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1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is an essential notion that has great significance for how people perceive themselves, interact with others, and make decisions. Culture dictates what is expected from a person regarding his or her autonomy, relationship's responsibilities, and social behavior. There are some terms that should be mentioned when speaking about cross-cultural psychology, such as individualism and collectivism. Individualism includes notions of independence, freedom, self-resilience, and goal oriented behavior, while collectivism implies interdependence, relationship with the others, group affiliation, and common goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). These concepts have been used to differentiate between societies in accordance with their prevailing cultural values. However, the development of globalization and cultural interaction possesses some doubts regarding their relevance in contemporary society.

This problem is especially pertinent since nowadays societies are becoming more interconnected. There is cultural exchange in the process of international education, migration, traveling work places, media and digital communication. In consequence, people might experience cultural expectations different from those which are characteristics of traditional cultural society of theirs. Nevertheless, intensified cultural interaction does not imply that the ideas of individualism and collectivism become obsolete ones. On the contrary, it indicates that these tendencies can be manifested in various ways depending on individual and situational conditions.

The difference between national classification of a particular society as predominantly individualistic or collectivistic and every individual being their carrier of such cultural tendency also should be mentioned. It is important to differentiate between these two perspectives, because sometimes an individual's cultural identity does not match the characteristics of the society he or she lives in. Recent research has increasingly emphasized the importance of considering within-culture variation rather than treating cultures as internally uniform (Uskul & Mesquita, 2026). This distinction

raises important questions about how cultural orientation should be understood in contemporary societies.

This essay analyzes individualism and collectivism as well as the application of these constructs in modern society. First, this paper looks at the theoretical backgrounds of these culture orientations. Secondly, the focus shifts on the application of these cultural constructs in the current society within the context of globalization and interaction among cultures. Finally, the essay critically analyzes the shortcomings of the conventional approach to understanding these culture orientations.

2. INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM

Collectivism and individualism are two theoretical perspectives on how people differ in terms of their interactions with others and their understanding of themselves. An individualistic orientation is concerned about independence and personal success and accomplishment, while a collectivistic orientation stresses interdependence, belonging to the community, and social responsibility (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Nevertheless, regarding these orientations as two entirely unrelated perspectives would be too simplistic, because a person might demonstrate both of them depending on the social context and specific situation.

The theory of independent and interdependent self-construal proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991) is especially important in this respect. Independent self-construal is characterized by a sense of relative autonomy and distinctiveness from others, while interdependent self-construal involves understanding the self in relation to others and special relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This different self-perception might affect individuals' perceptions of their obligations, goals, and relationships with others. For example, a person who is focused on independent self-construal might pay more attention to his/her individual preference and achievements than a person whose self-construal is more interdependent because he/she might take into account expectations and needs of his/her family members or other social group members.

However, it is necessary to understand that this theory does not refer to a fixed attribute, which would dictate behaviour in all situations. In addition, Triandis & Gelfand (1998) further highlighted the complexity of these theories by discussing two types of individualism and collectivism, namely horizontal and vertical. While horizontal individualism involves an emphasis on uniqueness with the preservation of equality to other people, vertical individualism puts greater weight on uniqueness and competitiveness. Likewise, horizontal collectivism implies a greater emphasis on cooperation of and equality in relations to others, vertical collectiveness stresses group orientation and hierarchy acceptance. Thus, it becomes obvious that there are different forms of individualism and collectivism, and these orientations should not be considered as something homogeneous and simple.

This is shown even more clearly by Oyserman et al. (2008). According to their theory of situated cognition, culture mindsets could be more or less salient based on environmental-related stimuli and contextual characteristics. The meta analysis and review carried out by these researchers have proved that the activation of individualistic or collectivistic mindsets could affect cognitive processes, self concept, value orientations, and related processes. The significance of this approach is the fact that culture orientations could be contextually sensitive.

Moreover, Schwartz (2006) has made another significant theoretical contribution by formulating his theory of cultural value orientations. The theory involves the classification of the various cultural value orientations that are revealed by the analysis of data on 73 countries. Thus, it is proved that cultural differences concern several value systems that interact and are interrelated rather than one Individualism-collectivism, opposition. Therefore, individualism and collectivism may serve as good starting points in the analysis of cultural differences but not everything about cultures can be explained by them (Schwartz, 2006),

On the whole, these theories illustrate the relevance of the concepts of individualism and collectivism as tools to explain the differences in self-perception, interpersonal relationships, motivation, and values. However, these approaches also draw attention to the intricate nature of cultural orientations. Therefore, such approaches constitute a solid basis for studying individualism and collectivism in contemporary societies.

3. CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

The growing interconnectedness of contemporary societies does not seem to eradicate the individualistic and collectivistic orientations. Recent studies, on the other hand, suggest that the cultural differences continue to hold their significance but become increasingly complex. Globalization has created interaction between societies, however, increased interaction among cultures does not automatically result in total convergence of cultures.

A most pertinent example of such an argument in recent times is provided by Kim (2024), who has conducted a meta-analysis on the literature of individualism-collectivism in Asia over 35 years. He argues about the lack of consistency in the past studies of individualism-collectivism in Asia, and suggests that globalization, combined with the changes in economic and political environment in Asia, has caused this problem. This is especially significant since it challenges the common understanding that Asian societies are still the same examples of collectivism traditionally associated with them.

However, the shift in cultural values should not be understood as an indicator that the notion of collectivism no longer exists. On the contrary, contemporary societies can accommodate elements of both individualism and collectivism. Exposure to multiple culture environments may lead to individuals to adapt values from different culture traditions without completely abandoning those associated with their original culture background. This shows how cultural orientations may develop and change according to different social contexts.

Another problem associated with the issue discussed is the difficulty of defining the direction of influence between culture and individuals and vice versa. Culture values may affect the way people think and behave; however, at the same time, individuals may participate in evaluation and transformation of culture. Thus, cultural transformations cannot necessarily be viewed as something that simply affects individuals as passive recipients of cultural influence. For instance, new attitudes towards work, education and family may emerge as a result of interaction between existing cultural values and the choices of individuals. Therefore, it becomes difficult to define culture as the sole factor influencing individual behavior. This means that, within cross-culture studies, individuals should be viewed not only as passive recipients of culture values, but also as active participants in the maintenance, adaptation, and transformation of culture (Uskul and Mesquita, 2026).

Furthermore, recent research studies on young adults confirm the continued importance of individualism and collectivism. Klein et al. (2024) studied the influence of individualism and collectivism on emotion regulation strategies among 5,900 college students in seven countries. Most importantly, the research took into account individual variations in cultural orientation instead of the assumption that all people in a certain country have similar cultural values. Thus, this demonstrates psychological significance of individualism and collectivism and for cultural diversity at the same time.

This is especially relevant in modern societies. Since globalization makes people experience various influences from different cultures, individuals can be exposed to different expectations via education, migration, workplace mass media, social interactions, etc, which can affect their self-section perception and communication with other people. Hence, cultural orientations cannot be influenced only by nations traditions, rather, individuals' active participation in social settings also play an important role.

Therefore, it is necessary to look into the impact of globalization on cultural orientations carefully. On one hand, it is possible that increased cultural interaction will ultimately make societies more similar. However, on the other hand, it is also possible

that increased cultural interaction will lead to the emergence of hybrid cultural identities. According to Uskul and Mesquita (2026), it is necessary for cultural psychology to shift from stable culture dichotomies towards considering cultures as internally diverse and dynamic. Their review looks at within-culture variations, acculturation and cultural change. Traditional contrasts between individualist and collectivist countries give an overly bounded view of culture. This theory applies to contemporary social life. For example, international students, migrants, and members of multicultural societies face various norms of behavior as regards independence, relationships with the family, and society.

Another example is digital communication. The development of social networks stimulates self-expression and personal branding, thus being consistent with individualism. Nevertheless, through the use of the internet and social networks, people can establish and maintain contacts not only with the family but also with the community and even form group identities irrespective of geographic location. Therefore, the effect of digitalization cannot simply be viewed as promoting individualism.

The next important piece of evidence has been offered by Akaliyski et al. (2026), who reassessed the individualism-collectivism dimension in light of contemporary cross-cultural data. A revised individualism-collectivism index covering 102 countries and territories was created and validated. This is especially important since it shows that scholars do not stop using the individualism-collectivism construct but only continue to develop them.

On the whole, modern research does not give a straightforward “yes or no” answer regarding the presence or absence of individualistic and collectivistic cultures today. It is true that there are some cultural differences. However, it is impossible to fully account for them using only national classification. Individualism and collectivism continue to function as important cultural orientations.

4. CRITICAL EVALUATION

Although the evidence points to the continued importance of individualism and collectivism, there are significant drawbacks to the way these constructs have been studied previously. One of the most notable criticisms is the assumption of cultural homogeneity among nations.

Prior cross-cultural research involved comparing nations that had varying levels of individualism-collectivism and using this difference to make an inference regarding their respective national cultures. However, this method overlooks the possibility of variations within each nation. This difference between national culture and individual cultural orientation is crucial. An individual residing in a culture traditionally considered collectivist may have very strong respect for personal freedom, whereas an individual residing in a culture traditionally considered individualist may value family and community relationships highly. Therefore, such descriptions as “Asian cultures are collectivists” or “Western cultures are individualists” may work as generalizations but not as a description of individuals.

Modern researchers support this criticism. Uskul and Mesquita (2026) claim that classical individualism/collectivism dichotomy may actually tempt scientists to see culture as bounded, stable, and internally homogeneous entities. They focus instead on cultural diversity within cultures and acculturation. It means that modern psychology should not only study differences between cultures, but also study differences within cultures.

Measurement is another significant consideration. Culture can be measured using surveys; however, terms like independence, interdependence and social obligation may not carry exactly the same meaning or importance within different cultures. The resulting disparities might therefore arise from issues with the measures used. According to Akaliyski et al. (2026), this issue can be resolved by re-examining the theoretical and

empirical foundation of the individualism-collectivism dimension and formulating an improved index based on 102 countries.

The work of Kim (2024) also reveals why the issue of culture change should not be overly simplified. While there was an observable reduction of collectivism in some Asian countries experiencing growth economically, politically, and in urban development, the changes do not necessarily indicate an increase in individualism. Furthermore, culture cannot be seen as the only factor that causes people's behavior. In terms of psychology, personality, socioeconomic status, relations within one's family, education and other factors play their role too. Thus, a person may choose to pursue an individual path in his career not only out of individualistic values, but also because of socioeconomic reasons or personal interests.

Nonetheless, these criticisms do not invalidate the usefulness of individualism and collectivism. On the contrary, these limitations suggest that such ideas should be used more wisely. Oyserman et al. (2008) are especially relevant since they assume that cultural orientations may differ depending on specific situations. This discussion has broader consequences for cross-cultural psychology. Firstly, scholars should be careful about applying national averages and should not use them as an explanation for the characteristics of every individual. On the other hand, neglecting the idea of individualism and collectivism completely would be ignoring the ongoing evidence of cultural diversity.

5. CONCLUSION

Individualistic and collectivist cultural orientations are still valid today; however, these concepts cannot be viewed as fixed characteristics of a whole nation anymore. As it is shown above, the process of globalization, migrations, modern communication technologies and intercultural contact has made cultures more complex instead of getting rid of the difference between individualism and collectivism. People may encounter different cultural norms and form value orientations influenced by several cultures.

Current research emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between cultural patterns of a nation and individual cultural orientations. Even the people who live in the same country have different views regarding the concept of independence, relations, achievements, and responsibility. Thus, it is not always justified to characterize the society as either individualist or collectivist since there can be considerable within-cultural differences. Moreover, according to the theoretical viewpoints of Markus & Kitayama (1991), Triandis & Gelfand (1998), and Oyserman et al. (2008), cultural orientations can have various manifestations and be more or less salient under particular social and situational circumstances.

In conclusion, rather than arguing that individualism and collectivism no longer exist, the best solution is one which suggests that the interpretation and application of individualism and collectivism have changed. These two constructs are still quite useful in describing self-concept, values, interpersonal relations, and behavior if they are not used in a fixed sense. Cross-cultural psychology today must therefore address both intergroup differences and intra-group diversity. In other words, individualism and collectivism will remain helpful concepts in cross-cultural psychology if they are seen as flexible and multidimensional and context-sensitive culture orientations rather than fixed characteristics of particular nations.

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