Similarities of the Latin Countries in Relation to Customer Expectations about Service Dimensions of the Hotel Service

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Abstract: - This research delves into the alignment of service dimensions with customer expectations in Latin countries, exploring the presence of homogeneity within this diverse group. Utilizing unidirectional ANOVA for individual service dimensions, comparisons were made between the means of the Latin cluster, the Latin European cluster, and the Latin American cluster to evaluate the uniformity of country averages. The results revealthat Latin countries do not form a homogeneous group concerning service dimensions; at least one country demonstrates distinct expectations, indicating varying customer preferences. Additionally, disparities were identified between the Latin-European cluster and the Latin American cluster. This challenges the reliance of Latin companies on cultural and historical proximity for internationalization, as customer expectations for the same service vary. Managers are urged to conduct country-specific analyses and tailor marketing strategies and service offerings to each Latin country. The cross-cultural research spans ten largely unexplored Latin countries, where the absence of consensus among authors in cultural dimension clustering underscores an incongruity in labeling Latin customers as equals with identical service expectations.

Key-Words: - Customer's expectations, Services dimensions, Latin countries, Tourism services, Hotel, Cultural dimensions, Cultural distance.

1 Introduction

Internal international trade in services experienced rapid growth, particularly notable in OECD countries, where it surged by 24% in exports and 22% in imports between 2010 and 2014, [1]. A distinctive aspect is the pivotal role customers play throughout the service process, occasionally reaching a level of participation where the customer becomes a co-creator of the service. The inherent characteristics of services, including intangibility, consumer involvement, interpersonal interactions, and the challenge of standardization, make formulating and managing a marketing strategy for services a complex endeavor.

Acknowledging the significant influence of comprehending customer needs on the efficiency and effectiveness of services, [2], achieving customer satisfaction remains the foremost objective for every supplier. Satisfaction hinges on the alignment of service performance with customer expectations, [3], [4]. To achieve and maintain customer satisfaction, it is imperative to comprehend customer expectations for a service. Consequently, managing these expectations becomes a critical aspect of service conception and management, with companies effectively communicating what customers anticipate in terms of service performance, [5].

The diversity in customer characteristics based on origin and culture underscores the notion that national culture shapes expectations, [6], [7]. While customers from the same culture likely share similar expectations due to shared cultural identity, attitudes, and behavior patterns, the internationalization of a firm requires careful consideration of foreign markets, [8]. Cultural analysis, as an essential criterion among others, is pivotal for understanding the cultural climate that can impact business operations, [9]. Marketers must understand how their services are perceived in diverse cultures, given that culture plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior, [10].

In the context of internationalization, managers often prioritize countries that exhibit cultural closeness, [11]. This is exemplified by Latin countries, where Latin companies choose to expand internationally into other Latin nations due to perceived proximity and assumed cultural similarity. However, cross-cultural research reveals a lack of consensus among authors regarding the clustering of these countries by cultural dimensions. While often regarded as culturally similar, [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18], studies on national cultures underscore discrepancies in how Latin American and Latin European countries are grouped, varying from one author to another. This incongruity challenges the notion of labeling Latin customers as equals and treating their service expectations equally.

This study aims to investigate whether Latin countries exhibit homogeneity in service dimensions by considering customer expectations about services.

This study challenges the assumption that Latin countries are a homogeneous group, particularly regarding customer expectations about service dimensions.

The research offers multiple advantages, providing valuable insights into customer expectations regarding services in Latin countries. Understanding these expectations is crucial for businesses operating in or planning to expand into these markets. Also contributes to cross-cultural understanding by highlighting the diversity among Latin countries. This knowledge is essential for international businesses, especially those from Latin regions, to recognize and adapt to cultural differences in customer expectations. The findings emphasize the need for companies to tailor their marketing strategies and services to each specific Latin country. This adaptation is essential for success in international markets where cultural variations impact customer preferences and expectations. The research challenges the assumption that Latin countries are a homogeneous group. This challenges the common practice of relying on cultural and historical proximity when internationalizing. Recognizing the diversity among Latin countries prompts a more nuanced and tailored approach to market entry and service provision. The study also suggests that managers should conduct a country-specific analysis and customize their marketing strategies accordingly. This provides practical guidance for businesses operating in or planning to expand into Latin American and Latin European markets. Empirically the research contributes to the field of cross-cultural research by focusing on ten different Latin countries. The lack of consensus among authors in clustering these countries based on cultural dimensions indicates a gap in understanding, and this study aims to fill that gap.

relationships and sustaining business success. In fact, the study underscores the importance of considering cultural factors in internationalization strategies. This information is valuable for companies looking to expand their operations globally, especially in Latin regions.

In summary, the study contributes valuable insights that can inform strategic decision-making

for businesses operating in the Latin American and Latin European markets, particularly in the service industry. Recognizing and addressing the diversity among Latin countries is crucial for effective marketing and service delivery.

2 Customer's Expectations

In a foundational sense, customer expectations center around the anticipated offerings of a service, [19], representing an outlook on the forthcoming service experience, [20]. Within the literature on customer satisfaction, expectations are defined as subjective predictions made and evaluated solely by consumers during service exchanges, inherently relative and influenced by customer perceptions, attitudes, and affects, [21], [22].

Concerning the evaluation of services, [21] pioneered the development of a multi-item scale called SERVQUAL, widely used for assessing service quality, [22], [23], [24], [25], [26]. This instrument measures service quality by conceptualizing it as the discrepancy between customer expectations and the perception of the service provider's performance (Service Quality = Performance – Expectations). Applied across various contexts, including tourism, where it is employed to evaluate hotel service quality attributes, SERVQUAL stands as a prominent tool in service quality assessment.

This evaluation, gauging the gap between expectations and actual performance, significantly influences customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a service, [27]. Customer satisfaction is achieved when the perceived service quality aligns with superior standards, creating a sense of value that either matches or surpasses the customer's ideal expectations, [22], [28]. Consequently, the effective management of customer expectations is crucial in service conception and management, [29].

Before the initial service encounter, each customer carries a distinct cultural identity, encompassing physiognomy, language, and demeanor, shaping the backdrop that influences the entire service encounter process, [30]. Customers from diverse countries or cultures exhibit varying levels of service quality expectations, stemming from differences in attitudes and behavior patterns, [31], [32].

In essence, each country possesses its unique culture, and since culture shapes how customers anticipate services, there is a necessity to adapt services according to the cultural nuances of each country. However, it is essential to ascertain whether culture not only impacts expectations regarding service quality but also influences other dimensions of the service, [33].

3 Services Dimensions

Customers maintain unique expectations for each service dimension, highlighting the importance of a thorough understanding of dimensions identified by various authors, [33], [34], [35], [36], [37], [38]. This research embraces a customer-centric viewpoint, concentrating exclusively on service dimensions within the service provider's sphere of influence and control. These dimensions signify areas that the service provider can intentionally design to meet and surpass customer expectations. The proposed classification introduces innovative service dimensions:

- Degree of Customer Involvement: Signifying the level of connection and interaction between the service provider and customers during the service process or system. Crucial for managing the service process, ensuring service quality, and determining the extent of customer involvement or co-production.
- Convenience Level: Encompassing customers' evaluation of service availability and effort expended before and during the service process (including money, time, and energy). The criteria for evaluation encompass risk assessment, physical safety, financial security, and levels of confidentiality.
- Contact Personnel Performance: Recognizing the pivotal role of contact personnel in service performance, particularly in differentiating services through the adept fulfillment of customer needs. Contact personnel gauge and assess customer needs based on the resources at their disposal.
- Complexity Degree: Acknowledging the service provider's authority to define and design service encounter steps and their number, influenced by the repeatability of service steps and customers' freedom in defining them. Complexity level determination is crucial for effective service provision.
- Information and Communication Power: Emphasizing the pivotal role of exchanging information between the service provider and customers. Information control becomes a source of power in the service process, with implications for task performance, issue clarification, promotion, and sales.

- Environment and Social Responsibility: Focusing on the service provider's capacity to offer environmentally oriented services with ecological processes and materials. The service provider can also play an educational role, fostering customer awareness for environmental protection and social responsibility.

Countries with homogeneous expectations regarding service dimensions are expected to demonstrate greater cultural proximity. Consequently, societies and individuals within such clusters are expected to share similar behaviors, values, and beliefs. This alignment underscores the interconnectedness of service dimensions and cultural factors in shaping customer expectations.

4 Latin Cluster and the Cultural Distance

Consensus among authors on clustering Latin countries based on cultural similarity remains elusive. Despite this, service providers in these countries often base internationalization decisions on assumed cultural proximity or similarity to other Latin nations. This incongruence is evident: service providers venture into these countries expecting cultural likeness, while researchers attempting to cluster Latin countries based on such similarity do not reach a consensus on the constituting countries of the cluster.

Crucially, companies' choices for foreign market selection are heavily influenced by cultural proximity, a factor where managers opt for foreign countries that share cultural similarities. This proximity facilitates adaptation to the foreign local context, sparing managers the need to learn new languages, religions, or national backgrounds. Latin companies exhibit a predisposition towards internationalizing to other Latin countries due to perceived cultural links. However, this cultural identification is occasionally overvalued by managers, not always stemming from a meticulous cultural analysis, [39], [40].

The decision-making process of Latin companies in internationalization is remarkably swayed by cultural proximity to other Latin countries, indicating an expectation of cultural similarity among Latin countries and people, [41], [42], [43], [44], [45], [46]. Latin managers often assume a low cultural distance between Latin European and Latin American countries and their respective markets. This presumption, rooted in historical ties, shared language, beliefs, values, and norms, leads companies to internationalize with lesser efforts and research on foreign cultures. Overestimating the importance of cultural proximity, Latin managers often prefer Latin countries for their internationalization efforts.

However, the cognitive dissonance of some Latin managers has led to unsuccessful performances in internationalization. Some companies anticipated streamlined communication processes and reduced risks and costs by entering Latin markets, only to encounter bureaucratic hurdles and disparate human resources practices. Consequently, it becomes imperative to assess whether previous cross-cultural studies align or differ in defining the countries constituting the Latin cluster and the characteristics and values defining each cluster.

5 Latin Cluster Constitution

The advancement of cross-cultural research has proven instrumental in grouping countries based on similar cultural dimensions, utilizing specific regional characteristics such as language, religion, history, and cultural aspects to form clusters that carry significance for societies and cultures, [18]. However, the constitution of these clusters varies among authors due to the use of different countries, cultural dimensions, methodologies, or differences in the decades when the studies were conducted, considering the dynamic nature of social, economic, political, and cultural elements.

From previous exercises in country clustering, two clusters have emerged—Latin countries, further divided into Latin Europe and Latin America. The clustering is based on the importance attributed to cultural dimensions, grouping countries with higher cultural proximity together. This grouping implies an expectation that societies and individuals within the same cluster share similar behaviors, values, and beliefs.

With the development of cultural dimensions and cross-cultural studies in the field of management research, countries, including Latin countries, have been categorized into clusters based on cultural dimensions. Cultural effects predominantly stem from differences between societal clusters rather than individual countries, [17]. While the constitution of country clusters lacks a universally accepted method, some authors consider clustering societies as an appropriate and relevant unit of analysis, [47]. These clusters are valuable for examining cross-cultural similarities and differences and can guide the sampling strategy for cross-cultural research, [46].

Table 1. Studies that cluster countries based on cultural dimensions or factors

Author (year)	Clusters
Haire et al. [48].	Latin European: Belgium, France, Italy and Spain Latin American: Argentina, Chile and India
Sirota and Greenwood [49].	French: Belgium and France Southern Latin American: Argentina and Chile Northern Latin American: Colombia, Mexico and Peru Independent: Brazil, Germany, Israel, Japan, Sweden and Venezuela
Hofstede [50].	Latin: Brazil, Italy, France, Switzerland – French speaking
Ronen and Kraut [51].	Latin European: France, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Portugal Latin American: Peru, México, Colombia, Argentina, Chile and Venezuela Independent: Brazil, Japan, India and Israel
Hofstede [50].	Latin European: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, France, Italy and Spain Latin American: Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Venezuela
Ronen and Shenkar [15].	Latin American: Argentina, Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, Peru and Colombia Latin European: France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain Independent: Brazil, Japan, India and Israel
Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner [52].	Latin countries: Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, France, Portugal, Italy, Spain and Romania
Brodbeck et al. [14].	Latin European: Spain, Italy and Portugal Independent: Czech Republic, France, Russia and Georgia
Gupta et al. [47].	Latin European: Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, France and Switzerland – French speaking Latin American: Venezuela, Ecuador, Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil and Argentina
Jesuino [14].	Latin European: Spain, Portugal, Italy, French Switzerland, France and Israel
Hofstede et al. [13].	Latin Countries: Brazil, France and Panama
Globe Project House et al. [18].	Latin European: Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, France and Switzerland – French speaking Latin American: Costa Rica, Venezuela, Ecuador, Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina
Stankov [17].	Latin European: France, Italy and Spain Latin American: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico and Venezuela

Table 1 showcases various studies that group countries into clusters using different variables. While other clusters are presented in these studies, Table 1 specifically focuses on the Latin clusters, European and American.

The studies presented in Table 1 highlight the divergence in the formation of clusters for Latin America and Latin Europe. Notably, the composition of the Latin Europe cluster varies across studies, featuring countries such as Italy, Spain, France, and Portugal. In some instances, Belgium is included in the Latin European cluster due to geographical proximity, linguistic similarities (with French and Dutch speakers), and shared cultural background. Hofstede's four dimensions study further supports this inclusion, placing Belgium closer to France than the Netherlands based on the rooted influence of the French language in Belgian social structure. However, more recent studies do not consistently maintain Belgium within the Latin European cluster.

In the early 21st century, French Switzerland and Israel were also considered Latin European countries by some researchers. Ronen and Shenkar suggest that the Latin American and Latin European clusters are expected to converge, primarily due to the historical effects of Spain and Portugal on colonized countries in Latin America, implying strong ties in language and religion. Notably, Portugal's cultural categorization varies among authors, as some place it within the European cluster while others include it in the Latin American cluster, [13].

Previous discussions imply an assumed cultural similarity among Latin countries, not only in terms of internationalization processes among companies but also in cross-cultural research, where Latin Europeans and Americans share certain cultural characteristics. If this Latin cluster indeed exists, customers residing in these countries are expected

to harbor similar expectations for service, particularly concerning service dimensions. To investigate the homogeneity of the Latin cluster, Latin American cluster, and Latin European cluster, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Customers from Latin countries share similar expectations for each service dimension.
Hypothesis 2 (H2): Customers from Latin European countries share similar expectations for each service dimension.
Hypothesis 3 (H3): Customers from Latin American countries share similar expectations for each service dimension.

The study is positioned in an unexplored context, emphasizing the lack of consensus among authors in clustering Latin countries based on cultural dimensions. The incongruity in clustering Latin American and Latin European countries is presented as a gap in understanding, and the objective of the research is to determine if Latin countries are a homogeneous group regarding service dimensions.

6 Methodology

The hypotheses were tested within the context of Latin countries, specifically focusing on hotel services. Recent research has extensively explored travel and tourism services, recognizing the significant influence of national culture on tourist behavior towards destinations, [53]. The tourism sector, a vital contributor to economic development in some countries, is also a prominent subject in service quality research due to its unique characteristics. In hotel services, for instance, customers actively contribute to the service experience, [54].

This study addresses a previous gap in the research area by conducting a multi-country analysis, [55]. [56], emphasizes the importance of including a minimum of 10 to 15 cultures in cross-cultural research. To address these gaps, the present research undertakes a transcontinental cross-cultural study, examining 10 different countries with a "presumed cultural similarity paradox", [57], [58].

The selected Latin European countries for this study include France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Romania. The Latin American countries in the study are Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay. The study focuses on university students attending post-graduate, master, and PhD programs

in these selected Latin countries. This population was chosen as they possess the characteristics necessary for responding to a questionnaire about consumer issues and are also customers of the hotel service, with the financial means to spend on such services. Schwartz emphasizes that "countries are meaningful cultural units," and students are considered an ideal sample for cross-cultural research due to their alignment on critical characteristics.

Data collection took place through an online questionnaire administered between April 10th and June 4th, 2018. To enhance the response rate and data validity, all questions were made mandatory. The questionnaire was distributed to selected universities in Latin European and Latin American countries via email, accompanied by an introductory text, a link to the online questionnaire, and a brief explanation of the research. Universities were requested to disseminate the questionnaire among their students, preferably those attending post-graduate courses, master's, and doctoral programs. Respondents were also encouraged to forward the email to their university colleagues, precluding the calculation of a specific response rate.

The questionnaire was initially developed in English and subsequently translated into the native languages of the Latin countries (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and Romanian) by a local native speaker. To ensure consistency, a back translation was conducted to verify that the translated words retained the same meanings in both languages. Employing a 7-point Likert scale for measurement, the questionnaire gauged customers' expectations regarding each service dimension, drawing inspiration from previous authors' measurements and incorporating sociodemographic characteristics, [59], [60], [61].

The questionnaire comprised two main sections. The first section focused on measuring customers' expectations for each new service dimension, while the second section delved into demographic information and certain moderator elements. The construction of the questionnaire followed an evolutionary process. Initially, constructs, questions, and scales from the literature that aligned with the new service dimensions were identified. A preliminary draft was then created with questions categorized under each subdimension of the new service dimensions. Subsequent iterations involved the identification and elimination of repetitions and questions with ambiguous interpretations. However, some subdimensions lacked questions already measured

by previous authors, prompting the formulation of new questions based on the literature review.

Table 2. Variables included in the questionnaire

Main dimensions (variables)	Authors
Degree of Customer Involvement (DCI)	[62], [63]
Convenience Level (CL)	[60], [61], [62], [63], [64]
Contact Personnel Performance (CPP)	[62], [63], [64], [65]
Complexity Degree (CD)	[62], [63]
Information and communication power (ICP)	[62], [63], [64],
Environment and social responsibility (ESR)	[66]

Following this refinement process, a test was conducted in Portugal, where the questionnaire was distributed to individuals involved in tourism and hotel research. Respondents were not only asked to answer the questionnaire but also to identify unclear or repetitive questions. The objective of this test was to resolve any conceptual uncertainties. Table 2 presents the variables included in the questionnaire, along with the references supporting their inclusion.

The analysis compared the means of the countries in the clusters regarding service dimensions, to uncover the homogeneity of the Latin cluster, the Latin American cluster and the Latin European cluster.

7 Findings

7.1 Socio-demographic Profile of the Sample
The sample of this research is adequate with 1262 observations (Portugal (15%), Spain (9%), France (9%), Italy (6%), Romania (9%), Brazil (12%), Mexico (13%), Uruguay (8%), Bolivia (10%) and Chile (7%). In Table 3 is presented the socio-demographic profile of the sample. perceive it as bad - they do not fully know the functions within their competence. 66% consider it.

Table 3. Socio demographic profile by country of residence

	PT	ES	FR	IT	RO	BR	MX	UY	BO	CL	NLE	NEL	NENL	Total
Age														
18 to 25	59%	14%	27%	12%	32%	16%	25%	22%	48%	17%	25%	0%	0%	29%
26 to 40	31%	32%	36%	40%	46%	41%	31%	32%	33%	37%	63%	29%	50%	36%
41 to 60	11%	50%	30%	44%	22%	38%	39%	44%	15%	35%	13%	42%	50%	31%
Above 60	0%	4%	7%	4%	0%	4%	6%	2%	4%	11%	0%	29%	0%	4%
Sex														
Female	26%	36%	29%	22%	50%	42%	33%	47%	43%	30%	63%	46%	17%	43%
Male	74%	64%	71%	78%	50%	58%	67%	53%	57%	70%	38%	54%	83%	57%
Education qualification														
Primary	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Secondary	22%	3%	0%	1%	3%	1%	0%	4%	18%	4%	0%	4%	0%	7%
Bachelor's	36%	13%	6%	36%	24%	17%	35%	40%	48%	23%	13%	29%	0%	28%
Master's/PhD	42%	84%	94%	62%	73%	82%	65%	56%	35%	73%	88%	67%	100%	65%
Annual household income (in relation to country's average)														
Far below	3%	3%	4%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Below	17%	10%	9%	1%	3%	3%	2%	2%	12%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%
Average	42%	38%	27%	55%	25%	21%	26%	29%	38%	19%	50%	29%	33%	32%
Above	36%	42%	48%	42%	48%	45%	57%	62%	39%	53%	38%	46%	33%	46%
Well above	3%	7%	12%	1%	23%	30%	15%	7%	11%	28%	13%	25%	33%	14%

Notes: Portugal (PT); Spain (ES); France (FR); Italy (IT); Romania (RO); Brazil (BR), Mexico (MX); Uruguay (UY); Bolivia (BO); Chile (CL); Non Latin Europe (NLE); Non-European Latin (NEL); Non-European Non Latin (NENL).

7.2 Reliability, Consistency Analysis and Outlier Detection
The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and the Cronbach Alpha determination was conducted on the general sample (N = 1262) and results are in Table 4.

Table 4. Consistency and reliability analysis of service dimensions

Dimension	KMO Test	Cronbach's alpha (score reliability)	AVE	CR
Degree of customer involvement (DCI)	0,879	0,819	0,480	0,820
Convenience level (CL)	0,955	0,947	0,669	0,948
Contact personnel performance (CPP)	0,902	0,941	0,733	0,943
Complexity degree (CD)	0,910	0,895	0,532	0,900
Information and communication power (ICP)	0,840	0,855	0,563	0,865
Environment and social responsibility (ESR)	0,917	0,929	0,611	0,926

The KMO test suggests that the service dimensions DCI (KMO=0.879) and ICP (KMO=0.840) exhibit good homogeneity, falling within the recommended range of 0.8 to 0.9, [67]. Additionally, the service dimensions CL (KMO=0.955), CPP (KMO=0.902), CD (KMO=0.910), and ESR (KMO=0.917) demonstrate excellent homogeneity, surpassing the 0.9 threshold, [67]. Therefore, it is advisable to proceed with the execution of the EFA.

All service dimensions display satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach Alpha (score reliability) exceeding 0.8, per the criteria established by [68]. Moreover, the service dimensions exhibit reliable values, as all CR values are above 0.7, [69]. Furthermore, each service dimension demonstrates convergent validity of the construct, with AVE values exceeding 0.5, except for the degree of customer involvement dimension (DCI), which has an AVE close to 0.5 (AVE=0.480), [69].

Applying the "outlier labeling rule" method proposed by [70], outliers were identified and eliminated. A total of 227 observations were excluded from the sample across service dimensions in all countries of residence.

7.3 Hypothesis Test Results

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA one way) was employed to compare the means of countries within clusters concerning service dimensions. So, this aimed to assess the homogeneity across the Latin, Latin American, and Latin European clusters. For each service dimension, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the means among the Latin countries cluster, the Latin European cluster, and the Latin American cluster, thereby determining whether the means of the countries were similar or different.

The results of the one-way ANOVA, presented in Appendix I, indicated a significance level of 0.000 for the service dimensions: degree of customer involvement (F = 14.972), convenience level (F = 23.742), contact personnel performance (F = 10.817), complexity degree (F = 12.072), information and communication power (F =

16.597), and environment and social responsibility (F = 4.455). Consequently, the null hypothesis (H1) was rejected, providing sufficient statistical evidence to confirm that at least one country's expectations differ for each service dimension.

A one-way ANOVA was applied to ascertain if customers' expectations regarding service dimension varied significantly among Latin European countries to analyze the Latin European cluster (comprising Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Romania) further.

The results of the one-way ANOVA, presented in Appendix II, revealed a significance level of 0.000 for the service dimensions: degree of customer involvement (F = 14.789), convenience level (F = 26.806), contact personnel performance (F = 6.020), complexity degree (F = 7.337), information and communication power (F = 18.637), and environment and social responsibility (F = 2.742). Consequently, the null hypothesis (H2) was rejected, providing sufficient statistical evidence to confirm that at least one Latin European country's expectations for each service dimension differ.

8 Discussion

Prior studies have emphasized that customer expectations regarding services vary based on the country of residence, particularly concerning physical features, facilities, contact with staff, [71], service quality, available personnel, employee empathy, and location, [2]. The findings reveal that Latin countries do not constitute a homogeneous group; at least one country differs, indicating that customers in these countries do not share the same expectations regarding service dimensions. This contradicts earlier assertions, [50], that Latin countries can be grouped together based on their culture.

Examining the homogeneity of the Latin European cluster and the Latin American cluster, the results indicate differences within each cluster, challenging the notion of homogeneous expectations among customers. This contrasts with previous claims, [18], [46], [47], suggesting that

both Latin European and Latin American countries can be treated as homogeneous clusters in terms of culture. Moreover, the lack of homogeneity within these clusters—Latin, Latin European, and Latin American—means that service providers cannot perceive customers' expectations about service as similar when devising internationalization strategies for these countries. Consequently, service providers must meticulously analyze the unique characteristics of each country and tailor their marketing strategies and service offerings accordingly.

Previous research has advocated that managers typically prioritize countries that are culturally and historically closer, measured by language distance, religious disparities, and colonial ties, [11], assuming these factors are the most challenging to overcome. However, this approach is not applicable to Latin countries, as their differences in expectations about service stem from cultural distinctions rather than historical ties.

These results presents a clear contradiction with previous research, particularly referencing studies [18], [46], [47] and [50]. This contradiction is a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge and challenges the assumption that Latin countries, whether European or American, can be clustered together based on cultural dimensions. In terms of country-specific expectations, findings highlight the nuanced nature of customer expectations within Latin countries, emphasizing that at least one country in each cluster differs in terms of service dimensions. This nuance underscores the importance of moving beyond broad cultural generalizations and recognizing the unique characteristics of each country.

This discussion effectively brings out the practical implications for internationalization strategies. The fact that expectations differ within both the Latin European and Latin American clusters implies that a one-size-fits-all approach cannot be applied. Service providers must conduct a thorough analysis of each country's characteristics and tailor their strategies accordingly. The disconfirmation of the idea that cultural and historical proximity is the primary factor for country selection emphasizes that managers need to prioritize an understanding of local expectations over traditional indicators such as language distance or colonial ties. This challenges the assumption that cultural and historical closeness is the most critical factor in country selection, [11]. By highlighting that differences in expectations exist within the Latin countries, it suggests that

cultural differences play a more substantial role than historical ties. This challenges conventional wisdom in international business literature.

9 Conclusions and Contributions

It is evident that Latin countries, including both the Latin European and Latin American clusters, do not exhibit homogeneity concerning customer expectations about service dimensions. This lack of homogeneity implies that customers within these clusters differ in their expectations, with at least one country displaying distinct means. Consequently, the grouping of Latin countries based on customer expectations about service dimensions is not viable, and the same holds true for attempts to present Latin European and Latin American clusters as homogeneous.

This research not only highlights the absence of homogeneity but also contributes to resolving previous disagreements in clustering Latin countries based on cultural similarity. The findings affirm that Latin European and Latin American customers exhibit differences in their expectations of service dimensions, refuting the notion that these regions can be clustered together. Therefore, Latin countries, whether American or European, do not cluster regarding customer expectations about service dimensions.

The implications of this research extend to practitioners, providing managers with a nuanced understanding of customers' expectations in countries that were traditionally thought to cluster together. Consequently, it is emphasized that a uniform approach to designing and marketing services should not be applied across Latin countries, be they American or European. These insights can inform the development or redefinition of marketing strategies during internationalization processes.

The primary limitation of this research is its exclusive focus on the hotel service context. Although the service dimension scale was designed for applicability across various services, future research has the potential to validate the identified relationships in different service domains, as consumption patterns change over the years, [72]. The second limitation is context-specific, as the study concentrated on a particular set of Latin countries to test hypotheses. However, there is room for future research to replicate these hypotheses in diverse country groups characterized by cultural proximity. Alternatively, the study could be expanded to include additional Latin countries, including some African nations

recognized as Latin countries by the Latin Union (2012), such as Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Senegal. Despite their inclusion in the Latin Union, these African countries have not been incorporated into cross-cultural studies and remain outside any established cluster.

While noting contradictions with specific studies, the discussion could further integrate these findings into the broader literature on cross-cultural management and internationalization. This would help position the study within the existing scholarly conversation and emphasize its contribution to advancing knowledge in the field, [73]. In future research, it could be explored specific cultural dimensions that contribute to the variation in customer expectations within Latin clusters or investigating how different industries may be affected by these cultural differences could be areas for further exploration.

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Appendix I

One-way ANOVA applied to service dimensions for Latin European countries

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Degree of Customer Involvement	Between Groups	117,500	9	13,056	14,972	0,000
	Within Groups	1053,377	1208	0,872		
	Total	1170,877	1217			
Convenience Level	Between Groups	45,120	9	5,013	23,742	0,000
	Within Groups	238,185	1128	0,211		
	Total	283,305	1137			
Contact Personnel Performance	Between Groups	41,297	9	4,589	10,817	0,000
	Within Groups	487,410	1149	0,424		
	Total	528,707	1158			
Complexity Degree	Between Groups	77,476	9	8,608	12,072	0,000
	Within Groups	843,612	1183	0,713		
	Total	921,088	1192			
Information and Communication Power	Between Groups	106,040	9	11,782	16,597	0,000
	Within Groups	839,118	1182	0,710		
	Total	945,158	1191			
Enviroment and Social Responsibility	Between Groups	40,099	9	4,455	4,625	0,000
	Within Groups	1168,493	1213	0,963		
	Total	1208,592	1222			

Appendix II

One-way ANOVA applied to service dimensions for Latin American countries

Latin Europe		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Degree of Customer Involvement	Between Groups	49,289	4	12,322	14,789	0,000
	Within Groups	500,753	601	0,833		
	Total	550,042	605			
Convenience Level	Between Groups	26,795	4	6,699	26,806	0,000
	Within Groups	141,192	565	0,250		
	Total	167,987	569			
Contact Personnel Performance	Between Groups	11,433	4	2,858	6,020	0,000
	Within Groups	275,381	580	0,475		
	Total	286,815	584			
Complexity Degree	Between Groups	22,341	4	5,585	7,337	0,000
	Within Groups	452,927	595	0,761		
	Total	475,268	599			
Information and Communication Power	Between Groups	56,587	4	14,147	18,637	0,000
	Within Groups	452,404	596	0,759		
	Total	508,991	600			
Enviroment and Social Responsibility	Between Groups	9,385	4	2,346	2,742	0,028
	Within Groups	513,302	600	0,856		
	Total	522,687	604			

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Conflict of Interest
The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.