Beyond Hofstede Dimension Model: A New Cultural Dimension of Context Culture

Shaofen Wu

***Abstract*—With significant political and economic changes over the decades, the limitations of Hofstede's cultural difference dimension model have been heated debated. The purpose of this research is to explore the levels of context culture among people in China of different ages and genders and whether context culture should be considered as part of the cultural dimension. The respondents were 385 people aged 20 to 40 in China, and the study was quantitative, using independent sample tests to answer research questions. This research shows that China is a high context culture country, and the women have higher context culture than men. In addition, context culture differs significantly in age groups, and the level of context culture increases with age. Therefore, context culture can be considered as a new cultural dimension, and it is also suggested to add this new dimension to Hofstede's cultural dimensions model to examine culture more comprehensively.**

***Index Terms*—Age, context culture, gender, Hofstede dimension model**

I. Introduction

Over the past 30 years, significant changes have taken place in both the political and economic fronts, leading to a distinct state of socioeconomics. The discussion on whether the value of the Hofstede-cultural difference dimension can fully meet the needs of current society has sparked a heated debate in the field of economics and management. In addition, numerous surveys of market economies, including developing countries such as China, have been conducted to explore the limitations of Hofstede's theory and thus make useful complements.

Dr. Hofstede put forward the cultural difference dimension model only by the static study method which was powered in the 1980s. Hofstede examined the responses of over 70,000 employees from a global corporation in 40 countries for aspects of cross-cultural variations. Hofstede derived and defined four dimensions, namely: uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, individualism/collectivism, and Power distance. His analysis was based on data collected between 1967 and 1973, when the world was going through a period of the cold war and lack accurate data in the study of socialist countries. Schwartz [1] saw the limitations of Hofstede's cultural dimension model, and he proposed six limitations related to the Hofstede model and the cultural level dimension. Hofstede also acknowledged that his four dimensions were not necessarily exhaustive, as they described the underlying difficulties of each culture, but that there may be other dimensions connected to equally basic human problems that have yet to be found [2]. Furthermore, critics argue that the four dimensions are insufficient to study cultural differences. Therefore, Hofstede agreed that the extra dimension would bring more benefits to his work. As a result, he began using the Chinese Value Survey (DVS) and incorporated long-term/short-term orientation into his culture dimensions model.

But it is known that culture is dynamic and constantly changing. After Hofstede put forward the cultural dimension model, tremendous changes have occurred in the world as well as China. Beginning with the second industrial revolution at the end of the 20th century, some third-world countries underwent revolutionary changes - the resurgence of China, India, Russia, and so on. The fourth industrial revolution, the digital revolution, took place on the back of the third industrial revolution from the mid-nineteenth century to the present [3]. For China, the success of China's economic liberalization since 1978 is largely due to the correct thinking and strong leadership of Deng Xiaoping and his successor Jiang [4]. In the late 1980s, private enterprise was legalized. Deng Xiaoping called for deepening economic reforms and establishing a socialist market economy during his southern visit in 1992 [5]. People's lives and cultures have changed dramatically because of China's economic reforms, and cultures from other nations, such as Japan, South Korea, and the United States, have begun to impact Chinese culture. Since then, the rapid development of China's economy has influenced the way people think and behave. The entire world has undergone significant cultural changes, so the Hofstede dimensional model is insufficient to study cultural differences. Based on limitations, this research attempts to complement Hofstede's cultural dimension model by deriving a new cultural dimension -context culture.

Culture, according to Hall, is the sum of people's patterns of behavior, attitudes, and material possessions. Culture is frequently unconscious, an intangible control system that works in our minds [6]. Body posture, tone of voice, the physical distance between interlocutors, time of day, weather, scenario, social conventions, geographic location of the communication, and other external factors are all examples of context. Context dimensions are divided into two categories: high context and low context. The main distinction between the two is the relative importance of each culture to the setting versus the actual message itself. It is easy to understand a culture by looking at how people communicate since communication means the way you express yourself. High context communication or information is characterized by the fact that most of it is internalized either in the physical context or in the person, with little to no encoding, explicit, or transmitting elements of the information [6]. Thus, close interpersonal relationships, well-structured social structures, and strong behavioral norms influence communication styles in high-context cultures [7]. In contrast, communication in low-context cultures is direct, dramatic, open, and precise, and based on feelings or actual intentions [8]. At the same

Manuscript received March 22, 2022; revised August 10, 2022; accepted October 17, 2022.

Shaofen Wu is with the Hempel A/S, China

*Correspondence: wushaofen_lxlm @163.com

time, some researchers have proposed that people who are accustomed to being silent in communication, use a lot of homophones, and rarely use body language can be identified as belonging to a high-context culture, while those with the opposite situation can be identified as belonging to a low-context culture. This study will focus on three aspects of communication, namely the use of silent behavior, the frequency of using homophones, and the frequency of using body language.

Shao and Hill [9] pointed out that China is a high context country. For example, business in China is mainly based on long-term relationships and trust networks. However, Western countries like the US prefer formal contracts and fair relationships. Therefore, it can be said that different communication paths will lead to huge differences in business relationships, and adding the context culture to the dimension of cultural differences is conducive to improving the Hofstede dimensional model.

This research attempts to use a quantitative method to study the context culture level of Chinese people of different ages and genders, and explore whether context culture should be regarded as part of the cultural dimension.

II. Research Methods

A. Type of Method

The focus of this research is to analyze the differences in context culture in different factors. According to Hall, a high-context culture is one in which people engage deeply with each other. Due to the close relationship between people, a social hierarchical structure is formed, the inner feelings of individuals are strongly self-controlled, and information is widely shared through simple and profound information [6]. In low-context cultures, social hierarchies have less influence on individual lives, and communication between people is more explicit and impersonal. Communication is direct, clear, dramatic, open, and based on feeling or true intent [8]. From this, it can be concluded that high-context cultures use more silence, homophones, and less body language and facial expressions, while low context cultures use the opposite. To effectively evaluate the level of context culture, a five-point scale (1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree') and 9 items are created:

1. I prefer to keep silence while communicating.
2. I focus on people's facial expression when talking.
3. I seldom use body language while communicating.
4. I prefer long-term relationships.
5. I focus on other's tone of voice in communication.
6. I think that relationships are more important than tasks.
7. I concern about others' feeling in the communication.
8. I seldom my true feelings directly in the communication.

I rely on written communication.

B. Sample and Data Analysis

The sample is based on a questionnaire survey distributed in China, and the population aged 20-40 is about 400 million. According to the sample size determination rules, if the sample size is too small, the investigation cannot be conducted. Besides, the calculation is an inverse confidence interval, which consists of a confidence level (usually 95%) and a margin of error. Therefore, we set an error of 5% and a sample size of 385.

The dimensions presented in this study are intended to be used in the study of modern cultures most often represented as cultural groups. The locations of the sample in the dimension represent the cultural value content, which can be explained as the cultural difference between high context culture and low context culture. People are chosen to cover a wide range of occupations in order to be more reliable. In China, samples were from the same region (city, unless otherwise stated). The study aimed to discover cultural differences between gender and age.

The survey was conducted in the respondents' native language and was based on back-translation that were further checked by the authors with native speakers. An online questionnaire will be used in China, and SPSS will be used to analyze the data by using an independent sample test.

C. Reliability Analysis

To overcome distractions, several constraints were placed in the questionnaire. The person answering the questionnaire must be local and have not stayed in another country for more than three years. In addition, questionnaires were distributed to all provinces across the country, which improved credibility. Invalid questionnaires where people choose a single option or leave blank answers were eliminated.

III. Results

he primary purpose of the questionnaire was to investigate the degree of context culture of people in China of different ages, gender. 385 people in China were covered by the questionnaire - 198 males and 187 females. People were divided into two age groups, group 1: 20-29 years old and group 2: 30-40 years old, with 211 people in age group 1 and 174 people in age group 2.

Different degrees of context culture between males and females were analyzed using SPSS. The average score of the males is 3.8653 and 3. 9816 for females. To compare the level of context culture for the different genders, an independent-samples t-test was used. Table I and Table II shows that the scores for context culture differed significantly between males (M=3.8653, SD=0.38319) and females (M=3.9816, SD=0.33905); t (383) = –3.146, p=0.002. These findings imply that males and females have different of context culture.

TABLE I: Paired Samples Statistics of Gender

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	3.8653	198	0.38319	0.02723
Female	3.9816	187	0.33905	0.02479

TABLE II: INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T TEST OF GENDER

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variances assumed	4.090	0.044	–3.146	383	0.002	–0.11626	0.03696	–0.18892	–0.04360
	Equal variances not assumed			–3.157	381.395	0.002	–0.11626	–0.033683	–0.18867	–0.04385

To find out the relationship between age and the degree of context culture, we divide the people into two age groups and an independent-sample t-test was used. As the Table III and Table IV indicate, people among the age of 20-29 in group1 occupy the main share of surveyed people with 54.80%. Their average score is 3.7204 while the people from group 2 have an average score of 4.1660. There is significant difference in scores between age groups 1 (M=3.7204 SD=0. 25964) and 2 (M=4.1660, SD=0. 32712); t (383) = –14.901, p=0.000). These findings indicate that there is significant difference in context culture between age groups.

TABLE III: PAIRED SAMPLES STATISTICS OF AGE

Age	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1	3.7204	211	0.25964	0.01787
2	4.1660	174	0.32712	0.02480

TABLE IV: INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T TEST OF AGE

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Score	Equal variances assumed	17.096	0.000	–14.901	383	0.000	–0.44565	0.02991	–0.50445	–0.38685
	Equal variances not assumed			–14.578	326.785	0.000	–0.44565	–0.03057	–0.50579	–0.38551

To assess the relationship between the level of context culture and age, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed. According to the results in Table V, the two variables have a weak correlation, r = 0.0691, n = 385, p = 0.000. Also, the results are summarized in Fig. 1 by a scatterplot. Overall, there is strong, positive correlation between age and context culture level. Increase in age is significantly related to an increase in context culture level.

TABLE V: TEST OF PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION COEFFICIENT RESULT

		age	score
age	Pearson Correlation	1	0.0691
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.000
	N	385	385
score	Pearson Correlation	–0.0691	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	385	385

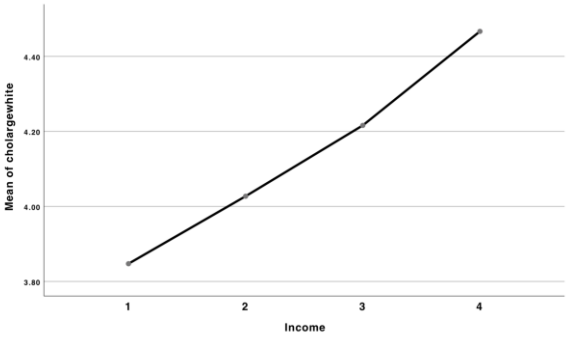

Fig. 1. Scatterplot of age and level of context culture.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study do support Shao and Hill's [9] claim that China is a high context country. China's score is very close to 4 points, which is above average, and thus can be classified as high context culture. The reason for this is that China believes in Confucianism, which means that an upright person should control his desires and actions and it is a national personality that reserves and does not directly say what he means and wants. Although China's politics and economy have changed a lot over the decades, China has a much longer history compared to some Western countries, but relatively few immigrants, so the culture hasn't changed much.

Besides, this finding also shows that women have higher context culture than men, which are supportive of the four characteristics identified by Salleh [10] that high-contextual culture requires close relationships and is reliant on emotion. Different genders have different expectations of society, and two level of context cultures emerge naturally. Females are more cooperative, and they are sensitive to the language of people's communication. When they look for a long-term relationship, they act less aggressively and more like a listener. They rarely express their true feelings to avoid conflict in communication. However, males behave differently in communication. Unlike women, men tend to be more independent so they will express their feelings and opinions more directly in the communication.

Finally, the survey results show that there is a statistically significant difference in age. With the development of China's economy and the implementation of the one-child policy, young millennials (mostly between the ages of 20-30) enjoy a better material life and are more concerned about their own feelings. They have the more opportunity to study and live abroad or work in multinational companies that expose them to Western culture and ideas, so they are more willing to express their ideas in communication than older

generation.

V. Conclusion

In Culture's Consequences, Hofstede [2] established a way for dissecting the idea of culture into a set of dimensions that may be used to compare individual countries and cultures. The current research has derived a new dimension of context culture and investigated among people of different gender and age in China. Furthermore, the current dimension is based on various theoretical arguments, procedures, different types of respondents, data from a later historical time, and a broader set of values. Not surprisingly, the new dimensions of context culture, while relevant in some ways, are quite neutral among people of different gender and age in China. There is insufficient evidence to support that context culture should be added to Hofstede's cultural dimension model.

According to our finding, the score of China is at a medium level which cannot be considered high context culture or low context culture. There is a slight difference between the score of females and males, which indicated that females have a slightly higher level of context culture than males. There is not much difference in the level of context culture among people of different age groups. Increases in age were not significantly correlated with a decreased level in context culture. People of different gender and age do not have a significantly different level of context culture and they cannot be considered high or low context culture because of the neutral attitude. Based on the result, it can be concluded that context culture cannot be considered as a new cultural dimension, and it is not suggested that context culture should be added into Hofstede's culture dimension model.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research is supported by Hempel A/S.

References

[1] S. H. Schwartz, "Beyond individualism/collectivism: New cultural dimensions of values," in *Individualism and Collectivism: Theory, Method and Applications*, U. Kim, H. C. Triandis, C. Kagitçibasi, S. C. Choi, and G. Yoon, Eds. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994, pp. 85–119.
[2] G. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980.
[3] K. Schwab, "The fourth industrial revolution," in *Proc. World Economic Forum*, Geneva, Switzerland, 2016, pp. 105-108.
[4] W. Y. Zhang, "The power of ideas and leadership in China's transition to a liberal society," *Cato Journal, Cato Institute*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 1–40, Winter, 2014.
[5] S. F. Song, *The Revival of Private Enterprise in China*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007.
[6] E. T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, New York: Doubleday, 1976.
[7] D. Kim, Y. Pan, and H. S. Park, "High-versus low-context culture: A comparison of Chinese, Korean, and American cultures," *Psychology & Marketing*, vol. 15, pp. 507–521, 1998.
[8] W. B. Gudykunst and S. Ting-Toomey, *Culture and Interpersonal Communication*, Newbury Park: Routledge, 1988.
[9] A. T. Shao and J. S. Hill, "Advertising sensitive products in magazines: legal and social restrictions," *Multinational Business Review*, Fall, pp. 16–24, 1994.
[10] L. M. Salleh, "High/low context communication: The Malaysian Malay style, in *Proc. the 2005 Association for Business Communication Annual Convention*, Irvine, CA, 2005.