Abstract

Due to its wide usage in vast fields of study, there is a lack of studies synthesizing the many aspects of national culture theory. We argue that given the proliferation of national culture theories in various disciplines, the need to integrate and provide an analytical review is deemed fundamental for further research. As such, we have reviewed 110 empirical and conceptual studies on the concept of national culture and recounted the different national culture theories within. We have also assimilated the varied criticism towards each respective national culture theory and synthesized them under six discernable shortcomings: the ecological fallacy, the concept of nations as units, the complexity of culture, the construct's conceptualization, the research approach, and the dangers of stereotyping.

Literature Review; National Culture; Cross Cultural Research

Introduction

Proponents of national culture theory believe that national culture can influence an individual's behavior, in which it creates social reinforcements of those individual dispositions that match its environment, while restraining those individual dispositions that don't fit well with its environment (Steenkamp et al. 1999). This pattern of persistent personality characteristics visible in the populations of nations is what gave rise to the concept of 'national character', which is synonymous with national culture (Baskerville 2005). By defining the country as the unit of analysis, national culture theory has provided researchers with the ability to dimensionalize culture, allowing for comparisons to be made between cultures which help in creating a basis for future hypothesis. As such, the popularity of national culture models partly stems from its ability to act as an integrating theory that combines the otherwise unrelated comparative studies found in cross-cultural research (Clark 1990). The cross-cultural field is therefore filled with various theories and models detailing different aspects of national character in their cross-cultural investigations (Lynn and Gelb 1996). Each theory details distinctive aspects of societal values and norms, thereby creating several national culture characteristics which in some cases prove contradictory or overlap. Additionally, the many facets of national culture theory may not be easily discerned as a consequence of the disparity in the disciplines in which it is employed. As such, we argue that given the proliferation of national culture theories in various disciplines, the need to integrate and provide an analytical review is deemed fundamental for further research. Hence, the aim of the paper is to review the relevant literature to attempt to provide some clarity regarding national culture models and to provide a synthesis for future empirical and theoretical work that may employ national culture in its cross-cultural research.

This paper aims to detail the different theories of national culture, namely the theories of Inkeles and Levinson, Hofstede, Inglehart, Schwartz, Trompenaars, Hall, and the GLOBE project. It is then followed by a summary of their contributions as well as their limitations. An analysis of more than 100 articles and the various critiques within allowed us to contextualize the literature's criticism towards national culture models into six critical shortcomings: the ecological fallacy, the concept of nations as units, the complexity of culture, the construct's conceptualization, the research approach, and the dangers of stereotyping. The paper provides a critical appraisal of the varied theories within national

culture research and reviews the crucial assumptions which underlie the claim of a systematic unified national culture.

Literature review

Some of the first researchers to apply the concept of national character in social science research and theory were Inkeles and Levinson (1969). They proposed that commonalties in personalities be derived and aggregated from a representative sample of the population to represent the model cultural characteristics. Three standard analytical items were developed to dimensionalize the concept of national character: relation to authority, conceptions of self, and primary dilemmas. An empirical validation of Inkles and Levinson's concept of national character was then established by Geert Hofstede, who constructed national culture dimensions similar to the one they theorized. Hofstede (1983) collected work related individual responses from more than 116,000 subjects from 72 countries, as part of an IBM survey. The data was collected twice over a period of four years from 1967 to 1973, in which Hofstede conducted factor analysis of the means of the nationally aggregated responses. He later analyzed the responses into four culture dimensions: 1) power distance (PD) which is a representation of inequality and how much (or how little) this fact is endorsed by the members of its society 2) uncertainty avoidance (UA) which pertains to society's tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. High UA societies will try to minimize as much ambiguity as possible by enforcing strict rules, laws, and safety measures. Low UA societies will be more tolerant of radical opinions and are considered less repressive 3) individualism/collectivism (IDV); individualism indicates societies where ties are very loose and emphasis is on the achievements by the individual, whereas collective societies are taught to think in groups, work as a team, and think in terms of "we" 4) masculinity/femininity (MAS) in which a society that values system rewards, relationships, and life quality is considered a feminine society. A masculine society would place value on competition, achievement, and performance. Hofstede (2001) later derived a fifth dimension called 'long term versus short term orientation' (LTO). The basis of this dimension was constructed from a questionnaire on values designed by Chinese social scientists; the Chinese Culture Connection group. Societies with a long-term orientation value investing, saving, and achievement of results. Short-term oriented societies value stability, traditions, conventions, and have a relatively small inclination to save. A sixth dimension called 'indulgence/restraint' (IVR) was introduced by Hofstede et al. (2010) to represent the gratification versus control of basic human desires

related to the enjoyment of life. Hofstede (2011) perceives any changes in national cultures to be very slow. He contends that even if changes do occur, the changes will be felt around the world and across all nations, thus the relative position that nations have on Hofstede's dimension will also not change. He also believes that even if new technologies influence countries, they won't necessarily change their relative position or rank.

However, a contradictory argument can be found in what Inglehart's (2000) WVS study has set out to prove, which is that values worldwide *are changing*. Inglehart's study is considered another proponent of the theory of national culture, in which the WVS was carried out in three waves of representative national surveys: 1981-1982, 1990-1991, and 1995-1998, making it the largest investigation to be conducted on attitudes, values, and beliefs at that time. Inglehart's study proposed two universal dimensions: firstly, the traditional versus secular rational dimension, which pertains to the relationship between self and authority, such that more traditional societies would place greater importance on religion and family than more secular societies. The second dimension is survival versus self-expression and denotes the relationship between the self and the collective group. Survival societies would place greater importance on their wellbeing as well as the importance of economic security, while self-expression societies would acknowledge the uncertainties in life and that change is inevitable (Inglehart and Baker 2000). Inglehart reports a substantial cultural change, most significantly in agrarian societies, which later became industrialized. These societies which adopted innovative technologies and processes, have become more secular and are regarded as more advanced, industrial, and rational societies. This can be seen as evidence that new technologies do change people's lives and may in fact influence their value sets and principles. Inglehart's findings can be seen in more recent actual events. For instance, it is illustrated in the risings of the Arab Spring, in which information communication technologies (ICT) were seen as effective facilitators of organized revolts throughout the region. Blogs, social media, and other interactive platforms such as Facebook were seen as important players in the events that brought about the toppling of old regimes such as those in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria (Aman and Jayroe 2013). The social networks have certainly enabled, informed, and created communities that call for more freedom of speech and transparency from their governments (Ghannam 2011; Rane and Salem 2012).

Other scholars who have attempted to categorize values that are shared universally include the work of Shalom Schwartz (1992, 1994, 2006). Schwartz identified universal psychological values collected from samples of college students and elementary teachers

from 73 countries. He proposed a theory for the universal content and structure of values. Using small space analysis, he identified seven interpretable dimensions in which national cultures differ: In the first three dimensions, *Intellectual Autonomy/ Effective Autonomy/ Embeddedness,* autonomy reflects both intellectual and effective autonomy, which jointly refer to the individual's freedom to pursue his own interests and desires. Embeddedness represents collectivism and social relationships, in which emphasis is made on maintaining the status quo and restricting any actions that may disrupt the traditional order. For *Hierarchy/Egalitarian commitment*: the hierarchy dimension represents the unequal distribution of power, roles, and resources, whereas egalitarian commitment refers to the value put on the welfare of the group over the pursuit of selfish interests. In the last dimension, *Mastery/Harmony*, mastery represents the importance of self-assertiveness, while harmony represents the importance of fitting in. Schwartz's theory has more dimensions than Hofstede's; it has been continuously compared to the latter theory, and there has been a contention by both authors that similarities do exist in some of their respective dimensions (Hofstede 2011; Smith et al. 1996). Another noteworthy work that also includes similar dimensions to Hofstede's theory is the study conducted by Trompenaars (1994). Trompenaars distinguishes national culture on several aspects, building on both Hofstede's and Schwartz's models to construct his own seven dimensions: 1) universalism/particularism 2) individualism/communitarianism 3) neutral/affective 4) specific/diffuse 5) achievement/ascription 6) attitude to time 7) attitude to environment. His dimensions are based on a survey drawn from 15,000 managers in 50 countries and were used to measure the differences in national culture in the workplace. The inclusion of seven dimensions, which were a combination of dimensions from different theories, sought to present a more cohesive view of national culture.

Another national culture model is the Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) study conducted by House et al. (2004) during the period 1994-1997. It is considered a collaborative work of 160 researchers investigating around 825 non-multinational organizations. The study sought to measure organizational values and cultures. Their findings were presented in the form of nine dimensions based on responses from around 17,000 managers functioning in 62 societies. The nine dimensions measured both actual societies (as is) and perceived values (as it should be) in different cultural settings. The nine dimensions are as follows: 1) uncertainty avoidance 2) power distance 3) institutional collectivism 4) in group collectivism 5) gender egalitarianism 6) assertiveness 7) future

orientation 8) performance orientation and 9) humane orientation. The nine dimensions are thought to be an amalgam of past research; constructs derived from other work, but mainly seen as an extension of Hofstede's framework (Hofstede 2011). It is important to note the classification of culture according to national values is not the only method. Edward Hall (1966, 1976) classifies cultures as either high context or low context, the basis of which is derived from society's perceived method of communication. High context cultures use implicit communication and have better developed interpersonal networks, whereas low context dimension represents cultures that use explicit communication and of whom the extent of normative influences is considerably less (Parthasarathy et al. 1995).

It can be discerned that all national culture models mentioned are constructed so as to enable more complex relationships to emerge and be quantified, thus enabling the operationalization of culture which previously could not be fully understood because of its apparent complexity. Proponents of national culture theory adopt deterministic assumptions, and collect data from large stratified samples, which are later analyzed objectively and statistically (Williamson 2002). As such, supporters of the functionalist and positivist approaches towards national culture assume culture to be a stable and observable phenomenon, that can be identified based on the shared attributes of a group (Lenartowicz and Roth 1999). This approach allows findings to be universally applicable. However, after illustrating the various national culture models, we should also address the criticism that each model has faced. As such, the next section will detail the criticism for each respective theory.

Table 1 summarizes the previous national culture models discussed in this section.

Table 1 National culture theories (insert here)

Criticism of national culture models

Although Inkeles and Levinson are acknowledged as some of the pioneers of national character, it should be mentioned that most of their underlying assumptions towards the national character model were developed theoretically (Clark 1990). As such, a cited criticism of their proposed dimensions is that they were constructed solely from their review of anthropological and psychological research dating as early as the beginning of the 20th century, and so had little empirical significance (Peterson 2007). Similarly, as Schwartz's theory was also theoretically conceived, the corresponding survey items were criticized for being constructed in a way that emphasizes only the hypothesized dimensions, making the

survey limited in scope (Steenkamp 2001). Hall's paradigm was also criticized for being too simplistic and limited in scope, since the model centered solely on a society's preferred method of communication, and disregarded other variables, such as situational variables like a common profession, which was believed to have biased the theory's assumptions (Patel 2013). Another critical pitfall of Hall's theory was the author's lack of rigorous methodology in the construction of his dimensions, such that most of his assessments on cultural context seem to only stem from anecdotes and observations (Cardon 2008).

Inglehart's theory has also been criticized for having contrary presuppositions as well as a simplistic interpretation of the relationship between values and modernity (Haller 2002). The validity of the WVS as a reliable measure of value orientations is also questioned, seeing as the construction of the survey items do not meaningfully reflect the hypothesized underlying dimensions (Davis and Davenport 1999). The scores of the items measured respondents as either materialists, postmaterialists, or mixed, which fuels the argument that most of the supporting evidence of a value shift may not have come from the technological advancements, but from the closed ended construction of the survey and the influence of the economic context in which it was administrated (Clarke et al. 1999). Even though Inglehart (2000) believes the WVS project to be a viable proof that value systems do change over periods of time, the author stresses that the WVS doesn't assume either economic or cultural determinism and that the project proves that relationships between values, economies, and politics are reciprocal in nature. This statement appears to be contradictory, seeing as the theoretical base for the WVS is that technological and economic advancements have caused changes in values evident worldwide.

Hofstede's framework has also faced tremendous criticism in recent years. Many scholars have criticized Hofstede's culture dimensions framework for being non-exhaustive and based on one corporation: IBM (Schwartz 1994; McSweeney 2002a). Moreover, Hofstede's survey was designed to measure work related values such as preferred leadership style, job content, and company related questions (Hofstede 1995). These were questions requested by IBM from IBM employees working in either IBM, or IBM related subsidiaries. As such, it begets the question as to how much of their answers were influenced by the immediate situation and place they were in. Indeed, the IBM survey was not used as a scientific instrument but as a management tool in order to provide feedback to managers and to rank and file employees (Hofstede 2001). Furthermore, unfavourable results may have influenced respondents to provide biased answers to reflect their department in a good light (McSweeney 2002b).

Moreover, Hofstede (2001), after conducting his ecological factor analysis on the results of his IBM survey, has in fact extracted three factors instead of the theorized four factors. The biggest factor was originally a combination of power distance and individualism. Based on his social science background, he applied theoretical reasoning and subdivided the factor into the power distance construct and the individualist construct. He renamed the latter construct the individualism-collectivism dimension. The method in which this particular construct has been conceptualized has been the subject of numerous criticisms, seemingly for the absence of a given empirical justification for the split and later naming of the constructs (Schmitz and Weber 2014; Orr and Hauser 2008; Bond 2002). Additionally, Hofstede's questionnaire essentially converged two methods of culture assessment in lieu of statements that simultaneously measured values as they are and as they should be. This belies an underlying assumption that shared values will surely manifest themselves in the behaviors or said practices of the country under study (House et al. 2002). This particular criticism is also shared by Trompenaars and GLOBE's study, in which both their theories are built on the assumption that a shared culture exists. Their questionnaire instruments are also devised and designed in such a way as to link cultural values with behaviors and then generalize these findings to all members belonging to the same nation. However, the theory that the survey instrument is built upon may in fact present unfounded results, seeing as the item questions are measuring cultural values which are later, without empirical proof, assumed to be practised in the said culture (Javidan et al. 2006).

Similarly, all mentioned national culture models share the same limitation around the usage of outdated data, as well as the apparent lack of sample representation; students and teachers in Schwartz's study and IBM employees in Hofstede's sample (Ng et al. 2007). Measures gathered from pre-identified dimensions such as those of Hofstede's national culture framework are in risk of anachronism if applied in another study (Bhimani 1999). This means that social changes over time will undoubtedly occur and alter the cultural profiles of the ranked countries. Kwok et al (2005) believe that culture is sensitive to environmental influences and as such cultural changes are more frequent than previously assumed. Moreover, cross cultural research often stresses the need for matched sampling to ensure that any differences can be attributed to the effect under study and isolate other potential influencing factors. This may minimize the threat to validity but may also limit the research finding's generalizability. Taras and Steel (2009) argue that by using matched samples, the researchers may be in danger of obscuring the existence of subcultures, and thus

limiting the diversity of data available for the study. Trompenaars and GLOBE's theories were also criticized in the literature for not providing significantly new contributions in relation to previous models, such as Hofstede's and Schwartz's (Patel 2013). It should also be noted that Trompenaars' framework was criticized by Hofstede (1996) for having too many dimensions, a poor methodology, and no content validity, as well as very poor data collection methods. This particular belief instigated by Hofstede, has led to an interesting debate with the GLOBE authors in the November 2006 issue of the *Journal of International Business Studies*. Exchanges on use of data, methodology, and validity of constructs were argued and each author seems to think his model is the better version for cross cultural research.

Methods

This paper reviewed peer reviewed empirical and conceptual studies on the concept of national culture and followed a qualitative synthesis of the relevant literature. Searches were made in several databases such as ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, EBSCOHost, and JSTOR. National culture was used as a search term in all the databases and in all the fields, including abstract, title, and full text. Articles were also identified by further uncovering the references used in the retrieved papers. Bearing in mind the broad scope of the search and the popularity of national culture theory, studies were only considered relevant if they addressed the concept of national culture, employed the theory in their investigations, or if they reviewed findings relevant to the theory. As such, the present study final review was based on 110 peer reviewed studies, in addition to three books authored respectively by Inglehart, Trompenaars, and Hofstede.

Discussion

The previous literature review recounted the different national culture theories and their respective limitations. In this section, we will attempt to assimilate the varied criticism in the literature towards each respective national culture theory and synthesize them under six shared, discernible shortcomings.

Nations as Units

The underlying theoretical underpinning of national culture theory is built upon the assumption that nationality can be a viable proxy for culture, because members of society will share an understanding of the institutional systems within their country (Hofstede 2001). Individuals within the country will also exhibit similarities in norms and values because of

their nationality. However, this is not consistent with anthropological views, in which it is believed that cultures cannot be equated with nations (Myers and Tan 2002). The contention that cultural values will manifest in practices can be seen as the driving mechanism behind the conception of the theory. If nations are used as a proxy for culture, then the subsequent assumption is that all values within the culture are believed to be similarly distributed. Some researchers noted that these scales do not measure values but preferences (Caprar et al. 2015). Although cross cultural research acknowledges the existence of the multi layered nature of culture, many studies are still limited to the measurement of values as the only valid cultural variable to be measured. The popularity of value-based culture models has led to the assumption that not only is culture based on values but that all values are cultural (Taras and Steel 2009). For example, the instrument by the GLOBE project was designed to differentiate between cultural values and practices. However, the instrument was criticized for essentially confounding the two and measuring the perception of existing values rather than actual practices. Hofstede's survey item questions were also criticized for asking respondents about their preferences and personal issues, instead of investigating their value system.

Anderson's (1983) research on imagined community theorizes that written publications often invoke in their readers a sense of community, by imparting the sense that they are experiencing the same social changes. In line with Anderson's theory, Cayla and Eckhardt (2008) conclude that communities can be created by infusing a common thread or experience throughout varied communication tools that are subsequently shared or consumed by the recipients. They believe that brands can act as symbolic forms that enable the creation of a new society, a new culture, and a sense of belonging to a brand community. The study of culture as a system of shared symbols and meanings is only one stream of research within anthropology centering on this illusive and complex phenomenon. There is also empirical evidence that cultural differences may be more region specific than country specific in that countries cluster at the regional level, such that countries with a history of close ties because of religion or trade would exhibit strong cultural similarities (Beugelsdijk et al. 2017). As such, some scholars believe that ethnic self-identification will be a better tool through which shared cultural values can be understood.

Ecological Fallacy

Cultural dimensions such as individualism and collectivism can also exist at the individual level, meaning they can be similarly conceptualized. Similar labels for constructs

used at different levels of analysis can cause others to misuse one to explain the other (Bond 2002). An individual can be measured as being more collective or individualistic; however, if the researcher is trying to measure whether nations are individualistic or collective, then they cannot ascribe their results to describe individuals. Even if the dimensions can be applied to both levels, the way in which they are measured prohibits the researcher from using them interchangeably. For example, the dimension uncertainty avoidance can exist at both an individual level as well as a national level. However, the construct uncertainty avoidance that is used to denote national culture is meant to describe and measure nations, and therefore it cannot be used to describe and measure individuals within these nations (Brewer and Venaik 2012). If the manner in which they were constructed is at different levels of analysis then they cannot be used to describe both nations and its inhabitants (Bond 2002; Yoo et al. 2011).

Criticism towards national culture and other such similar constructs built at the national level believes that such theories cannot help others better understand the inhabitants of the said culture. In actual fact, some scholars have even begun to question the usefulness of the ecological (national) unit of analysis as a whole (Yoo et al. 2011). If national culture cannot predict or describe individual behavior, then the meaningfulness of its measure must be questioned in research investigating individual behavior. This has serious implications for cross-cultural research, because of the abundant studies in the literature confounding the level of analysis in national culture literature (Tellis et al. 2003; Van den Bulte and Stremersch 2004; Yaveroglu and Donthu 2002; Yeniyurt and Townsend 2003). This pitfall explains the 'ecological fallacy' of assuming similar relationships exist across different levels of analysis, at individual and national levels (Robinson 2009). Sample means on a culture dimension may not provide a sufficient understanding of the cultural dimension under study, such that emphasising the mean will only create the illusion of a homogeneous group and underscore the possibility of subcultures and thus cultural diversity (Taras and Steel 2009). The prevailing theories of national culture utilized scores that were constructed from aggregated national responses and as such using them to infer about individual inhabitants of the same country can be considered a useless endeavour (Patel 2013). Similarly, Fischer et al. (2010), question this implicit, non-isomorph nature of such national level constructs when theoretically aspects of individuals and societies can impact each other interchangeably.

Stereotyping

National culture models stress that the descriptors of dimensions refer to extremes and that actual situations which may occur in these cultures could be anywhere in between the relevant dimensions (Hofstede 2001; Schwartz 2006; Craig and Douglas 2006). However, despite warnings from authors such as Hofstede, GLOBE, and Schwartz, national culture scores have often inadvertently been misinterpreted and used in the literature to stereotype individuals (McSweeney 2009). This problem is sometimes perpetuated by the authors themselves, in which stereotyping expressions are evident in extensive discussions linking their framework with various individual concepts such as the concept of self, personality, and consumer behavior (Patel 2013). The construction of the dimensions and their relevant choice of sub items may be a by-product of the original author's culture. The questionnaire instruments utilized in national culture theories may be culturally bounded by the researcher's own background and thus may have misappropriated his understanding of other cultures. This particular argument has been mentioned in the literature, as it was utilized by Jacob (2005) in her argument against the questionable transferability of Hofstede's survey instrument and his rather particularistic view of culture. For example, one of Hall's cultural high context related anecdotes refers to his appraisal of Arab family orientation and its effect on the open spaced interiors of most Arab homes, which led him to theorize that "Arabs do not like to be alone", because of the apparent lack of partitions and thus limited privacy (Hall and Hall 1990:158). Another noteworthy example is seen in Hofstede's (2011) belief that the 'restraint dimension' prevails in the Muslim world. His analysis of what his dimension represents leads him to infer that people in such cultures are 'less likely to remember positive emotions' and have 'fewer happy people'. Perhaps this explains why, until 1998, *Culture's Consequences* has been cited 540 times in psychology related journals; a science that should be focused on the individual and not national level aggregated indices (Baskerville 2005).

Construct Conceptualization

Most national culture models are conceptualized from a survey made up of individual level items measuring self-reports which are then aggregated to country level (Schwartz 1994; Trompenaars 1994; Hofstede 2001; Inglehart 2000; House et al. 2004). According to Chan (1998), computing the group mean will only give you the average tendency and only indicate the individual's perceptions about themselves as individuals and not the group. Only when agreement within groups is assessed can the rationale of a collective construct be applicable to the whole group. McSweeney (2009) criticizes national culture for mistakenly viewing statistics as hard realities, in which the average tendency does not equal a casual

causal? force; in so much as it does not have much consequence in real life. Self-reporting items that solely measured individual's perceptions of themselves without any indication of the collective group have been heavily used in national culture surveys, despite the criticism towards possible bias in the responses (Dorfman et al. 2012). Operationalizing of culture is often conducted through self-reported items and not through direct observation of cultural behavior. This may be due to the difficulty of observing cultural phenomena, and survey method being the preferred choice for quantitative research. However, this has caused national culture models to exclude other aspects of culture that may not be easily discerned without direct observation and qualitative research methods (Taras and Steel 2009).

Moreover, people can interpret questions differently, response styles can vary, and even how the survey is administrated can affect the answers. Concerns also include acquiescence bias, in which respondents tend to agree with statements and to choose socially desirable responses, instead of choosing the survey item that truly reflects their beliefs (Taras et al. 2010). If the questions were being worded in such a way as to appear as morally desirable values that would mean that choosing to label the statement as unimportant would reflect badly on the respondent. Respondents may be choosing to rate the statements as very important, because they believe them to be good qualities to possess, but labelling them as very important cannot be used as an indication that they behave similarly or that the value is reflective of their culture, only that a high rate may signify the respondents' desire for such a value. Such reporting assessments sometimes provide biased and subjective responses, such that individuals may find it difficult to give an accurate numerical assessment of the construct being measured by the questionnaire. Other problems include translations, cross cultural differences in response style, and the difference in interpreting the scale anchors. For example, Hofstede's survey was criticized for including several distinctive scaling mechanisms, such as the inclusion of both itemized and Likert scales, which may have accounted for the poor inconsistency of the instrument (Kruger and Roodt 2003).

Complexity of Culture

From an anthropological view point, any construct that attempts to compartmentalize culture should be seen as an inadequate and partial view of how cultures operate. Utilizing these dimensions as a basis to differentiate between cultures often fails to capture all the relevant components of culture. Cultural diversity can exist within a single country, such that

generations of individuals become the product of the times and events that shape their lives. Daghfous et al. (1999) believe that there is no such thing as a homogenous culture identity, given the existence of multiple ethnic groups in one country, which in turn can lead to enculturation (learning the value of one's culture) and acculturation (learning the values of host country) processes. To exacerbate the issue, any individuals, even within the same ethnic group, are themselves changing, with several identities shaping them as they age in life (McSweeney 2013). Moreover, many factors such as market fragmentation, cultural contamination (a culture becomes tainted by other cultures), multiple ethnic groups, and the development of linkage across nations may pool to make the concept of 'national culture' very irrelevant (Craig and Douglas 2006).

Similarly, Geertz (1973) believes that the complexity of culture cannot be unraveled into universal and ordered traits. He is a proponent of the idea that only through the varied particularities of culture can we form systematic relationships among such a diverse phenomenon. The characteristics of different cultures, and most notably, the different characteristics of individuals within each culture, should be observed without trying to reduce the findings into uniform identities. Fixating only on cultural traits that are empirically universal only signifies that we have factored out the commonalities and rendered the differences as secondary, thus reinforcing stereotypes. Geertz (1973) believes that cultural analysis, by way of ethnography, is more or less a guess at meaning, an assessment of facts, and in no way a discovery of the meaning of culture. It is at best an incomplete analysis. For example, his ethnographic notes on Balinese cockfights concluded that cockfighting stood for status or social ranking within the Balinese culture. However, he does not extend his commentary to predict that it reinforces status discrimination, only that his notes provide an explanation towards Balinese behavior and obsession with cockfighting. He believes ethnographic descriptions are interpretive, and microscopic, and their importance to cultural theory is not because they provide conclusive answers to our questions, but because they provide a record of human behavior and as such facilitate an ongoing conversation on social theory.

The Research Approach

The aforementioned national culture models were constructed from a collection of data taken from large stratified samples, which were later objectively analyzed using statistical techniques, thereby assuming the positivist philosophy (Williamson 2002). Much of the

opposition reject national culture theory, because in essence, it does not concur with their own interpretivist philosophy, which is that positivist research is not an appropriate tool to understanding culture (Jacob 2005). Although the criticism synthesized from the literature may be in favor of more qualitative approaches towards the study of national culture, it should be noted that favoring interpretive descriptors of culture seldom produces generalizable findings. Analysis often highlights symbolic meanings within a specific culture rather than providing reliable and consistent cultural constructs (Reckwitz 2002). By defining the country as the unit of analysis, national culture theory has provided cross-cultural and cross-national research with an important mode of research and investigation in which comparisons can be made between cultures. Having said that, however, many researchers still feel that culture is too intricate to be treated as a single variable (Harrison and McKinnon 1999).

Which brings us to the debate between positivists and interpretivists on the subject of culture; two approaches that are conceptually and analytically dichotomous. Interpretivists reject the notion that culture can be ordered into a quantifiable phenomenon, because in essence, it does not concur with their own philosophy, which is that culture is too complex and intricate to be appropriated for instrumental purposes (Jacob 2005). It can also be argued that it is only through a critical appraisal of everyday life that a country's culture can be discerned. Applying a highly functionalist and positivist approach to culture provides an erroneously simplistic view of what is otherwise a very complex pattern of cultural components (Baskville 2005). In fact, the field of anthropology is dedicated to understanding culture and its origins, its meanings as well as its evolution. Interpretivists favor such methods as grounded theory or extended case methods when researching global questions about culture, because it allows the researcher to engage with the context in which the phenomenon occurs. Anthropologists are encouraged to study culture as a set of meanings and symbols, to reject theoretical formulations and focus on interpretive theory instead (Geertz 1973). In symbolic anthropology, culture is seen as semiotic, being constituted by shared symbols, meanings, and interpretations. This is an epistemological approach that refuses to be reduced to neat and structured models (Shankman et al. 1984). Positivists, on the other hand, believe that culture, despite its complexity, is thought to have an underlying order in its chaos, and that the uncovering of such order can lead to universal cultural components (Kluckhohn 1953). The key differentiating feature of the positivist philosophy is

its adamant belief that any social behavior can be measured objectively, even a complex multi leveled construct such as culture (Sekaran 2003).

Conclusion

The choice of country as a surrogate for culture may not be the ideal choice, but instead of discarding value-based research completely, we recommend that we incorporate both the etic and emic approaches to culture. There is value in emic approaches as they broaden our understanding by providing new insights and theories through their detailed depictions of culture. Cultural values are too broad and as such we should not be using an approach that is too deterministic. We argue that our dependence on a single approach may promote a narrowed view of an otherwise complex phenomenon such as culture. In this regard, further research should rely on more varied methods of research designs rather than relying exclusively on surveys (Kwok et al. 2005). The narrow focus on surveys or ethnographic case studies to understand cultural phenomena may limit our understanding – a multi method approach can provide balance in which the strengths and weaknesses of one method are compensated for by the other. Qualitative research techniques can inform quantitative results and thus amplify the value of our findings.

For example, Caprar et al. (2015) recommend utilizing behavioral scenarios, experimental designs, or the application of more sophisticated data analysis techniques that allow for the integration of both national and individual variability. For example, Taras and Steel (2009) recommend that hierarchical linear modeling should be used to analyze the multi layered nature of culture through statistically determining how much variance is accounted for at the micro level and the macro level, as well as the interaction between the two levels. Modeling culture at both the level of the individual and the group allows us to recognize the cross-level nature of culture and subsequently to avoid the ecological fallacy by accounting for any interaction effects between the levels. Self-reporting bias should also be minimized by reinforcing it with qualitative approaches to data collection, such as observations or in-depth interview follow ups, so that convergent validity can be achieved.

We also believe that the lack of interaction between the different fields investigating the construct of culture has caused a lack of synergy within cross cultural research (Kirkman et al. 2006). We agree with Taras and Steel (2009) when they call for more interaction between the varied fields studying culture such as international business, cultural psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Unifying our knowledge base will only enrich our

understanding and increase our awareness of relevant and alternative theories to national culture. Establishing a communication with other fields allows us to build on different methodologies and expand on models that may have been otherwise excluded because they were from a different research field.

We understand that we have not provided an exhaustive review, nor do we aim to be comprehensive given the volume of research on national culture. Instead we have chosen to highlight the criticism directed at national culture theories and synthesize them for future research. We have narrowed our review to the concept of national culture and its subsequent theories and models which were of an etic nature, leaving out possible emic qualitative research. Therefore, we believe that by questioning prior research and recognizing the limitations of national culture models, future research can develop and improve upon those models to advance our understanding of culture.

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