



# Homogeneity versus heterogeneity of cultural values: An item-response theoretical approach applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions in a single nation



Josef A. Mazanec<sup>a</sup>, John C. Crotts<sup>b,\*</sup>, Dogan Gursoy<sup>c</sup>, Lu Lu<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Tourism and Service Management, MODUL University, Vienna, Austria

<sup>b</sup> Department of Hospitality & Tourism Management, School of Business, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, 29424-001, USA

<sup>c</sup> School of Hospitality Business Management, College of Business, Washington State University, College of Business, Pullman, WA, USA

## HIGHLIGHTS

- A scale to measure Hofstede's cultural dimensions at the individual level is tested.
- The scale was then applied to questions testing the homogeneity of the measures.
- Q1 regards the speed to which acculturation occurs within an immigrant population.
- Q2 the degree regional differences within the US constitute distinct cultural values.
- Implications for tourism marketers and a call for future research are discussed.

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is threefold. First it tested the validity and reliability of a scale designed to measure Hofstede's five cultural dimensions at the individual or psychological level across two large ( $n > 500$ ) convenience samples of the United States population. Once deemed an appropriate measure, the scale was applied to questions testing the homogeneity of the measures. The questions refer to the speed to which acculturation occurs within an immigrant population and the degree to which purported regional geographic differences constitute distinct cultural values as measured by Hofstede. Implications for tourism marketers as well as a call for future research are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is a global market and as such requires marketers to face the dilemma of whether it is appropriate to standardize or segment the tourism product and its promotional mix (You, O'Leary, Morrison, & Hong, 2001). Chief among segmentation strategies is one focused on tourists' preferences and behaviors based upon national cultures. The shared value structures often noted within a defined nationality or multinational grouping (Erez & Earley, 1993) are derived from a society's historical "patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting" (Kluckhohn, 1954, p. 86). Though many have argued that shared languages, telecommunications, economic consolidation, tourism, and immigration are

influencing the convergence of cultural values (Dann, 1993; Nowak & Kochkova, 2011; Reisinger & Crotts, 2012), the preponderance of the literature supports culture as one of the many forces influencing consumer decision-making (Correia, Kozak, & Ferradeira, 2011; Figuez, Rodriguez, Castaneda, Sabote, & Buhalis, 2012; Hsu, Woodside, & Marshall, 2013; Kim and McKercher 2011; Lam, 2007) and thus is important to those in the business of marketing internationally.

The foundation for much cross-cultural research is the pioneering work of Geert Hofstede (1980, 2001); De Mooij and Hofstede (2011). Through a combination of primary and secondary data, Hofstede (1980, 2001) evaluated 66 nations, creating cultural index scores and ordinal rankings for five constructs. Briefly they are: power distance (a tolerance for class differentials in society); individualism (the degree to which welfare of individualism is valued more than the group); masculinity (achievement orientation, competition and materialism); uncertainty avoidance

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [crottsj@cofc.edu](mailto:crottsj@cofc.edu) (J.C. Crotts).

(intolerance for risk); and later long-term orientation (stability, thrift, respect for tradition, and future oriented) the Confucian dynamic of long-term–short-term orientation) which he contends effectively distinguish people from various nations. Between 1980 and 2014, these works have been cited more than 1900 times in Business Source Primer, which exceeds the combined citations of the alternative theories of Schwartz (1994, 2006), Inglehart and Baker (2000), and Steenkamp (2001). The method these recent studies used generally group respondents based on their national citizenship or country of birth. Once grouped, respondents are assigned numeric values based on their citizenship involving one or more of Hofstede's cultural traits, and these quantified cultural values are correlated with various aspects of consumer behavior (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2002). This approach is unlike what is found in typical consumer research where a metric is administered to an individual to measure his or her differences from others. For illustration, Money and Crotts (2003) treated Japanese as collectivists and uncertainty avoiders and Germans in their samples as individualists and risk takers. Such an approach is acceptable when the unit of analysis is a country, and when qualified by the fact that variability does exist within a country (Reisinger & Crotts, 2010). However the approach is inappropriate when the unit of analysis is an individual.

According to Soares, Farhangmehr, and Shoham (2007) review of the literature, defining culture in terms of nationality or place of birth is common in business research in general. Despite the level of sophistication attained in market segmentation theory, tourists' nationality has been the most popular segmentation criterion routinely practiced by destination managers. Clearly, but not always recognized by practitioners, nationality serves as a proxy for cultural values assumed to be homogenous within a nation's members. But is it true? If CV dimensions can be validated on individual levels, we may further investigate the homogeneity versus heterogeneity issue within a nation allowing us to address issues such as the speed of acculturation of immigrants and regional differences.

## 2. Research objectives

Hofstede has warned researchers several times that his VSM instruments from which he derived his five cultural dimensions produce results that are generalizable at the national level and are not intended to be applied at the individual level. Actually, as Fischer, Vaclair, Fontaine, and Schwartz (2010) demonstrated with MDS and Procrustes analysis of the Schwartz Value Survey, one must not expect particularly strong isomorphism between the national-level and individual-level dimensional structures. Evidently, an application on disaggregate level demands a rigorous validation effort; researchers face a much higher risk of encountering inadequate items as individual defects in response behavior are not ironed out by aggregation. Attempts at validating one or more Hofstede dimensions on individual level date back as Dorfman and Howell (1988) and have continued since. Yoo, Donthu, and Lenartowicz (2011) provide a review of these studies. The same authors succeeded in building their individual level CVSCALE with five Hofstede dimensions following the classical scheme of scale construction. Derived from data collected from American and South Korean undergraduate students, they provide initial evidence of a validated 26 item scale that applies Hofstede's constructs at the individual or psychological level. It is this scale that this research will attempt to further validate drawing from samples of adult populations with both the means and interests to purchase international travel.

The following analyses employ the 26 CV items Yoo et al. (2011) selected from a starting set of 39 candidate items. Our study will

examine whether the CVSCALE results can be replicated if one proceeds according to the principles of Item Response Theory (IRT). The intent is to objectively determine whether an IRT version of CVSCALE can implement Hofstede's theoretical constructs at the individual level. If successful we contend the scale will provide researchers a valuable means to better understand the complexities of heterogeneous national populations and the macroeconomic factors that are influencing convergence and divergence of cultural norms and values (Franke & Nadler, 2008). The behavior of the dimensions scores can be investigated with respect to homogeneity once the CV dimensions are available on a disaggregate level.

Homogeneity means absence of heterogeneity and that is what we have to search for. However, a more precise definition is needed. Heterogeneity is a multi-faceted concept covering observed and unobserved forms, which may appear as model or parameter heterogeneity (Mazanec & Strasser, 2000, p. 20f.). For the purpose of this study the heterogeneity concept must be related to the CV measurement results. (A simplistic interpretation such as the overall amount of dimension score variation within the sample is pointless as the score variances of the latent dimensions are set to unity during estimation.) Heterogeneity is assumed to become manifest if there are subgroups of respondents exhibiting significantly different score values. Searching for such subgroups represents severe testing if grouping criteria with a high plausibility of generating dimension score differences are selected. Obeying this principle for choosing potential covariates it is hypothesized that cultural ancestry, immigration background of the family, and time and place of residence in the U.S. are associated with one or more CV dimensions. As such, this would be a test of Woodward's (2012) eleven nation premise of the US using Hofstede's five cultural dimensions as measured by the CVSCALE. The U.S. makes an interesting case study since the country is often described as a melting-pot of immigrant cultures, while others denote regional differences (Kahle, 1986; Woodward, 2011). Given that one's national culture will be manifested in virtually all attitudes, judgments and actions, the issue of homogeneity is worth investigating and understanding.

In addition to this theory-guided procedure we apply a second, data-driven approach. Considering the CV scales as a multivariate belief system it derives symptomatic patterns of CV dimensions and explores potential profiling criteria of the resulting subgroups.

## 3. Methodology and results

### 3.1. Sampling

The database consists of two independent samples. Generating separate estimates for each sample justifies more rigorous test conclusions than reliance on single-source results. Subjects for Sample #1 were composed of 621 members of a paid consumer panel in the US who were administered the survey in March 2014. To insure that respondents carefully considered all responses, a series of validation questions were inserted into the online survey in order to identify completed surveys that were randomly responded to, yielding a final sample of 507 respondents for an 81.6 percentage response rate. More than half (52.7%) of the respondents were male. Their median age and annual income was 32 years and US \$40,000–59,999 respectively, with more than one half (57.6%) having earned a university diploma. Respondents reported they resided in 45 of the 50 US states representing all eleven of Woodward's (2012) regions of the US.

Sample #2 comprises 520 new respondents from the same consumer panel drawn a month after the first. These respondents completed the validation questions correctly from a total of 691 subjects yielding a 75.3% response rate. Similar to Sample #1, 52.2%

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