

# CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH AND THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBALISATION

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## Summary

The purpose of this paper is to review the most important contributions in theory and methodology of cross-cultural research. It aims to highlight that differences in behavioural patterns between cultural groups are seen as indices of broader aspects of behavioural or psychological functioning. Culture is conceptualised as a set of constructed psychological meanings (internal culture) and as a set of external conditions within which humans develop and act (external culture). Furthermore, it claims that there are common psychological processes in all human beings, and that cultures shape the development and expression of these underlying features.

## Key words

Cross-cultural research, cross-cultural psychology, culture, behaviour

## Összefoglalás

A tanulmány igyekszik bemutatni a legfontosabb elméleti és módszertani eredményeket a kultúrák közti kutatás területén. Hangsúlyozza a viselkedési minták eltérő jellegét egyes kultúrák között, és kiemeli ezen eltérések pszichológiai aspektusait. Rámutat a belső és külső kultúra megkülönböztetésének jelentőségére, továbbá hangsúlyozza a közös pszichológiai folyamatok jelenlétét, valamint a kultúra szerepének fontosságát ezen funkciók kialakításában.

## Kulcsszavak

Kultúrák közti kutatás, kultúrák közti pszichológia, kultúra, viselkedés

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## **Introduction**

There are many different types of research across societies with dissimilar cultures. An essentially qualitative cross-cultural research consists of narratives, interpretations, and comparisons of two or more societies. Most qualitative researchers claim that behaviour in its entire complexity can only be comprehended within the context of the culture in which it develops. Qualitative research is carried out in natural settings. Multiple methods are applied that are preferably interactive, and participants are involved in the data collection rather than subjected to surveys and experimental treatments. Qualitative methods can supply valuable information on the specific ways culture shapes psychological variables.

Quantitative descriptions are focused on numerical data and statistical analyses; they allow a mathematical confirmation of hypotheses. However, neither elaborate statistical comparisons of many countries nor qualitative interpretivism are adequate on their own to exhibit persuasive findings with practical applicability. A combination of scientific methods, grounded in justifiable statistics, and some unavoidably subjective interpretations are needed to understand cultural diversity.

## **Cross-cultural Research Overview**

Cross-cultural research can be conducted for theoretical or practical purposes. The second should have some priority over the first. The expanding interest in cross-cultural awareness throughout the world is promoted by the spreading and deepening globalisation process induced by the expansion of international business. Because business is a practical venture, it proposes constructive and pragmatic solutions. International managers, politicians, government employees, translators, and educators are becoming increasingly interested in cultural differences as their contacts with members of unfamiliar societies expand and intensify. Cross-cultural research pertains to empirical studies performed among members of various cultural groups who have divergent experiences that lead to predictable and considerable differences in behaviour. The goals of methodology in cross-cultural research include reliability, validity, representativeness of experimental tasks, and their generalisation to behaviour in different cultures. Cross-cultural research is demanding, and it brings with it a great number of complex methodological issues that researchers must deal with. The most important concept is equivalence, which is defined as a condition of similarity in conceptual meaning and empirical method between cultures that allows comparisons to be meaningful. Measurement equivalence refers to the degree to which measures used to collect data in different cultures are equally valid and reliable.

Cross-cultural research is culture-comparative research. A key difficulty in cross-cultural research refers to inferences which emerge when researchers ascribe the source of group differences to culture without empirical verification. Even if the source of observed differences is culture, it is not accurately evident what cultural variables cause the differences and why. This type of error of interpretation in inference is referred to as ecological fallacy, or as the cultural attribution fallacy, i.e. the inference that cultural variables created the observed differences in the compared cultures, but there is no empirical verification for this inference.

There is no ideal method, leading to a fundamental cultural model for the explanation of cultural differences, whereas cross-cultural psychology has by now become a major source of knowledge about cultural differences between modern societies. It is any type of research on human behaviour that compares behavioural patterns across two or more cultures. Cross-cultural psychology is the study of the relationships between cultural context (covert behaviour) and human behaviour (overt behaviour). Most researchers examining behaviour across cultures argue that differences in covert (thoughts, beliefs, meanings) and overt behaviour (observable actions and responses) are culturally shaped reflections of common psychological functions and processes. They claim that culture is an important contributor to

the development and display of human behaviour, and thus culture has become an important theoretical construct to incorporate in models of human behaviour and an outstanding variable to take into consideration in all areas of cross-cultural research. In cross-cultural psychology researchers are concerned about behavioural patterns and how they are integrated into cultural contexts.

There are two dominant approaches to cross-cultural studies in psychology, the etic and emic approach. The etically oriented researcher assumes a meta-cultural perspective; while emically oriented researchers attempt to analyse the observed phenomena through the eyes of their subjects. The etic approach requires a descriptive system which is equally efficacious for all cultures and which allows the representation of similarities as well as differences between individual cultures. Culture is regarded as a factor of influence which explains differences in cognition, learning and behaviour. This approach examines behaviour from outside the culture system, and is focused on many cultures. The emic approach focuses on cultural distinctions meaningful to the members of a given society. It observes behaviour from within the culture system, and is based on one culture. The vulnerability of an etic approach is that the concepts of researchers are influenced by their cultural backgrounds. They apply imposed etics or pseudo etics. The objective of empirical analysis is to alter the imposed etics to match the emic viewpoint of the culture studied. This should eventually lead to the emergence of derived etics which are reliable cross-culturally.

### **Developments in Cross-cultural Research**

The first phase of cross-cultural research began more than one hundred years ago with the far-reaching study by Rivers (1901) which was the first to introduce significant empirical rigour to cross-cultural research. He was among the first to acknowledge that reliable field data needed to be collected first-hand by professional social scientists. He began an earnest attempt to test the theory that non-Europeans exerted extraordinary visual acuteness and perceptual abilities at the expense of higher cognitive functioning. Non-Europeans were observed as devoting a greater proportion of mental energy to seeing and perceiving, and less to intellectually more superior pursuits. Many other innovative studies manifested cultural similarities and differences in cognition (Cole and Scribner, 1977), emotional expression (Ekman, 1982), and social cognition (Fiske and Taylor, 2013). One of the restrictions of these cross-cultural comparisons is that they do not include empirically verifiable interpretations about culture as the source of group differences.

Cross-cultural research into social behaviour has become a significantly important field within the context of acculturation, intergroup relations, intercultural communication, and organisation psychology. Social behaviours are associated with the socio-cultural context in which they occur; and social psychological processes are likely to be present in all cultures, but their demonstration in social behaviours can be significantly affected by the cultural context. A universal model of social relations by Fiske (1991) has introduced four elementary relational structures which are sufficient to describe an enormous spectrum of forms of human social relations, as well as social motives and emotions, intuitive social thought and moral judgement. Because models of interaction are greatly dissimilar across cultures, people need to be able to adjust their sociality to their specific community, harmonising their motives and actions with the culture. Fiske has argued that people utilise four fundamental models for structuring most aspects of sociality in all cultures. These models include communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing. He claims that these models are both fundamental and universal, and they are the basic components of social relations among people in all cultures.

Cultural studies advanced research on culture and emotion by accepting systematic approaches to culture that have allowed for the understanding and anticipation of cultural

differences in emotions in a logical and effective way (Mesquita and Karasawa, 2002). Based on Mesquita's framework, individualistic cultures enhance the evolution of independent senses of the self that promotes an emphasis on personal concerns and the view that emotions signal subjective feelings; in contrast, collectivistic cultures induce the development of interdependent senses of the self that supports a focus on one's social worth and the worth of one's in-group, and the notion that emotions reflect information about interpersonal relationships.

The clarification of dimensions of cultural variability was obviously an advance in cross-cultural research; however, it did not entirely focus on issues concerning the cultural attribution fallacy. It was only presumed that cultural groups were, for example, either individualistic or collectivistic. It also remained only an assumption that the members of individualistic cultures maintained individualistic values whereas the members of collectivistic cultures held collectivistic values. This problem was examined by Markus and Kitayama's (1991) elaborate work connecting individualism-collectivism on the cultural level with the concept of the self on the individual level. They assumed that individualistic cultures nurture the development of independent self-construals, which have consequences for mental processes and behaviour. They also argued that collectivistic cultures support the development of interdependent self-construals, which have different consequences. This work was significant in the development of cross-cultural research because it identified an important component of cultural differences, i.e. self-construals. Different types of self-construals, emerging from divergent cultural contexts, could therefore be one of the sources of observed cultural differences. Markus and Kitayama (1991) noted that culture influences how human beings interpret their identity, and this self-construal in turn affects subjective experiences in various domains. They differentiated between two fundamentally different perspectives on the self. Within the independent construal, the self is regarded as completely different from others. Important self-definitions refer to one's autonomous features, such as traits, abilities, and personal attitudes. This way of defining the self is most prominent in Western, individualist societies. The interdependent perspective, which is characteristic for East Asian, collectivist culture members, highlights the fundamental relatedness of the self to others. Whenever a psychological process entangles the self, the degree of independence-interdependence will influence the end result. Markus and Kitayama thus argued that an individual's sense of the self is affected by his or her cultural background and influences in turn how he thinks, feels and acts.

Another considerable line of research within the field of cultural studies was produced by Nisbett and his colleagues in the area of cognition and reasoning. Research has shown that cognition and reasoning styles differ across cultures. Nisbett and his colleagues have argued that East Asians reason in a holistic and relational way, whereas Westerners reason in an analytic way (Nisbett, 2003). These researchers claim that cultural differences, caused by differences in ecologies, lead to divergent social practices. These differences produce dissimilarities in the way individuals in different cultural groups classify items, communicate, and perceive the environment. This framework claims that cognitive styles are analytical and logical in western cultures, whereas cognitive styles are holistic and dialectical in East Asian cultures.

Cross-cultural research has led to the introduction of the five-factor model, which is an elaborate taxonomy of personality traits, which are tendencies to show compatible patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions. The model by McCrea and his colleagues (McCrea, Costa, 1996) claims that countries differ on aggregate levels of neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness. The five-factor model argues that these traits symbolise biologically based inclinations for behaviours, and that cultures equip individuals with specific ways in which these inclinations are demonstrated in specific behaviours.

### **Dimensions, Values and Social Axioms in Cross-cultural Research**

Cross-cultural research in values has demonstrated that values can differ across societies. Values are inferred constructs, whether observed as societal or individual. This implies that values are not explicitly observed, but rather described through their manifestations in social organisation, practices, and symbols. Thus, values are highly psychological. The significance of values in cross-cultural psychology was strongly influenced by the prominent study of Hofstede (1980). He defined values as a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affair over others. The vital innovation in Hofstede's analysis was the dimension approach. The identification of purposeful dimensions of cultural variability that represent the subjective components of culture has been one of the greatest achievements in cross-cultural research. Such dimensions support researchers in interpreting their findings. The identification of dimensions, their quantification on scales, and the placement of countries on these scales were outstanding advances and allowed researchers to anticipate and interpret cultural differences along meaningful dimensions of variability. He applied an ecological analysis, in which answers by individuals were aggregated to the level of their countries, focusing on societies rather than on individuals, on national cultures rather than on personalities. Hofstede's model appeared at a time when cultural differences between societies had become crucially relevant for economic as well as political reasons. His dimensions characterise national societies. IBM subsidiaries were used as matched samples from their societies, and then differences between their values were analysed and applied as evidence of differences in shared mental programming among people from different national societies.

Schwartz (1994) has extended the Rokeach tradition in value research. He is known as an influential researcher in the domain of cultural values and the structures they form across societies. He has elaborated a widely accepted value model that consists of seven universal value orientations (embeddedness, hierarchy, intellectual autonomy, affective autonomy, egalitarianism, mastery, harmony). These are classified along two major dimensions: openness to change versus conservation and self-enhancement versus self-transition. Considerable research in many countries has strengthened the validity of this model across cultures. Values were perceived as desirable trans-situational goals, differing in significance, that act as guiding principles in the life of an individual or social entity. Three universal requirements were believed to be at the root of values: needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinating social interaction, and requirements for the functioning of society and the survival of groups.

Smith, Trompenaars, and Dugan (1995) tried to measure and map the existing cross-cultural variations on Rotter's locus of control. Rotter in 1966 developed a questionnaire for the measurement of the locus of control. This concept refers to people's perceptions to the degree to which they believe diverse life events can be regulated. Internal locus of control refers to the view that people can regulate diverse events, whereas external locus of control assumes that what happens to people is controlled by external circumstances. The study by Smith, Dugan, and Trompenaars aimed to address the issue of dimensionality of the concepts in Rotter's scale at national level. They reported two universal value orientations (egalitarian commitment versus conservatism, utilitarian involvement versus loyal involvement).

The World Values Surveys grew out of a study launched by the European Values Survey group under the leadership of Jan Kerkhofs and Ruud de Moor in 1981. These surveys revealed that cultures were changing and that these changes were predictable. To monitor these changes, a new wave of surveys was launched, this time designed to be carried out globally, with Ronald Inglehart coordinating the surveys outside Western Europe. Coherent patterns of change were observed in a wide range of key values. To monitor these changes and probe more deeply into their causes and consequences Inglehart (1997) used a wide set of

items and reported two attitude-belief-value dimensions, namely traditional versus secular-rational, and survival versus self-expression.

House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004) have reported nine value orientations (performance orientation, assertiveness orientation, future orientation, human orientation, institutional collectivism, family collectivism, gender egalitarianism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance) related to leadership. This is the result of a 10-year research programme, the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness Research Program (GLOBE) which aims to increase available knowledge that is relevant to cross-cultural interactions.

Bond and Leung (2004) have reported two dimensions of social axioms. Social axioms are general beliefs and are viewed as generalised acceptances. This concept was introduced by Rotter to characterise the locus of control. These are basic premises that people use to guide their behaviour. Social axioms are likely to vary across individuals, reflecting the idiosyncratic experiences of individuals. Leung and Li (2008) suggest that social axioms serve the four major functions of attitudes: they facilitate the attainment of important goals (instrumental), help people protect their self-worth (ego defensive), serve as a manifestation of people's value (value-expressive), and help people understand the world (knowledge). Based on the data collected from participants of diverse cultures, Bond and Leung (2004) suggested that five factors of social axioms appeared to be universal: fate control, reward for application, social cynicism, religiosity, and social complexity.

### **Benefits of Cross-cultural Research for Intercultural Communication**

There has been an increased need for an understanding of intercultural communication, the use of this knowledge for training professionals in order to make them more competent in dealing with intercultural issues. Cross-cultural research aims to point out those elements of communication that are sources of communication deficiencies during intercultural encounters. Modes of social, linguistic, and cognitive functioning are mainly shared across cultures. This similarity makes it quite possible for people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to communicate with each other. Both linguistic and non-linguistic forms of communication play a role in intercultural communication. Language is a highly culture-specific medium. If two persons do not share a common language their interactions are severely restricted. Prosodic aspects of language, which include (pitch, loudness) and intonation contours can lead to misunderstandings. Pragmatic aspects of language, such as the taking of turns in conversations, exchange of compliments, politeness, and an indirect versus a direct style of communication may also lead to misunderstandings. Like linguistic utterances, the meaning of a specific gesture can differ strongly across cultures.

Theories of intercultural communication problems tend to focus on specific problems in specific situations of communication. These theories try to provide explanations for communication difficulties in terms of broad socio-cultural factors (Gudykunst and Mody, 2002). They define three ways in which culture can be included in communication theory. First, culture can be integrated explicitly into the theory. Second, theories seek to explain cultural variations in communication. Third, theories can seek to explain communication patterns between individuals from different cultures when they are interacting. Whereas much empirical research seems to point to communication problems being rather situation-specific, most theories tend to invoke broad cultural dimensions to describe communication differences. A central question is what type of explanation, a situation-specific or dimensional explanation, best fits intercultural communication problems. For example, the expression of local conventions in relation to eye contact is highly situation-dependent; however, it is also seen as an instance of power distance dimension. Research in intercultural communication is clearly an important area of application in cross-cultural research.

## Conclusion

Most cross-cultural research is cross-national, and therefore researchers need to consider all the relevant sources that could potentially produce observed cross-country differences. Some differences are cultural and some are non-cultural. Therefore, it is very important for research in the future to rule out the possibility that non-cultural sources contribute to observed group differences. The accepted definition of culture, a meaning and information system shared by a group and transmitted across generations, would allow researchers to begin to parse out many non-cultural variables that vary between countries and need to be considered. On the ecological level, there are many non-cultural variables, such as affluence, population density, religion, and climate. These non-cultural factors vary across cultures, and have potential impact on psychological processes. Thus, there is a distinct possibility that observed cross-country differences that are assumed to occur because of cultural differences may in fact appear because of economic factors.

Understanding the impact that cultural influences have on basic values, priorities, beliefs, and behavioural patterns has been observed as a critical prerequisite in cross-cultural research for decades. Researchers need to develop an efficient conceptual framework that will enable them to classify how samples of individuals differ. This framework must be constructed on the basis of concepts that are not simply derived from one culture and imposed on others. Valid culture-based concepts must be used by researchers to interpret differences in culture-level conditions.

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