The Influence of Cultural Differences on Gender Issues in Tourism and Hospitality Employment: A Grounded Theory Analysis

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Abstract

Gender issues involving job employment and promotion in the tourism and hospitality industry are influenced by cultural differences between individualism and collectivism. As many countries rely on revenue from tourism and hospitality, raising awareness of culture-based gender issues contributes to the sustainable development of this sector. Consequently, given the uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding these concepts, it is important to explore the functional mechanisms of cultural differences in gender issues. To this end, this study employed the grounded theory method to conduct semi-structured interviews of human resource managers of tourism organizations in various countries. It was concluded that four key factors—gender-based employment opportunities, gender-based job promotions, gender in leadership roles, and gender bias—are impacted by cultural differences in gender issues. These findings are discussed with the support of previous research, following which a theoretical framework is constructed to illustrate the significance of individualistic and collectivistic cultures' different perspectives on gender issues. This paper then explains the implications of the findings for scholarly and managerial fields, with a particular focus on the implications for the Asian business context. Finally, the limitations of the study are acknowledged, and recommendations for future research are provided.

Keywords: Collectivism, Cultural differences, Grounded theory, Individualism, Tourism and Hospitality employment

Introduction

Throughout the history of sex and gender studies, which began in the mid-twentieth century, numerous social scientists have investigated this significant social issue. Subsequently, this field has experienced tremendous growth. Yavorsky et al. (2019) stated that the American Sociological Association (ASA) is one of the largest organizations focusing on sex and gender. During the peak of functionalist sociology, sociologists were primarily interested in sex and gender, often portraying women as the "hearts" of families and men as the "heads" of families (Conroy & Weiler, 2016). Serious attempts to study sex and gender gained momentum with the entrance of women into science and the influence of the second wave of feminism on intellectual inquiries (Tenhunen, 2014). Psychologists then began measuring sex role attitudes using scales embedded in personality and employment tests (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2019). A decade of debate ensued on the best use and measurement of this new conceptualization (Atwood & Axt, 2021).

For many decades, gender differences have been studied as an interdisciplinary topic in various fields, including social sciences, business, management, psychology, technology, and entrepreneurship. Scholars have explored the nature of existing gender differences, their origins, and their impact on individuals' lives (Dautzenberg, 2012), with some suggesting that gender-specific inequalities may have biological foundations. However, it is widely accepted that the behavioral differences observed in biological and sex roles are reinforced by societal values, cultural beliefs, and social structures. These differences are commonly referred to as 'gender' (Morgan & Pritchard, 2019). Notably, occupational segregation by gender is a key characteristic of all societies, with varying levels of segregation across countries. Low-income countries tend to have lower levels of segregation, while wealthy industrialized countries exhibit at least moderately elevated levels of segregation (Deng & Grow, 2018). This reflects the social structure of societies where occupations are often prescribed based on gender. Correspondingly, previous studies on gender inequality consistently highlight the unequal employment and career opportunities faced by females, particularly in terms of promotions (Vithayaporn, 2020). This gender disparity extends to issues of unequal pay, where even when a female employee is promoted to a management position, she may not receive equal compensation compared to her male counterparts (Skalpe, 2017).

Indeed, societal perceptions and expectations play a significant role in provoking gender differentiations, serving as cultural guidelines that shape the development and maintenance of social status for the two genders. It is important to note that culture differs from personality, as culture is a collective phenomenon at the societal level, whereas personality is an individual-level concept (Coe et al., 2019). Culture encompasses values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and other factors that contribute to the distinctive patterns observed among different countries, regions, ethnicities, or social groups (Nesterchuk et al., 2020). It influences societal norms and practices, including those within the broader community and the workplace. When examining the behaviors and characteristics of females and males, as well as the dynamics between them, it becomes evident that culture plays a significant role in shaping how genders are perceived and how their relationships are understood (Barreto et al., 2021).

Therefore, focusing attention on studying the influence of cultural differences on gender issues can provide valuable insights into understanding how gender issues are

shaped by cultural variations. Cultural differences and gender issues play significant roles in employment opportunities and the minimization of gender inequality resulting from cultural disparities (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020). Previous studies (Barreto et al., 2021; Hutching et al., 2020; Dautzenberg, 2012) have explored the topic of gender issues and cultural differences, aiming to promote gender equality across various fields. However, a research gap still exists, especially concerning employment opportunities and inequality. These areas of employment persist as pressing gender problems (Jayachandran, 2021), particularly due to the specific cultural differences found in individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

In addition, it is noteworthy that the tourism and hospitality sector has received particular attention within the realm of gender inequality studies (Jayachandran, 2021). Though it is known for providing hospitality as a core product, this industry often presents barriers and challenges that hinder the professional growth of female employees within organizations. For instance, in the airline industry, opportunities for promotion are insufficient for meeting the expectations of female employees, particularly in top management positions, which are mostly occupied by males (Vithayaporn, 2020). Females, in turn, typically dominate lower-level positions (Mooney, 2020). In truth, even though both male and female employees in the tourism and hospitality sectors possess similar skills, qualifications, and proven records of excellence, females still face obstacles in achieving equal success (Zhang & Zhang, 2020). As a result, substantial gaps and numerous challenges persist for females in achieving equal employment within this industry (Barrios & Villarroyam, 2022).

Therefore, the objective of this study was to address the gap in the literature by investigating how cultural differences influence gender issues in terms of employment opportunities, specifically in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry. Accordingly, the research question was formulated as follows: "What are the influences of cultural differences on gender issues regarding equal employment in the tourism and hospitality industry?" By answering this question, this study aimed to shed light on the specific factors and dynamics that contribute to gender disparities and hinder the attainment of equal employment opportunities within this industry.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background on Gender Issues

Gender is commonly understood as the differentiation between males and females, encompassing physical and biological distinctions. However, as noted by Perry et al. (2019), it extends beyond mere biological characteristics and includes societal expectations regarding gender roles. Gender roles encompass a range of descriptive and normative expectations, with stereotypes suggesting that men are more inclined towards leadership, analytical thinking, and critical skills, while women are often perceived as kinder, warmer, and more supportive (Perry et al., 2019). These stereotypes can lead to gender bias, favoring men over women for leadership positions.

Gender disparities encompass a range of issues, as identified by Smeds and Aulivola (2022). These include mortality inequalities, where women tend to have higher mortality rates, particularly in North Africa and Asia. Fertility inequalities are also

evident, with sex-selective abortions occurring in East Asian societies, reflecting a preference for boys over girls. Inequalities in access to basic facilities are observed, where women receive less attention and healthcare, even in cases without explicit anti-female bias. Moreover, specific inequalities in opportunities exist, with girls in many Asian, African, and Latin American countries receiving less schooling than boys. Women also face barriers to employment and career advancement, leading to occupational inequalities. Ownership inequalities are apparent, with major assets such as houses and land being asymmetrically distributed. Finally, family inequalities persist, as women are often expected to prioritize family responsibilities while men are assumed to work outside the home.

Numerous studies have analyzed gender bias in the tourism and hospitality sector (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020; Mooney, 2020; Jadnanansing et al., 2023; Silva & Couto, 2023), with a specific focus on empowerment and community participation. These studies have revealed a traditional male dominance in the industry, particularly in terms of job promotion. Boley et al. (2021) found variations in perceptions of psychological, social, and political empowerment based on gender and destinations, showing that women are more empowered in certain cases. On the other hand, scholars have strongly criticized employment conditions within global hotel chains as well as smaller local companies (Mooney, 2020; Boley et al., 2021; Abou-Shouk et al., 2021), and these conditions are even more severe from a gender perspective (Connell, 2012). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2020) has further highlighted that while the tourism industry offers greater employment opportunities for women compared to other sectors, their prospects for advancement and salary scales remain limited. Moreover, women are significantly underrepresented in managerial and leadership roles within the industry (Hutchings et al., 2020). Overall, while an increase in women's economic contribution is seen as fostering greater equity, contrary evidence exists (Nakata & Momsen, 2017).

Cultural Differences and Gender Issues

Culture encompasses the norms, beliefs, and customs that individuals acquire from society, shaping their behavioral patterns (Barreto, 2021). Although cross-cultural psychology has developed theories on subjective cultural issues (Bleidorn et al., 2016), empirical research in this area is limited, and studies have often been preliminary and speculative in nature (Forbes, 2010). Moreover, the debate on whether civilization is converging or diverging remains ongoing (Gibbons, 2012). Nonetheless, theories in cross-cultural psychology (Gabrenya & Glazer, 2022) propose that national cultural values and characteristics influence human thoughts and behaviors, contributing to individual differences. In a six-culture study, Li et al. (2021) aimed to uncover causal connections between cultural phenomena and individual behavior within those cultures (Bormann et al., 2021). They suggested that each culture, with its unique environment and historical background, can be understood as a system that influences child-training practices tailored to the specific needs of that culture.

Culture also significantly influences consumer decision-making, with buying patterns and motives varying among nations. In tourism literature, few researchers have explored cross-cultural tourism research (Zhu & Chang, 2019). Consequently, Obioma et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative review and assessment of cross-cultural studies, advocating for more tourism researchers to adopt a cross-cultural perspective.

Expanding research efforts in this domain can deepen our understanding of the interplay between culture and tourism and provide valuable insights for tourism practitioners and policymakers.

Individualist and Collectivist Cultures

According to Hofstede (1994) as cited in Maaravi et al. (2021), collectivism refers to a social framework in which individuals prioritize the well-being of their specific in-group, such as their relatives, and display enduring loyalty to the group. The GLOBE project similarly defines collectivism as the degree to which individuals' express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families (Gabrenya & Glazer, 2022). Collectivism is prevalent in many Asian countries such as China, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Collectivist cultures emphasize interdependence among organizational members, with a focus on emotions, harmonious interpersonal relationships, and empathy (Germani et al., 2020), as well as conformity, group belongingness, and dependence. Individuals in collectivist cultures are members of collectives and in-groups, which provide them with support in exchange for their loyalty to the group.

Consequently, leaders in collectivistic societies prioritize addressing the work-related challenges faced by their subordinates and assisting them in finding resolutions (Blau et al., 2020). They are also expected to take responsibility for the career development and well-being of those under their supervision. As such, employees in supervisory positions in collectivist cultures may exhibit mentoring behaviors that surpass those of supervisors in individualistic cultures. In turn, staff in collectivistic cultures are more likely to value the care and support provided by their managers due to their inclination to seek guidance and advice from supervisors. Based on these observations, it can be concluded that collectivist cultures exhibit characteristics such as collective goals, a focus on relationships, and supervisors' assistance and concern, which are consistent with the mentoring behaviors of managers. Pirlog (2020) highlights, for instance, that Japanese society is known for its group-oriented structure, with employees working as part of a team rather than as individuals. Decisions are often made based on the consensus of the group to ensure acceptability among the majority. The importance of group relations is further evident in the bonding among colleagues and teammates through the exchange of various gifts known as "omiyage."

On the other hand, individualist cultures often view the self as separate from others. Individualism is an intrinsic component of Western culture, emphasizing a self-concept that is individual rather than interdependent with others. Prominent examples of individualist cultures include Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (USA). In individualist cultures, personal goals are considered more important than group aims, whereby individual characteristics like autonomy and initiative are respected and considered valuable (Chen et al., 2021). People are expected to prioritize themselves and their immediate families, exhibiting a self-centered approach. In contrast to collectivist cultures, workers in individualistic cultures may prefer a less personal supervisor-subordinate relationship to maintain their autonomy and independence. For example, in Europe and North America, decision-making is typically conducted by business executives, focusing on organizational objectives and benefits rather than the feelings of the majority. Interestingly, there are indications of the adoption of certain aspects of Western individualism in Japan, signaling a potential

trend towards a blend of individualism and collectivism seen in other Asian countries (Darmawati & Herlina, 2019).

Gender Issues and Cultural Differences in Employment

Cultural norms are the informal rules governing acceptable behaviors and expectations within a society. These norms lead to gender gaps in employment and salaries, playing a significant role in restricting female employment in both developing and developed countries. Cultural differences also contribute to gender inequality. In individualistic societies, which are typically found in Western cultures, there tends to be a higher level of gender equality. In contrast, collectivist societies, which are more commonly found in non-Western cultures, often exhibit higher levels of gender inequality, such as the stereotype of men as leaders and women as followers.

Gender patterns, roles, and stereotypes associated with suitable careers for men and women are deeply ingrained at the family and societal levels (Botella et al., 2019). Efforts are being made to combat these stereotypes in various areas, such as toy retailing, where research focusing on catalogs has been conducted. Efforts have also been made at the institutional level to address gender stereotyping in education. For example, the OECD has produced a report entitled "Gender Equality in Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship," which has influenced programs in countries categorized as both individualistic and collectivistic (Jayachandran, 2021).

Zhang and Zhang (2020) studied 36 Asian countries to examine tourism and gender equality from an Asian perspective. They found a significant positive impact of tourism on gender equality, which was highest and most statistically significant in countries located in East and Southeast Asia, followed by those in West and Central Asia, and finally those in South Asia. They also revealed that employment opportunities in the tourism industry in Asian countries, where services and hospitality are key offerings, continue to be influenced by gender factors, particularly when compared to Western countries characterized by individualistic cultures. This observation aligns with the stereotypes associated with collectivistic cultures, such as those found in Asian countries, where there is a preference for harmony and interpersonal communication. Consequently, the services and hospitality industry in these cultures tends to favor female employees, as females are seen as symbols of harmony. On the other hand, leadership positions requiring decisive and efficient decision-making are predominantly occupied by male employees in both Asian and Western cultures. However, the gender gap in leadership positions is wider in Asian cultures due to their collectivistic nature, compared to individualistic Western societies that are more open to females in leadership roles. This difference can be attributed to the greater emphasis on individual achievement, regardless of gender, in individualistic cultures.

Overall, the observations made by Zhang and Zhang (2020) highlight the influence of cultural factors and gender norms on employment opportunities and leadership positions in the tourism industry. While the services and hospitality sector in Asian cultures may favor female employees due to cultural preferences, there remains a disparity in access to leadership roles, particularly in collectivistic cultures, when compared to individualistic Western societies. These findings do not only contribute to our understanding of how tourism affects gender equality in Asian countries, but also underscore the importance of further multidisciplinary research to better understand and

address cultural differences and their implications for gender equality within the tourism industry. Their results also call for ongoing research to investigate the dynamics of equality or inequality within this context.

Table 1: Summary of the literature

Title	Key Findings
Theorical background on gender issues	A gender issue refers to any gender-related circumstance or topic concerning social norms, culture, economy, or politics, particularly the disparities, challenges, and discrimination faced by individuals based on their gender identity. Addressing gender issues involves promoting gender equality, challenging discriminatory practices, advocating for inclusive policies, and fostering greater equity. It requires efforts at various levels, including organizational reforms and policy changes. The significant key findings on gender issues served as the theoretical foundation on which the researcher constructed the research instrument.
Cultural differences and gender issues	Cultural differences play a significant role in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to gender issues. Each culture has its own unique norms, values, and expectations regarding gender roles, identities, and relationships. These cultural variations can lead to diverse perspectives and practices when it comes to gender-related matters. Recognizing and understanding cultural differences is crucial for promoting inclusivity, respecting diverse experiences, and working towards more equitable gender relations globally. By understanding cultural differences, human resource managers can effectively and efficiently manage a diverse workforce within organizations.
Individualism vs collectivism	Individualism and collectivism are cultural dimensions that describe how societies prioritize the relationship between the individual and the collective group. These cultural differences have an impact on various aspects of social interactions, values, and behaviors. Examples of individualistic cultures include the USA, Western European countries, and Australia. Examples of collectivistic cultures include most Asian countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea, as well as many African and Latin American countries. It is important to recognize that these cultural dimensions exist on a spectrum, and cultures can exhibit varying degrees of individualistic and collectivistic values. The key findings related to individualism and collectivism helped the researcher understand the characteristics and differences between these cultural orientations. Additionally, the researcher conducted interviews with individuals from both cultural backgrounds to gain insights and perspectives.

Gender issues and cultural differences related to employment	Gender issues in employment encompass the disparities, challenges, and discrimination faced by individuals based on their gender within the workplace. These issues can be influenced by cultural differences in the beliefs, norms, and practices regarding gender and work. These findings supported this study in identifying how gender issues are influenced by cultural differences, with a specific focus on employment within the tourism and hospitality industry.

Methodology

The grounded theory approach was chosen as the research method for several reasons. Firstly, gender and cross-cultural issues are abstract and sensitive topics that can be prone to disputes. Using a grounded theory approach allows for a more nuanced exploration of these topics. Secondly, previous studies have identified a wide range of factors that influence cross-cultural gender issues, making it difficult to test traditional hypotheses. The grounded theory approach, with its focus on theory development from data, is better suited for such complex relationships. Thirdly, the relationships between cross-cultural and gender issues are multifaceted, and quantitative research alone may not capture the depth and complexity of these relationships.

Corbin and Strauss (2014) suggested that the grounded theory approach is interpretative in nature, aiming to uncover concepts, relationships, and theoretical explanations for existing phenomena. Constructing a formal theory involves a heuristic abstract process of inductive theoretical development (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). In this study, a pragmatic version of the grounded theory approach was used, employing open, axial, and selective coding for data analysis. This method allows researchers to examine the data sentence by sentence, refine constructs, identify recurring themes, and continuously supplement data until theoretical saturation is reached. By adopting this approach, researchers can minimize biases and gain a deeper understanding of the data. Based on the findings from the grounded theory analysis, a theoretical framework was developed to explain the relationships and concepts related to cross-cultural gender issues.

Data Source

Individual semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection in this study. This approach allowed the participants to express their thoughts freely and independently, without the influence of others like colleagues or superiors. It also enabled the researcher to gather in-depth insights and personalized perspectives from each participant, specifically regarding their experiences and views on gender and employment in the tourism industry. The interview instrument used in the study was developed based on a comprehensive literature review, specifically referring to the work of Oben (2021). It was tailored to capture the perspectives of culturally individualistic and collectivistic participants, and focused on key questions related to gender and employment in the tourism industry, as follows: 1) What do you think about female leadership in your company? 2) Does your country prefer females working in the service and hospitality industry, such as in tourism or hotels? 3) In your country, do

females have more opportunities in the tourism industry? 4) Does individualism affect the employment process? 5) Does collectivism affect the employment process? 6) In your company, do females have more opportunities for promotion? 7) Is gender an issue in hiring employees in the tourism industry? and 8) Do males dominate the top positions?

As listed in Table 2, a total of 20 participants (i.e., human resource managers from leading travel and tourism companies, hotels, and airline businesses) were selected for the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), this sample size is sufficient for qualitative research and allows for the exploration of diverse perspectives. The selection of participants was also guided by the theoretical saturation test, which determines when additional information ceases to emerge from the data. The interviews were conducted between 1 July and 31 August 2022, using a combination of face-to-face meetings and Zoom sessions for convenience. Each of the 20 interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, ensuring their understanding of the study's purpose and confidentiality. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the interviews if they felt uncomfortable. Overall, this study adhered to ethical guidelines set by the Institutional Review Board for Human Ethics Research Committee.

Table 2: Key Informants

Enterprises	Position	Nationality	Culture type	No. of participants
Tourism promotion organizations	HR Manager	Japanese	Collectivist	2
	HR Officer	Korean	Collectivist	2
Travel agents	HR Manager	Japanese	Collectivist	1
	HR Manager	Chinese	Collectivist	1
	HR Manager	Thai	Collectivist	1
	HR Manager	Malaysian	Collectivist	1
	HR Manager	Australian	Individualist	2
	HR Manager	Korean	Collectivist	1
	HR Director	Singaporean	Collectivist	1
Hotels	HR Officer	American	Individualist	1
	HR Director	Thai	Collectivist	2
	HR Manager	Filipina	Collectivist	1
Airlines	HR Manager	Thai	Collectivist	2
	HR Manager	New Zealander	Individualist	1
	HR Manager	American	Individualist	1
Total				**20**

After each interview, the researcher organized the materials and wrote a memo summarizing the key points and insights obtained. This process facilitated the systematic organization of the collected information. Approximately 10,000 words were obtained from the interview records of all participants. Following the recommendation of Creswell and Poth (2017), two-thirds of the interview records, or approximately 6,000 words from 14 randomly selected interviewees, were chosen for coding and further analysis. These selected records were coded to identify patterns, themes, and perspectives related to the influence of cross-cultural differences on gender

issues in the tourism and hospitality industry. Through this analysis, this study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various perspectives expressed by the participants regarding gender and cultural influences in the industry.

Data Analysis

Following the qualitative approach, the interview data was analyzed using content analysis. The process began with open coding, where the data was systematically examined and segmented. Through continuous abstraction, comparison, and synthesis, the researcher identified the main principles that represented the essence of the data segments. These principles were then used to form categories that captured the main themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Next, axial coding was conducted, which involved re-analyzing the extracted categories and exploring the internal relationships among them. This step aimed to uncover the connections and associations between the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Finally, selective coding was conducted to further explore the internal relationships and develop a coherent storyline that connected the distinct main categories.

To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher sought the input of three experts who are professors specializing in gender studies, development, and cultural differences. The experts, who are from two postgraduate universities in Thailand, reviewed the coding process, analyzed the categories, and offered feedback on the emerging themes and patterns. They also provided valuable insights and perspectives, ultimately validating the analysis and interpretations of the data. Following the expert evaluation, the researcher conducted an analysis of the identified categories and examined the key categories that emerged from the coding process. To ensure the robustness of the analysis, a second comparison was performed to confirm that no new categories or themes emerged. By following these rigorous steps and incorporating expert input, this study established a solid theoretical framework grounded in the data. This approach ensured the reliability of the conclusions and implications drawn from the study, providing a solid foundation for the research findings.

Results

Open coding

The first step in the analysis involved the segmentation of the data into manageable units for analysis, known as open coding. Through a process of abstraction, comparison, and brainstorming, the researcher extracted the key concepts that represented the fundamental components of the data segments. These concepts were then used to form categories that captured the main themes and patterns observed in the data. After several rounds of data analysis and comparison, a total of 10 categories were identified, which are described in detail in Table 3.

Table 3: Open Coding

	Categories	Original statements regarding different cultures	
		Individualism	Collectivism
1	Female leadership roles	The positions are open to everyone who possesses the required competencies. Regardless of gender, success depends on an individual's capabilities. However, competitiveness is quite high in the selection process and thus, male employees often dominate high-caliber positions.	Qualification for a position is the priority of the selection process. Therefore, positions are open for all genders, in order to provide services and hospitality to customers. Nevertheless, female candidates are approached to manage delicate types of jobs.
2	Preference for female employees	Individualistic cultures emphasize egalitarianism in society and thus, gender bias is an issue when advertising job opportunities. All those working in hotels, travel agents and airline industries must avoid specifying a preferred gender in job positions. Furthermore, discrimination issues may be raised in individualistic culture countries.	It is a norm in a collectivistic country that females are considered more suitable for service and hospitality jobs such as in tourism businesses, hotels, restaurants, and airlines. Hence, it is quite often seen that job advertising indicates the gender as "female only."
3	Greater opportunities for females	Equality is often a feature of individualistic cultures; therefore, greater opportunities for females to enter the tourism industry is not an issue, as equal employment opportunities are the norm for employers when recruiting. This depends on the individual's suitability for the job.	As for job stereotypes in the services and hospitality field, females certainly have greater opportunities. For example, flight attendant positions in airlines in Japan, China and Korea specify females only. Likewise, travel agencies often recruit females for leading roles in management.
4	Competency orientation	Individualistic cultures encourage personal achievement that leads to the recruiting process focusing more on the capabilities, qualifications, and experience of the candidate rather than a singular mindset.	Beyond competencies that fit the job, candidates' characteristics (e.g., caring, responsible) and interpersonal relationships are also considered. This reflects collectivistic cultures which prefer good team workers and sympathizing with one another in the team.
5	Job promotion	Regardless of gender, individual employees receive equal opportunity for a job promotion, which is awarded based on their performance.	Apart from individual qualifications, group acceptance is also a key factor to consider for a job promotion. In collectivistic cultures, females are usually given a job promotion as

			they demonstrate more care about co-workers' concerns, in contrast with individualistic cultures where there is primarily a work-related orientation.
6	Gender bias	Because of the serious and strict employment laws in individualistic countries, explicit gender preference must be avoided in any circumstance involving an organization and its applicants, including in daily communications. In other words, an organization must show no intention of gender bias.	Gender preference exists in certain jobs in collectivist countries. However, people do not see it as an injustice when opportunities arise only for females over males.
7	Gender symbolism in tourism promotion	A strong image of a country's profile is used to promote its tourism industry in most Western countries, as individualistic cultures normally publicize the leadership roles of females. Human rights campaigns also highlight that specific genders should not be used for advertising, particularly for tourism.	In Thailand, for example, the norm is to use a picture of an elegant actress or a beauty pageant queen as a symbol to promote tourism in the country. Likewise, other collectivistic cultures may also utilize images of females as symbols of culture and tradition.
8	Male dominance in top positions	Individualistic cultures support personal achievement and equality. On the other hand, decisions are made by the leader rather than the group, based on the organization's goals instead of collectivist concerns about group relationships. Hence, males dominate top positions that require effective and sharp decision-making, mainly due to a negative impression of female characteristics.	In tourism organizations in collectivistic countries such as Thailand, there have always been few females in top roles, as males predominantly hold those roles. Similarly, in the hotel business, males dominate general manager positions, whilst the airline industry is attempting to promote more females into top positions.
9	Gender balance in the workplace	There are no issues with balancing gender in the workplace as individualistic cultures emphasize work rather than interpersonal relationships. In addition, discrimination laws regarding employment do not allow mention of gender preference. Also, tourism and hospitality jobs are not perceived as female work, whereas collectivist societies perceive this field as more	In the tourism and hospitality industry of collectivistic cultures, there are more female employees because of the social construct that female employees are suitable for this industry. However, to balance gender differences, HR managers may provide advancement opportunities to male employees in the organization.

		appropriate for females.	
10	Gender issues	In conclusion, individualistic cultures perceive employment as genderless according to their traditions and norms. Moreover, national laws and legislation comply with equality, diversity, and inclusive idealism.	It is a stereotype and social construct that for some jobs, certain genders are more suitable. This entails no discrimination or legal issues. Collectivistic cultures perceive fewer gender issues based on the tradition and norm that males are the leaders of the family.

Axial coding

Through the analysis, this study found that the 10 categories formed in the open coding could be integrated into four main categories, as detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: Axial Coding

No.	Categories	Corresponding statement	Connotation statement
1	Gender employment opportunities	- Greater opportunities for females - Preference for females	Given the influence of gender-based employment opportunities in the tourism and hospitality industry, there are slight distinctions between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, especially regarding flight attendant positions in the airline business. Collectivistic cultures of Asia prefer females, and job opportunity advertisements can specifically use the term "females only." This is in contrast with the individualistic culture of the Western context, which consider such preferences as gender discrimination.
2	Gender-based job promotion	- Competency orientation - Job promotion	Competency, qualifications, and work experience have long been factors to consider for job promotion in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures. However, the distinction in a collectivist culture is the aim to combine personal characteristics and attitudes rather than focusing only on work achievements, as interpersonal relationships are a key influence in collectivistic cultures.
3	Gender and leadership roles	- Females in a leadership role - Male-dominated top positions	Both individualistic and collectivistic cultures are dominated by male leadership because of the perception that male leaders perform effective decision-making and provide efficient outcomes compared to females. However,

| 4 | Gender bias | - Gender bias
- Gender balance in the workplace
- Gender issues
- Gender symbolism in tourism promotions | collectivist cultures are characterized by harmony and are concerned with personal care. Thus, females are more highly considered to manage a business based on this point of view.

As a result of national laws and societal norms rigorously penalizing any form of discrimination or harassment, gender bias is not a customary practice in any individualistic culture. In contrast, collectivistic cultures often use females as a symbol of attractiveness to promote the country's tourism and destinations. |

Selective coding

Based on the findings, a theoretical model was constructed on the gender-based factors influenced by cultural differences in the tourism and hospitality industry (see Figure 1). Specifically, gender employment opportunities, gender-based job promotions, gender and leadership roles, and gender bias are affected by the differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Figure 1. Proposed Theoretical Model
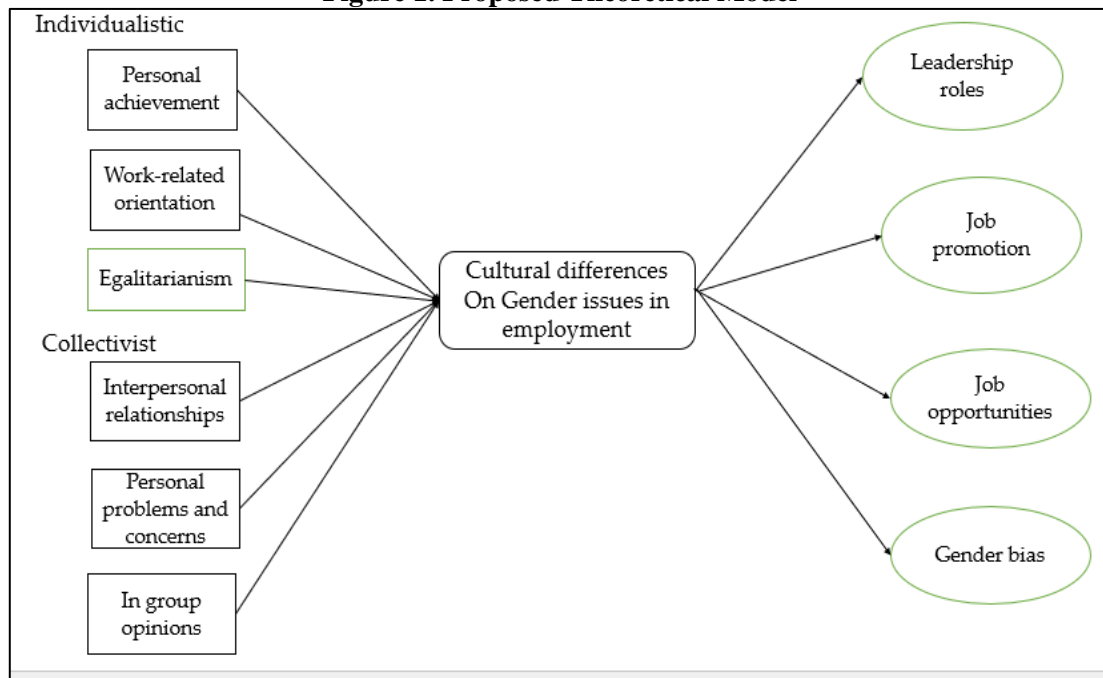
After developing the theoretical framework, the remaining two-thirds of the data were examined to determine if any new insights or perspectives emerged. A follow-up feedback process was also conducted with a subset of 14 interviewees. However, no significant new data or critical views were obtained from this additional analysis. Therefore, it was concluded that the categories formed in the theoretical framework adequately captured the factors of cultural differences that influence gender issues in

employment in the tourism and hospitality industry. The extraction process was considered complete, and theoretical saturation was achieved.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with the observations made by Conroy and Weiler (2016) that cultural perspectives often associate females with the role of the "heart" and males with the role of the "head" within a family structure. These gendered perceptions and stereotypes are deeply rooted in many societies, including the tourism and hospitality industry, where females are often viewed as caring or nurturing and thus suitable for roles that involve interpersonal communication and harmonization. In contrast, males are more commonly associated with leadership positions that require efficient decision-making. These cultural norms and expectations have a significant impact on employment opportunities and career progression within the industry. In collectivist cultures, where interpersonal relationships, harmony, and conformity are highly valued, traditional gender roles and expectations may be even more pronounced. It is important to acknowledge that cultural perspectives and their influence on gender issues can vary across different societies and regions. Therefore, while this study's findings align with the observations of Conroy and Weiler (2016), it is essential to approach the topic with sensitivity and recognize the diverse experiences and realities of individuals within various cultural contexts. This study identifies four main factors related to gender issues in employment within the tourism and hospitality industry, as follows:

The first factor is gender employment opportunity, which supports the notion that increasing female participation in the workforce can empower the labor market and provide more opportunities for women, in line with the observations of Nakata and Momsen (2017). Second, gender-based promotion as a factor aligns with previous research by Boley et al. (2021) and Hutchings et al. (2020), indicating that men have historically dominated leadership roles due to societal perceptions of masculinity, intelligence, and analytical skills. Women, on the other hand, are often associated with characteristics such as kindness, supportiveness, and expressiveness. The study further explores how cultural differences influence these perceptions, highlighting that collectivist cultures may value female characteristics more due to their emphasis on harmony, leading to a preference for female employees in certain roles. The third factor, gender and leadership roles, indicates that leadership positions in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures are primarily occupied by men. While collectivistic cultures may show a slightly higher inclination towards females due to their emphasis on harmony, male dominance in leadership positions remains prevalent. This finding contrasts with the work of Skalpe (2017), who highlighted gender inequality in compensation. However, this study does not specifically address payment disparity, as it acknowledges that female leaders in the 21st century can earn equal or greater salaries compared to their male counterparts. Finally, gender bias is the fourth factor, which acknowledges the existence of such bias. As identified by Deng and Grow (2018), women often engage in unpaid work within the household, which limits their participation in the labor market. However, in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry, the study suggests that females are preferred to enhance tourists' experiences and boost tourism revenue in the 21st century.

Conclusion

This study highlights the influence of cultural differences, specifically individualism and collectivism, on gender issues in job employment and promotion in the tourism and hospitality sector. In individualistic cultures like Australia, the UK, and the USA, personal data such as age, sex, and photographs are typically removed from job applications to ensure a gender-neutral evaluation process. On the other hand, collectivist cultures like Thailand, Japan, and China may still consider personal data alongside qualifications when assessing applicants' suitability for a job. This difference in approach to personal data evaluation can impact job employment opportunities, promotions, and leadership roles in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures, albeit with different perspectives on the selection and promotion processes. However, this study notes that in the tourism and hospitality industry, the nature of the industry itself may mitigate the severity of gender issues, resulting in them being less negatively perceived.

The implications of this study are twofold: scholarly and managerial. From a scholarly perspective, this study adds empirical evidence and insights to existing gender theory, specifically in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry. By exploring the influence of cultural differences in individualism and collectivism on employment procedures, job opportunities, and leadership roles, the study expands the body of knowledge on gender dynamics in organizational contexts. The findings thus contribute to the understanding of how cultural differences shape gender-specific employment procedures and shed light on the contrasting approaches to job opportunities and promotions based on personal data.

From a managerial standpoint, this study highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing cultural differences when it comes to gender issues in the tourism and hospitality industry. Creating inclusive and equal opportunity environments requires understanding and accommodating these cultural nuances. Furthermore, this research emphasizes to managers the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into human resource strategies, policies, and corporate responsibility initiatives in the tourism and hospitality industry. By doing so, organizations can contribute to creating more equitable and inclusive workplaces and positively impact the industry's social and economic development. This could enhance meaningful work for all employees, regardless of gender. As confirmed by the study of Tan et al. (2023), meaningful work is one of the tools for business achievement. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for ongoing scholarly research and managerial interventions to foster gender equality in employment and promotion processes, considering cultural differences and the unique characteristics of the tourism and hospitality industry.

This study has a few limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, it employed a qualitative method, i.e., interviews, to identify key factors and construct a framework. The developed theoretical framework may benefit from further validation through quantitative methods. Secondly, the factors identified in this study are based on the grounded theory approach and are specifically valid for individualistic and collectivistic cultures. To expand upon these findings, future studies should explore gender issues in employment and promotion across a broader range of cultural dimensions.

Practical Implications for Asian Business

This study provides insights on gender issues in employment opportunities within the Asian context, taking into consideration the cultural differences between collectivistic Asian societies and individualistic Western societies (Sanger & Gleason, 2020). Despite the collectivistic nature of Asian culture, there are complex variations influenced by religion and tradition in different Asian countries. Therefore, it is important to enhance the awareness of gender issues in employment, job promotion, and leadership roles in order to promote equal opportunities in the region regardless of gender. Asian businesses have a role to play in promoting social progress and challenging traditional gender norms. By actively addressing cultural influences on gender issues, they can contribute to the advancement of gender equality in society. Recognizing and addressing the influence of cultural differences on gender issues in tourism and hospitality employment can lead to numerous positive outcomes for Asian businesses. By promoting gender equality and inclusivity, businesses can create a more productive, innovative, and socially responsible work environment, contributing to their long-term success and positive societal impact.

The tourism industry encompasses various stakeholders, including destination management, transportation, accommodation, dining, and travel agencies, making it a significant and rapidly growing service sector. Despite female participation reaching high levels at the regional level in Asia, females are often confined to lower-level positions such as cleaning, kitchen staff, and front-line customer service, with limited representation in management positions. To address gender issues related to employment opportunities in the Asian context, there is a need to focus on recruiting, retaining, and promoting talented women for technical and managerial leadership roles. This will not only meet future skill and productivity requirements but also create a more inclusive and equitable industry.

In many Asian countries, there are deep-rooted cultural norms and traditional values that shape societal attitudes toward gender roles and employment. Promoting gender equality at the management and executive levels may pose challenges for Asian businesses due to societal biases. However, if Asian businesses operate on a global scale, they must be mindful of cultural differences when interacting with partners and customers from different regions. Addressing the influence of cultural differences on gender issues in tourism and hospitality employment requires a multi-faceted approach. Asian businesses should focus on promoting diversity and inclusion, offering equal opportunities for professional growth, and challenging traditional gender norms to create a more equitable work environment. This not only improves business outcomes but also contributes to broader social progress in the region.

In this regard, the findings of this study highlight the unique influence of cultural preferences on gender-related occupations and the recruitment process in both Western and Asian organizations. While females have more opportunities in leadership roles influenced by collectivistic cultures, the study acknowledges that the percentage of males in dominant positions remains higher. However, this can be seen as an initial step towards empowering females to take on leadership roles in the industry. This study therefore emphasizes the need to raise awareness about gender preferences in employment and reduce gender inequality, not only to support females but also to provide equal opportunities for males in various careers within the tourism and

hospitality industry. The industry in Asia is known for its warm and harmonious service, reflecting the characteristics of collectivism. It is crucial to leverage this strength to promote equal employment opportunities and increase female representation in leadership positions. Overall, this study calls attention to the importance of understanding cultural differences and their influence on gender issues in employment within the Asian context.

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