Culture change and globalization: The unresolved debate between cross-national and cross-cultural classifications

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to examine the assumptions of culture homogeneity within nations and its stability in the current global context. First, by using a sample of 720 respondents (207 in Canada, 263 in Japan, and 250 in Morocco), it empirically examines the cultural values of three countries at three different continents (Canada in North America, Japan in East Asia, and Morocco in North Africa) and compares the findings to Hofstede's framework. Second, it tests for the existence of cultural segments transcending the national boundaries. Cultural values are measured using the horizontal–vertical individualism and collectivism scale. The findings show that: (i) horizontal collectivism dominates the cultural environment of these three countries; (ii) horizontal collectivism and horizontal individualism coexist in Canada; and (iii) vertical individualism characterizes Morocco and Japan more than Canada. In addition, the study reports three segments that transcend national borders, each of them sharing the same cultural values. When compared with each other, the three clusters completely differ on horizontal collectivism, vertical collectivism, and horizontal individualism. The research concludes that some changes are occurring in cultural values/patterns in the three studied countries.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

本研究欲考察各国文化同质性的假设及其在当前全球化背景下的稳定性。首先，通过使用720名被抽取出的调查对象（加拿大207名，日本263名，摩洛哥250名），本研究按经验主义考察了分属于三个不同的大洲（加拿大属北美洲，日本属东亚，而摩洛哥属北非）三个国家的文化价值观，并将研究结果与霍夫斯泰德的框架进行比较。其次，本研究查验了超越国界的文化区段。文化价值观乃通过横向——纵向的个体主义和集体主义尺规进行衡量。研究结果表明：i）横向的集体主义在这三个国家的文化环境里都占主导地位；ii）横向的集体主义和横向的个体主义在加拿大并存；以及iii）与加拿大相比，摩洛哥和加拿大更以纵向个体主义为其特征。此外，本研究汇报了三个超越国界的区段，每一个区段都共享相同的文化价值观。当互相进行比较时，这三个集群在横向集体主义、纵向集体主义和横向个体主义方面完全不一样。本研究总结到在被研究的三个国家里文化价值观模式/模式。

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1. Introduction

Culture consists of values and shared beliefs that are manifested in patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving (Kluckhohn, 1951). It plays a significant role in every aspect of human behavior, including consumption. Previous studies in psychology and marketing assert that culture is one of the underlying determinants of consumer attitudes and behaviors (Agarwal et al., 2010; Laroche et al., 2004; Steenkamp et al., 1999). Despite the large number of works on culture in the last three decades following the publication of the seminal work of Hofstede (1980), cultural studies, and in particular cross-cultural ones, have always been a subject of criticism. At least two major limitations or fallacious assumptions (Tung, 2008) are reported in the literature: (1) the homogeneity of culture within nation and (2) its stability over time.

First, the development of cross-cultural studies in different fields such as management, marketing, and psychology has been dominated by the assumption of cultural homogeneity within a given country. This view is exemplified by the seminal work of Hofstede (1980, 2001) considering that culture is homogeneous within the same country. In a more recent study, Minkov and Hofstede (2012) found that African, Latin American, Asian, and Anglo in-country regions tend to form distinct national clusters. They further argued that neighboring countries sharing official languages, religions,

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historical experiences, and traditions do not noticeably intermix when grouped on the basis of cultural values.

The use of country (nation) as a proxy for culture has been however criticized (Agarwal et al., 2010; Cleveland and Laroche, 2007; Craig and Douglas, 2006; Morales and Ladhari, 2011; Tung, 2008; Winzar, 2015; Yaprak, 2008). Despite that Minkov and Hofstede (2014) found that the regions of most European countries and randomly formed nationally homogeneous groups of European respondents further support the assertion of national clusters, they also reported that large samples of randomly chosen individuals from diverse European nations cannot be sorted into nations. They argued "individuals cannot be sorted out into nations on the basis of their values, but randomly formed national homogeneous groups of people can" (p. 173). According to them, culture is something shared at the group level rather than at the individual level.

Recent works state that globalization contributes to reduce cultural differences across countries and meanwhile leads to a certain "convergence". Craig and Douglas (2006, p. 329) argued that cultures are increasingly connected by "global flows diffusing ideas, products and images across the world". This convergence favors the development of consumer segments that transcend national borders and share similar cultural orientations (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007). Agarwal et al. (2010) argued that international market segmentation should recognize the behavioral homogeneity and heterogeneity within and across countries.

Second, several studies implicitly assume that culture is static. This view is not shared by academics who argue that culture evolves over time (Kelley et al., 2006; Spector et al., 2001; Tung, 2008; Yaprak, 2008). The evolution of culture is attributed to the interaction among people having different cultures, the spread of technology (i.e., the development of Internet and communication technologies), and globalization (Craig and Douglas, 2006).

The aims of this study are two-fold. The first objective is to empirically investigate the stability of culture over time. The research intends to examine and contrast the cultural patterns of three countries presumably presenting different cultural environments. The findings are then compared to the prevailing national categorization of these countries (based on Hofstede's classification). The second objective is to test for culture homogeneity within country by identifying cross-cultural segments (i.e., segments identified based on cultural values) that transcend national boundaries.

The literature shows limited empirical attention to the examination of the stability and homogeneity of culture within a country. To our best knowledge, there is no empirical study applying a cultural orientation framework to test for the existence of cross-national consumer segments (i.e., testing for the homogeneity/heterogeneity of cultural orientations within and across nations). Previous frameworks use behavioral and attitudinal variables as segmentation criteria to confirm the existence of cross-national segments that transcend countries or nations (e.g., Bijmolt et al., 2004; Yavas et al., 1992). This study fills this void by using cultural values as segmentation criteria.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. After this introduction, a literature review addresses the construct of culture and its major frameworks. Then, the methodology for the empirical study is described and the results are discussed. The paper concludes with theoretical and managerial implications.

2. The role of culture and its evolving nature

Culture is an elusive construct, difficult to define and operationalize. According to Soares et al. (2007, p. 283), "culture is a fuzzy concept raising definitional, conceptual, and operational obstacles for research on it and on its consumer behavior influences". Confirming this view, Leung et al. (2005) stated that culture is a multilevel (from the most macro level of global culture to the individual level) and multi-layer (from the external layer of observed behaviors and artifacts to the unobservable and deepest internal layer of basic assumptions) construct. Therefore, and according to Craig and Douglas (2006), it is difficult to study culture as it is becoming diffused (i.e., cultures are contaminated and penetrated by elements from other cultures). They further contend that using a geographical setting (e.g., nationality) or ethnic background as a proxy for culture is no longer relevant since cultures are increasingly linked (i.e., interpenetrated) and, therefore, geographically localized cultural units are rapidly disappearing. However, as reported in Table 1, most studies examining the effect of cultural orientations on consumer behavior frequently use nationality as a proxy for culture.

In the past two decades, academicians discussed several theories of cultural change, which could be classified into four categories: cultural convergence, cultural divergence, cultural crossvergence, and cultural hybridization. These theories, as reported in Table 2, are debated in the literature. For instance, Agarwal et al. (2010) supported the relevance of horizontal segmentation (cross-cultural based segmentation) over vertical segmentation (cross-national based segmentation). Reisinger and Crotts (2010) found that between-nation differences are relatively small compared to within-nation variability. Bird and Stevens (2003) advocated that as national cultures tend to degenerate, their gradual convergence is giving birth to 'a commonly accepted global culture'. de Mooij and Hofstede (2002) argued that assuming the homogenization of economic systems leads to the homogenization of consumer behavior is only supported by anecdotal evidence. Alden et al. (2006) concluded that globalization and cultural homogenization are not equivalent. Craig and Douglas (2006) said that culture interpenetration produces de-territorialization, cultural contamination, cultural pluralism, and cultural hybridization. Cultural contamination refers to a culture becoming infiltrated by products, ideas, and images from other cultures. Finally, Usunier and Lee (2005) argued that convergence and divergence occur simultaneously, although at different levels. The cultural convergence process (homogenization of cultural values and consumption patterns) takes place at the macro level (international level), whereas the cultural divergence process (heterogenization of cultural values and consumption patterns) occurs at the micro level (regional or local level).

Few studies support the existence of consumer segments that transcend national boundaries (e.g., Agarwal et al., 2010; Bijmolt et al., 2004; Yavas et al., 1992). Yavas et al. (1992) identified cross-national segments on the bases of perceived risk and brand loyalty for two frequently purchased products (toothpaste and bath soap). Agarwal et al. (2010) called for a distinction between vertical market segments (i.e., cross-national segments) and horizontal market segments (cross-cultural segments). Their study reports differences between cross-national and cross-cultural approaches/models of consumer-perceived service quality. Bijmolt et al. (2004) proposed a multi-level latent class model that studies country segmentation and consumer segmentation in a single step (not sequentially). Their empirical study supports the combination of country segments and consumer segments for explaining financial product ownership.

3. Operationalization of culture: the horizontal and vertical individualism–collectivism orientations

Scholars have made many attempts to define a comprehensive and ample framework to explain individuals'/countries' cultural orientations. Cultural values have been the central construct used in social sciences to study and define culture (Craig and Douglas, 2006; Oyserman et al., 2002). Several typologies conceptualize and operationalize culture. The most well-known is Hofstede's five dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, long term orientation, and masculinity/femininity. Other well-known conceptualization theories and dimensions are listed