

Reflections of Cultural Dynamics on International Trade: A Qualitative Analysis Approach 8

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Abstract

Culture is a structure that is not innate but acquired later by individuals, shaped through social environment, traditions and customs, religious beliefs, and value judgments. It can be defined as the set of beliefs and norms adopted by societies in order to make sense of, organize, and guide their individual and collective lives. There are many different cultures around the world. With the effect of globalization, interaction between different cultures is increasing, and production and trade activities are gaining a cross-border nature. Today, a product is designed in one country, manufactured in various regions, and reaches consumers in many markets. This situation offers firms access to an expanding market on an international scale. In this context, the interaction between culture and international trade is becoming increasingly important. One of the widely accepted views in the literature is that cultural similarities facilitate foreign trade; as countries with a common cultural background encounter fewer problems in communication and business processes. However, it is also argued that such similarities may lead to trade being limited to certain regions. On the other hand, when managed with appropriate strategies, cultural differences can create significant opportunities for firms and contribute to their success in international markets. This study aims to reveal the strategic importance of cultural characteristics in the context of international trade and to contribute to the literature in this field.

1. Introduction

In a globalizing world, international trade has gained momentum and

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made continuous progress. While progressing, it has been influenced by both economic and external factors. Culture is one of the most important and decisive external factors. People want to maintain consumption habits that are consistent with their lifestyles and customs. They tend to always give priority to countries that offer products and services with attention to this issue. Although product price and quality are decisive factors in commercial terms, price and quality alone are not sufficient in cultural terms. Globally, countries expect their business partners to share similar values with them. If this is not possible, they at least expect them to be sensitive to their customs and traditions and to show respect for their values. Conducting business by understanding each other and showing respect for each other's values is an important cultural factor. Even seemingly insignificant details can increase fragility between countries and damage commercial relations. In this context, it is extremely important for countries wishing to operate globally to be knowledgeable about different cultures.

In this context, the main objective of this study is to provide general information about various cultures to companies wishing to export their products or services to a different country for the first time. To this end, an attempt has been made to provide general information about the cultural structures of countries from different regions of the world that are considered to have different cultures. The countries covered in the study were selected randomly, and countries for which detailed information could be collected were included in the scope of the study. Information on topics such as punctuality, business meetings, business dinners, and gift-giving cultures in the selected countries was compiled and summarized by examining various written sources. The study was prepared according to qualitative analysis principles and was prepared in accordance with the document/text analysis technique, which is a type of qualitative analysis.

2. The Concept of Culture

There are various definitions of the concept of culture. According to Boyd and Richardson, culture is a set of values that influence knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors passed down from generation to generation through learning or imitation (1985, p. 2). Guiso et al. (2006, p. 23) define culture as a set of ethnic and religious traditional beliefs and values that can be passed down unchanged from generation to generation. Culture is the identity of societies (Arslan et al., 2017, p. 670). It is expressed as a whole set of material and spiritual values, such as knowledge, art, ethics, law, beliefs, customs, and traditions, which include the skills and habits acquired by individuals who are members of a society (Çetin, 2016, p. 73). Culture is an abstract concept

that influences the behavior of individuals (McCort and Malhotra, 1993, p. 92). Based on all these statements, culture refers to the sum of the religion, language, beliefs, behavior, aesthetic, and moral values learned by individuals belonging to a society (Özcan, 2000, p. 24). In other words, it is the set of norms that regulate individuals' behavior so that they can live in harmony within the community (Saydan and Kambir, 2007, p. 74-89).

There are five basic elements that constitute culture. These elements can be listed as values, norms, beliefs, symbols, and language. Values are thoughts and principles that contain norms but are more general than norms, serving as a control mechanism that provides criteria for distinguishing between good and bad or beautiful and ugly. Norms are written or verbal rules that regulate customary and ideal patterns of behavior within society and impose sanctions on individuals who fail to comply. Beliefs are truths, facts, and ideals shared by people, which may be based on common sense, religion, or science. Symbols are the meanings that individuals attach to the objects they perceive in the outside world. Language is an important tool in learning and transmitting culture and is the whole system of symbols and rules that contributes to individuals interacting with each other (Yaylaci, 2014, p. 35).

2.1. Characteristics of Culture

Culture, which varies from country to country and society to society, is a phenomenon with a broad scope that encompasses various elements in terms of its characteristics. In this context, the characteristics of culture can be summarized as follows (Özalp, 2009, p. 87-88):

- **Learned:** Culture is not an innate characteristic. Individuals first learn the cultural values of their society within their families. The acquisition of culture continues later in school and work life. Individuals become carriers of a particular culture by communicating with other individuals.
- **Social:** Culture does not belong to a single individual, but to every member of a society. It is created by the members of society and used collectively. Personal values do not reflect the cultural characteristics of society.
- **Changeable:** Culture can change according to time and the needs of individuals. The rate of change varies according to the level of modernity of the society. While change occurs slowly in a small society where acceptance takes a long time, changes are quickly accepted in developed or developing societies.

- **Need-Satisfying and Fulfilling:** Culture is a structure that regulates behavior to enable individuals to live in harmony, thus meeting their biological and psychological needs. Cultural elements must provide satisfaction to society members in order to maintain their existence.
- **Adaptable:** Culture is a phenomenon that can be changed or adapted according to the will of individuals.
- **Transmitted from Generation to Generation:** Culture, which forms a bond between generations, is an ever-growing accumulation.
- **Restrictive:** Culture restricts the behavior of a society by placing it within a specific mold. When members of a society interact with individuals from other societies, they feel compelled to preserve their cultural values and behave in accordance with the restrictions imposed by their culture.
- **Symbolic:** Culture is the symbolization of a phenomenon by assigning meanings to it. The values possessed by societies can be demonstrated to other societies with which they interact through symbols.
- **Composed of Interrelated Elements:** Culture is a structure composed of various interrelated elements. Any change in one element affects the others because they are interrelated.

3. Trade Culture in International Trade

Global economies are increasing the number of companies operating internationally every day. The cultural differences between international companies and the foreign companies they work with directly affect many business-related issues (Mutlu, 1999, p. 270). In global trade, it is necessary to behave according to the traditions of the host country and observe local customs (Gesteland, 2005, p. 15). Market failures due to socio-cultural reasons are likely to occur in trade negotiations. The mutual lack of understanding of cultures by international companies is a hidden factor that leads to failure (Öğüt and Kocabacak, 2008, p. 148). The greater the cultural differences with host countries, the greater the problems that will arise in global markets (Tung, 1998, p. 23-27). Therefore, it is inevitable for international companies to learn about cultures different from their own and develop strategies accordingly (Ehtiyar, 2003, p. 67).

International businesses that prioritize only their own culture and disregard other cultures will fail in global markets (Mutlu, 1999, p. 270). In this case, the cultural environment of the target audience in global markets

must first be determined, and it should not be forgotten that the customer who forms this environment has significant effects on various networks such as economic units that manage the buying and selling processes, advertising and media tools, and companies that conduct marketing research (Gegez et al., 2003, p. 87). Companies that learn about different cultures and implement strategies according to these cultures increase their competitive power and, consequently, their business success (Sheer & Chen, 2003, p. 52).

4. Research Method

In order to provide information on what companies exporting goods or services for the first time or wishing to work with a new country should pay attention to during business meetings, document/text analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study. To this end, countries where all information on greetings, punctuality, gift-giving, business dinners, and meetings could be accessed were included in the scope of the study. The cultural characteristics of these selected countries and the importance of these characteristics in terms of trade were investigated, and the information collected through qualitative analysis was summarized.

4.1. Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative research is one of the methods developed to produce knowledge with the aim of understanding an individual's own potential, analyzing their inner world, and examining the depth of social structures. This method involves a deep effort to gather information about the subject being studied. It is based on collecting data from as many sources as possible and reinterpreting it from the researcher's perspective. Qualitative research also examines the problem it addresses within its own context, focusing on the meanings researchers assign to it, using an interpretive approach. During the qualitative research process, the researcher's mental processes of discovery are activated. Since this approach is researcher-focused, it is largely subjective and highly susceptible to the researcher's personal assessments.

Researchers working with this method are obliged to preserve the subject without straying from its originality and without detaching it from its real context. While elaborating on the subject according to their own views, researchers should analyze, interpret, and make sense of the subject's own realities (Özdemir, 2010).

There are three types of qualitative research: observation, interview, and document/text analysis. Since the document/text analysis method was used in this study, only document analysis will be discussed under this heading.

4.1.1. Document/Text Analysis

Scanning written documents containing information about the phenomena or events under investigation in detail and forming a meaningful whole from this data is called document or text analysis. This method, which also includes literature review, allows the researcher to systematize their observations and interview records as well as other documents. Document analysis allows the researcher to save time and resources, and facilitates the classification of the phenomena and events under investigation according to their order of importance, the organization of data sources, and the creation of new data sets (Baltaci, 2019).

5. Findings

This section of the study summarizes the characteristics of the trade cultures of the countries selected to represent Asia, Europe, North America, the Middle East, and North Africa. The countries included in the study are listed in Table 1. The cultural characteristics of the countries listed in Table 1 are explained in the order presented in the table.

Table 1. Countries Included in the Study			
European Countries	Asian Countries	North American Countries	Middle Eastern and North African Countries
Germany	China	The United States	Iran
Italy	India		Egypt
Russia	Japan		Türkiye
Spain	Kazakhstan		
France			
England			

Source: Prepared by the author.

Germany

Germany, which stands out in world trade for its business discipline, looks at the reliability and profitability of a country's laws before doing business there (Cioffi, 2002, p. 355). According to their adopted business model, they prefer to first develop their own technologies in their own countries, then open up to foreign markets and increase their market share (Bond et al., 2003, p.153).

Germans are very punctual and expect the other party to be sensitive about this. They prefer to conduct business meetings during business hours. Business meetings and correspondence are conducted in English (Evason, 2017). They always want business meetings to be held at their own offices first. They mostly want their own business models to be valid. They attach importance to written contracts. Continuing discussions on the subject of the contract after it has been signed is a sign of mistrust for them (Bruttel & Sol, 2006, p. 69-89).

Germans keep their private and professional lives separate. They place great importance on hierarchy. The most senior person enters the meeting room first. Company titles are not taken into account. The terms “Herr” or “Madam” are used. However, academic titles must be used if applicable.

Business cards are important to Germans. Educational information and, if applicable, the person’s achievements should be added to the business card. If Germans nod in greeting, you must nod back; nodding without them nodding first is not well received.

Germans are generally reserved people. They are also very organized and methodical. They dislike sudden changes in business matters (even if they are positive developments). They are rule-oriented and place importance on adhering to rules and ensuring others do the same. They want every task to proceed according to plan and schedule (Evason, 2017).

If you are having a meal with Germans, you should not arrive before the invitation time; you should arrive right at the meal time. You should not sit down until you are shown to your seat. You must send a polite message the next day.

Gift-giving is not welcome in German business culture, and they make this clear through their actions. Germans should never be given gifts without giving one in return. Giving expensive gifts can lead to misunderstandings. Bringing chocolate or flowers is considered a sign of courtesy. However, carnations and chrysanthemums should not be chosen as they represent mourning. Red flowers are also frowned upon. As the number 13 is considered unlucky for Germans, the number or content of gifts should not be related to the number 13 (Minvielle, 2023).

Italy

Italy, with its Mediterranean character, is a country where business negotiations are easiest to conduct. Italians place more importance on packaging and presentation than on the contents of a product. To them,

anything that looks beautiful and appeals to the eye is of high quality.

Italians, who have a humorous personality, can be loud during meetings. They are also very prone to interrupting the other party (Kenna & Lacy, 1995, p. 15). They generally prefer to conduct initial business meetings in the office. When meeting people during interviews, the terms “Signore” or “Signora” must be used before their names. They attach great importance to titles. Italians place great importance on maintaining eye contact throughout the interview. Avoiding eye contact means you are bored, in their view. An appointment must be made before the interview, and care should be taken not to be late for the meeting. Meetings must be in writing. They do not prefer to talk business immediately at meetings; they prioritize getting to know you first (Gesteland, 2005, p. 211).

Italians place great importance on hierarchy. They respect power and age. Italians love compliments. They are also tactile and dislike distance. Italians are not punctual and may be late for meetings. However, the concept of “being on time” is extremely important in Italian business culture. According to this concept, the other party must always be prepared (Evasion, 2017). They do not speak English very well. Therefore, an interpreter is needed. Business cards are widely used in Italy. One side of the business card should be in English, and the other side in Italian. People’s titles and educational information must be included on the business card (İtkib, 2008, p. 10).

Italians prefer to exchange gifts only on very special occasions. They do not consider it appropriate for the other party to give a gift without them giving one first. Gifts should be from prestigious brands but should not be too expensive. They should not be small gifts either. Gifts should be opened immediately upon receipt. Gifts should definitely not feature a company logo. Black and gold packaging should not be chosen as it symbolizes mourning, and purple packaging should be avoided as it symbolizes bad luck. If flowers are to be given, red and yellow flowers and chrysanthemums should be avoided (Melemen, 2012, p. 246).

In Italy, business dinners are only for special people and are few in number. Meals are usually served very late. You should not leave the table for any reason, even to use the restroom. You should not make phone calls at the table. These situations are frowned upon by Italians (Evasion, 2017).

Russia

Russian business culture requires a sense of belonging to a group and behaving appropriately within that group. Establishing long-term and reliable relationships is essential for the successful outcome of a business deal.

Patience is extremely important when dealing with Russians. They prefer not to do business with people they do not trust (Katz, 2006). Although business meetings are conducted face-to-face, intensive phone calls should also be made (Gesteland, 2005, p. 187). Maintaining contact with the person they are talking to during a conversation shows that they trust them.

Russians are not solution-oriented. Because they are problem-oriented, they discuss a problem without producing any solutions. They are not punctual. However, they expect the other party to arrive at meetings on time, while they themselves may arrive 1-2 hours late. Current and social topics must be discussed before starting a business meeting. Contracts made with Russians should be short and concise and prepared in both English and Russian. Russians may frequently make changes to contracts. However, they do not like to reopen a topic that has already been agreed upon. They often resort to deceptive techniques to gain a marketing advantage, may play dumb, and may mislead the other party. It is very difficult to get them to compromise. They do not like to take risks. They pay close attention to price in export negotiations. Business cards are extremely important for Russians. They should be prepared with one side in English and one side in Russian, and the person's professional titles must be included. Russians have three names: first name, last name, and their father's surname. These three names must be learned. Russians love exchanging gifts. Since they spend a lot of money on gifts, you should bring expensive gifts to Russians. If you are giving flowers, yellow, white, and red flowers should definitely not be chosen (Melemen, 2012, p. 135-137).

Spain

Individualism dominates Spanish business culture. Group decision-making is very rare. Because they place great importance on hierarchy, people of equal status should work together. They generally display a modest attitude and do not like people who appear overly confident (Dreamer, 2021). They are not punctual, but they expect visitors to be punctual. In business meetings, one should not jump straight into the topic but try to get acquainted first. Topics are discussed in detail during meetings, and bargaining is extremely important (Gesteland, 2005, p. 216). They prefer meetings to be conducted in Spanish. Titles are extremely important to them.

Gifts should only be exchanged if the meeting is successful. Care should be taken to ensure that the gift is of good quality, well-packaged, and not excessively expensive. Gifts related to the number 13 and chrysanthemums should definitely be avoided (Çekinmez, 2006, p. 9).

France

In France, where economic classes hold significant importance, values are always prioritized. The French consistently take pride in their culture, history, language, and arts. They are uncompromising in highlighting their unique values in fields such as art, entertainment, and commerce. As they dislike silence during conversations, researching French history and culture beforehand and using this knowledge during discussions can be advantageous (Köse & Ünal, 2003, p. 35). In commercial agreements, they seek to obtain as much information as possible about the other party before making any decisions (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1995, p. 305–309).

The French generally display a formal and distant attitude toward people they meet for the first time. However, despite this formality, they prefer to stand in close proximity while speaking. In business meetings, handshakes are the preferred form of greeting. Unlike in other countries, smiling holds no particular significance in France. Eye contact is extremely important for the French. As hierarchy is highly valued, the titles of the individuals to be met must be known in advance. Unless requested otherwise, addressing the French by their first names should be avoided, and the use of titles such as “monsieur” or “madame” is essential. In French culture, attempting to meet without an appointment is considered impolite, both in daily life and in business settings. It is crucial to adhere strictly to the scheduled time (Melemen, 2012, p. 271–272). During meetings, the French expect exporters to speak French, and poor use of the language is not well received. Furthermore, they do not hesitate to correct grammatical errors during conversation. This should be taken with tolerance and not perceived as rudeness. Logic forms the foundation of France’s business culture. The French do not hesitate to criticize ideas they find illogical (Gesteland, 2005, p. 203).

In French business culture, making changes and taking risks is not welcomed. When they encounter failure in a business matter, they prefer to find a new course of action through rules and regulations. Written communication is extremely important to them. Phone calls and face-to-face meetings are not considered significant or actionable unless they are documented in writing (Université Paris Cité, n.d.).

The French generally prefer to schedule business meals around lunchtime. They do not like discussing business during meals. Due to their respect for hierarchy, the most important person sits at the head of the table. The next in rank sits to their left, and the second most important person sits to their right. Upon entering and leaving, each person at the

table must be individually greeted; failure to do so is considered rude. At home invitations, no food should be left on the plate (Scroope, 2017). For business meals, punctuality is essential, whereas for home invitations, arriving 15-20 minutes late is appropriate (Université Paris Cité, n.d.). At home invitations, serving orange juice after coffee signals to the guest that it is time to leave. Gift-giving holds moderate importance in French culture and should be done at an appropriate time. Suitable gifts include flowers, quality chocolates, fine wine, or liqueur. If flowers are given, carnations symbolize ill will, and chrysanthemums are associated with funerals, so these two types should be avoided. Gifts are generally considered appropriate to present before the meeting begins at invitations. Gifts should be opened upon receipt (Melemen, 2012, p. 275).

England

Known in international trade as the “Empire on which the sun never sets,” England shares similar characteristics with America in terms of power and avoiding uncertainty. The British focus on long-term business relationships rather than short-term ones.

They have a cold and detached demeanor and dislike physical contact. Conservatism and personal space are important. Care should be taken to leave space between people when sitting and to avoid physical contact. You should also avoid asking personal questions (Catterall, 2025). During conversation, you should maintain a distance of at least an arm's length. Shaking hands is appropriate when meeting for business, but when shaking hands with women, you should wait for the woman to extend her hand first (Gesteland, 2005, p. 234).

To meet with British people, an appointment should be made at least two weeks in advance. During meetings, one should be logical and sensible, make eye contact, and introduce oneself by first and last name. The British like to discuss current affairs before meetings. Therefore, it would be useful to review the agenda there before visiting the UK. Also, the British do not feel like members of the European Union. Sensitivity should be shown on this issue during discussions. The British use body language with great skill and reveal very little of what they are thinking to the other party. It is quite difficult to understand what they are thinking from their facial expressions. They prefer a conservative dress style at meetings. Therefore, a dress style that is not too flashy should be preferred. Also, since they prefer to wear striped ties only in schools and military places, striped ties should definitely not be worn during meetings (Evason, 2016).

Humor is part of British business culture. They like to use humor in meetings and business discussions. They prefer to use humor to soften a tense atmosphere (Warburton, n.d.).

Business cards are an important component of business meetings, and you should always bring enough business cards with you. They are punctual. You should always make sure to arrive on time for meetings. Gift-giving is not very common in British business culture. However, flowers can be brought to invitations. You should avoid bringing chrysanthemums, white lilies, and red roses. The British prefer to eat food that is appropriate for their geographical location. At business dinners, care should be taken to use the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right hand (Melemen, 2012, p. 246).

China

It is impossible not to be influenced by China in global trade and not to engage in economic activities. Due to this characteristic, China is a country that maintains its importance in world trade and requires attention to traditional trading styles.

The Chinese attach great importance to their history. They like to ask guests about current or historical topics related to their country to learn their opinions. In this case, China and Chinese leaders should definitely not be criticized, and political discussions should be avoided at all costs (Jensen, 2000, p. 164). Care should be taken to give short and accurate answers (Bjerke, 2001, p. 106). Chinese people prefer to bow and shake hands simultaneously when greeting someone. Introductions should be made from the most senior to the least senior.

They are punctual. Making appointments in advance and arriving on time is very important to them (Köse and Ünal, 2003, p. 37). Chinese slides and colorful brochures are considered appealing during meetings. Entry into the meeting room and seating at the table are based on seniority, with the most senior person entering the room first (Melemen, 2012, p. 246). At the beginning of the meeting, the Chinese wait for their counterparts to place their offer on the table and then make an offer of their own, without making eye contact. Reflecting the understanding of “kill, but with a borrowed knife,” this situation is ingrained in Chinese culture and is one of the most frequently used tactics of the Chinese (Fang, 2000, p. 204). The Chinese are very patient. They may prolong negotiations to wear down the other side (Li et al., 2001, p. 115). They tend to return to a topic they have discussed and explain it repeatedly, so it is necessary to listen patiently each time. The

Chinese do not go to a country to buy goods; the seller must bring the goods to them. Even if the purchase does not go through, any questions or emails from China should not be left unanswered; a positive or negative response should be given (Çiçek and Koyuncu, 2007, p. 45-64). Due to their culture, Chinese people use indirect language because they cannot say “no” directly (Sheer and Chen, 2003, p.52). Consensus is very important in China. No decision is made without consensus (Bjerke, 2001, p. 104). Bargaining is a very important concept for the Chinese. They consider a deal made without bargaining to be incomplete (Chinese Culture Center, 2004, p. 22).

In China, the surname comes before the given name. Full titles should be used when meeting someone for the first time and when addressing a Chinese person. For the Chinese, smiling is a sign of irritability. They prefer to smile when faced with an unpleasant situation (Li et al., 2001, p. 132-137). Pointing at someone with the index finger or waving the index finger is perceived as aggressive and rude (Jensen, 2000, p. 165).

Business cards are very important to Chinese people. One side of the card should be in Chinese. Cards should be presented and received with both hands, with the Chinese side facing up. When receiving a business card, it should be examined for a while, not immediately put in a pocket, and kept on the table during the meeting. In Chinese culture, gold represents prestige and wealth, so business cards printed with gold ink will create a positive impression (Plafker, 2007, p. 85-86).

In Chinese culture, it is very important not to be late for a meal. They usually prefer to arrive 15 minutes early. All guests should arrive together and on time. One should not sit down without being shown a seat. One should not talk during the meal, and chopsticks should be used for eating (Köse and Ünal, 2003, p. 38-41). Giving a tip implies that the person did not do their job well and is considered insulting. Therefore, tips should never be given (Li et al., 2001, p. 142).

In China, gift-giving is seen as a sign of respect and courtesy. The size of the gift is not important. A visitor who arrives without a gift is considered disrespectful. The number 4 and the word “hour” are associated with death, so gifts should not contain anything related to these. The number 8 represents abundance and prosperity, so a gift associated with this number is positively received. Gifts should be given according to hierarchy. Blue, black, and white colors should not be preferred as they are associated with death and funerals; yellow, red, and pink colors should be preferred instead (Quanyu et al., 1994, p. 215-216).

India

India, one of the oldest civilizations in world history, is a country with great diversity in religion and language due to the CAST system and British colonialism. When greeting someone, you should place your hands together in front of your head, palms touching, and bow your head. Greetings can also be in the form of a handshake, but women should never shake hands without extending their hand first. Indians are not punctual. Their plans can change even at the last minute. Therefore, it is necessary to confirm appointments a few days in advance (Scroope, 2018).

For Indians, “word” is essential. Therefore, they prefer not to make written agreements. However, if companies are going to work with Indians, they must make a written contract and work with a letter of credit, which is a guaranteed form of payment (Scroope, 2018).

Indians place great importance on titles. They may continue to use titles in everyday life. There is no specific seating arrangement at meeting tables. However, they place importance on older, more senior, and more experienced individuals speaking first. All topics discussed are generally decided at the meeting table (Kumar and Sethi, 2005, p. 133).

Indians prefer to flavor their food with various spices such as saffron, curry, black cumin, mustard, cinnamon, and ginger. Those who follow Buddhism do not eat meat, while those who follow Hinduism can eat meat other than beef (Melemen, 2012, p. 167).

Gift-giving is not very important in India. However, a person invited to a meal may bring a gift that is not very expensive and is not available in India. However, since the Hindu religion is embraced, products derived from beef and leather products should not be brought (Çekinmez, 2006, p. 9).

Japan

In Japanese culture, where harmony, loyalty, and national consciousness are at their highest, people are very inclined to work together and in harmony. The Japanese prefer to resolve all disputes they encounter through compromise. Waste is a very important concept in Japanese culture, and using everything without waste forms the basis of this culture. This concept is seen as the starting point for the concepts of zero defects, just-in-time production, and lean organization in industry. Japanese people, who view written contracts as a formality and a sign of distrust, generally place importance on their word. Even if they do sign contracts, these contracts are not very detailed (Melemen, 2012, p. 246).

When greeting each other, the Japanese prefer to bow rather than shake hands. Those with higher seniority bow less, while those with lower seniority bow more. People are introduced by their surname and title in order of age (Scroope, 2021). At meetings, the most senior people sit at the center of the table. They are followed by their assistants and seniors in order of title. It is expected that people of equal rank will sit opposite each other.

Business cards are extremely important in Japanese culture. The most senior individuals present their business cards first. Business cards should be presented with both hands, examined in detail when received, nothing should be written on the card, titles must be included, and one side of the card must be in Japanese. Cards should not be immediately put in a pocket but kept on the table throughout the meeting (Jetro, 2000, p. 7).

The Japanese consider using the word “no” to be rude, so instead of saying “no,” they prefer to say “we will consider it.” They use the word “yes” not only to approve or accept something, but also to indicate that they understand what has been said. Therefore, every “yes” should not be interpreted as approval or acceptance (Güvenç, 1989, p. 134).

For the Japanese, product quality and standards come first. Price is secondary. They consider anything that has been discounted to be of poor quality. Once the price is lowered, it is very difficult to raise it again. In addition, they attach great importance to packaging and presentation (Enginkaya, 2005, p. 99-108).

Fish is fundamental to Japanese food culture. They generally prefer to eat fish. Green tea must always be present at the table. In Japanese culture, tipping restaurant staff makes them feel belittled. Therefore, tips should never be given.

Gift-giving is extremely important in Japanese culture. Gifts should be purchased from the region or area where they live, given after the meeting, and should never be opened in front of the recipient when received. As the number 4 is associated with death, gifts should not bear any reference to this number. Great care should be taken to ensure the gift is well wrapped.

Kazakhstan

Handshakes are common in business meetings. Eye contact should also be made. Some Kazakh men may not want to shake hands with women. If several meetings are scheduled on the same day, a handshake is required each time. A handshake is also required when leaving the meeting. People are addressed by their first names and titles (Commisceo Global, n.d.).

Business cards are an important element. One side should be in English and the other in Russian. There is no specific way to give a business card, but it should not be immediately put in your pocket; you should glance at it.

Hierarchy is important in Kazakhstan. At meetings, people of the same level usually sit opposite each other at T-shaped tables. Business should not be discussed immediately at the meeting; current topics should be discussed, and the other party should be allowed to bring up the business topic. Giving small gifts at the end of the meeting is appreciated.

In Kazakhstan, a written contract should not be expected for every decision. If a solid and honest business relationship is established, a handshake often signifies an agreement (Melemen, 2012, p. 198-199).

The United States of America (USA)

Comprising fifty states and one federal district, the United States is home to people from many different ethnicities and races, making it difficult to speak of a single trade and food culture. However, American culture can be summarized with the words change, flexibility, diversity, and individualism. Americans, who appear hardworking and entrepreneurial, have a dynamic and assertive spirit. Because they like to boast about their past successes, this is often perceived as arrogance and pride. For them, past achievements are more important and worthy of respect than age or experience (Evason, 2021).

Greetings involve a handshake. A light handshake is seen as a sign of distrust. When meeting someone in a position of authority, they should extend their hand first. They dislike physical contact. Hand jokes should be avoided. Sitting close to them in business meetings makes them uncomfortable. Meetings proceed at a fast pace. Remaining silent during a meeting is frowned upon. They do not hesitate to say "No" if they have a negative opinion about business. Being solution-oriented, they believe that every problem has a solution. Business ethics are extremely important to them (Evason, 2016). They do not beat around the bush in meetings; they get straight to the point. For them, a lack of eye contact causes trust issues. They generally prefer to do business with overly corporate and reliable companies (Business Culture, 2025). Because they have a competitive and aggressive character, they use threats and warnings as a persuasion tactic on issues they disagree with (Sonußen, 1997, p. 22-23).

Jokes are commonly used in American culture, but when tensions are high, jokes should not be used to try to lighten the mood. Personal questions should never be asked during business meetings. They are punctual. For

them, time is as valuable as money in the bank. Punctuality is one of the most important components of this culture. When evaluating the other party, they look at their attitude towards time and how they use it. Business breakfasts are common. They believe that the host must pay for the business meal. They are not concerned about discussing business at invitations. Business meals should be attended on time. They consider arriving before the meal time to be rude. Gift-giving is not very common. They accept gifts from the other party but may not give gifts to the other party themselves. Gifts should be given when the business meeting is over (Mclemen, 2012, p. 229-230).

Iran

Greetings are exchanged with a handshake. However, if there is a female employee on the other side, you should not extend your hand unless she extends hers first. If she does not extend her hand, it is preferable to greet her with a nod (Mirabi, 2025). Political topics should never be discussed during business meetings (World Travel Guide, 2012). Negative comments should not be made about Islam, state policies, or Iran's international relations (Evason, 2016).

They are not punctual, but they expect the other party to be punctual. Business should not be discussed directly during meetings; the other party should be allowed to bring up the subject. If wearing a jacket, permission must be asked before removing it. As Muslims, they do not work on Fridays (Mclemen, 2012, p. 246).

Business dinners are very common. Iranians generally prefer to discuss work-related topics at business dinners. The bill is not split between the parties; the host pays (Neil, n.d.). Business cards are important and should be prepared in Farsi. Business cards are exchanged by middle and senior managers. Gift-giving is not very common in Iranian culture. Expensive gifts should be avoided as they may be perceived as wasteful (Evason, 2016). Gifts should be well-wrapped (Izraeli, 2004, p. 1-2).

Egypt

Egypt, which plays an important commercial role due to its geographical location, is a modern Islamic country. As it is a Muslim country, Friday is considered a holy day. Therefore, they do not work on Fridays. In fact, a large part of the population does not work on Thursdays either. Egyptians are not punctual. However, they expect the other party to arrive on time (Akgür and Roca, 1997, p. 97).

Egyptians enjoy contact and joking around. Upon first meeting, the other

party is greeted with a handshake. However, it is not preferred for women to shake hands with men. In the Arab world, the left hand is considered unclean, so the right hand is generally used for handshakes. To do business in Egypt, it is essential to have an intermediary from that country. This allows them to trust and do long-term business. Hierarchy is extremely important, and decisions are made in accordance with hierarchy. Business cards are widely used in Egypt. One side of the card must be in Arabic. When receiving a business card, it should definitely not be put in your pocket without looking at it first. Titles are very important to Egyptians. When addressing an Egyptian, the title is said first, followed by the surname (Scroope, 2017).

When going to a meeting in Egypt, you should not wear the local clothing. This is considered rude by Egyptians. Men should wear dark-colored clothing, and women should dress modestly.

Gift-giving is an important custom for Egyptians. Gifts should be given with the right hand. Flowers should not be brought to business meetings as they are only accepted in situations such as weddings and illnesses. High-quality chocolates or sweets are preferred as gifts. Only the right hand should be used when eating in Egypt. Adding salt to food should be avoided, as Egyptians interpret this as meaning that the food is tasteless or not liked (Scroope, 2017).

Türkiye

Turkish culture, where East meets West and ancient traditions blend with modern life, bears the traces of various cultural influences. Generosity, warmth, and hospitality are always at the forefront of Turkish culture, which is a blend of various cultures. Because Turks are warm-hearted, smiling is a form of greeting. Therefore, smiling and shaking hands are preferred when greeting someone for the first time (Homer, 2024).

Turks are extremely attached to their traditions and customs and are sensitive about being respected. Respect for Islam and the country's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, is particularly important. Criticizing Islam, Atatürk, or the Turkish flag during meetings is considered offensive (Number One Property, 2024). Respecting elders is also very important in Turkish culture. When an elder enters the room during a meeting, you should stand up and offer them your seat (Magnificent Travel, n.d.).

Turks value punctuality. You are expected to arrive on time for meetings. However, they may be late for certain reasons (Evason, 2019). Since jumping straight into the topic in business meetings is considered rude,

some small talk should be made at the beginning (The Istanbul Insider, 2025). Maintaining eye contact during conversation is considered a sign of attention and respect (Magnificent Travel, n.d.). Turkish coffee and tea are usually served during meetings. Visual communication is as important as verbal communication in meetings. Therefore, presenting business-related information in graphic form can create a positive impact. Turks enjoy bargaining. Therefore, initial prices are usually not valid (Evason, 2019).

In Turkish culture, business cards are used when a deal is finalized and a business relationship is to be established (Evason, 2019). Business cards should be exchanged with both hands, and should not be immediately put in your pocket after receiving them, but should be examined for a while (Number One Property, 2024).

Turks like to touch within certain boundaries. Touching the shoulder while talking to business partners is a sign of trust (The Istanbul Insider, 2025).

In business meals, declining invitations is considered rude. Invitations must be attended punctually, and if there will be a delay, prior notification is essential. Finishing the plate is regarded as a sign of courtesy, so no food should be left on the plate (Magnificent Travel, n.d.). In Turkish culture, the left hand is considered unclean in traditional and local settings; therefore, eating with the right hand is preferred (Number One Property, 2024).

Gift-giving is significance in Turkish business culture. Avoid extravagant gifts; small, meaningful gifts are preferred. Gifts should be beautifully wrapped, presented with both hands, and opened immediately upon receipt (Number One Property, 2024).

Table 2. Summary of the Cultural Characteristics of the Countries Included in the Study

	Business Meals	Punctuality	Gift Giving	Meaning of Colors	Meaning of Numbers
Germany	Coffee, Beer	Very punctual	Rarely	Black, seriousness	13, unlucky
Italy	Coffee, Cake	Not punctual	Rarely	Black and gold, mourning. Purple, bad luck	13, unlucky
Russia	Tea, Meat dishes	Not punctual	Very important	Red, power	7, lucky
Spain	Coffee, Tapas	Not punctual	Rarely	Red, passion	7, lucky
France	Wine, Cheese	Partially punctual	Important	Blue, freedom	7, lucky
England	Tea, Pub Food	Punctual	Rarely	Red, power	7, lucky
China	Tea service	Very punctual	Very important	Red, luck. Blue, black, and white, funerals and death.	4, death. 8, abundance and prosperity.
India	Tea, Spicy Dishes	Not punctual	Not important	Red, power	7, lucky
Japan	Fish products, Green Tea	Very punctual	Very important	White, mourning	4, death.
Kazakhstan	Tea, Meat dishes	Not punctual	Partially important	Blue, trust	7, lucky
USA	Coffee, Fast-Food	Very punctual	Rarely	Blue, freedom	7, lucky
Iran	Tea, Meat dishes	Not punctual	Rarely	Green, sacredness	7, lucky
Egypt	Coffee, Persimmon	Partially punctual	Important	Green, sacredness	7, lucky
Türkiye	Coffee, Dessert	Partially punctual	Important	Red, happiness	7 and 9, lucky

Source: Prepared by the author.

Conclusion

Global economies form a building block for strong societies. Trade plays important roles in the development and strengthening of societies, and is seen as a factor that determines prosperity in most societies. Considering that trade takes place within a social framework, it is possible to say that the cultural values of societies influence trade. This is because when demanding a good or service, every society tends to prefer the one that best suits its own values. This situation increases the importance of trade culture in global trade.

Reflecting the traditions and customs of societies, trade culture influences many components of business life, from greetings and dress codes to business dining etiquette, punctuality, gift-giving, and contract etiquette. These components are not common to every culture but are important factors that influence commercial life and vary from culture to culture. Since no society would prefer to work with a company that is far from its own values, both companies exporting their goods for the first time and those continuing their exports should always consider these factors. Ignoring cultural values is considered a cause of commercial disputes in most societies.

This study conducted qualitative research on the cultural characteristics of certain countries to provide cultural guidance to companies wishing to export their goods or services for the first time and to those already engaged in exporting. It attempts to describe the cultural characteristics of countries randomly selected from Europe, Asia, North America, the Middle East, and North Africa. The study attempted to summarize the characteristics of these countries in terms of greetings, business meetings, business dinners, gift-giving, punctuality, and contract etiquette in the workplace.

According to the findings of the study, it was concluded that the vast majority of European and Asian countries value punctuality, while countries that are not punctual expect their counterparts to be punctual. It was also found that the vast majority of Middle Eastern and North African countries are not punctual but expect their counterparts to be punctual. The study also found that Asian countries are more respectful than other countries and generally use a closed language, and that they cannot say "No" because it is perceived as rudeness, and that not every "Yes" word is an acceptance or approval. While age is an important criterion for respect in Asian countries, achievements are seen as a criterion for respect in American countries rather than age. For some of the countries covered in the study, gift-giving is a sign of courtesy, while for some countries it is a phenomenon that can lead to misunderstanding. Furthermore, for some countries, arriving at a meal

on time is an important sign of respect, while for some countries arriving late is important, and for others arriving before the mealtime is important. In other countries, tipping is an acceptable behavior, but in Asian countries, leaving a tip at meals is a sign of rudeness and condescension. All these differences make it essential to thoroughly research the etiquette and cultural structures of the countries to be visited.

In conclusion, we can say that taking cultural values into account is one of the basic requirements for success in global economies. Arriving on time for business meetings, not taking offense at the flexibility of some societies on this issue, seating arrangements at meetings, points to consider at business dinners, whether or not the gift chosen for gift-giving should be expensive, avoiding certain numbers and symbols as gifts, how business cards are prepared and presented, and many other small details are fundamental components that influence business negotiations and contribute to their successful outcome. The characteristics of the countries discussed is summarized in Table 2.

Cultural values are important complementary elements for trade. Of course, they should not be seen as the sole factor for success in global trade. In addition to product characteristics such as quality, price, and packaging, economic indicators such as countries' levels of development, exchange rates, inflation, and interest rates; political and legal regulations such as government policies, customs tariffs, and international trade agreements; and natural and environmental factors such as geographical location, climate conditions, and natural disaster risk must also be taken into account. All these elements should be evaluated in conjunction with the cultural framework. This will enable the development of more comprehensive, sustainable, and effective strategies in global trade.

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