

Culture as a Construct: Implications of Culture Change at the Individual Level

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Abstract: This paper provides a conceptual framework to study implications of cultural change at the individual level in an ever-changing global business world using a constructivist approach. A review of advances in the context of culture, individual behaviour and international business leads to the identification of research gaps, which are used to develop a conceptual framework. The proposed theoretical framework enhances our understanding of the dynamics of cultural change and its impact on individuals. The paper shows how the personal culture of an individual is characterised and where effects of cultural change are evident. By introducing four categories of sub-communities in different cultural contexts; territorial sites, institutionalised sites, personal nature and lifestyle affiliations, the paper extends the work on traditional communities. The proposed conceptual framework can also be used as an analytical tool to study individual cultures and has the potential for further development.

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1. Introduction

The evolution of the service and knowledge-based sector in post-industrialised societies inevitably accompanies the fact that people live with, and encounter only, one another (Bell, 1973). People need to deal with interpersonal confrontation more than they are historically used to. With regard to the powerful forces of globalisation, Vance and Paik (2006) argue that rising international migration and the increasing expansion of multinational corporations across cultural boundaries demand novel developments in international management practices to cope with a culturally diverse workforce. Thus, there are not only changes in society itself; it is the interaction between societies that demand a certain level of vigilance and understanding from individual societal members. Hamilton (1994) claims that what we witness with the development of a global economy is not increasing uniformity, but rather the continuation of civilisational diversity through the active reinvention and reincorporation of non-Western civilisational patterns.

Historically, the theory of national character in cultural anthropology discussed personality characteristics and patterns that are modal among the adult members of the society (Barzun, 1937; Benedict, 1934; Inkeles and Levinson, 1969). The thoughts of national character in cultural anthropology preceded the developments that are reviewed subsequently and can be traced back to the epoch in Western culture known as the enlightenment (Harris, 1968; Locke, 1690). Even most recent advances in cultural studies are evident in the earliest work of scholars, as Locke (1909) argued over 300 years ago in his thoughts on education: 'you must

take this for a certain truth, that which will most influence their carriage will be the company they converse with. Children (nay, and men too) do most by example. We are all a sort of chameleons that still take a tincture from things near us' (p. 104).

In this context it is impossible to ignore the impact of cultural change on individuals and vice versa. The ever-increasing globalisation of the world has resulted in increased business, social and religious migration; hence it has a serious effect on national cultures of different countries. On the other side, a new breed of individuals has emerged who are well equipped to adjust in different cultures due to a particular mindset. These developments support a need for further research on exploring the impact of a changing global business world and its effects on the individuals with particular relation to subsequent changes in individuals' values and behaviours.

The paper explores the impact of such changes in an evolutionary manner (the impact of cultural change on individuals and the impact of change in individuals on national culture) and proposes a conceptual framework that can help us to understand this phenomenon more effectively. The paper is structured as following. The next section presents the theoretical background of the paper including a critical review of the literature on culture, traditional communities and the emergence of dynamic communities. This section is followed by discussion and synthesis of the literature reviewed. Then, the paper develops a conceptual framework based on the identification of gaps in the literature. The last section includes concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 *The Traditional Paradigm: National Culture*

Hofstede (1980: 25) defines culture as 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another' and Krymlicka (1996) notes that national culture is one determinant of individual self-identity and guides daily activities of people by providing a spectrum of values that are culturally accepted amongst a national group. Beekun et al. (2008) further state that comprehending differences in cultural values are the key to understanding the differences in national and international management practices, and provide the foundation for building an effective system of multinational organizational controls.

These statements are to a great extent representative for a major field in cross-cultural research, namely the development of broad multi-country surveys in social science that have been conducted over the last three decades (Kirkman et al., 2006; Smith, 2002). In this view the concept of national culture is based on a collective membership approach, considering culture as being an independent variable; hence, that perceptions and behaviours of group members are largely determined by collectively shared values – or value dimensions (Earley, 2006; Leung et al., 2005).

Hofstede's (1980a; 1991) concept for classifying national cultures, as one of the most influential frameworks, has had a significant impact on defining and measuring nationally shared values and differences (Kirkman et al., 2006). Most major research projects conducted in cultural and cross-cultural studies were based on Hofstede's (1980; 1991) five value dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and the fifth later added short-term versus long-term orientation (Bond et al., 2004; Kirkman et al., 2006).

Whereas the initial focus of research was based on a sole macro-level approach, several authors (Erez and Gati, 2004; Leung et al., 2005; Inglehart and Baker, 2000) proposed a more complex model with numerous cultural layers. Based on Klein and Kozlowski's (2000) general multi-level model, Leung et al. (2005) integrated national culture as the second most macro-level after global culture. Sublayers following national culture are organizational culture, group culture, and individual culture. With sublayers being nested hierarchically, this top-down/bottom-up model was developed based on the traditional international business theory and its focus on situating national culture (Earley, 2006; Leung et al., 2005).

Within the broader realm of culture, the concept of values and differences in value orientation (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; McClelland, 1961;

Mead, 1967; Parsons and Shils, 1951; Rokeach, 1973) was taken on by social scientists suggesting that culture is based on or represented by a system of values (Earley, 2006). Often cited in managerial context, Rokeach (1973: 5) defined value systems as 'an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance.' Rokeach (1973) further claims that three types of beliefs can be identified: descriptive beliefs (true or false), evaluative beliefs (good or bad), and prescriptive beliefs (desirability of means or ends). In order to distinguish values from the often interchangeably used term of attitudes, he explains that a value, referring to a single belief of a very specific kind, concerns a desirable mode of behaviour (means) or end-state (ends) guiding situational actions beyond momentary to more ultimate, hence, long-term goals. In contrast, attitudes refer to more than one belief concerning a specific situation (Rokeach, 1973).

Rokeach (1973) contrasts the terms values and norms to provide a better understanding of the collective code of conduct opposing individual values. Whereas values refer to means and ends, norms are only concerned with modes of behaviour; thus, while norms determine the behavioural mode in a specific situation in compliance to group behaviour (often referred to as the collective code of conduct), values are not limited to specific situations, are more enduring (long-term goals), and individually internalised, hence existing along a continuum of relative importance (Rokeach, 1973).

Since the publication of Hofstede's (1980; 1991) work, further attempts have been conducted to identify new value dimensions. The 'Schwartz Value Survey' identified seven value dimensions in order to facilitate prediction of organizational, work-related and cultural issues (Schwartz, 1994). More recently, the GLOBE project utilised nine theory-based (a priori) value dimensions to provide a basis for understanding differences in leadership behaviour across organizations worldwide (House, et al., 2004).

Leung et al. (2005) claim that the results gained from value dimensions largely comply with previous conceptions and most correlate with one or more of Hofstede's five value dimensions (Hofstede 1980; 1991). As the implications from new, non-correlating value dimensions are largely unknown, the usefulness of a more refined typology remains to be demonstrated (Leung et al., 2005).

The above review of the main theoretical aspects of the traditional paradigm leads to a number of key determinants that can be identified. Relating to Hofstede's (1980; 1991) value dimensions, the national culture approach emphasises the concept of

group membership, defining culture as ‘values, beliefs, norms, and behavioural patterns of a national group’ (Leung et al., 2005: 357). Every member of a group (global, national, organizational, etc.) shares distinct traits within a given boundary and hierarchy that are viewed upon as consistent and, thus, allows behavioural predictions. This rather essentialist perspective can be derived from the value focus discussed earlier, as values, in Rokeach’s (1973) definition, are enduring traits (long-term goals) concerned with means and ends along a continuum of relative importance (Earley, 2006; Leung et al.: 2005).

2.2 *A Dynamic Setting: ‘Glocalisation’*

In parallel with cultural studies, since the 1980s considerable attention has also been given to the evolution of globalisation and its impact on culture and international business (Leung et al., 2005). In order to understand what is meant by globalisation and the theories of globalisation concerned with culture and international business, Schaeffer (2003) argues that it is necessary to review what is being globalised.

Dunning (1998) refers to three features that characterise the shift of economies towards a world economy: the emergence of non-material based assets as growth and wealth creators (e.g. intellectual capital, knowledge, and as a result the service industry), globalisation of economic activities facilitated by technological advances (e.g. transport, communication, etc.), and the inter-relation and inter-dependence of the ‘main stakeholders in the wealth-seeking process’. In this regard, the evolution of the world economy can be described as a network of growing interdependence reflecting cross-border streams of capital, goods and services, information and technology (or ‘know-how’), and people (Dunning, 1998; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2001; Schaeffer, 2003). According to this ongoing evolution, two predominant schools of thought emerged during the 1980s and 1990s that are evident in a diverse spectrum of academic fields (Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

Levitt (1983), for example, states that the world is acquiescing in a coerced convergence process, resulting in a global market where differences – regional and national – are rudimentary remains of the past. Numerous authors (Friedman, 2005; Levitt, 1983; Heuer et al., 1999) suggest that culture specific characteristics: values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, etc. are ultimately converging and international business practices become similar, hence, standardised – and even culture-free. Due to advances especially in communication technologies that facilitate the interconnection of business units worldwide, some authors even argue that

international business practices are converging so strongly that distances in general (physical, cultural, etc) are merely a minor factor (Cairncross, 2001; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2001; Levitt, 1983).

This view on the effects of globalisation was highly disputed and it is argued by another school of thought that the concepts of cultural distance are holding strong (Douglas and Wind, 1987; Epstein, 2009; Inglehart and Baker, 2000). With regard to the international business context, numerous authors (Bartlett and Ghosal, 1987; Ghemawat, 2003; Prahalad, 1990) argue that globalisation on micro level, e.g. standardisation of products, marketing, or other activities, should not be mistaken as generally applicable to all other activities; hence, this second school of thought suggested the persistence of distances that are based on historically embedded, traditional values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms that prevail (divergence), albeit the undeniably ongoing globalisation (Epstein, 2009; Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Beekun et al., 2005; Ghemawat, 2003). This twofold approach of combining globalisation and localisation (Gould and Grein, 2009), convergence and divergence (Leung et al., 2005), or consolidation and diversity (Adams and Markus, 2004), etc. is often referred to as semi-globalisation, glocalisation or partial globalisation (Ghemawat, 2003; Gould and Grein, 2009; Leung et al., 2005).

2.3 *Traditional Theory of Cultural Change*

As reviewed in the previous sections, the ongoing process of globalisation leads to increased mutual influences of national cultures and consequently to some form of cultural change or exchange (Leung et al., 2005). Leung et al. (2005) state that the notion that cultural change ultimately results in convergence is yet to be proven, however, in order to develop international business practices successfully, it is inevitable to understand this complex interaction. Most existing frameworks based on the traditional paradigm regard culture as a stable entity with values and value dimensions being consistent and enduring over time. Therefore, culture is considered as changing significantly slowly (Hofstede, 1980; 1991), leading to a high potential for predicting behavioural patterns and outcomes (Weick and Quinn, 1999). Cultural stability in this view suggests a considerable fit between national culture and organizational practices, thus, high adaptation to behavioural predictions, and ultimately, higher effectiveness of international business practices (Erez and Earley, 1993).

2.4 *Advances: Critique of the Traditional Paradigm*

In recent studies and evaluations, a number of authors (Adams and Markus, 2004; Earley, 2006; Gould and Grein, 2009; Harton and Bourgeois, 2003; McSweeney, 2002; Smith, 2002) suggest a shift

towards a more direct approach in researching the cultural context in international business; thus, moving away from predominant national surveys. This has significant methodological implications for the study of cultural change.

Gould and Grein (2009) argue that the traditional paradigm enforces barriers on cultural studies, as the theoretical focus of attention is placed on the role of national culture – a destined form of culture – rather than on culture itself being a more holistic, constructivist paradigm. In accordance, McSweeney (2002) states that Hofstede's (1980; 1991) framework treats national culture as implicit; core; systematically causal; territorially unique; and shared, hence, neglecting discrepancy between culture and geographic territories e.g. migration, expatriates, international students, dislocated people, etc., cultures that impact or even supersede the influence of national culture e.g. organizational culture, etc., and as already stated above, the forces of globalisation and institutional changes e.g. changes within the European Union (Gould and Grein, 2009; McSweeney, 2002; Smith, 2002).

Regarding culture as being geographically indigenous – that is belonging to a distinct territory (e.g. nation-state) – seems reasonable supposing that people act according to certain locational conditions and stay put (Ricart et al., 2004). However, as Rose (2003) suggests, people may identify with, identify against or not identify with particular places in which they find themselves. Harton and Bourgeois (2003: 43) put forward that top-down approaches simply document and describe the range of values expected between people from different national groups.

Earley (2006) states that the traditional paradigm treats culture separately on national, organizational and individual level, hence, disregards the dynamic interrelated character of culture. He argues that Hofstede's (1980; 1991) concept of value dimensions emphasises broadly shared cultural attributes that represent the 'collective programming of the mind', resulting in a 'realm of stereotyping and cross-level fallacies' with regard to individual level interpretation. Organizational researchers, however, are interested in individual employee actions across cultural settings which proves considerably problematic when relying on aggregated, macro-level implications; hence, significant generalisation (McSweeney, 2002; Smith, 2002).

In compliance with other authors (Adams and Markus, 2004; Erez and Gati, 2004; Gould and Grein, 2009; Kitayama, 2002; Triandis, 2006), culture should then be regarded as a psychological construct reflecting a multitude of influences on individuals (Earley, 2006). In order to map cultural influences on individuals in a broader or more

constructivist context than national culture or hierarchical cultural layers, Gould and Grein (2009) introduced their 'Glocalized Community Culture Model' suggesting that culture should be viewed as a network of communities that cross the strict, hierarchical boundaries (global, national, organizational, etc) of the traditional paradigm. This is an example for a more constructivist approach that incorporates different influences on individuals. Communities in this regard are referred to as sites of culture and sites involve various forms, including face-to-face contact, as well as other types of linkage, imagined or virtual, explaining cultural phenomena as results of social, interpersonal influence within and between communities an individual identifies with (Gould and Grein, 2009; Harton and Bourgeois, 2003).

Identification in this view is based on the key assumption that communities can take on salience over others (Gould and Grein, 2009; Harton and Bourgeois, 2003). In an interactionist conception – that is, an individual within a network of interrelated communities – an identity is based on the individual's level of commitment to his or her social networks; hence identities based on communal affiliation may occur hierarchically depending on the social, situational and environmental context (Earley and Ang, 2003).

2.5 Beyond National Culture: Cultural Intelligence

Mullen, et al. (1985) state that people showing a certain behaviour will inevitably refer to that behaviour as more usual, or common. What Mullen et al. (1985) refer to as the 'False Consensus Effect' was further developed by Krueger and Clement (1994), arguing that if people believe X, they regard X as norm; that is, the inescapable reality that all humans are ethnocentric (Triandis, 1990). This view complies with advances in cultural psychology stating that cultural change depends on the extent to which X is believed among individuals, as communication of X may lead to majority persuasion (Harton and Bourgeois, 2003). Hence, Harton and Bourgeois (2003) argue that differences between people raised in different regions of the world on such traits as individualism-collectivism show clustering of attitudes and behaviours that can form in a relatively short period of time on a variety of intellectual and judgemental tasks.

As these clusters overlap and interact, it inevitably leads to some form of cross-association that may not even present a logical context (correlation), e.g. people from Western countries tend to be more individualistic, than people from Eastern countries; there is no logical link between food preferences and individualism-collectivism, yet, one could predict food preferences quite well from

information about a person's self-concept (Harton and Bourgeois, 2003; Triandis, 1995). Therefore, regional clusters of attitudes and behaviours are evident; they can form quickly, interact, and are changeable, whereas the environment is regarded as relatively stable (Triandis, 1995; Wasti, 2002; Westerman et al., 2007).

Earley and Ang (2003) state that the ongoing globalisation process results in people being confronted with the difficulties in judging interpersonal and work-related issues between differing cultural perceptions. Triandis (2006) argues that judgements depend highly on the amount of information available to an individual and presuppose a certain form of intelligence to develop a prospering relationship. In a modern concept of intelligence, Sternberg (1985) suggests three key dimensions for defining intelligence: 'Adaptation', which refers to the customisation and implementation of strategic implications on a task, 'Direction', that is, knowing what has to be done, and 'Criticism' which means regarding one's own approach (Kihlstrom and Cantor, 1984; Sternberg, 1985; 1997; Sternberg and Grigorenko, 2006). Based on this concept, Triandis (2006) further states that a culturally intelligent person suspends judgement until information becomes available beyond the ethnicity – or nationality – of the other person.

Bird et al. (1993) identified three types of knowledge that are concerned with cultural knowledge: factual knowledge, that is, fact-based aspects regarding a country's political, historical, economic development, and social conditions. Conceptual knowledge reflects how particular cultures view 'central concerns such as appropriate forms of behaviour' (p. 417). Both types of cultural knowledge are explicit, the information concerning factual and conceptual knowledge can be transmitted; these concern the prediction of behaviours by assessing value systems or value-dimensions, which relates to the approach of the traditional paradigm reviewed earlier (Bird et al., 1993; Johnson et al., 2007).

The third type of cultural knowledge is referred to as attributional knowledge indicating an expanded understanding of appropriate behaviour, that is, a form of tacit knowledge, thus, a type of knowledge that is difficult to communicate. It is therefore regarded highly problematic in the context of teaching and learning (Bird et al., 1993; Polanyi, 1958). While the former two are of considerable importance for individuals situated in a new cultural context, acquiring the latter type – attributional knowledge – appears to be the greatest challenge.

Earley and Ang (2003: 59) defined cultural intelligence as 'referring to a person's capability to

adapt effectively to new cultural contexts.' The concept of cultural intelligence deals with the acquisition process of cultural knowledge introduced above and is referred to by Earley and Ang (2003) as 'Metacognition' covering three aspects of the process (Johnson et al., 2007; Triandis, 2006): the 'person aspects' are concerned with intra- and inter-individual perceptions and stand for the self-view and the view on others that can be regarded as relying on social interactions (Earley and Ang, 2003; Harton and Bourgeois, 2003). The second factor in the task of 'cultural learning' is concerned with the attained information itself and is referred to as task variables. Individuals analyse the degree of complexity of this task and become prepared, or not, to face it (Johnson et al., 2007). The last aspect, 'strategy variables', represents the process of utilising cultural knowledge and corresponds to the importance of cultural knowledge even beyond the acquisition process (Earley and Ang, 2003).

2.6 Cultural Change

The above outline largely contradicts the assumptions made within the limitations of the traditional paradigm that culture is rather consistent, stable and changes slowly (Leung et al., 2005). Breaking away from the established basis of defining cultures as systems of values or value dimensions, it leads to an approach that focuses on environmental influences and changes as the major forces affecting individuals in their cultural context (Berry et al., 2002).

Here, the term culture relates to Geertz (1973: 5) definition of culture as a 'web of significance' highly complying with Adams and Markus' (2004) culture as a pattern, Harton and Bourgeois' (2003) culture formation through clustering and correlation, Gould and Grein's (2009) communities model, etc.

Harton and Bourgeois (2003) argue that people are influenced by their individual environment, leading to regional clustering of cultural perceptions depending on the number of people sharing a particular organization of associated beliefs; that is, people will be increasingly likely to share similar attitudes with those living close to them. Hence, cultural change and convergence (consolidation) can be explained as increasing interpersonal influences over time (majority influence). Contrary, the persistence of cultural distance (diversity) remains, as those holding minority opinions are insulated within their clusters and they receive social support for maintaining their beliefs (Harton and Bourgeois, 2003; Kameda and Sugimori, 1995).

3. Discussion and Synthesis

In essence, the above critique (Adams and Markus, 2004; Earley, 2006; Gould and Grein, 2009; Harton and Bourgeois, 2003; McSweeney, 2002; Smith, 2002; Triandis, 2006) suggests three important gaps that need to be further explored when researching the cultural context of international business practices. Firstly, more emphasis has to be put on 'mapping all cultural influences, not just national culture'. Secondly, it has to be understood that culture is not only based on values. And thirdly, culture has to be regarded as a dependent variable in a dynamic environmental setting.

For example, contemporary conceptual frameworks based on networks and communities suggest applying a more constructivist approach when researching the individual's context of culture or capacity to adapt to varying cultural settings (Earley, 2006). The view adopted in this paper considers clustering of individuals, with some form of shared cultural perception, as communities; hence as sites of culture (Gould and Grein, 2009). Zhu and Huang (2007) argue that cultural integration eliminates conflicts arising from cultural differences by organizing and amalgamating different communities. Thus, being situated in a new cultural environment presupposes some form of mediation ability – or cultural intelligence – to organize and amalgamate one's different communities.

Gusfeld (1978) found that communities comprise a certain internal perception that differs from others' outside (group membership). Crossing boundaries of the traditional paradigm's hierarchical multi-layer approach, the communities-based view then leads to wholly different sets of analyses, regarding how culture functions globally, but not necessarily nationally (Gould and Grein, 2009). With reference to Inglehart and Baker's (2000) suggestion that one's own cultural heritage is based on enduring, traditionally embedded values; developing individual change in the form of cultural integration must then be subject to communities outside traditional perceptions. This gives rise to the question (Q1): do the communities an individual is a part of – or interacts with – differ in the extent to which they represent traditional (traditional communities) opposed to non-traditional cultural perceptions (dynamic communities)?

Question 1 shows a gap in cross-cultural research at the individual level as it may provide an explicit basis for developing cultural intelligence by engaging with certain communities. If research around this question suggests a distinction between traditional and dynamic communities, findings could lead to implications on acquiring tacit cultural knowledge from proactively engaging certain

communities. This bears significant importance for immigrants, international students, and expatriate managers living and working abroad. Thus, based on Inglehart and Baker's (2000) assumption that traditional perceptions are rather value-based and indicate an individual's persisting cultural heritage, it has to be questioned (Q2) whether cultural integration is fostered by dynamic communities and whether dynamic communities support mediation, hence, organizing and amalgamating different communities (Zhu and Huang, 2007).

Relating to the complex process of cultural change, integration, and learning, research as part of this paper further seeks to identify similarities between individuals' communities that contribute to cultural change and integration. In the context of question 2, this means attaining implications towards explicit measures that can be taken on by individuals to foster cultural integration. Thus, it has to be questioned (Q3) whether comparable dynamic communities result in congruent cultural changes amongst individuals.

Question 3 aims at 'operationalising' the findings from question 1 and question 2 by identifying communities that potentially influence a number of individuals; consequently, have a more generally applicable significance in the integration process. It can then be argued that one community may have a higher potential impact on an individual's capacity to adapt to varying cultural settings (Earley, 2006). Therefore, it has to be asked (Q4): do certain dynamic communities have stronger implications on cultural change than others? These questions are used to develop a conceptual framework which is discussed next.

4. Development of a Conceptual Framework

The constructivist approach in social science suggests that individuals create knowledge and interpretation based on experience, hence emphasises experience as it is lived, felt, undergone by social actors (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985: 83) further explain that the 'constructivist philosophy is idealist; that is, a construction in the minds of individuals'. In this regard, Guba and Lincoln (1989) state that constructions are attempts to interpret experience. In this context, the individual is placed at the centre as a starting point to develop a conceptual framework. Relating to Earley and Ang (2003), Figure 1 shows a conception of an individual's social environment with the shaded area representing communities he or she is committed to.

The arrows surrounding the individual in Figure 1 indicate the interactionist character of these communities – or sites of culture – accounting for what Gould and Grein (2009), based on Martin

(2005), refer to as the hybridised interaction of various communities; that is, cultures may form new mixes from their interactions.

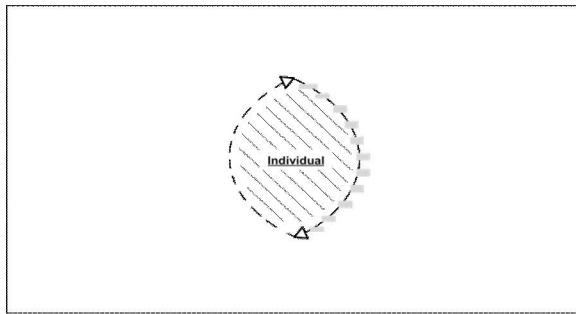


Figure 1. Individuals' social networks

Recommitting to Inglehart and Baker (2000) and as specified in the context of question 1, a distinction between two types of communities is proposed. As clarified earlier, traditional communities represent sites of culture that are rather value-based, historically embedded and comprise an individual's cultural heritage (Inglehart and Baker, 2000).

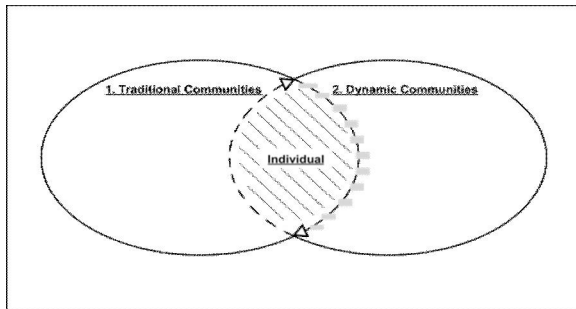


Figure 2. Types of cultural communities

Dynamic communities relate to modern sites of culture that may form or change quickly, are rather norm based (Triandis, 1995) and where individuals' communal commitment can be regarded as choice rather than given (Westerman et al., 2007; Wasti, 2002). Figure 2 accounts for the above and shows that an individual's cultural identity is subject to commitments towards traditional and dynamic communities.

In order to allow a more refined approach in identifying specific cultural sites, the two types of cultural communities are segmented into four categories (Figure 3). The first category of traditional communities termed territorial sites, relate to cultural communities that are primarily based on geographic boundaries such as nation states, regions, cities, etc., accounting for most cultural frameworks within the traditional paradigm (e.g. Leung et al., 2005).

The second category of traditional

communities is referred to as personal nature and represents value-based perspectives of individuals that allow relating to others on such factual traits as religion (Inglehart and Baker, 2000), gender, ethnicity, age, and so forth (Gould and Grein, 2009).

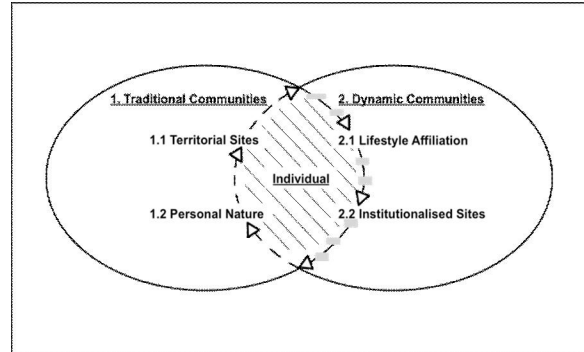


Figure 3. Four categories of cultural communities

Lifestyle affiliation as the first category of dynamic communities refers to consumer characteristics that accompany certain shared activities delineating the most modern communities such as online communities, brand communities, music societies, sports associations, etc., hence, most leisure related or socialising activities that allow people to identify with others. This context also clarifies that communal entities may incorporate various forms, such as direct, interpersonal, face-to-face contact, virtual (Rheingold, 1993) or even imagined linkages (Anderson, 1983).

Institutionalised sites of culture as the second category under dynamic communities are most commonly referred to as organizational culture and embody teams, groups, divisions, etc., within the context of public or private organizations comprising any form of legally constituted governmental or non-governmental institution (Gould and Grein, 2009).

Question 2 and question 3 directly relate to these two categories as suspected communities of choice that mediate perceptions from traditional communities with those of a new or different environment possible. As mentioned earlier, the arrows surrounding the cultural sites of the individual represent the interaction between any of the communities an individual is committed to. The reason for the arrows being dotted builds upon the view of interrelated communities and accounts for the interaction between communities an individual is affiliated with (shaded area) and outside communities (plain area).

5. Conclusion

In an era of ever-increasing globalization, culture and cross-cultural issues have been

extensively studied, especially when local cultures are constantly exposed to and interact with a web of foreign ideas, values, and lifestyles. In this context, this conceptual paper explores how different cultures condition individual behaviour in an evolutionary manner. Particularly, this paper studies the phenomenon of convergence of values over time due to intense interactions among individuals belonging to different religious and cultural backgrounds and proposes a conceptual framework to further enhance our understanding of this phenomenon.

The conceptual framework proposed is based on the findings of the critical analysis of related literatures. The paper also identifies gaps in the literature and discusses them as research questions; such as ‘do the communities an individual is a part of – or interacts with differ in the extent to which they represent traditional opposed to dynamic communities?’; ‘Is cultural integration fostered by dynamic communities and do dynamic communities support mediation?’; ‘Do comparable dynamic communities result in congruent cultural changes amongst individuals?’ and ‘Do certain dynamic communities have stronger implications on cultural change than others?’

It is argued in this paper that the impact of change in individual’s culture depends not only on factors such as personal nature and lifestyle affiliations of the individuals but also on individuals’ interaction with territorial and institutionalised sites. The concepts of territorial and institutionalised sites are explained in this paper along with a discussion on how values and individual preferences of individuals’ belonging to these sites evolve. Using a constructivist approach, it is argued that individuals belonging to dynamic communities are more inclined to accommodate new cultural values without questioning the foundations of traditional communities. Further, the concepts of mediation ability and sites of culture are also discussed in this paper.

Future research should empirically test the proposed conceptual framework by analysing the behaviour and changes in values of individuals who move from one culture to another culture. It would be interesting to see how values and preferences of people from a rigid cultural background (for example, conservative Islamic culture) change over time when they move to any predominately Christian Western country. Particularly, the use of ‘mediation ability’ and ‘sites of culture’ concepts can shed new light and further contribute to the fields of individual behaviour and cross-cultural studies.

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