

Cross-Cultural Business Research: Introduction to the special issue

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Abstract

As markets become increasingly global, an understanding of the world's cultures is imperative. This special issue consists of nine articles devoted to increasing our understanding of culture. It follows the 11th Cross-Cultural Research Conference, which was held in Puerto Rico in December 2005. An open invitation to conference participants and other interested researchers resulted in 56 submissions for the special issue. Articles chosen were subjected to several rounds of double-blind reviews and revisions. They cover a variety of topics including vacationing, managerial competency appraisal, horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism, consumer services, cultural conditioning, electronic word-of-mouth, the global hip-hop culture, ethical attitudes, and impulse buying behavior.

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1. Introduction

This special issue follows the 11th Cross-Cultural Research Conference, which was held at the Hyatt Dorado Beach Resort and Country Club in Puerto Rico on December 11–14, 2005. As has been true of previous Cross-Cultural Research Conferences, the 2005 conference was organized through the efforts of an informal network of cross-cultural researchers. Scott Smith from Brigham Young University, Provo was the Arrangements Chair. Arrangements for 2005 were particularly challenging because the original site, the Hyatt Regency Cancun, was heavily damaged by Hurricane Wilma less than two months before the conference. Lenard Huff from Brigham Young University, Hawaii served as Program Chair and Area Coordinator for North and South America. Also serving as Area Coordinators were Julie Yu, Chinese University of Hong Kong (South/Southeast Asia), Michael J. Polonsky, Victoria University (Australia/New Zealand/Oceania) and Soren Askegaard,

University of Southern Denmark, Odense (Europe/Middle East/Africa).

Articles chosen for this special issue were not limited to those presented at the conference. An open invitation was given to interested researchers, as well as conference participants, resulting in 56 submissions. A rigorous review process involving 158 reviewers and several round of reviews resulted in the selection of the nine papers included in this issue. The articles cover a variety of topics including vacationing, managerial competency appraisal, horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism, consumer services, cultural conditioning, electronic word-of-mouth, the global hip-hop culture, ethical attitudes, and impulse buying behavior.

2. Summary of articles

Most literature that examines the role of culture on vacationing focuses on vacations in fairly distant lands, both geographically and culturally. In their article, “Cultural Influences on Cross-Border Vacationing”, Lord, Petrevu and Shi focus on the less exotic, but perhaps more common practice of vacationing in bordering countries. Focusing on cross-border vacationing in the Western New York–South Ontario region of North America, and the Hong Kong–Shenzhen region of China, the authors examine the influence of three dimensions of culture – individualism,

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uncertainty avoidance and time orientation – on four dependent variables: vacationers' evaluation of attractiveness, likelihood of future visits, frequency of past visits, and satisfaction with visiting the border destination. They hypothesized (H1) that for the individualists in North America, but not the collectivists of China, functional variables that affect the value derived from the individual vacation experience would positively influence each of the four dependent variables. Because both regions are fairly low in uncertainty avoidance, hedonic motivations (H2) such as pleasure and novelty were expected to have a strong positive influence on the dependent variables in both regions. Finally, because of the short-term orientation of individualists, North Americans were expected to be negatively influenced by time-related variables (H3) such as the amount of time in getting to the chosen location and the length of the visit. Multiple regression analysis found marginal support for H1, but a further segment analysis showed that a larger percentage of North Americans are driven by functional variables that influence value than Chinese. H2 was strongly supported, suggesting that pleasure and novelty are important determinants of appraisal, choice and satisfaction for both North Americans and Chinese. Contrary to prediction, the longer the time, the more likely North Americans will choose a cross-border vacation destination. Apparently, time-strapped Americans enjoy an opportunity to get away from it all.

As organizations expand globally, they must find ways to accurately and fairly appraise the competency of managers from a variety of cultures. In the article, "Managerial Competency Appraisal: A Cross-Cultural Study of American and East Asian Managers", Chong explores the managerial competency appraisal process using the MAP (Managerial Assessment of Proficiency) instrument published by Parry (1992). Questions from MAP measure 12 competencies grouped into four clusters: administrative, communication, supervisory and cognitive competencies. Using composite MAP scores for managers from the United States, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Taiwan, Chong utilized a Multidimensional Scaling procedure that showed close proximity among the Asian managers, who were quite distant from Americans. Individual data from managers in the United States and Singapore showed that Singapore managers scored lower than American managers in virtually all competencies, though the difference was not significant for "making decisions and weighing risks", "planning and scheduling work", and "setting goals and standards". This may reflect differences in cultural values that influence both the development of competencies and the value placed on different competencies. It also indicates that an instrument used to assess managerial competency in one culture may not accurately and fairly assess managerial competency in distant cultures.

Individualism/collectivism is almost certainly the dimension most heavily used to compare behaviors, relationships and attitudes across cultures. However, the individualism/collectivism dichotomy may be too simplistic to capture the more nuanced differences across cultures. In an attempt to refine our understanding, scholars led by Triandis (e.g., Triandis 1995; Triandis and Gelfand 1998; Singelis et al., 1995) added the horizontal/vertical dimension to individualism/collectivism, producing four culture types rather than two: horizontal collectivism

(HC), horizontal individualism (HI), vertical collectivism (VC) and horizontal collectivism (HC). While theoretically valuable, relatively few scholars have used these dimensions in empirical research. In the article, "A Reduced Version of the Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism Scale: A Four-Country Assessment", Sivadas, Bruvold and Nelson argue that one reason for this is that the most prevalent 32-item scale for measuring HC, HI, VC and HC has measurement problems and is difficult to administer. Searching for a more parsimonious, yet psychometrically stable scale, they reduce the scale from 32 to 14 items using samples from China, Denmark, India and the U.S. (chosen to represent HC, HI, VC, and VI dominant cultures, respectively). The 14-item scale should be easier to administer and enhance researchers' ability to include these measures as variables in cross-cultural studies.

Services dominate most developed economies and are gaining in importance throughout the world. In addition, service firms are becoming increasingly international. This requires an understanding of cross-cultural differences in consumers' service experience. Responding to this need, Zhang, Beatty and Walsh wrote, "Cross-cultural Consumer Services Research: A Review of the Literature and Future Research Directions". Their review is based on 40 articles found in services, consumer and marketing journals and utilizes a framework that focuses on three dimensions of consumer service experience: service expectations, evaluations of service and reactions to service. They found that 31 of the studies based their analyses on Hofstede's (1980; 1984; 1991) dimensions of individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and long-term orientation. Only six used Hall's (1976) high context/low context dimension and four considered horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. No other conceptual framework was used more than once. Based on their review, Zhang, Beatty and Walsh introduce the concept of "cultural service personalities", defined as the overall characteristics or tendencies related to consumer service experiences within a specific culture. A culture's service personality is shaped by its value and belief systems, communication systems and material culture.

One of the most important trends in business today is the emergence of a number of large markets (e.g., China, India, Russia, and Eastern Europe) which have only recently been open to mostly free trade and modernization. As a result, a vast number of consumers who have been conditioned to more traditional, utilitarian consumption values are being exposed to more modern, hedonistic products and advertisements. In "Hedonic vs. Utilitarian Consumption: A Cross-Cultural Perspective Based on Cultural Conditioning", Lim and Ang hypothesize that consumers who are more culturally conditioned towards utilitarian consumption should hold more favorable attitudes towards ads and brands of utilitarian than hedonic products (H2a), and should perceive brands of utilitarian products as having more favorable brand personality traits than those of hedonic products (H3a). By contrast, consumers who are less culturally conditioned towards utilitarian consumption should hold similar attitudes towards ads and brands (H2b), and hold similar brand personality perceptions for either utilitarian or hedonic products (H3b). Using data from Shanghai

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