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# Gender Dynamics From The Arab World: An Intercultural Service Encounter

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GENDER DYNAMICS FROM THE ARAB WORLD: AN INTERCULTURAL SERVICE
ENCOUNTER.


by


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# ABSTRACT

Arab countries strive toward the modernization and feminization of the Arab culture; however, some of these countries (i.e., Saudi Arabia) are culturally and legally governed by "sharia law", and have maintained cultural norms regarding segregation of the sexes. In order to have a better understanding of the Arab travelers to the U.S., this research focuses on the gender dynamics between the service providers and Arab customers during a service encounter. Specifically, this research examines how the same and opposite genders of service-provider and customer influence Arab customers' emotional response (comfort), consequently their service encounter evaluation (satisfaction), and behavioral intentions (feedback willingness). This research also examines how the employees' efforts to solicit feedback from Arab customers may intensify the effect of gender dynamics on Arab customers' responses.

Scenario-based online surveys are created and distributed to respondents of Arab descent in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and United Arab Emirates by using snowball sampling. The results based on 326 respondents show potential differences determined by gender interaction. Arab customers were more comfortable, more satisfied with the service encounter, and more willing to provide feedback, if the employee was the same gender as the customer, as opposed to the employee being the opposite gender from the customer. However, results showed that employee efforts to solicit feedback did not intensify the gender interaction effect. Additionally, through the service encounter, the Arab customers' comfort influenced their service encounter satisfaction and their willingness to provide feedback. The findings of this research provide valuable implications for hospitality managers to better cater to the needs of Arab customers by examining the dimensions of gender boundaries in an intercultural service encounter.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is continuously expanding in order to provide services on a globalized level (Javalgi et al., 2006). As globalization increases, businesses face the challenge to perform adequate market research, and to cater to the needs of their diverse customer segments (Javalgi et al., 2006; Matos et al., 2011). Among the various international tourists, the U.S. Department of Commerce indicates that 925,000 Middle-Eastern visitors travelled to the U.S. in 2012 (Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, 2012a). The number of Middle-Eastern visitors has substantially increased to 398,000 more visitors since the year 2005 (75% increase). This Middle-Eastern segment comprises approximately 3.1% of the international inbound travelers' market (Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, 2012b) with an average annual income of $78,544 (Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, 2012a). Similarly, the Office of Travel Tourism Industries (2012b) shows Canada, Mexico, and the United Kingdom as the top three markets for international visitation. Results show, Canadian tourists stay in the U.S. on average for 8.25 nights (Office of Travel and Tourism, 2012c), Mexican tourists stay 11.1 nights (Office of Travel and Tourism, 2012d), and British tourists stay an average 14.2 nights (Office of Travel and Tourism, 2012e). Comparatively, Middle-Eastern tourists stay in the U.S. an average of 24 nights (Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, 2012a). Even though Middle-Eastern tourists are a growing market segment, academic research on them remains relatively sparse.

Based on the potential impact of this segment, the U.S. hospitality industry may be interested in understanding some of the nuances of Arab culture in order to ensure Arab customer satisfaction. Hofstede (1993) suggests that the culture of a country may not be observed easily, but it can be deduced and used to predict customer behavior. Previous studies

show that different cultures and countries evaluate services differently (Chang, 2008; Malhotra et al., 1994; Mattila, 2000), yet there exists limited understanding of these differences (Malhotra et al., 1994). Muslim societies have a tendency to divide their professional and personal lives based on gender (Ali, 2000; Mernissi, 1996; Syed et al., 2005; Syed, 2010). Haddad and Esposito (1998) highlight the fundamental role of gender in Arab culture that has maintained strict laws and cultural norms regarding segregation of the sexes. For example, in Saudi Arabia, males and females are strictly separated in the work environment, public places and social events (Haddad & Esposito, 1998; Olofsson, 2004, AbuKhalil, 1997).

Since it is evident that Middle-Eastern countries exhibit gender-related cultural traits, examining these traits can assist in better comprehending their behavior in service encounters. The appraisal theory suggests that people's evaluation of events lead to a variety of emotions that lead to specific behavioral reactions (Dalakas, 2005; Folkman et al., 1986; Smith 2006). Similarly, White (2005) suggests that emotional responses are important to better understand tourists' behavioral intentions. During a service encounter, the service employees often seek feedback from customers (Voss et al., 2004). Voluntary feedback provided by customers is considered one of the most valuable forms of information for service organizations to improve service quality and customer satisfaction (Fundin, & Bergman, 2003; Voss et al., 2004). Therefore, businesses emphasize the need to encourage their employees to create mechanisms to facilitate feedback from customers (Plymire, 1990, 1991; Sampson, 1996; Sanes, 1993).

*Problem Statement*

Despite the growth of Middle-Eastern travelers to the U.S., very limited research exists on customer behavior of this cultural group. Considering the growth of this travelers' segment in

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the US hospitality market, efforts should be made to examine the cultural attributes of this Middle-Eastern market as to better cater to their needs and expectations.

Due to a high degree of segregation between the sexes in Arab countries, gender plays an important role during Arab customers' evaluation of service encounters that requires interpersonal interactions between the customer and the service employee. Even though previous studies have investigated intercultural service encounters (Sharma et al., 2012), they have *not* examined emotional, cognitive, and behavioral intentions among *Arab* customer from a gender perspective. Furthermore, previous literature lacks *empirical* examination of Arab customer behavior in a hospitality service setting. This study attempts to address these gaps in literature and examine the importance of gender dynamics of Arab customers in service encounters.

## *Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this research is to examine the gender dynamics between the service provider and Arab customer during service encounters. Specifically, this research examines how the same and opposite genders of service-provider and customer influence Arab customers' emotions (comfort), consequently their service encounter evaluation (satisfaction) and behavioral intentions (feedback willingness). This research also examines how employees' efforts to solicit feedback may intensify the effect of gender dynamics on Arab customers' emotions, service encounter evaluation, and behavioral intentions.

## *Significance of the Research*

The number of Middle-Eastern travelers to the U.S. substantially increases every year; however, very limited research exists on the customer behavior of this cultural group. This

research can shed some light upon gender dynamics between Arab travelers and employees in an intercultural service encounter within the hospitality industry. Furthermore, this research will contribute to the cultural studies in hospitality research by encouraging further investigation of the role of gender in service encounters from an intercultural perspective.

Due to norms of Arab culture that are explained in detail in this study, expected results will show that when a customer's and service provider's genders are matched (same gender), the customer will exhibit higher comfort level, more positive service evaluations, and higher approach behaviors (e.g., providing feedback to a service provider). These results can provide managerial implications that are linked to customer segmentation, intercultural management, and culture-based strategies and tactics to enhance the Arab customer service experience.

### *Definition of Concepts and Constructs*

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are used:

- **Arab:** An individual who has adopted the Arabic language and whose origins are from an Arab country.
- **Arab culture:** Collective traits linked to the Arab society.
- **Islam:** A religious faith based on the teaching of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad, along with an absolute submission to one God, Allah.
- **Muslim:** An individual practicing Islam.
- **Sharia:** Law based on Islam, specifically the teachings of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet.

- **Feedback or voluntary feedback from customers:** A customer's voluntary behavior of voicing feedback to a service provider.

- **Employee feedback solicitation:** An employee's behavior that constitutes as actively asking feedback from a customer.

- **Willingness to provide feedback:** The extent to which a customer will provide feedback to a service provider.

- **Intercultural service encounter:** An interaction between two parties who have diverse cultural backgrounds; an interaction between Arab customers and U.S. employees in this study.

*Organization*

The following sections consist of chapters' two to five. Chapter two includes relevant literature discussions and hypotheses. Chapter three provides detailed information regarding methodology employed in this study. Chapter four provides results, analysis, and discussion of the study's findings. Chapter five provides theoretical implications, managerial implications, further research, and limitations of the study.

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

*Arab Culture*

For the purpose of this study, an "Arab" person is defined as an individual who has adopted the Arabic language and whose origins are from an Arab country (Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, 2006). Additionally, being an Arab person is a cultural trait rather than a racial or ethnic trait (Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, 2006). Arab countries more or less are geographically located in the Middle-East and North Africa (Also known as MENA). Currently there are 22 Arab countries in the world (Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, 2006).

Previous literature has mentioned that nations are rarely homogenous in culture (Dann, 1993) and there are limitations of using nationality as an indicator of culture. Furthermore, Donthu and Yoo (1998) indicated that "subculture" is defined as combinations of various cultures that go beyond general geographic boundaries. For example, Bahrain has a population of 1,248,348, Saudi Arabia has a population of 26,534,504, and United Arab Emirates has a population of 5,314,317 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). However, 46% of Bahrain's population is Bahraini, while 54% are foreigners (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012a). Saudi Arabia's population consists of 22% immigrants (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012b). United Arab Emirates' population consists of only 19% Emirati and 81% being expatriates or from other Arab countries (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012c). Keeping in mind these statistics, this study is to examine "Arab" culture, rather than country-specific culture. Arab culture is defined as collective traits linked to the Arab society. It is important to note that the Arab culture is highly

diverse with differences among Arab countries, and within Arab countries (Office of the Deputy

Chief of Staff for Intelligence, 2006).

*Gender in Arab Culture*

"*Shariah*" is an Arabic etymology used in the Qur'an (Islam's holy book) as a guiding

compass for Muslims. This terminology represents "God's Law" and demonstrates how Muslims

should conduct behaviors and practice their personal and professional lives (Abdo & Mogahed,

2006). It is important to note that *Shariah* pertains to the rules on gender segregation (Beverly,

2008; Eleanor, 1999; Metcalfe, 2008). Furthermore, there have been numerous controversies that

*Shariah* is imposed on Arab women rather than chosen (Abdo & Mogahed, 2006). However,

Abdo and Mogahed's (2006) conducted a study in 22 predominant Muslim countries; the survey

represents 90% of the 1.3 billion Muslims. Their results showed that 62% of women believe

*Shariah* should be the only source of law, indicating that women indeed have a preference

towards gender segregation and Arabs do not impose segregation but rather favor it.

Gender segregation in Islamic culture has deep cultural roots (Hadad & Esposito, 1998).

Previous studies discuss the fundamental role of gender in lifestyles of Muslim societies (e.g.,

Ali, 2000; Mernissi, 1996; Syed et al., 2005; Syed, 2010). In fact, gender segregation is even

legally imposed in countries such as Saudi Arabia (Olofsson, 2004). Even though Islam is not the

sole basis for the debate over gender roles, Arab traditional values and beliefs have largely

maintained this perspective (Ablah, 2004). The recent Global Gender Gap Report presented by

the World Economic Forum (Hausmann et al., 2012) represents gender gap ranking of 135

countries in the world. Among these countries, Arab countries represent some of the lowest

ranking for gender gaps; United Arab Emirates (107), Kuwait (109), Bahrain (111), Qatar (115),

Algeria (120), Jordan (121), Lebanon (122), Oman (125), Egypt (126), Morocco (129), Saudi Arabia (131), Syria (132) and Yemen (135). These scores represent the significant gender gap within Arab countries.

Haddad and Esposito (1998) indicate that countries, such as Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, and Jordan are striving towards modernization and feminization of Arab families in the Islamic culture. The percentage of women labor force has substantially increased between 1960 and 2000 by 47% in the Middle-East and North Africa due to the feminization of public employment (Moghadam, 2005). However, workplaces in Arab countries adamantly employ the maintenance of segregation in the work environment (Syed, 2010, Baker et al., 2007). Even though Arab countries are significantly influenced by western exposure; they still hold similar conservative devotion towards Islam (Dadfar et al., 2003), and some Arab countries (such as Saudi Arabia) are governed by *shariah* law and societal norms which affirms the authority of father, husband or brother over the woman (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). Within traditional perspectives, it is assumed that "gender" is the factor that gives men authority in male-dominated societies of the Arab world (Haddad & Esposito, 1998). Unfortunately, societal norms of the Arab world act as a hindrance towards modernization, and gender equality has always been a heated debate topic for Islam from a religious perspective (Spierings et al., 2009).

Past research in Arab culture highlights strong cultural norms regarding segregation of the sexes (Ali, 2000; Baker et al., 2007; Haddad & Esposito, 1998; Mernissi, 1996; Syed et al., 2005; Syed, 2010). Moreover, service marketing and management literature exhibit the role of cultural values clashing that can be evident even in a service encounter (e.g., Donthu & Yoo,

1998). As there is an increase of Arab travelers to the U.S., the following discussions consider intercultural service encounters of Arab travelers in a U.S context.

*Intercultural Service Encounter*

Since being an Arab person shares a cultural trait, it is essential to better examine the elements of culture. Hofstede (1989) studies provided various attributes of cultures; namely, power distance index, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance index, masculinity versus femininity, and long term orientation. These attributes have been studied previously in the context of a service encounter (Donthu & Yoo, 1998). Among the five cultural dimensions, *Power Distance* is the degree to which a society accepts relationships inequality (Hofstede, 1989). Hofstede's (2013) country scores showed Arab countries as high power-distance cultures which accept authoritarian type relationships that are more formal and impersonal. In contrast, Hofstede (2013), considered U.S. a lower power distance culture where people expect relationships to be more informal and personal. These findings exhibit the role of cultural values clashing that can be evident even in a service encounter (Donthu & Yoo, 1998).

A service encounter is the interaction between a customer and employee, as both engage in a form of role performance (Bitner et al., 1990). Along with professional roles within a service encounter, these encounters entail personal dimensions as well (Berry, 2002). These personal dimensions turn the service encounter into a social encounter (Berry, 2002) and can lead to the formation of a friendship between the customer and employee (Price and Arnould, 1999). On the other hand, the norms of culture make up a customers' evaluation of a service encounter (Mattila, 2000; Winsted, 1999). Considering the service encounter between an Arab traveler and a service employee constitutes as an intercultural service encounter, cultural aspects

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of this encounter should be taken into account.  Zhang et al. (2008) indicate that due to cultural

background differences between an employee and customer, there are differences between

perception and expectation of roles which are magnified in an intercultural service encounter.

Recently, Sharma et al. (2012) investigated intercultural sensitivity with customers' perceived

comfort level. Their findings showed that cultural distance perceived by customers significantly

contributed to their perceived interaction comfort. Moreover, Chang (2008) studies demonstrate

that cultural roots within a service encounter had an important link to perception of service, as

well as emotions perceived during that service encounter.

Similarly, past research also suggest cultural differences exist among service quality,

service expectations, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions (Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Furrer et al.,

2000; Chang, 2008; Lui et al., 2001; Reisinger & Turner, 1999; Winsted, 1999; Zhang et al.,

2008). Furrer et al., (2000) focused on American, Asian and European individuals, and showed

results that Hofstede's cultural dimensions were linked to service quality. Donthu & Yoo (1998)

focused on the cultural dimensions of British, Canadians and Indians.  Chang (2008), Reisinger

and Turner (1999), Winsted (1999), and Lui et al., (2001) compared U.S. and Asian customers.

All these researches have contributed significantly to providing various theoretical and

managerial implications; however, there is lack of research on Arab or Middle-Eastern

individuals.

*Appraisal Theory of Service Evaluations*

Researchers have emphasized the role of emotions in comprehending behavioral

intentions (e.g., Bagozzi et al., 1999; White, 2005). The appraisal theory suggests that people's

evaluation of events lead to a variety of emotions that leads to specific behavioral reactions

(Dalakas, 2005; Folkman et al., 1986). In addition, Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior explains that a behavior's outcome is influenced by beliefs of that behavior. The subject of values has been widely ignored in research when pertaining to specific customer behaviors (Litvin et al., 2004). However, Ajzen (1991) discussed that attitudes on a specific behavior are created based on perceived value of that behavior. The stronger a belief on a behavior, the more likely it is to influence behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991).

More importantly, the role of emotions affecting behavioral intentions is widely recognized, also known as the tri-component model of attitudes (Bootzin et al., 1991). This model proposes that the cognitive component consists of perceptions, while the affective component consists of emotions, and the conative component relates to behavior (White, 2005).

Mukthar and Butt (2011) research suggests that the tri-component model describes religious attitudes or belief as part of the cognitive component. Chang (2008) showed that cognitive interpretations of experiences affect emotions. Accordingly, Sheth and Mittal (2004) also stated that emotions are followed by a behavioral response. These suggestions from past research have led to the conceptual framework of this study where cultural and religious roots are manifest in a form of gender interaction, being linked to emotions, that consequently affect behavioral intentions.

*Conceptual Framework*

This study focuses on how gender affects Arab customers' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral intentions in a service encounter. As shown in Figure 1, this research proposes that when an employee's gender and customer's gender match (the same gender), the service

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encounter will be more comfortable from the Arab customers' perspective compared to the situation where an employee's gender and customer's gender mismatch (the opposite gender). Additionally, when the employee actively engages in gathering feedback from the customers, the mismatching gender interaction effect on comfort will be magnified. Finally, the customer's comfort from a service encounter will in turn influence the evaluation of the service encounter and behavioral intention of providing feedback.
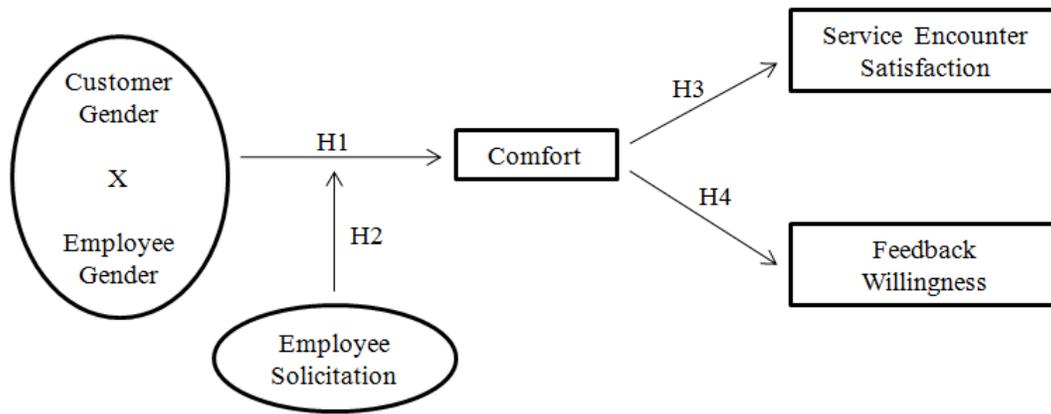


**Figure 1: Gender effects on comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness**

In the following, the constructs used in the model, their impact and relationships on the service encounter outcomes are discussed. After relevant literature discussions and conceptualization, the hypotheses are stated with rationales.

*Gender and Comfort in Service Encounters*

Service encounters are known to be highly personable social encounters (Berry, 2002; Winsted, 1997). Some researchers relate service encounters to hedonic traits; suggesting that

service encounters are personal, elicit emotions, and are intimate (Goodwin & Smith, 1990; Sandström et al., 2008). The role of emotions in service encounters has been repeatedly researched and shown to have a significant impact on service evaluations (Smith, 2006). Service encounters lack a tangible component for customers to consume and assess (Bowen & Ford, 2002). Due to the absence of this tangible component, service providers (i.e., employees) become the source of emotional evaluation for the customer (Rafaeli,1993). Moreover, it is a cognitive process to interpret events and emotions play a part in embodying this construal (Ortony et al., 1994).  One of the important emotional aspects of examining a service encounter is the customers' perceived comfort with the encounter (Paswan & Ganesh, 2005; Spake et al., 2003).

Customer's comfort is defined as a psychological state in which a customer feels "calm", "peaceful", and "not insecure" about their interaction with a service provider (Spake et al., 2003, pg 321). Additionally, comfort is defined as a positive emotion (Daniels, 2000) linked with a balanced state of mind (Simmons, 2001). Comfort has also been linked to aspects of the attachment theory, which suggests individuals are more comfortable to familiar people and objects (Bowlby, 1969, Dunn 1977). Similarly, customers perceive a service encounter to be pleasurable if the experience is comfortable (Cheng et al., 2012). Moreover, reduced anxiety or increased comfort during a service encounter greatly impacts customer satisfaction (Gwinner et al., 1998; Reynolds & Beatty, 1999) and service quality evaluations (Butcher et al., 2001; Dabholkar et al., 2000).

Additionally, comfort is a form of emotion during a service encounter (Lloyd & Luk, 2011). Research shows, once a customer is comfortable with an employee, they also feel they are highly respected (Schneider & Bowen, 1999). Zeithaml et al. (1996) research showed customers

that were more comfortable with the service environment were more likely to recommend that service to others. Furthermore, Paswan and Ganesh's (2005) study researched cross-cultural interaction comfort. Their research shows that cross-cultural comfort is essential towards understanding customers' perception of service in an unfamiliar environment (Paswan & Ganesh, 2005). Comfort during a service encounter plays a key role towards customer's perception of service quality as well (Lloyd & Luk, 2011). Similarly, research showed that cross-cultural interaction comfort was associated with evaluating a service as a whole (Parameswaran & Pisharodi, 2002).

Rosenbaum (2005) suggest that customers search for signs and attributes before approaching a potential service encounter. Researchers show that customers respond more favorably to the frontline service staff being the "appropriate" gender (Mathies & Burford, 2011, pg 637). Some studies have explained that female customer's contact with service personnel involves more intimacy, personal, and psychosocial exchanges compared to male customer's contact (Bu & Roy, 2005). Additionally, these differences are further investigated to find that gender is a significant moderator on the influence of perceived attitude and subjective norm (Baker et al., 2007). Other studies have found that gender plays a role towards a customer's approach and avoid behavior. For example, Dean (2012) discusses the impact employee gender may potentially have on customer avoid/approach behavior, and that this is a topic which has not been fundamentally researched.

Through these findings, it is likely that a cultural clash could take place in a service encounter between an Arab customer and American employee. Evidently, gender is an important factor that influences Arab customer's perception of service encounters, due to their cultural

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roots. Since Arab males or females are not accustomed to interact with a person of the opposite sex, their emotional response, comfort level, will be low when having to interact with a person of the opposite sex. Hence:

> $H_1$: *When Arab customer's and service employee's gender are matched (the same gender), the Arab customer exhibits a higher comfort level, than when the genders are not matched (the opposite gender).*

### *Employee Feedback Solicitation*

Groth (2005) indicated that hospitality managers, need to focus on socializing customers in order to encourage voluntary behavior, such as providing feedback. Customer feedback is considered a valuable source of information, and is an opportunity for organizations to improve their performance, improve their service quality, and develop towards increasing customer satisfaction (Fundin & Bergman, 2003; Opoku, 2006; Voss et al., 2004). Therefore, researchers have emphasized the need for employees to solicit this feedback (Groth, 2005; Opoku, 2006; Plymire, 1990, 1991).

There are various employee behaviors that entail the action of soliciting feedback. Plymire (1990, 1991) suggest that customers' are more willing to provide feedback when employees' are willing to listen. For example, engaging in "small talk" constitutes as an employee effort (Barker & Hartel, 2004, pg 7) and can be used towards soliciting feedback. Reaching out to customers to understand their perception of services received, or address concerns, helps manage those customers' expectations greatly (Parasuraman & Berry, 1991). In addition, conversation taking place in a service encounter enhances the service experience since

it is a form of personalization (Lovelock et al., 2007). However, the role of conversation has been widely ignored in service encounters (Garzaniti et al., 2011).

The interaction between customer and employee determines the customer's perception of service quality (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Among the extensive research on the dimensions of service quality, employee mannerism and behavior, has often been mentioned as a key component that leads to customer satisfaction and positive evaluation of the service encounter (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Parasuraman et al., 1991; Raajpoot, 2004; Winsted, 2000). More importantly, a previous study showed that an employee's behavior or service manner is shown to influence the customer's emotions (Pugh, 2001).

Winsted (1999) found that American customers find employee friendliness an important attribute in a service encounter. On the other hand, Japanese customers find formality an important determinant in service encounters. Similarly, studies have shown that employees' engaging the customer in "small talk" is a positive attribute (Llyod & Luk, 2011, pg 177; Winsted, 2000, pg 407). However, Paswan & Ganesh (2005) study provided an example of a customer startled from an enthusiastic greeting from an employee in a store because the customer is not accustomed to such forms of expressions. De Mooiji (2004) stated that people from collectivist societies are not encouraged to voice personal opinions. Similarly, within Arab traditions, voicing of one's mind can be construed to have a negative connotation. Within traditional upbringing, it is emphasized that if a person was not able to produce "good" conversation, they should instead remain silent (Ayish, 1998, pg 43). The famous Arab expression dominates this action "if speech is made of silver, silence is gold" (Ba'alabki, 1980, pg 78). Hence, these cultural norms suggest Arabs' resistance in engaging conversation or

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providing feedback. This strict avoidance behavior of Arabs would be in direct contradiction to the casual approach behavior of Americans which are very friendly, informal, and willing to talk to strangers without being introduced (Conference & Incentive Travel, 2012).

The findings of past research suggest differences in perceived behavior in a service encounter between an Arab customer and American employee that could lead to negative emotional consequences. Service encounters are evaluated based on emotions (Mattila & Enz, 2002). Furthermore, these emotions and evaluations are subject to the behavior of the service provider (Chen, 2008). Therefore, as the employees gender will impact the Arab customers comfort level, the employees attempt to solicit feedback from the Arab customer will exaggerate the effect on the Arab customers comfort level. In other words, an Arab customer's comfort level will be the lowest when his/her gender is different from an employee's gender and the employee tries to seek feedback from the customer.

> $H_2$: *The gender mismatching effect on comfort level is exacerbated when an employee*
> *actively solicits feedback from the Arab customer.*

### Service Encounter Satisfaction

Studies regarding the evaluation of service encounters have been dominated by research referring to customer satisfaction and service quality (e.g. Brady & Cronin, 2001; Giese & Cote, 2000; Oh, 1999; Olsen & Johnson, 2003; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Studies have also shown that a positive interpersonal contact between customer and service provider affects the customer's overall evaluation of the service experience (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). Service providers try to provide the customer with positive emotions that lead to high satisfaction levels (Hartel et

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al., 1999). However, perceptions of satisfaction are affected by cultural backgrounds of customers (Chang, 2008). Moreover, dimensions of evaluating a service differ by country and culture and there is a need to understand these differences (Malhotra et al., 1994).

Since research has shown that cultural traits affect perception of satisfaction (Chang, 2008; Malhotra et al., 1994), the affective component (emotions) behind the perception of satisfaction is important as well. Service evaluation studies show that customers' emotional responses are linked to satisfaction evaluation, and that satisfaction consists of an affective component (Chang, 2008). Research demonstrates that emotions will affect satisfaction levels; positive emotions lead to positive satisfaction levels while negative emotions lead to negative satisfaction levels (Price et al., 1995). However, some researchers argue that positive emotions positively influence satisfaction while negative emotions may not impact satisfaction, since customers may be tolerant of negative service experience to some extent (Chang, 2008).

The service employee is considered as a key component through service quality and customer satisfaction research (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Giese & Cote, 2000; Zeithaml et al., 1990). In a service encounter, the employee delivering the service becomes the service (Lovelock et al., 2007). Accordingly, their behaviors are used to determine the customer's level of satisfaction (Barker et al., 2004) as well as levels of service quality (Crosby et al., 1990). Previous literature also identifies that there are specific behaviors that lead to customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction from a service encounter (Bitner et al., 1990; Hartline et al., 2000). These employee behaviors include employee responses to customer needs, requests, courtesy, and friendliness (Bitner et al., 1990; Hartline et al., 2000). Along with specific behaviors, employee cultural attributes also affect service encounter evaluations (Sharma et al.,

2012). For example, Sharma et al.'s (2012) investigation revealed that customers lowered their service expectations from employees that were perceived as culturally distant.

Previous studies show that customer emotions, do in fact influence service quality evaluation, and satisfaction (Chang, 2008; Salazar et al., 2010). Similarly, studies ascertain that norms of cultural diversities impact a customer's evaluation of a service encounter (Mattila, 2000). Arab customers' perceptions of service encounter satisfaction are likely to be influenced by their perceived comfort with the service encounter.

*H₃: The comfort level generated from gender interactions positively influences service encounter satisfaction.*

*Customer Feedback Willingness*

The importance of customer feedback as a means to improve service quality and customer satisfaction is ever-increasing (Fundin, & Bergman, 2003; Voss et al., 2004). The "voice" of the customer has only received attention from academic research if the incidents are linked to extreme negative or extreme positive ones (Mattila & Wirtz, 2004; Tantawy & Losekoot, 2000). While some researchers provided dimensions and attributes on service encounters which may lead to customer compliments, others have examined the role of customer politeness, and how this may lead a dissatisfied customer not to voice dissatisfaction (Lerman, 2006). Research on customer feedback has also been studied through customer citizenship behavior and customer voluntary performance which can be used to further analyze why customers choose to communicate feedback to an organization (Abbasi & Safarnia, 2011; Abbasi et al., 2011; Bettencourt, 1997; Eh Di et al., 2010; Groth, 2005; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007).

However, there is limited research on the role of conversation or feedback willingness in service encounters (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996).

Spake et al. (2003) and Lacey's (2012) studies indicated that comfort perceived during a service encounter had an impact on active voice. On the other hand, studies have shown that some cultures are concerned with the concept of 'saving face' which is linked to avoiding criticism, and avoiding any form of confrontation, especially in public places (Chang, 2008; Manzur & Jogaratnam, 2007). Due to these cultural attributes, an Arab customer may feel hesitation to provide feedback. Moreover, 'saving face' can also be an important cultural trait that will prevent Arab customers from providing feedback.

Previous research demonstrated that emotions can predict consumers' behavioral intentions (Ryu & Jang, 2008; Ryu et al., 2012; Salazar et al., 2010). More importantly, Sharma et al. (2009) provides evidence that if a customer feels uncomfortable interacting with a service provider, they will be less willing to supply any information to that service provider. Similarly, this research posits that Arab customers will evaluate a service encounter (cognitive) based on their gender and experience comfort accordingly (affect). As a result, Arab customers' perceived comfort will determine their willingness to provide feedback (conative). Taken together, the fourth hypothesis is stated:

> *$H_4$: The comfort level generated from gender interactions positively influences feedback providing behavioral intentions.*

In summary, Hypothesis 1 predicts gender matching and mismatching effects on comfort. Thus, it expects the two-way interaction effect between customer's gender and employee's

gender. Hypothesis 2 states that the gender mismatching effect will be magnified when the employee tries to solicit the feedback, thus tests the three-way interaction effect on comfort. Hypothesis 3 and 4 predict the positive impact of comfort on service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness. Mediation analysis is conducted to test the effect of comfort generated from gender interaction and employee solicitation on service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness.

In order to test the proposed hypotheses, an experiment is conducted by using a role-play scenario method. The details on the research design and procedures are presented in the following chapter.

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

*Research Design*

The research design consists of 2 (employee gender: male vs. female) x 2 (customer gender: male vs. female) x 2 (feedback solicitation: solicitation vs. non-solicitation) between-subjects quasi experimental design. Employee gender is manipulated in the scenario (Appendix C) along with feedback solicitation manipulated by an employee's solicitation behavior that tries to engage the customer in a conversation and invite customers' feedback (Appendix D).

The participants are randomly assigned to one of the four written scenarios and instructed to role-play a customer's experience in checking out of a hotel. After reading the assigned scenario, the participants are asked to complete a survey designed to measure the effectiveness of the experimental manipulations and the dependent constructs regarding their comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness.

*Measures*

As the research is designed to examine the effects of gender and employee feedback solicitation on comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness, the measures of manipulation checks and the constructs utilized in this study are explained below.

Manipulation Check

In order to ensure that the two scenarios created, represented employee solicitation behavior during a service encounter (no solicitation vs. solicitation), scales were adapted from Barnard's (2002) study and modified to meet the needs of this study. The three items (e.g., The

employee actively seeks feedback about the quality of service) are measured on a 7-point scale (1=strongly agree, 7=strongly disagree). Additionally, in order to assess the gender manipulation presented in the scenario, all respondents are asked "What was the first thing that you noticed about the employee in this scenario?" Also, previous research shows the significance of keeping experimental designs as realistic as possible (O'Donnell, 1996; Cummings & Laura, 1998). Therefore, scenario realism is assessed by asking participants, "How realistic is this scenario to you?" (1=highly unrealistic; 7=highly realistic) and "How difficult/easy is it to imagine yourself as a customer in this scenario?" (1=very difficult; 7=very easy).

### Comfort

First and second hypotheses examine how the gender matching and mis-matching effect along with employee solicitation can negatively or positively influence comfort. Therefore, comfort is measured via five items, uncomfortable-comfortable, unpleasant-pleasant, irritated-relaxed, distressed-calm and uneasy-at ease, adopted from Spake et al. (2003) on a 7-point bipolar scale (e.g., 1=uncomfortable, 7=comfortable).

### Service Encounter Satisfaction

The third hypothesis of the study suggests that levels of comfort positively influence service encounter satisfaction. Service encounter satisfaction is measured by five items. Two items are adapted from Mattila et al. (2003) *satisfaction with service encounter* scale. Additional three items on *customer satisfaction* with the employee are adapted from Barnard (2002) and modified to fit the needs of this study.

The fourth hypothesis of this study posits that levels of comfort positively influence feedback willingness. Feedback willingness is measured by six items adapted from Bettencourt's (1997) *customer voluntary participation* scales, measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 7=strongly disagree). Bettencourt's (1997) measures focused on a retail setting, therefore, adjustments are made to fit the context of this study (i.e. "this store" is replaced with "this employee"). All measures used in the study are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Measurement Items**

| Variable | Items | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Employee Solicitation | • The employee actively seeks feedback about the quality of service.<br>• The employee enthusiastically looks for signs from you regarding the services at the hotel.<br>• The employee aggressively seeks information about your experience at the hotel. | Barnard, 2002 |
| Employee Gender | • What was the first thing that you noticed about the employee in this scenario? | |
| Comfort | • Uncomfortable-Comfortable<br>• Unpleasant-Pleasant<br>• Irritated-Relaxed<br>• Distressed-Calm<br>• Uneasy-At Ease | Spake et. al., 2003 |
| Satisfaction | • I am satisfied with this employee as a provider of services.<br>• Overall, I am satisfied by the service I receive from this employee.<br>• All things considered, I find that this employee delivers satisfactory service.<br>• If you were the customer in this interaction, to what extend would you feel satisfied?<br>• This encounter was:<br>  ○ Much worse than I expect<br>  ○ Pretty much what I expect<br>  ○ Much better than I expect | Barnard, 2002<br><br>Mattila et al., 2003 |

| Variable | Items | Source |
|---|---|---|
| Feedback Willingness | • I would let this employee know of ways that the hotel can better serve my needs.<br>• I would make constructive suggestions to this employee on how the hotel can improve its services.<br>• If I have a useful idea on how to improve a service, I would give it to this employee.<br>• When I experience a problem, I would let this employee know, so they may improve the service issue.<br>• If a notice a problem, I would inform this employee, even if it does not affect me.<br>• If this employee performs good service, I would let them know it. | Bettencourt, 1997 |

Other Scales

Social desirability scale is helpful in better analyzing respondent attitudes and increasing credibility of the survey. It is assessed in this study to control social-desirability bias for pro-social behavior (feedback willingness). Ten items are adapted from Strahan and Gerbasi (1972) social desirability short scale and are keyed true/false to indicate social desirability bias from the respondent.

Additionally, participants are asked to indicate the number of times they travel in a year (Weber, 2005) outside their country of residence. Respondents travel frequency demonstrates their ability to be more accustomed to non-Arab cultures. Taking into account that respondents will not necessarily be Muslims, religious views, and the level of practice in their religion are asked. In fact, non-Muslims make up 20% of Bahraini's population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012a), 5% of United Arab Emirates (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012b), and a small percentage of the 8 million expatriates in Saudi Arabia (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012c). This religious aspect may help identify responses from non-Muslims and non-practicing Muslims in order to indicate whether religion has any significance with emotional responses,

service encounter satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Finally socio-demographics such as age and education were asked, most importantly gender for this research. All measures used in the survey can be found in Appendix E.

*Pretest*

A pretest was conducted to examine scenario manipulations. A total of 119 undergraduate students were recruited at the University of Central Florida. All participants were randomly assigned one of the four scenarios. The average age of the respondents was 20 years old and 72.3% of the respondents were female. Among the ethnic backgrounds, 69.2% were white/Caucasian, 11.1% were Hispanic, 5.1% were African-American, 4.3% were Asian, and 10.3% were considered 'other'. All constructs had high reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha), .789 for employee solicitation, .902 for comfort, .930 for service encounter satisfaction, and .829 for feedback willingness.

Manipulation Checks

A T-test was conducted to check the employee solicitation behavior manipulations presented in the scenarios. Employee solicitation behavior manipulations presented in the scenarios showed a significant difference (t = -8.63, p = .00) and the descriptive statistics show that mean of feedback willingness was higher for the solicitation condition (mean=5.75) compared to no solicitation condition (mean = 3.93). Additionally, in regards to the question pertaining to the first thing noticed about the employee, results show 32 respondents (26.8%) noticed the employees' gender and 34 respondents (28.5%) mentioned the words "he" or "she" is their description of the first thing they noticed. Overall, approximately 55% of the respondents

indicated that gender was a subtle, yet noticeable attribute presented in the scenario. Finally, regarding realism checks, respondents perceived the scenario as believable (mean = 5.51) and realistic (mean = 6.00). Overall, these results conclude the scenario manipulation was in fact effective.

Preliminary Data Analysis

MANCOVA was conducted in order to examine comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness by employee gender, customer gender, and employee solicitation. Multivariate tests showed no significant main effect of employee gender (Wilks' Lambda = .977, F = .860, p = .464) and no significant main effect of customer gender (Wilks' Lambda = .964, F = 1.367, p = .257). However, results indicated a significant main effect of employee solicitation (Wilks' Lambda = .781, F = 10.178, p = .00). Additionally there was no two-way interaction effect of employee gender and customer gender (Wilks' Lambda = .993, F = .253, p = .859), and no three-way interaction effect of employee gender, customer gender, and employee solicitation (Wilks' Lambda = .978, F = .834, p = .478).

Pretest Summary

Pretest results showed no significance of main and interaction effects of employee gender, customer gender, and employee solicitation on comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness. However, the descriptive statistics and plots suggest an imbalance of gender may have led to non-significant results. Since the pretest was conducted on a hospitality college's undergraduate students, the pretest sample consisted of a large female sample (female

respondents: 72.3%). Hence, due to the imbalance of the sample's gender, results are inconclusive in terms of gender interaction main effect.

A larger sample of non-students with varying travel experience may have resulted in more favorable results. However, the main purpose of this pretest was to assess scenario context and manipulation checks. Overall, the results displayed an effective scenario manipulation, especially in terms of employee solicitation and employee non-solicitation behaviors (t = -8.63, p = .00).

*Procedure and Sample*

An online survey was created and distributed to samples in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain using snowball sampling. Through the researcher's acquaintances, 87 initial participants residing in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain were contacted by the researcher. They were asked to participate in the survey and distribute the survey link to other people they know. Therefore, additional participants were recruited via participants through their own acquaintances. Finally, the data collection through snowball sampling resulted in the total of 440 participants. Smith (2006) suggests that there has been a lack of direct translation to comprehend emotions in another language. In order to ensure appropriate translation of measurement items and instructions, the survey instrument was translated and back-translated by two independent Arabic speakers.

Since this research is to examine the Arab traveler's gender based reactions to the service provider, there are a few inclusion and exclusion criteria of the sample. The survey begins with the first qualifying question asking the respondents whether or not they consider themselves

Arab. If a respondent does not consider them self as an Arab, the respondent reaches the end of the survey. If the respondents define themselves as Arab, the respondents proceed to the second qualifying question which asks if the respondents traveled outside their country of residence. If the respondents do not consider themselves to travel outside their country of residence, their responses may not be appropriate due to artificiality of the results. Therefore, those respondents are excluded from the survey participation.

Since, this research is deployed in a highly diverse geographic location, the question of national heritage/country of origin and country of residence will be taken into account in order to increase validity and increase generalizability of the study. In addition, Arabs who have lived in western countries may exhibit more liberal responses to the survey. Therefore, respondents are asked if they have lived in a non-Arab country for more than a year.

*Main Study*

In order to test the hypotheses, a 2 (employee gender: male vs. female) x 2 (customer gender: male vs. female) x 2 (employee solicitation: no solicitation vs. solicitation) between-subjects design was used. The same scenarios provided in the pretest of the study were used with additional questions that tap into Arab cultural background and characteristics (i.e., "Please indicate your religion. Based on the religion you indicated, use the scale to display your level of religious practice").

A total of 440 Arab individuals' participated in the online survey. Based on the screening questions, two participants did not consider themselves Arab or Middle-Eastern and 44 had never travelled outside their country of residence. Hence, these participants were taken to the end of the survey. Out of the 394 remaining surveys, 68 were removed because they were incomplete. Overall, the survey received 326 usable surveys from respondents of at least 18 years of age or older.

Respondents' average age was 30 years old, whereas 50.3% of the respondents were male and 49.7% of the respondents were female (Table 2). Additionally, respondents were primarily residents of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. However, country of origin or nationality varied, and 23 Arab countries were selected as their national country. High frequencies of country of origin were Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon. "Other" countries included Albania, Bosnia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Yemen. Table 2 provided detailed information of this study's sample demographics.

**Table 2: Sample Demographics (Main Study)**

|  | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| *Gender* | | |
| Male | 164 | 50.3 |
| Female | 162 | 49.7 |
| *Age* | | |
| 18-25 | 95 | 29.0 |
| 26-30 | 117 | 36.0 |
| 31-35 | 58 | 17.0 |
| 36-40 | 24 | 8.0 |
| 41-45 | 17 | 5.0 |
| 46-50 | 11 | 4.0 |

|                         | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 51-55                   | 4         | 1.0            |
| *Country of Residence*  |           |                |
| Saudi Arabia            | 143       | 44.0           |
| United Arab Emirates    | 112       | 34.0           |
| Bahrain                 | 67        | 21.0           |
| Other                   | 4         | 1.0            |
| *Country of Origin*     |           |                |
| Saudi Arabia            | 80        | 24.5           |
| United Arab Emirates    | 37        | 11.3           |
| Bahrain                 | 44        | 13.5           |
| Palestine               | 36        | 11.0           |
| Egypt                   | 24        | 7.5            |
| Lebanon                 | 26        | 8.0            |
| Other                   | 79        | 24.2           |
| *Education*             |           |                |
| High School             | 12        | 3.7            |
| Diploma/2-year degree   | 55        | 16.9           |
| Bachelors Degree        | 204       | 61.8           |
| Masters degree          | 51        | 15.5           |
| Doctoral/Professional Degree (JD, MD) | 4 | 1.2     |
| *Religion*              |           |                |
| Islam                   | 314       | 96.3           |
| Christianity            | 10        | 3.1            |
| Other                   | 2         | 0.6            |
| *Travel Frequencies*    |           |                |
| Once a year             | 71        | 21.8           |
| 2-3 times a year        | 140       | 42.9           |
| 3 times or more         | 113       | 34.7           |
| None                    | 2         | 0.6            |
| *Lived for more than a year in a non-Arab country* |  |   |
| Yes                     | 161       | 49.4           |
| No                      | 165       | 50.6           |
| *Income Level\**        |           |                |
| Less than $20,000       | 57        | 17.5           |
| $20,000 - $39,999       | 31        | 9.5            |
| $40,000 - $59,999       | 87        | 26.7           |
| $60,000 - $79,999       | 26        | 8.0            |
| $80,000 - $99,999       | 35        | 10.7           |
| $100,000 or more        | 90        | 27.6           |
| *Total*                 | 326       | 100            |

* Income level is converted from respondents' indicated currency to U.S. Dollars

Construct reliability was assessed (Table 3). All constructs had high reliabilities (Cronbach's Alpha), .975 for employee solicitation, .984 for comfort, .970 for service encounter satisfaction, and .986 for feedback willingness.

**Table 3: Construct Reliability (Main study)**

| Variable Type | Variable Name | Number of Items | α |
|---|---|---|---|
| Manipulation Check | Employee Solicitation | 3 | 0.975 |
| Dependent Construct | Comfort | 5 | 0.984 |
| | Service Encounter Satisfaction | 5 | 0.970 |
| | Feedback Willingness | 6 | 0.986 |

# CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## *Manipulation Checks*

T-test was conducted to check the employee solicitation behavior manipulations presented in the scenarios. As expected, solicitation behavior manipulations presented in the scenarios showed a significant difference (t = 34.65, p = .00) and the descriptive statistics show the mean of feedback willingness was higher for the solicitation condition (mean=6.71) compared to no solicitation condition (mean = 2.88). Next, for employee's gender, all respondents were asked the question "What was the first thing that you noticed about the employee in this scenario?" Results show 175 respondents, 53.5% noticed the employees' gender, and 100 respondents, 30.6% mentioned the words "he" or "she" is their description of the first thing they noticed. Overall, about 84.4% of the respondents indicated that gender was a subtle, yet noticeable attribute presented in the scenario. Finally, regarding realism checks, respondents perceived the scenario as believable (mean = 6.82) and realistic (mean = 6.72). Taken together, these results conclude the scenario manipulation was in fact effective.

## *Hypothesis Testing*

First, MANCOVA was conducted in order to examine comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness by employee gender, customer gender, and employee solicitation. Social desirability and level of religious practice were added as covariates. Multivariate tests showed social desirability as significant (Wilks' Lambda = .75, F = 34.58, p = .00), along with level of religious practice (Wilks' Lambda = .92, F = 10.07, p = .00). Results also showed a significant main effect of employee gender (Wilks' Lambda = .92, F = 9.60, p = .00), significant main effect of customer gender (Wilks' Lambda = .95, F = 5.23, p = .00), and a

significant main effect of employee solicitation (Wilks' Lambda = .94, F = 7.35, p = .00).

Additionally there was a significant two-way interaction effect of employee gender and customer

gender (Wilks' Lambda = .50, F = 104.81, p = .00). However, there was no significant three-way

interaction effect of employee gender, customer gender, and employee solicitation (Wilks'

Lambda = .99, F = 1.59, p = .19).

Since MANCOVA results suggest that all main and two-way interaction effects are

significant, univariate analyses results examined each outcome variable: comfort, service

encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness. Table 4 provides the summarization of the

univariate analysis results. Table 5 shows all means by condition for each dependent variable and

Table 6 summarizes the means of the two-way gender interaction effects on dependent variables.

Discussions on the univariate analyses results are followed.

**Table 4: Main Study Univariate Analysis Results**

| Dependent Variable | Source | df | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Comfort** | Employee Gender | 1 | 6.22 | .01 |
| | Employee Solicitation | 1 | 2.6 | .10 |
| | Customer Gender | 1 | 1.22 | .27 |
| | Employee Gender * Customer Gender | 1 | 247.57 | .00 |
| | Employee Gender * Employee Solicitation * Customer Gender | 1 | 0.64 | .43 |
| **Service Encounter Satisfaction** | Employee Gender | 1 | 8.84 | .00 |
| | Employee Solicitation | 1 | 10.09 | .00 |
| | Customer Gender | 1 | 1.12 | .29 |
| | Employee Gender * Customer Gender | 1 | 131.41 | .00 |
| | Employee Gender * Employee Solicitation * Customer Gender | 1 | 2.3 | .13 |
| **Feedback Willingness** | Employee Gender | 1 | 28.03 | .00 |
| | Employee Solicitation | 1 | 4.78 | .03 |

| Dependent Variable | Source | df | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Customer Gender | 1 | 11.95 | .00 |
| | Employee Gender * Customer Gender | 1 | 247.21 | .00 |
| | Employee Gender * Employee Solicitation * Customer Gender | 1 | .00 | .98 |

Note: Analysis conducted at α = 0.05

### Table 5: Means by Conditions (Main Study)

| | Employee Gender | Customer Gender | Comfort | Service Encounter Satisfaction | Feedback Willingness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Employee Solicitation** | Male | Male | 6.13 | 4.73 | 5.68 |
| | | Female | 3.42 | 3.28 | 2.82 |
| | Female | Male | 3.18 | 3.07 | 2.50 |
| | | Female | 5.64 | 4.28 | 4.62 |
| | Average | | *4.59* | *3.84* | *3.91* |
| **Employee Non-Solicitation** | Male | Male | 6.25 | 4.55 | 5.54 |
| | | Female | 3.70 | 2.75 | 2.45 |
| | Female | Male | 3.56 | 2.51 | 2.26 |
| | | Female | 5.74 | 4.08 | 4.16 |
| | Average | | *4.81* | *3.47* | *3.60* |

### Table 6: Means of Gender Interaction Effect

| Employee Gender | Customer Gender | Comfort | Service Encounter Satisfaction | Feedback Willingness |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Male** | **Male** | 6.19 | 4.64 | 5.61 |
| | **Female** | 3.56 | 3.01 | 2.64 |
| **Female** | **Male** | 3.37 | 2.79 | 2.38 |
| | **Female** | 5.69 | 4.18 | 4.39 |

<u>Comfort</u>

Results from MANCOVA on *comfort* indicated that employee gender (F = 6.22, p = .01)

had a significant main effect on comfort. However, the main effects of customer gender (F =

1.22, p = .27) and employee solicitation (F = 2.60, p = .19) were not significant, indicating they

had no effect on comfort. More importantly, interaction effect of employee gender and customer

gender (F = 247.57, p = .00) was significant and these results provide support for $H_1$. Lastly,

three-way interaction effect of employee solicitation, customer gender, and employee gender

were not significant (F = .64, p =.43) on comfort, thus $H_2$ is not supported. The two-way gender

interaction effect on comfort is further illustrated in Figure 2.



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Social-Desirability = 20.74, Religious practice = 79.90

**Figure 2: Interaction Effect Comfort**

As expected, comfort mean scores showed that male customers were more comfortable with male employees (mean = 6.19), compared to female employees (mean = 3.37). On the other hand, female customers were more comfortable with female employees (mean = 5.69), compared to male employees (mean = 3.56).

Additionally, as shown in Table 5, male customers were more comfortable interacting with a male employee soliciting behavior (mean = 6.13), rather than a female employee soliciting behavior (mean = 3.18). Also, female customers were more comfortable interacting with a female employee soliciting behavior (mean = 5.64), rather than a male employee soliciting behavior (mean = 3.42).

On the other hand, results showed comfort means of employee solicitation (mean = 4.59) compared to employee non-solicitation (mean = 4.81) were approximately the same, indicating employee solicitation had no positive or negative effect on comfort.

Service Encounter Satisfaction

Results from MANCOVA on *service encounter satisfaction* indicated that employee gender (F = 8.84, p = .00) and employee solicitation (F = 10.09, p = .00) had a significant effect on service encounter satisfaction. Additionally, customer gender (F = 1.12, p = .29) had no effect on service encounter satisfaction. However, there was a significant interaction effect of employee gender and customer gender (F = 131.41, p = .00), and no three-way interaction effect of employee solicitation, customer gender, and employee gender (F = 2.30, p = .13) on service

encounter satisfaction. The two-way gender interaction effect on service encounter satisfaction is further illustrated in Figure 3.



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Social-Desirability = 20.74, Religious practice = 79.90

**Figure 3: Interaction Effect Service Encounter Satisfaction**

Consistent with the results from comfort, service encounter satisfaction mean scores showed male customers were more satisfied with an encounter when the employee was male (mean = 4.64), rather than if the employee was female (mean = 2.79). Similarly, female customers were more satisfied with the service encounter if the employee was female (mean = 4.18), rather than if the employee was male (mean = 2.7).

Additionally, as shown in Table 5, male customers' service encounter satisfaction was higher while interacting with a male employee soliciting behavior (mean = 4.73), rather than a male employee soliciting behavior (mean = 3.07). Also, female customers service encounter satisfaction mean was higher when interacting with a female employee soliciting behavior (mean = 4.28), rather than a male employee soliciting behavior (mean = 3.28). Additionally, overall service encounter satisfaction mean of employee solicitation (mean = 3.84), compared to employee non-solicitation (mean = 3.47) were approximately the same.

Feedback Willingness

Results of MANCOVA on *feedback willingness* indicated that employee gender (F = 28.03, p = .00), customer gender (F = 11.95, p = .00), and employee solicitation (F = 4.78, p = .03) had a significant effect on feedback willingness. The results also showed a significant interaction effect of employee gender and customer gender (F = 247.21, p = .00), but no three-way interaction effect of employee solicitation, customer gender, and employee gender (F = .00, p = .98) on feedback willingness. The two-way gender interaction effect on feedback willingness is further illustrated in Figure 4.

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Social-Desirability = 20.74, Religious practice = 79.90

**Figure 4: Interaction Effect Feedback Willingness**

Consistent with the results of comfort and service encounter satisfaction, feedback willingness mean scores showed male customers were more willing to provide feedback to male employees (mean = 5.61) over female employees (mean = 2.38), and female customers were more willing to provide feedback to female employees (mean = 4.39) than male employees (mean = 2.64). Male customers were also more willing to provide feedback to male employees soliciting (mean = 5.68), rather than female employees soliciting (mean = 2.50). Similarly, female customers were more willing to provide feedback to female employees soliciting (mean = 4.62), rather than male employees soliciting (mean = 2.82). Lastly, it is important to note that feedback willingness mean scores of employee solicitation (mean = 3.91) compared to employee

non-solicitation (mean = 3.60) were approximately the same, indicating solicitation had no positive or negative effect on feedback willingness.

The Effects of Comfort on Service Encounter Satisfaction and Feedback Willingness

In order to test the effects of comfort on service encounter satisfaction ($H_3$), hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. Social desirability and level of religious practice were covariates and were significant within the regression analysis model (F = 63.56, p = .00) and 50% of the proportion of variability in service encounter satisfaction was explained by social desirability and level of religious practice ($R^2$ = .50). The first hierarchical regression analysis on service encounter satisfaction showed that the regression model is significant (F = 107.09, p = .00) and 67% of the proportion of variability in service encounter satisfaction was explained by employee solicitation, customer gender, employee gender, social desirability, level of religious practice, and comfort ($R^2$ = .67). As shown in Table 6, comfort is positively related to service encounter satisfaction (t=12.78, p=.00) after controlling for employee gender, customer gender, employee solicitation, social desirability, and level of religious practice. Therefore, $H_3$ is supported (Table 7).

**Table 7: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Service Encounter Satisfaction**

| Independent Variables | β | T | P |
|---|---|---|---|
| Block 1: Controls ($R^2$ = .03) | | | |
| Employee Gender | -.09 | -1.63 | .11 |
| Customer Gender | -.05 | -.78 | .43 |
| Employee Solicitation | .14 | 2.44 | .02 |
| Block 2: Covariates ($R^2$ = .50) | | | |
| Employee Gender | -.09 | -2.38 | .02 |
| Customer Gender | -.02 | -.461 | .66 |
| Employee Solicitation | .13 | 3.25 | .00 |
| Social Desirability | .58 | 14.6 | .00 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Level of Religious Practice | -.24 | -5.74 | .00 |
| Block 3: Full Model ($R^2$ = .67) | | | |
| Employee Gender | -.05 | -1.58 | .12 |
| Customer Gender | -.01 | -.30 | .78 |
| Employee Solicitation | .16 | 4.89 | .00 |
| Social Desirability | .35 | 9.03 | .00 |
| Level of Religious Practice | -.16 | -4.58 | .00 |
| Comfort | .50 | 12.78 | .00 |

Note: Dummy coded variables: Employee Gender: 0= male, 1=female; Customer Gender: 0=male, 1=female; Employee Solicitation: 0= no solicitation, 1= solicitation

The second hierarchical regression analysis on feedback willingness ($H_4$) showed social desirability and level of religious practice were significant in the model (F = 44.94, p = .00) and 41% of the proportion of variability in feedback willingness is explained by social desirability and level of religious practice ($R^2$=.41). Additionally, the regression model was significant (F=164.97, p = .00) and 87 % of the proportion of variability in feedback willingness is explained by employee solicitation, customer gender, employee gender, social desirability, level of religious practice, and comfort ($R^2$= .87). More specifically, comfort is positively and significantly related to feedback willingness (t=21.21, p=.00) after controlling for employee gender, customer gender, employee solicitation, social desirability, and level of religious practice. Thus, providing support for $H_4$. (Table 8).

**Table 8: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for Feedback Willingness**

| Independent Variables | β | T | P |
|---|---|---|---|
| Block 1: Controls ($R^2$ = .04) | | | |
| Employee Gender | -.17 | -2.99 | .00 |
| Customer Gender | -.12 | -2.09 | .04 |
| Employee Solicitation | .08 | 1.54 | .12 |
| Block 2: Covariates ($R^2$ = .64) | | | |
| Employee Gender | -.18 | -3.95 | .00 |
| Customer Gender | -.10 | -2.13 | .03 |
| Employee Solicitation | .08 | 1.86 | .06 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social Desirability | .51 | 11.32 | .00 |
| Level of Religious Practice | -.23 | -5.19 | .00 |
| Block 3: Full Model ($R^2 = .87$) | | | |
| Employee Gender | -.11 | -3.87 | .00 |
| Customer Gender | -.08 | -2.86 | .01 |
| Employee Solicitation | .12 | 4.38 | .00 |
| Social Desirability | .17 | 5.11 | .00 |
| Level of Religious Practice | -.12 | -4.02 | .00 |
| Comfort | .70 | 21.21 | .00 |

Note: Dummy coded variables: Employee Gender: 0= male, 1=female; Customer Gender: 0=male, 1=female; Employee Solicitation: 0= no solicitation, 1= solicitation

Hierarchical regression analyses results show a positive relationship between comfort and the outcome variables (service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness) after controlling for manipulating variables and covariates, thus providing evidence for $H_3$ and $H_4$. According to the conceptual framework, customers' comfort level is influenced by the interaction effects of genders and employee solicitation not solely by main effects of individual independent variables. Further examination is conducted using MANCOVA.

Mediation Analysis

In order to test the effect comfort generated from interaction effects of independent variables on service encounter satisfaction ($H_3$) and feedback willingness ($H_4$), mediation analysis was conducted. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), mediation testing involves three steps. The first regression model should indicate that the independent variable is a significant predictor of the mediator. The second regression model should show that the independent variable is a significant predictor of the dependent variable. The third regression model should contain both the independent and mediator variables entered simultaneously with the dependent variable. In the third regression analysis, two conditions must be met, if a mediator effect is

present: (i) the mediator is a significant predictor of the dependent variable after controlling for the effect of an independent variable on the outcome and (ii) the direct relationship of the independent variable to the dependent variable becomes significantly smaller in size than it was in the first regression model (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Previously in MANCOVA, there are overall significant main effects of the three independent variables on comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness. Therefore, the first two steps are addressed. In order to test the third step, comfort is added to the model. As a result, MANCOVA model includes three independent variables and their interaction effects as well as comfort. In addition, social desirability and level of religious practice are added as covariates to be controlled.

Results of MANCOVA without comfort as a covariate, showed customer gender and employee gender had a significant interaction effect on service encounter satisfaction (F = 131.41, p = .00), as well as feedback willingness (F = 247.21, p = .00). Whereas, MANCOVA with comfort as a covariate, showed customer gender and employee gender had a significant interaction effect on service encounter satisfaction (F = 21.64, p = .00), as well as feedback willingness (F = 36.62, p = .00). The substantial decrease in F-values suggests that comfort was a partial mediator within the analysis. Table 9 summarizes the MANCOVA results.

**Table 9: MANCOVA (with and without Comfort) Summary Table**

| Source | Dependent Variable | df | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee gender*Customer gender | Service Encounter Satisfaction | 1 | 131.41 | .00 |
| | Feedback Willingness | 1 | 247.21 | .00 |
| Comfort | Service Encounter Satisfaction | 1 | 46.77 | .00 |
| | Feedback Willingness | 1 | 159.99 | .00 |

| Employee gender*Customer gender | Service Encounter Satisfaction | 1 | 21.64 | .00 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Feedback Willingness | 1 | 36.62 | .00 |

Note: Analysis conducted at $\alpha = 0.05$

In summary, the results from the main study show that employee gender, customer gender, and employee solicitation, all had a significant impact on comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness. Results also demonstrated that customers were more comfortable, more satisfied with the service encounter, and more willing to provide feedback when the employee in the scenario were the same gender as the customer. Additionally, employee solicitation was significant on service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness, but not on comfort.

Demographic Testing

A multivariate test was conducted using social desirability scores, age, country of origin, country of residence, travelling frequency, education, experience living in a non-Arab country, religion, level of religious practice, and income as covariates to better examine external factors that may have affected the results of the study.

Age was found marginally significant on results (Wilk's Lambda = .98, F = 2.23, p = .08), specifically significant for service encounter satisfaction (F = 5.23, p = .02). Religion was found as not significant (Wilk's Lambda = .98, F = 1.96, p = .12), however level of religious practice was found significant (Wilks' Lambda, = .95, F = 5.91, p = .00). Specifically, level of religious practice was significant on comfort (F = 5.71, p = .02), service encounter satisfaction (F = 15.52, p = 00), and feedback willingness (F = 13.64, p = 00).

On the other hand, education level was not significant (Wilk's Lambda = .99, F = 1.40, p = .24), but had marginal significance on service encounter satisfaction (F = 4.03, p = .05). Additionally, income level was significant (Wilk's Lambda = .97, F = 3.04, p = .03), specifically, income level was significant for comfort level (F = 7.47, p = .00). Social desirability scores were found significant (Wilk's Lambda = .78, F = 28.54, p = .00) on comfort level (F = 28.24, P = 00), service encounter satisfaction (F = 81.37, P = .00), and feedback willingness (F = 40.29, p = .00). Since social desirability was found significant, social desirability scores were an average low of 2.7 (out of 10 point index scale).

On the other hand, non-significant results included if a respondent lived in a non-Arab country for more than a year (Wilk's Lambda = .99, F = 1.22, p = .30). Additionally, country of origin (Wilk's Lambda = .99, F = .19, p = .90) was not significant, along with country of residence (Wilk's Lambda = .99, F = .314, p = .82), and respondents travel frequency (Wilk's Lambda = .99, F = .89, p = .45).

*Discussion*

In summary, the results from the main study show that employee gender, customer gender and employee solicitation all had a significant impact on comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness. Results also demonstrated that customers were more comfortable, more satisfied with the service encounter, and more willing to provide feedback when the employee in the scenario were the same gender as the customer. Additionally, employee solicitation was significant on service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness, but not on comfort. Multiple results provided evidence that comfort had a significant role as a mediator and effected service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness. Therefore, when

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customers were comfortable with the interaction, they were more satisfied with the service encounter and more willing to provide feedback.

A consistently significant element in this study was the gender interaction effect. Additionally, employee's gender always had a significant interaction effect on comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness. These findings support hypothesis 1 which hypothesized that same gender employee and customer exhibited higher comfort levels rather than a mixed gender combination.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that employee solicitation exacerbated the gender matching effect. However, employee solicitation was not significant on comfort, therefore hypothesis 2 is rejected. Yet, employee solicitation was significant on service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness. Additionally, mean scores of comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness was approximately the same whether the employee engaged in soliciting behavior or not.

Regression analysis results showed that comfort did in fact influence service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness. Additionally, proportion of variability explained by the regression model was much higher for feedback willingness compared to service encounter satisfaction. Hence, comfort had a stronger influence on feedback willingness, rather than on service encounter satisfaction. Overall, comfort was found as significantly impacting service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness, therefore, Hypothesis 3 and 4 are supported. MANCOVA results provide further evidence for comfort being a partial mediator between the gender interaction effect on service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness.

Moreover, social desirability was found to have effects on results, although respondents had a social desirability average that was low as 2.7 (out of 10 point index scale). Therefore, it was desirable to control its effect in the analysis. From the literature review it seems that level of religious practice had a strong inference with gender perspectives. Statistical results showed that level of religion practice, mean score of 79.90 (out of 100 point scale), impacted all the dependent variables of the study. Results also show that age and education had a significant impact on service encounter satisfaction, but not on feedback willingness or comfort.

**CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

*Theoretical Implications*

Sameer (2012) suggests that even though numerous studies exist on tourist emotions, very limited research exists on the determinants of these emotions. Therefore, in the case of this research, the determinant of emotions perceived by Arab customers is determined by their gender. This research corresponds to previous research that emotions affect service encounter satisfaction (Dalakas, 2005; Folkman et al., 1986; Sheth & Mittal, 2004), and behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991).

In accordance with previous research, results indicated that emotions did play a mediating role in determining the customer's behavioral intentions (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Dalakas, 2005; Folkman et al., 1986; White, 2005). However, results from this study demonstrate customers' comfort had a stronger impact on their willingness to provide feedback, rather than their satisfaction with the service encounter. However, contrary to previous research, employees soliciting feedback from the Arab customers did not determine their willingness to provide feedback (Groth, 2005; Opoku, 2006; Parasuraman & Berry, 1991; Plymire, 1990, 1991).

This study has provided valuable results towards existing literature. Results showed that employee gender did influence customer comfort, service encounter satisfaction, and feedback willingness. These findings also contribute to existing literature on the consumer behavior of Arab individuals by highlighting the importance of cultural dimensions in a service encounter.

Additionally, instead of researchers focusing on determining tourist characteristics, the influence of national culture on the tourist should also be further investigated (Kang & Mascardo, 2006). The results from this study can be used to study the influence of national culture on tourists.

*Managerial Implications*

Managerial implication of this study can be used for consumer analysts to better understand and cater to the needs of Arab culturally oriented customers. Furthermore, this research can be included in creating and developing country-level and cultural based service strategies (Donthu & Yoo, 1998). Since emotional level (comfort) was used as a mediating variable and results indicated varying emotions based upon gender, this research can be used in comfort-creating mechanisms (Spake et al., 2003) for Arab customers. Online reservation and booking systems allow hotels to know the geographic location of where there customers are expected to arrive from. Therefore, when hotels predict a high level of Arab tourists to check-in at their locations, they have to be more informed on Arab boundaries before approaching them or hoping to provide them with a good service.

An important aspect of these results show that employees trained to engage customers in order to encourage feedback (Barker & Hartel, 2004; Groth, 2005; Opoku, 2006; Plymire, 1990, 1991) may not be an effective strategy altogether. The results of this study showed that employee soliciting or not soliciting feedback were approximately the same. These results indicate that if an employee attempts to solicit feedback, it did not necessarily increase the customer's willingness to provide feedback. Researchers can follow through with a comparable conceptual model and methodology in order to determine which other cultures face similar cultural norms.

Therefore, hospitality managers will have to reconsider their approach towards various tourist segments.

Furthermore, Sizoo (2008) recommended that customer contact employees should be trained on the skill of being interculturally sensitive, since this provides customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Mattila and Enz (2002) research implies that employees should be trained on understanding customers nonverbal cues (emotions) and act accordingly. Similarly, employees catering to culturally diverse customers should be trained on whether their intentions in soliciting feedback are effective or not. Therefore, organizations should have other sources of facilitating customer feedback; such as paper-based or online surveys, with multiple language options.

*Limitations and Future Research*

This study faces several limitations that can be addressed in future research. There is a sampling limitation since the method deployed by this research is snowball sampling which may not be representative of the whole Arab population. Similarly, respondents in this study are expected to be Muslims, and most likely residents of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. Future research will need to be conducted in more Arab countries, specifically reaching out to non-Muslim Arabs as well, in order to increase reliability of the findings. Additionally, this sample's majority respondents were Muslims and can create a bias in the results. Furthermore, research indicates that Saudi Arabians tend to be more conformist and have high structure needs compared to other Gulf Region residents (Welsh & Raven, 2006). Since majority of the respondents were residents or nationals of Saudi Arabia, this could have skewed the results of the study. Future study is encouraged to include a more broad range of Arab countries to increase generalizability of the findings. Additionally, future research should use a probability

sampling technique to better demonstrate the study's sample does in fact represent the Arab population.

Future research may examine when gender sensitivity effects are reduced. For example, relationship with the company or self-service technology may help reduce Arab customers' gender sensitivity or possibly eliminate it. Furthermore, studies can also research whether gender attributes in different forms of technological communication (i.e. telephone conversation, email, website) affects Arab customers' emotions, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions, compared to face-to-face interaction.

Since the scenario presented in the study relates to a hotel scenario, future research can address these gaps by extending the research in hospitality contexts. Even though the scenario was specific to a hotel context, the study's conceptual model is generalizable to other hospitality-related service encounters. Furthermore, future conceptual models can also better examine the important link between service encounter satisfaction and feedback willingness, which was not addressed in this study.

This experimental design used written scenarios that present the limitation of low external validity to the real world. In order to increase the external validity of the results, future researchers may utilize audio, video, or graphic aid to help participants role-play in the research. Also, the experimental design may be vulnerable to the Hawthorne effect due to its sensitive context (i.e. gender). However, by using the social desirability scales this effect is better analyzed. Future research can use several different kinds of social desirability scales that may provide varying responses.

This study entails the examination of gender, emotions, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. However, comfort may vary based on the ethnicity of the service provider. For example, race is an attribute that can be perceived positively or negatively by Arab individuals. Etgar's (2011) study indicated not only gender contributing to customer avoid-approach behavior, but ethnicity of service provider as well. Further research will need to be conducted to understand the role of ethnicity on Arab customer avoid-approach behavior.

However, contrary to previous research, employee soliciting feedback from the Arab customer did not determine their willingness to provide feedback (Groth, 2005; Opoku, 2006; Parasuraman & Berry, 1991; Plymire, 1990; Plymire, 1991). This important finding demonstrates further research needs to be conducted in order to better comprehend how different cultures perceive employee solicitation behavior. Additionally, future research can better examine employee solicitation behavior and find different approaches based on customer culture.

Researchers can study the role of emotions on service encounter satisfaction, as well as feedback willingness, and how this varies based on customer culture. More importantly, this research contributes to cross-cultural studies in hospitality research by encouraging further investigation in regards to the role of gender in service encounters.

# APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETER (PRETEST)

## Approval of Exempt Human Research

**From:**      **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
                **FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

**To:**          **Marryam S. Khan** and Co-PI: **Hee Jung Ro**

**Date:**      **June 26, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 6/26/2013, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of Review: | Exempt Determination |
| Project Title: | Gender Dynamics in Service Encounters |
| Investigator: | Marryam S. Khan |
| IRB Number: | SBE-13-09464 |
| Funding Agency: | |
| Grant Title: | |
| Research ID: | N/A |

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 06/26/2013 05:09:10 PM EDT

IRB Coordinator

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**APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETER (MAIN STUDY)**

**University of
Central
Florida**

## Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
**FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Marryam S. Khan** and Co-PI: **Hee Jung Ro**

Date: **September 06, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 9/6/2013, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

|  |  |
|---|---|
| Type of Review: | Exempt Determination |
| Project Title: | An intercultural service encounter: perspectives from the Arab world. |
| Investigator: | Marryam S. Khan |
| IRB Number: | SBE-13-09583 |
| Funding Agency: |  |
| Grant Title: |  |
| Research ID: | N/A |

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 09/06/2013 11:32:21 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator

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**APPENDIX C: GENDER SCENARIOS**

### Female Employee

You travelled in the United States of America for vacation and stayed at a hotel. You have stayed at this hotel for approximately one week and plan to check out today. You approach the front desk to proceed with the check out process. There is a female employee working at the front desk. Once you approach her, she greets you. She then proceeds with the checkout process. She asks you if you enjoyed your stay at the hotel. Once she completes the checkout you leave the hotel.

### Male Employee

You travelled in the United States of America for vacation and stayed at a hotel. You have stayed at this hotel for approximately one week and plan to check out today. You approach the front desk to proceed with the check out process. There is a male employee working at the front desk. Once you approach him, he greets you. He then proceeds with the checkout process. He asks you if you enjoyed your stay at the hotel. Once he completes the checkout you leave the hotel.

**APPENDIX D: SOLICITATION SCENARIOS**

*Female Employee Soliciting*

You travelled in the United States of America for vacation and stayed at a hotel. You have stayed at this hotel for approximately one week and plan to check out today. You approach the front desk to proceed with the check out process. There is a female employee working at the front desk. Once you approach her, she greets you. She then proceeds with the checkout process. While doing so, she begins talking to you. She then asks you if you enjoyed your stay at the hotel. She then asks you more questions regarding your stay: "were the amenities in your room satisfactory?", "was the room service efficient?"She continues asking you detailed questions about your stay at the hotel. Finally, she then proceeds to ask you: "what can we do to improve our service to you?" Once she completes the checkout, you leave the hotel.

*Male Employee Soliciting*

You travelled in the United States of America for vacation and stayed at a hotel. You have stayed at this hotel for approximately one week and plan to check out today. You approach the front desk to proceed with the check out process. There is a male employee working at the front desk. Once you approach him, he greets you. He then proceeds with the checkout process. While doing so, he begins talking to you. He then asks you if you enjoyed your stay at the hotel. He then asks you more questions regarding your stay: "were the amenities in your room satisfactory?", "was the room service efficient?" He continues asking you detailed questions about your stay at the hotel. Finally, he then proceeds to ask you: "what can we do to improve our service to you?" Once he completes the checkout, you leave the hotel.

# APPENDIX E : MEASURES

**Manipulation Check (Soliciting Feedback)** (from Barnard, 2002)
Based on your experience in the scenario, please indicate on a scale of 1-7 your general opinion.
(1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree. α =.915)
– The employee actively seeks feedback about the quality of service.
– The employee enthusiastically looks for signs from you regarding the services at the hotel.
– The employee aggressively seeks information about your experience at the hotel.

**Manipulation Check (Gender)**
- What was the first thing that you noticed about the employee in this scenario?

**Comfort** (from Spake et. al., 2003)
Please indicate on a scale of 1-7 your feelings, based on your experience in the scenario. (α =.70, 1=uncomfortable disagree, 7=comfortable).
– uncomfortable-comfortable
– unpleasant-pleasant
– irritated-relaxed
– distressed-calm
– uneasy-at ease

**Feedback Willingness** (from Bettencourt, 1997)
Based on your experience in the scenario, please indicate on a scale of 1-7 your general opinion.
(1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).
– I would let this employee know of ways that the hotel can better serve my needs.
– I would make constructive suggestions to this employee on how the hotel can improve its services.
– If I have a useful idea on how to improve a service, I would give it to this employee.
– When I experience a problem, I would let this employee know, so they may improve the service issue.
– If a notice a problem, I would inform this employee, even if it does not affect me.
– If this employee performs good service, I would let them know it.

**Customer Satisfaction** (from Barnard, 2002)
– I am satisfied with this employee as a provider of services.
– Overall, I am satisfied by the service I receive from this employee.
– All things considered, I find that this employee delivers satisfactory service.

**Satisfaction with Encounter** (from Mattila et al., 2003)
– If you were the customer in this interaction, to what extend would you feel satisfied?
– This encounter was:
  o Much worse than I expect
  o Pretty much what I expect
  o Much better than I expect

**Social-Desirability** (from Strahan–Gerbasi, 1972)

The following statements assess your general opinion. Please answer true or false alongside each statement. (True/False).

- You are always willing to admit it when you make a mistake.
- You always try to practice what you preach.
- You never resent being asked to return a favor.
- You have never been annoyed when people expressed ideas very different from your own.*
- You have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.
- You like to gossip at times.
- There have been occasions when you took advantage of someone.
- You sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.
- At times you have really insisted on having things your own way.
- There have been occasions when you felt like smashing things.

*Note: The original word 'irked', is replaced by 'annoyed' as conducted similarly by other studies (Thompson & Phua, 2005).*

**Social Demographic Variables**

- Do you classify yourself as an 'Arab' person or a 'Middle-eastern' person?
- Have you ever travelled out of your country of residence to a non-Arab country?
- What is your gender? (Male/Female)
- Please select a country that reflects your national heritage/country of origin
- Please indicate the country you currently reside in
- What year were you born?
- What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- Have you lived (for more than a year) in a non-Arab country for education or business purposes? (yes/no)
- Have many times a year do you travel outside your country of residence? (Once a year/2-3 times a year/3 times or more/never).
- Please indicate your religion.
- Based on the religion you indicated, use the scale to display your level of religious practice (0-100)
- Please state the currency of your monthly income. If you are currently unemployed, please state the currency of your family's monthly income.
- Please select the range that best fits your monthly income. If you are currently unemployed, please state your family's monthly income.

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