b>	<b>6.0120</b>	<b>5.5324</b>	<b>6.1790</b>	<b>5.4556</b>
<b>N.America / Europe</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5.3625</b>	<b>5.5200</b>	<b>4.8250</b>	<b>5.5833</b>	<b>4.6900</b>
	<b>High</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4.7500</b>	<b>5.3500</b>	<b>3.8750</b>	<b>5.0625</b>	<b>3.8000</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5.5000</b>	<b>6.0000</b>	<b>5.0500*</b>	<b>5.7000</b>	<b>5.4000</b>

	<b>High</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5.2708</b>	<b>4.9167</b>	<b>4.1458</b>	<b>4.9375</b>	<b>4.2000</b>
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\* P<0.05      \*\* P<0.01      \*\*\* P<0.001

The fifth hypothesis predicted there would be gender differences in expectations and perceptions of service quality. The first part of the hypothesis expected males to have higher expectations of service quality than females. ANOVA indicates that indeed four of the five SERVQUAL expectation dimensions differ by gender. The responsiveness dimension was not significant. Table 10 summarizes the difference in means by all the respondents.

**Table 10. All Respondents - Gender vs. Expectations t-Tests**

<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>P of Difference</b>
<b>Tangibility</b>	<b>Male</b>	265	6.0783	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	<b>Female</b>	180	5.6389	
<b>Reliability</b>	<b>Male</b>	265	5.8765	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	<b>Female</b>	180	5.3917	
<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>Male</b>	268	4.6981	<b>0.553</b>
	<b>Female</b>	181	4.6156	
<b>Assurance</b>	<b>Male</b>	268	5.9521	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	<b>Female</b>	181	5.4696	
<b>Empathy</b>	<b>Male</b>	267	4.5193	<b>0.016</b>
	<b>Female</b>	181	4.1923	

The differences between the means shown in Table 10 were all in the hypothesized direction. Four of the five means were statistically significant, indicating males expected higher service quality than did females. These results tend to support Hypothesis 5 a.

Hypothesis 5 b anticipated that females would have higher perceptions of service quality than would males. The results are shown in Tables 11.

**Table 11. Gender vs. Perceptions (complete sample)**

Perceptions	Gender	N	Mean	M	P of Difference
Tangibility	Male	267	5.7188	5.2739	<0.001
	Female	181	5.3077		
Reliability	Male	267	5.6712	5.3077	0.001
	Female	181	5.3077		
Responsiveness	Male	267	5.0905	4.6961	0.002
	Female	181	4.6961		
Assurance	Male	266	5.7682	5.3702	<0.001
	Female	181	5.3702		
Empathy	Male	165	4.9651	4.6381	0.008
	Female	181	4.6381		

ANOVA indicated statistically significant differences in the perceptions of SERVQUAL dimensions between genders. These relationships are examined in greater depth by comparing means between genders in Table 11. In all cases, contrary to our predictions, females actually had statistically significant lower perceptions of service quality than did males. Thus, Hypothesis 5 b is not supported. Perhaps there is a gender bias in the interpretation of the scales, such that females rate both expectations and perceptions lower than do males. Another possible explanation may be that women are more proficient at shopping, more realistic, and thus, have lowered expectations and perceptions. Further research should clarify this difference.

While we had no formal basis for comparing genders between Kuwait and Lebanon nationals on the SQ dimensions, and thus no hypotheses, such a comparison was within the scope of our study. The results for Kuwaiti nationals are found in Tables 12 and 13.

**Table 12. Kuwait Respondents - Gender vs. Expectations**

Expectations	Gender	N	Mean	P of Difference
Tangibility	Male	53	5.1981	0.247
	Female	58	4.9310	
Reliability	Male	53	5.4893	0.010



	<b>Female</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.9109</b>	
<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>4.3192</b>	<b>0.292</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.0517</b>	
<b>Assurance</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>5.4371</b>	<b>0.039</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>5.0129</b>	
<b>Empathy</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>4.2792</b>	<b>0.291</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.0207</b>	

**Table 13. Kuwait Respondents - Gender vs. Perceptions**

<b>Perceptions</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>P of Difference</b>
<b>Tangibility</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>4.9151</b>	<b>0.483</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.7586</b>	
<b>Reliability</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>4.9698</b>	<b>0.944</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.9552</b>	
<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>4.5943</b>	<b>0.141</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.2371</b>	
<b>Assurance</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>5.0314</b>	<b>0.580</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.9181</b>	
<b>Empathy</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>4.4311</b>	<b>0.512</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>4.2914</b>	

On only the reliability and assurance expectations dimensions were there significant differences between the genders, but mean differences suggest that Kuwaiti women had both lower expectations and lower perceptions than Kuwaiti men. This is in contrast to the significant differences found in Tables 10 and 11 when all respondents were included.

Results for Lebanese respondents are listed in Tables 14 and 15.

**Table 14. Lebanon Respondents - Gender vs. Expectations**

<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>P of Difference</b>
<b>Tangibility</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>6.1026</b>	<b>0.649</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>6.0106</b>	
<b>Reliability</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>5.9573</b>	<b>0.026</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>5.4766</b>	
<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>4.4231</b>	<b>0.177</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>4.8524</b>	
<b>Assurance</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>6.0705</b>	<b>0.027</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>5.5729</b>	
<b>Empathy</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>4.0718</b>	<b>0.589</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>4.2333</b>	

**Table 15. Lebanon Respondents - Gender vs. Perceptions**

<b>Perceptions</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>P of Difference</b>
<b>Tangibility</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>5.7821</b>	<b>0.049</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>5.3559</b>	
<b>Reliability</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>5.6564</b>	<b>0.008</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>5.0479</b>	
<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>4.7244</b>	<b>0.771</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>4.6458</b>	
<b>Assurance</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>5.5256</b>	<b>0.593</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>5.3958</b>	
<b>Empathy</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>4.5692</b>	<b>0.929</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>4.5458</b>	

These results show a somewhat different pattern from that of the Kuwaiti respondents. There were significant differences between Lebanese men and women in reliability and assurance expectations and in tangibility and reliability perceptions, with men higher than women. However, in contrast to the Kuwaiti nationals, Lebanese women had higher responsiveness and empathy expectations than men, although these differences were not statistically significant. These results suggest some differences in gender responses to SQ between Kuwait and Lebanon, with the implication that gender responses in other countries may also differ.

## DISCUSSION

As retailing increasingly becomes more global, it is important to consider the needs and expectations of customers and employees of differing cultures. This study is an early attempt at learning more about the service quality expectations and perceptions of customers and employees in the Middle East and about the various national cultures they represent. As earlier described, this region is a growing market, with a booming population and significant economic influence that is predicted to grow even greater in the near future. It is critical that global retailers understand this potentially huge market.

First, we found that the dimensionality of the SERVQUAL instrument is suspect for other cultures. While factor analysis indicated the recovery of five dimensions in several national cultures in our sample, different items were included in those dimensions than proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988). Even so, the reliabilities of the original factors were satisfactory for exploratory analyses. These results suggest that further research is needed in understanding the important dimensions of service quality in different countries. Managerial implications are obvious – retail customers in different countries may expect and perceive different types and levels of service encounters.

We found that there were indeed differences between expectations of quality of service encounters and national cultures. Kuwaiti national customers were more similar in their expectations of SQ to Lebanese customers and North American/European customers than to other Arab customers. This may be more an artifact of the small sample sizes of customers from Lebanon and North America/Europe than any real similarities. The customers from India/Sri

Lanka/Bangladesh had higher expectations than Kuwaiti customers for Tangibility, Reliability, and Assurance, but no differences in Responsiveness or Empathy. These results might be explained in part by Donthu and Yoo (1998), who found that higher power distance customers had lower SQ expectations (Kuwait) and that high uncertainty avoidance customers had higher SQ expectations (India/Sri Lanka/Bangladesh). That Responsiveness and Empathy were not different between groups might indicate that these factors were either not very important to any group or that the national cultures perceived them equally.

Our hypothesis (H2:) predicting that Kuwaiti nationals would have lower service quality perceptions than non-Kuwaitis was supported, suggesting that exposure to high service retailers through travels abroad may make Kuwaiti national customers less appreciative of the retail service they receive at home. The implication for global retail marketers is that globalization may raise the level of service quality required to satisfy customers.

There were minor differences between customer and employee expectations of SQ, as indicated in the third hypothesis. Only assurance and empathy were statistically different, with employees expecting higher levels. At least for our sample, the differences between customer and employee expectations of tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness were small, suggesting employees knew what their customers wanted. The study was unable to detect if differences in assurance and empathy might be due to a difference in national culture, training, or some other explanation.

Customers with high levels of fatalism had lower SQ expectations and lower SQ perceptions than those with lower fatalism levels. Since these results were consistent across the national cultures tested (although not significant in all cases), fatalism may be a relatively simple way to determine SQ expectations in a given culture or target segment. Obviously, more research, including refinement of the fatalism scale and testing across a variety of cultures, is needed, but retail managers might be able to use such a simplified measure to provide service to new foreign markets.

Finally, in our attempt to uncover some of the influences on service quality expectations in the Middle East, we did find a gender influence. Males expected higher levels of service quality, but they also perceived they received higher levels, than did females. We attempted to explain this difference by suggesting females interpreted the scales differently from males, but another explanation is that females actually did receive poorer service than males. This would fit with what we think we know about the separation of genders in the Middle East and how females are treated, at least in public.

### *Managerial Implications*

The cultures of the Gulf Region are unique in many aspects, but there is a general tendency toward fatalism. This is manifest in many ways, but particularly in one expression, “insha’ Allah,” roughly translated as “Allah (God) willing,” but may also be used to suggest, “if the boss wills it” (Rice 1999). Insha’ Allah is used to explain many uncertainties in life and sometimes to delay or reposition responsibility and decision-making. In our study, we thought fatalism would relate to expectations of the quality of service encounters, and the results supported this prediction. As the Middle East becomes more diverse with peoples from many different backgrounds working in the area, however, this fatalistic attitude may become less prevalent.

Also, as more Middle East citizens travel outside this area of the world, other, less fatalistic attitudes may become more pronounced, especially regarding the quality of service encounters. Retailers may wish to develop strategies to improve the quality of service encounters before their competitors enter the market. Global retailers may have both an advantage and a disadvantage in this regard. Their advantage may come from past experiences in improving the quality of service encounters in competitive, demanding markets and in relying on sophisticated ways of measuring and managing it, especially involving employee training procedures. On the other hand, global retailers may be at a disadvantage in assuming that what works in other regions and areas of the world will work in the Middle East. Certainly there are specific service strategies that may be universal, such as “service with a smile” or quick service, but Middle East customers are distinctive in many aspects of their consumer behavior and will undoubtedly require some unique service solutions.

Globalization has been a great leveler in many ways, but retail services may require a judicial use of standardized practices. Our study suggests that there are significant differences between national cultures in their expectations and perceptions of service quality. National culture goes a long way to explaining these differences, but is not a complete explanation. We also found considerable differences within national cultures in both service quality expectations and perceptions. Retail service managers can utilize this information to better understand and serve their customers. Additionally, nationals of each particular country have certain financial advantages that effect their buying patterns, international traveling, education, etc. This must be taken into consideration in any studies conducted in the Middle East as this factor differentiates the population dramatically in each country.

### *Limitations*

This study, while providing much useful and interesting information, is not without its limitations. First, our exploratory study was limited to two countries in the Gulf Region, Kuwait and Lebanon. Second, the surveys were completed by a convenience sample of customers and retail employees who may not represent the larger population. Third, we used self-reporting techniques, which may be somewhat biased. Fourth, we used scales that have not been adequately tested in either culture, but have been found valid in other cultures around the globe. Finally, our questionnaire was in English, which assumed respondents could read and understand the questions adequately to answer them. Even though we assumed English to be understood by our respondents, Hofstede (1991) suggests that language differences may contribute to mistaken cultural perceptions. These issues may reduce the generalizability of our study.

On the positive side, we have examined the quality of service encounters in retail stores located in an area of the world seldom researched. We believe this study contributes to understanding customers and retail employees in the Middle East and in other under-researched areas such as Lebanon, and East Asia. Progressive global retailers can benefit by understanding that national culture can have an important impact on customer service quality expectations and perceptions and be prepared to manage these variables. Likewise, regional retailers should understand that even within their own national culture, there are differences in expectations and perceptions. Employees can be trained to offer the types and levels of service expected by customers from various national cultures. Future studies need to examine larger customer samples, targeting particular industries and cultures. Additionally, further research on the distinct origins and

cultures of the various service workers need to be examined in light of employee financial and non-financial employee reward systems and retail service quality.

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