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An essay on individualistic and collectivistic cultures in contemporary societies.

1.0 Introduction

Collectivism and individualism are prominent sources of cultural variation which may affect cognition, behaviour, motivation, and interpersonal relationships (Colnaghi et al., 2026). It is suggested that in individualistic societies, people prioritize independent selves, self-affirmation, and personal achievements rather than carrying our social roles and expectations (Colnaghi et al., 2026). On the other hand, collectivist societies are often characterized by emphasis on group values and outcomes over their individual achievements and goals (Colnaghi et al., 2026). Furthermore, they are core cultural dimensions for explaining human behaviour, which are theorized to have changed due to various factors such as urbanization and globalization, where globalization spread westernized values and ideas (Mukherjee & Awasthi, 2023). Collectivism and Individualism may have changed in the way that they appear in contemporary society, but their impact remains present in various aspects mentioned in this study, such as parenting, work attitudes, and attitudes towards AI. Some cultures often hold on to different values of collectivism and individualism depending on the context and country, where countries such as Kenya and Japan are largely collectivist, yet it manifests through different traditions and priorities. Moreover, a tool often used to measure collectivism and individualism in the studies included in this paper is Hofstede's index, a widely cited measure of cultural differences (Akaliyski et al., 2026). Considering the subjects mentioned above, this essay aims to discuss the existence of individualistic and collectivist cultures in contemporary society.

2.0 Potential factors and history

The impact of individualism and collectivism in cultures is a commonly researched topic; however, their origins are still debated, as it is much easier to study and understand the consequences of these cultural dimensions rather than their underlying causes (Colnaghi et al., 2026). There are many theories surrounding the relevant factors or causes which may lead to cultures becoming or remaining individualistic/collectivist.

2.1 Subsistence styles

Colnaghi et al. (2026) suggest that according to empirical and theoretical research, ecological factors, such as subsistence style, may be a determining factor for shifts in cognitive and cultural traits, such as individualism and collectivism. Historically, hunter-gatherer groups are associated with small, nomadic groups with loose hierarchies, where initiative is prioritized, similar to individualism (Colnaghi et al., 2026). On the other hand, the more collectivist group practiced agriculture, where they focused on interdependence, social expectations, and conformity (Colnaghi et al., 2026). Agriculture of crops such as rice was labour intensive, complex, and required coordinated efforts from people, increasing their dependence on each other as collective action is needed (Colnaghi et al., 2026). The evolution of collectivist cultures and values is often linked to this need of cooperation and group-oriented cognition (Colnaghi et al., 2026). This, however, does not apply to all agricultural practices, where crops such as wheat did not require

such high levels of cooperation, leading to higher independence and less collectivist values (Colnaghi et al., 2026). Furthermore, Colnaghi et al. (2026) mentions that cooperation does not always lead to collectivism, where it can still occur in individualistic cultures as long as the cost of cooperation is low.

2.2 Urbanization and modernization

Many studies mention urbanization and socioeconomic development as a driving force for individualism. Santos et al. (2017)'s study investigates various countries and mentions multiple factors which affected the rise in individualism such as socioeconomic development, natural disasters, severe spread of pathogens, and variations in climate. They suggest that socioeconomic development and the shift from agriculture to industrialization with higher occupational prestige and income may be a leading factor, however (Santos et al., 2017). Similarly, Hamamura (2012) mentions the theory of modernization where families become smaller and urban population increases, altering attitudes and values. In the study American and Japanese cultures are analyzed where it is found that effort for success is emphasized in both countries (Hamamura, 2012). However, they found that despite modernization in Japan, it still persisted as considerably collectivist, emphasizing social harmony and contribution (Hamamura, 2012). They highlight the impact of cultural heritage on the impact modernization can have on collectivism. On a similar note, Grigoriev et al. (2026) argue that rather than urbanization, socio-ecological factors such as migration may lead to the persistence of collectivism even in urban landscapes.

3.0 Individualism and collectivism in contemporary society

As mentioned previously, a culture's individualism and collectivism affects various aspects of how people live, behave, and interact. It can affect aspects ranging from people's parenting styles to work attitudes. Hence, this section discusses examples of how individualism and collectivism exists and presents in contemporary society, with mention of the impact of these cultural dimensions.

3.1 Parenting styles and Child adjustment

To begin with, the impact of cultural values on parenting styles and children's adjustment was investigated by Oburu (2024) in Kenya.

Oburu (2024) states that Kenya is considered to have a collectivist culture, according to Hofstede's Index, as it has a low score of 25. According to Hofstede's framework, the majority of the Kenyan population continues to practice their special customs and traditions, maintaining strong, long-standing commitments to their ethnic in-groups, where they also value societal expectations and conformity. Socialization of children and family obligations, including extended family, are also often prioritized, according to Oburu (2024). Additionally, principles of sacrificing self-interest for the interest of the group and sharing of resources is also common, further identifying the prominent Kenyan culture as collectivist.

However, Oburu (2024) also mentions a gradual increase in individualism in Kenya, where he suggests it may be due to an increase in western education, globalization, and urbanization. As a result, Oburu (2024) claims that like many other cultures, social structures evolve and change over time, altering and reducing traditional networks and values, where it then becomes difficult to determine if conformity, or the lack of it, suggests individualism or collectivism.

Hence, Oburu (2024)'s study collected individual collectivism/individualism data from their sample of 95 children, 95 mothers, and 94 fathers they recruited. The study investigated whether the collectivism, individualism, and conformity values of mothers and fathers were related to parenting behaviours and child adjustment during middle childhood (Oburu, 2024). The reports of the mothers, fathers, and children on the parents' warmth, individualism, collectivism, psychological control, family obligations, and the children's internalizing and externalizing behaviours were considered to assess this association (Bacchini et al., 2024).

The results of the study indicated the parents with higher collectivism scores, scored higher in warmth, in addition to the expectation they had for their children's family obligations (Oburu, 2024). Furthermore, there was a positive relationship between the parents' conformity values and maternal/paternal warmth, expectations for children's family obligations, and parental knowledge solicitation (Oburu, 2024). Moreover, there was a negative relationship between the parents' individualism and their expectations surrounding their children's family obligations (Oburu, 2024). However, the results showed that regardless of whether the parents were individualistic or collectivist, there was still some adherence to traditional values and expectations for family obligations (Oburu, 2024).

3.2 Work attitudes

Tatliyer and Gur (2022) conducted a study to investigate the impact of collectivism and individualism as a determinant for economic and institutional outcomes by investigating their effect on work hours. They claim that employees would prioritize self interest and have shallow relationships at work in individualistic cultures, while in collectivist societies, they act in group or firm interest and form relatively strong emotional bonds with employers (Tatliyer & Gur, 2022). The results of their study showed that individualism is negatively linked with average work hours (Tatliyer & Gur, 2022)

3.3 ChatGPT Usage

Żulicki (2026) investigated the effect of cultural dimensions on the chances of ChatGPT usage amongst 21 countries. Hofstede's framework was used to analyze the results of this study, where the results showed that collectivist countries were more likely to use ChatGPT compared to individualistic countries, according to Żulicki (2026). This is observed in countries such as Kenya, Pakistan, India, South Africa, and Indonesia (Żulicki, 2026). They suggest this may be due to the push of the norm to use ChatGPT, as well as potentially imitating wealthier countries rather than embracing innovation (Żulicki, 2026). Similarly, they found that in individualistic cultures, there were lower rates of ChatGPT usage, where it was once high, but after reaching 20% population usage, it became increasingly used amongst low individualist societies (Żulicki, 2026). Furthermore, it is mentioned that, at times, ChatGPT usage in low-income countries exceeded the internet usage as well (Żulicki, 2026). They also discuss a term called data colonialism, where low-income and emerging economies were the most likely to have higher

ChatGPT usage rates, and employees from these countries such as Kenya are often exploited in this industry (Żulicki, 2026).

4.0 Discussion and Conclusion

Culture can remain unchanged for centuries, yet change within a few decades (Hamamura, 2012). Similarly, collectivism was often the most prominent in the past of many cultures, perhaps due to the nature of work at the time. However, while individualism seems to increase in the recent generations, some cultures still maintain a predominantly collectivist lifestyle.

Furthermore, individualistic cultures are often tied to urbanization and westernisation, where it is deemed as the more modern way of living. In an individualistic culture, one would focus on themselves and their own success rather than the burden of fulfilling extended family obligations. On the other hand, collectivism is often linked with lower achievements and out-dated values; however, many studies claim that may be a westernized view, highlighting the benefits of a close-knit community such as more willingness to contribute to the group's benefit and cooperate, compared to individualistic cultures. In the study conducted on ChatGPT usage, it supports the claim of collectivist societies having lower modernization to some degree, yet it also doesn't. To be able to access the internet and use AI at this scale, the area needs to be somewhat modern, yet these cultures are still collectivist as they uniformly try to conform to the image of wealth and innovation through high AI usage. Moreover, the study conducted in Japan also further proves modernization and collectivism can occur simultaneously as many still hold onto cultural values which they believe benefit the community. Furthermore, urban and modern societies can still have collectivist groups, as immigrants often maintain their cultural beliefs

even after migrating to urban areas. Moreover, it is difficult to categorize individualistic cultures as individualistic at times when the people of that culture conform to the expectations of their community to focus on their self-affirmation achievements. Conforming to the expectation of your group of emphasizing personal goals blurs the line between collectivism and individualism, where it ventures into the collectivist dimension of fulfilling group expectations and achievements. Many modern societies are persistently collectivist and individualist depending on various factors, where these dimensions are reflected in different ways. The collectivist values upheld can also differ, as some prioritize harmony and contribution, and others conformity. The limitations of this paper include the lack of detail in explanation of evidence and discussion. The evidence is often over-or under-explained. In conclusion, collectivism and individualism often changed with time, most commonly from collectivism to individualism; however, one or the other still exists in contemporary society.

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