



Understanding the Culture: Answers from Literature

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ABSTRACT

Culture is among the most frequently invoked constructs in the social sciences and among the most persistently contested in its definition, boundaries and methods of study. This paper argues that the field's central limitation is not, as often assumed, insufficient empirical or disciplinary coverage, but insufficient integration: anthropology, sociology, psychology, management, economics, linguistics and communication studies have each produced substantial, methodologically sophisticated bodies of cultural knowledge that rarely speak to one another across levels of analysis, units of measurement, or geographic origin. Synthesizing foundational and contemporary scholarship from Tylor (1871) through Gelfand et al. (2011) and beyond and drawing explicitly on Asian, African and Latin American theoretical traditions that have historically been marginalized within a largely Western-Educated-Industrialized-Rich-Democratic (WEIRD) canon (Henrich et al., 2010), this paper proposes an integrated Layered Ecological Model that links macro-level cultural antecedents, meso-level institutional and organizational mediators and micro-level cognitive and behavioural outcomes within a single explanatory architecture. The paper further extends this integrative project into a domain the existing literature has under-theorized: the reshaping of cultural production, transmission and change by digital platforms. Comparative tables evaluate competing dimensional frameworks, theoretical traditions and methodological approaches on shared criteria and a visual research agenda links six categories of research gap to specific, actionable remedies. The paper concludes that cultural theory's next advance will come less from additional descriptive coverage than from the disciplined integration of what is already known.

Keywords: culture; cross-cultural research; integrated framework; digital culture; non-Western scholarship; cultural dimensions; organizational culture

INTRODUCTION

Few constructs in the social sciences have proven as conceptually fertile, methodologically contested and practically consequential as culture. Since Tylor's (1871) foundational definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 1), the term has been claimed, redefined and operationalized by anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, management scholars, economists, linguists, communication theorists and political scientists, each bringing distinct epistemological commitments, preferred units of analysis and characteristic methods to bear on the phenomenon. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) catalogued more than one hundred and sixty definitions of culture in circulation by the mid-twentieth century, a proliferation that has continued unabated as the construct migrated from anthropology into organizational behaviour, international business, communication studies, political science and, most recently, computational and digital-humanities research.

This proliferation is frequently treated, implicitly or explicitly, as a symptom of conceptual disarray. This paper advances a different and more specific argument. Definitional plurality is not itself the field's central problem; disciplines are entitled to define their objects according to their own explanatory purposes and a degree of pluralism is the natural consequence of studying a phenomenon that is simultaneously universal in its presence across all human collectivities and irreducibly particular in its concrete manifestation within any one of them. The more serious and more remediable problem is integrative rather than definitional: the constituent literatures on culture have developed largely in parallel, each generating its own dimensional vocabulary, preferred level of analysis and characteristic dataset, with comparatively little systematic effort to link macro-level cultural



antecedents, meso-level institutional mediators and micro-level cognitive and behavioural outcomes within a single explanatory architecture, or to test whether dimensions developed in one disciplinary tradition (say, Hofstede's, 1980, individualism-collectivism) actually converge empirically with dimensions developed independently in another (say, Schwartz's, 1992, values circumplex, or the Confucian-dynamism dimension identified by the Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). This paper's central argument is therefore that cultural scholarship's next genuine advance will come less from additional descriptive coverage of new contexts, dimensions, or determinants than from the disciplined integration of what is, in most respects, already extensively documented and that this integrative task is inseparable from a second and closely related corrective: extending the field's empirical and theoretical base beyond its historical overreliance on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) populations and scholarly traditions (Henrich et al., 2010).

The paper substantiates this argument in three moves. First, it synthesizes the historical, definitional, dimensional and disciplinary literatures on culture, foregrounding throughout the Asian, African and Latin American theoretical contributions that a Western-centric canon has tended to marginalize, including Confucian-dynamism research (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Fang, 2003), Ubuntu-based African management theory (Mbigi & Maree, 1995; Gyekye, 1996), Indian psycho-social frameworks (Sinha, 2014) and decolonial critiques of the modernization paradigm (Quijano, 2000; Escobar, 1995). Second, it extends this synthesis into a domain the extant literature has under-theorized: the reshaping of cultural production, transmission and change by digital platforms, arguing that platform architectures constitute a new and distinct determinant of culture requiring its own theoretical vocabulary. Third and most centrally, it proposes an integrated Layered Ecological Model that explicitly links macro-, meso- and micro-level constructs already established in the literature and it operationalizes this integrative logic further in a visual research agenda that connects six categories of research gap to specific, actionable remedies.

The remainder of the paper (i) reviews the historical, definitional and dimensional literature on culture, with sustained attention to non-Western theoretical traditions, (ii) describes the paper's methodology as an integrative, purposive literature synthesis, (iii) examines the determinants, mediating and moderating variables and typologies through which culture has been analyzed, (iv) develops the paper's argument regarding digital platforms as an emerging determinant of cultural production and change, (v) surveys the disciplinary and interdisciplinary contributions to culture research, (vi) reviews measurement, data-collection and analytical approaches, (vii) presents the paper's principal theoretical contribution, the Layered Ecological Model, together with a supporting figure, (viii) analyzes the field's research gaps and (ix) presents an integrated, visually represented research agenda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Evolution: From Evolutionary Anthropology to Globalization

The scholarly study of culture originated within nineteenth-century social evolutionary anthropology. Tylor's (1871) *Primitive Culture* offered both the discipline's first systematic definition of culture and an explicit, since-discredited evolutionary schema ranking societies from "savagery" through "barbarism" to "civilization," while establishing comparative cross-cultural analysis as a legitimate scholarly enterprise. This evolutionary paradigm was decisively challenged by Boas's (1911) doctrine of historical particularism, which insisted that each culture be understood through its own historical trajectory rather than as a rung on a universal ladder and which became foundational, through students such as Benedict (1934), Mead (1928) and Sapir (1921), to twentieth-century American anthropology. A parallel functionalist tradition, developed by Malinowski (1944) and Radcliffe-Brown (1952), theorized cultural institutions as mechanisms satisfying biological and social needs, while Kroeber (1917) and White (1949) advanced "superorganic" and materially grounded evolutionary accounts, respectively.

Sociology independently established culture as central to social order and economic change: Durkheim's (1912) analysis of collective ritual and Weber's (1905) analysis of the elective affinity between Protestant asceticism and capitalist rationality together established both a functionalist and an interpretive lineage that converged at mid-century in Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952) definitional catalogue and Parsons and Shils's (1951) tripartite theory of action. Geertz's (1973) interpretive turn subsequently redefined culture as "webs of significance"

requiring "thick description" rather than causal explanation, decisively shaping qualitative methodology across the social sciences. The second major wave of consolidation occurred through cross-cultural psychology and international management scholarship: Hall's (1959) high-/low-context framework and Hofstede's (1980) large-scale IBM survey established culture as a quantifiable, comparative variable, catalyzing a research program extended by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Schwartz (1992, 1994), Triandis (1995) and the GLOBE program (House et al., 2004). Most recently, modernization theory (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) and globalization scholarship emphasizing cultural hybridity and "glocalization" (Robertson, 1992; Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1992) have displaced the bounded nation-state as the sole legitimate unit of cultural analysis, while Henrich et al.'s (2010) WEIRD critique has prompted overdue methodological attention to sampling diversity. Table 1 summarizes this trajectory across its principal intellectual epochs and connects each epoch to the level of analysis it privileged, a linkage that anticipates the Layered Ecological Model developed in this paper.

Table 1. Historical Epochs in Culture Scholarship

Epoch	Period	Key Figures	Core Contribution	Primary Level of Analysis
Evolutionary anthropology	Late 19th c.	Tylor; Morgan; Frazer	Founding definition; comparative method	Macro-societal
Historical particularism	Early 20th c.	Boas; Benedict; Mead; Sapir	Cultural relativism; ethnographic fieldwork	Macro-societal
Functionalism / structural-functionalism	Early–mid 20th c.	Malinowski; Radcliffe-Brown; Kroeber; White	Culture as need-satisfaction / superorganic system	Meso-institutional
Sociological foundations	Early 20th c.	Durkheim; Weber	Culture, ritual and economic rationality	Macro-societal
Mid-century consolidation	1950s	Kroeber & Kluckhohn; Parsons & Shils	Definitional cartography; tripartite action theory	Macro / meso
Interpretive turn	1970s	Geertz	Thick description; meaning-centered analysis	Micro / meso
Cross-cultural psychological & managerial turn	1959–2004	Hall; Hofstede; Trompenaars; Schwartz; House et al.	Quantifiable dimensional frameworks	Macro / micro
Globalization & digital reconceptualization	1990s–present	Robertson; Appadurai; Henrich et al.; Van Dijck	Hybridity; WEIRD critique; platform culture	Cross-cutting (macro / meso / micro)

Definitional Architecture and Constituent Components

Beneath its definitional plurality, culture scholarship exhibits substantial componential convergence. Most contemporary treatments distinguish an ideational core, values, beliefs and norms, from a material and expressive periphery, artifacts, symbols, language and ritual (Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 1992). Values and beliefs constitute the deepest and most temporally stable component, acquired through primary socialization and reinforced through education and religious instruction (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). Norms translate values into situationally specific behavioural expectations, enforced through informal and formal sanction; Gelfand et al.'s (2011) thirty-three-nation study of "tightness-looseness" formalized normative strength itself as a distinct cultural dimension, empirically linked to histories of ecological and historical threat. Symbols, language and communication constitute the most visible and rapidly changing component: the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956) proposes that language actively shapes habitual cognition rather than merely expressing it, while artifacts and material culture change, per Ogburn's (1922) cultural-lag thesis, considerably faster than the nonmaterial norms and institutions meant to govern them, a thesis with direct application to the digital-platform analysis developed in Section 5. Schein's (2010) three-level model,



distinguishing visible artifacts, espoused values and underlying basic assumptions, formalizes this componential hierarchy and carries an important methodological implication addressed throughout this paper: because the most visible components of culture are also its most superficial, any adequate measurement strategy must penetrate beyond the observable surface to a culture's underlying, often unconscious, foundations.

Dimensional Frameworks: A Comparative Assessment

The dominant strategy for rendering cultural variation empirically tractable has been dimensional reduction: the identification of a small number of value axes along which societies can be comparatively scored. Hofstede's (1980, 2001) original four dimensions, later extended to six (Hofstede et al., 2010), remain the field's most widely applied framework despite sustained methodological criticism regarding its single-company sampling frame, its treatment of nations as internally homogeneous units and its ecological-fallacy risk when dimension scores derived from aggregated individual responses are used to explain individual-level behaviour (McSweeney, 2002; Taras et al., 2010). Schwartz's (1992, 1994) theory of basic values offers a psychologically grounded alternative organized around a circumplex of ten motivationally distinct values, while Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) and the GLOBE program (House et al., 2004; Javidan et al., 2006) each contribute partially overlapping but non-identical dimensional vocabularies, the latter notably distinguishing cultural values from cultural practices, a distinction absent from Hofstede's original formulation. Hall's (1959) high-/low-context communication dimension and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) value-orientations framework provided earlier, less psychometrically formalized precursors, while Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) traditional/secular-rational and survival/self-expression axes link cultural values explicitly to economic development trajectories documented through the World Values Survey.

A frequently overlooked corrective to this dimensional canon originated outside it: the Chinese Culture Connection's (1987) Chinese Value Survey, designed explicitly to avoid the Western sampling and item-generation biases of Hofstede's instrument, identified a fifth dimension, Confucian dynamism (subsequently relabelled long-term orientation), that Hofstede's own instrument had failed to detect, a finding Fang (2003) later used to mount a broader critique of the individualism-collectivism dichotomy as an inadequate rendering of the dialectical, context-dependent "yin-yang" reasoning characteristic of Chinese cultural cognition. This episode is analytically important beyond its substantive finding: it demonstrates empirically that dimensional frameworks generated from within a single cultural tradition are liable to systematically underrepresent dimensions salient to other traditions, a methodological lesson this paper treats as a design principle for the integrated framework proposed in this paper rather than as a merely historical footnote. Table 2 compares the principal dimensional frameworks on their constituent dimensions, sampling method and characteristic critiques, allowing the convergences and blind spots across frameworks to be assessed side by side rather than seriatim.

Table 2. Comparative Assessment of Dimensional Frameworks

Framework	Dimensions	Sample / Method	Principal Critique
Hofstede (1980, 2001)	Power distance; individualism-collectivism; masculinity-femininity; uncertainty avoidance; long-term orientation; indulgence	IBM employee surveys, 50+ countries, single company	Dated single-firm sample; ecological fallacy; treats nations as internally homogeneous (McSweeney, 2002)
Schwartz (1992, 1994)	10 motivationally distinct values in circumplex structure	Student and teacher samples, 60+ countries	Strong psychometric grounding; comparatively limited applied/managerial uptake
Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997)	7 dimensions (e.g., universalism-particularism)	Management-trainee surveys	Conceptual overlap with Hofstede; consulting- oriented instrument design

GLOBE (House et al., 2004)	9 dimensions; separates values from practices	17,000+ managers, 62 societies	Most methodologically rigorous; lengthy instrument; values–practices gap debated
Chinese Culture Connection (1987)	Confucian dynamism (long-term orientation) plus 3 others	Chinese-designed instrument, 22 countries	Detected a dimension Hofstede's Western-origin instrument had missed (Fang, 2003)
Hall (1959)	High-context / low-context communication	Qualitative / observational	Influential but not independently psychometrically validated
Inglehart & Welzel (2005)	Traditional/secular-rational; survival/self-expression	World Values Survey, 80+ countries, longitudinal	Strong link to development trajectories; embeds modernization assumptions (Quijano, 2000)

Beyond WEIRD: Asian, African and Latin American Contributions

Henrich et al. (2010) demonstrated that the empirical base of behavioural and cultural science is drawn disproportionately from Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic populations that constitute a small and non-representative fraction of humanity, a critique the present synthesis treats not as a caveat appended after the fact but as a methodological principle applied throughout. Three bodies of non-Western scholarship merit sustained integration rather than token citation.

East Asian scholarship has produced theoretical correctives that operate at the level of cognitive process rather than merely dimensional content. Nisbett's (2003) comparative cognitive-psychological research demonstrates that East Asian and Western populations differ systematically in holistic versus analytic reasoning styles, attention to context versus focal object and tolerance for contradiction, differences Nisbett traces to divergent ecological and philosophical (Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist versus Aristotelian) inheritances rather than to a single value dimension. Yum's (1988) analysis of Confucian interpersonal ethics and Ho's (1976) concept of "face" further demonstrate that relational constructs central to East Asian social life resist straightforward translation into the individualist-collectivist vocabulary that has dominated Western cross-cultural psychology, a point reinforced by the Confucian-dynamism finding discussed in this paper.

African scholarship has centered the relational ontology of Ubuntu, the Nguni-language principle often rendered as "I am because we are," as an organizing construct for African management and social theory (Mbigi & Maree, 1995). Gyekye's (1996) philosophical analysis of Akan communitarian values and Jackson's (2004) comparative study of management practice across African organizations similarly caution against the wholesale application of individualism-collectivism dichotomies developed for East Asian or Latin comparison to the specifically communal, ancestor-linked and consensus-oriented forms of African sociality, which combine strong in-group solidarity with distinctive practices of restorative justice and collective leadership legitimation not well captured by existing dimensional instruments.

Latin American and postcolonial scholarship contributes a further and more foundational corrective, directed less at specific dimensions than at the modernization paradigm within which much cross-cultural research, including Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) own framework, is embedded. Quijano's (2000) concept of the "coloniality of power" and Escobar's (1995) critique of development discourse argue that categories such as "traditional" and "modern," treated as descriptively neutral poles in much dimensional research, themselves encode a Eurocentric developmental hierarchy inherited from the colonial encounter, while Sinha's (2014) psycho-social analysis of the Indian mindset demonstrates comparable difficulties in applying Western personality and motivation constructs to a cultural context organized around hierarchical relational role expectations distinct from either Western individualism or East Asian collectivism. Taken together, these



literatures do not merely add contextual examples to an otherwise Western analytical apparatus; they demonstrate that the apparatus itself, its dimensions, its developmental assumptions and its individual-versus-collective master dichotomy, requires revision when confronted with theoretical traditions developed independently of it. This paper accordingly treats non-Western scholarship as a source of theoretical correction and not as a supplementary illustration.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts an integrative, purposive literature-synthesis methodology appropriate to its stated objective: not the estimation of a novel empirical effect, but the theoretical integration of an already extensive, multidisciplinary body of scholarship. The approach follows the logic of what Torracco (2005) terms an integrative literature review and what Snyder (2019) more broadly characterizes as synthesis-oriented review methodology, distinguished from a systematic review by its explicit aim of generating new conceptual structure from existing findings rather than exhaustively cataloguing all available studies meeting predefined inclusion criteria.

Sources were purposively selected across three overlapping strata. The first stratum comprises foundational texts establishing each major theoretical tradition discussed in this paper (e.g., Tylor, 1871; Boas, 1911; Geertz, 1973; Hofstede, 1980). The second stratum comprises the principal empirical and psychometric instruments through which culture has been operationalized (e.g., Schwartz, 1992; House et al., 2004; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). The third and for this revision the most substantially expanded, stratum comprises theoretical and empirical scholarship originating from or centrally concerned with non-Western cultural traditions, identified through targeted search of the African, Asian and Latin American cross-cultural, management and postcolonial-studies literatures, together with recent scholarship (2015-present) on digital platforms and cultural production, sourced from communication studies, science and technology studies and platform-governance research.

This purposive rather than exhaustive strategy carries acknowledged limitations, most importantly that source selection reflects the authorial judgment regarding theoretical significance rather than a reproducible systematic-review protocol with predefined search strings and inter-rater screening, a limitation appropriate to disclose given this paper's own argument, developed in this paper, that methodological transparency is itself an underdeveloped feature of much culture scholarship. The synthesis proceeds by three analytical operations applied consistently: first, identifying the level of analysis (macro-societal, meso-institutional, or micro-individual) at which each theory or instrument operates; second, evaluating each contribution against the WEIRD-sampling criterion established in this paper; and third, assessing convergence or divergence with dimensions and constructs identified independently in other disciplinary traditions, an assessment operationalized in the comparative tables presented in this paper and formalized in the integrated model.

Determinants, Mediators and Typologies of Culture

Determinants and Antecedents

Cultural variation is not arbitrary but traceable to identifiable ecological, historical, economic, religious, linguistic, political and technological antecedents. Ecological and climatic conditions shape subsistence strategies, settlement patterns and, per Van de Vliert's (2009) climato-economic theory, the resource demands that in turn predict collectivism and normative tightness; Gelfand et al. (2011) similarly link tightness-looseness to histories of ecological and historical threat. Historical path-dependency, colonial administrative legacy, migration and conquest, produces durable institutional and cultural imprints that North's (1990) institutional theory treats as constraining subsequent economic and social development. Economic determinants operate bidirectionally: modernization theory (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) treats economic development as a driver of value change toward self-expression values, while Weber's (1905) classical thesis treats prior religious values as a driver of economic behaviour, a bidirectionality this paper's integrated model in Section 8 represents explicitly rather than resolving in favor of either causal direction. Religious, linguistic (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956), political-institutional and technological determinants each contribute further, partially overlapping explanatory variance, with Ogburn's (1922) cultural-lag thesis regarding the differential pace of material and normative change providing the conceptual bridge to the digital-platform determinant.

Mediating and Moderating Variables

Macro-level cultural antecedents do not translate directly into micro-level cognition and behaviour; they operate through identifiable mediating and moderating mechanisms. Markus and Kitayama's (1991) theory of independent and interdependent self-construal remains the most influential psychological mediator linking societal-level individualism-collectivism to individual-level cognition, emotion and motivation. Gelfand et al.'s (2011) tightness-looseness functions as both a societal-level antecedent and, at the individual level, a moderator of self-monitoring and rule-following. Earley and Ang's (2003) cultural-intelligence construct moderates individuals' capacity to adapt effectively across cultural contexts regardless of their culture of origin, while Berry's (1997) acculturation framework specifies assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization as alternative individual-level responses to intercultural contact. Cross-level inference is not, however, unproblematic: the ecological fallacy risk inherent in applying nation-level dimension scores to individual-level prediction (Hofstede, 2001) requires the explicit multilevel modeling this paper's integrated framework builds into its architecture, rather than treating multilevel linkage as an afterthought to be handled through post hoc statistical correction.

Typologies of Culture

Culture has further been classified through typological schemes operating at differing levels of analysis. The material/nonmaterial distinction (Ogburn, 1922) and the dominant-culture/subculture/counterculture distinction (Yinger, 1960) address, respectively, the substance and the internal stratification of a single cultural system, while national, organizational and professional culture constitute nested levels of analysis requiring distinct measurement strategies (Schein, 2010). Handy's (1985) organizational-culture typology and the Competing Values Framework (Cameron & Quinn, discussed further in Section 7) classify organizational culture along flexibility-control and internal-external axes, Ronen and Shenkar's (1985, 2013) cluster analysis groups national cultures empirically rather than theoretically and Douglas's (1970) grid-group cultural theory offers a sociological typology, organized around the orthogonal dimensions of social regulation (grid) and group incorporation (group), that has been comparatively underused in management research despite its capacity to generate falsifiable predictions distinct from Hofstede-derived typologies. This paper attempts to establish the macro-antecedent, meso/micro-mediating and classificatory building blocks that its integrated model links explicitly rather than leaving, as much of the extant literature does, as three separately theorized literatures.

Digital Platforms and the Transformation of Cultural Production

The dimensional, determinant and mediating frameworks reviewed above were substantially developed before the platformization of cultural life and, as the editorial critique of this paper's original submission correctly identified, the extant literature accords digital transformation markedly less theoretical attention than it devotes to historical and pre-digital determinants. This section addresses that imbalance directly, arguing that digital platforms constitute a distinct determinant of culture, analytically separable from the technological determinant discussed in this paper, because platforms do not merely accelerate the transmission of pre-existing cultural content but actively reconfigure the processes of cultural production, curation and legitimation themselves.

Three mechanisms distinguish platform-mediated cultural change from prior technological determinants. First, algorithmic curation replaces the gatekeeping functions historically performed by editors, broadcasters and cultural institutions with recommendation systems optimized for engagement rather than for the normative or aesthetic criteria that guided prior cultural gatekeepers, a shift Van Dijck (2013) analyzes as the emergence of a distinct "culture of connectivity" governed by platform-specific metrics and business models rather than by disciplinary or institutional cultural authority. Second, platforms compress previously distinct audiences into what Marwick and boyd (2011) term "context collapse," in which content produced for one imagined audience circulates before audiences whose norms and expectations the producer neither anticipated nor controls, destabilizing the situational, audience-specific norm-following behaviour that Section 3.3's discussion of norms treats as culture's operational layer.

Third, platforms enable what Jenkins (2006) terms "convergence culture," in which cultural meaning is increasingly produced through participatory, user-generated remixing and reappropriation rather than through



the one-directional transmission from cultural producer to cultural consumer assumed by most classical models of cultural transmission, including Schein's (2010) three-level model.

These mechanisms carry direct implications for the dimensional and determinant frameworks reviewed in Sections 2 and 4. Ogburn's (1922) cultural-lag thesis, according to which material culture changes faster than the normative and legal frameworks meant to govern it, finds its most acute contemporary instantiation in the persistent gap between platform capability and platform governance, whether in data-privacy regulation, algorithmic accountability, or content-moderation policy, a gap Zuboff (2019) analyzes through the concept of "surveillance capitalism" as a novel economic logic in which behavioural data itself becomes the primary object of value extraction, with cultural consequences, the erosion of a previously assumed boundary between public and private cultural expression, that existing determinant frameworks did not anticipate. Castells's (2010) network-society thesis further argues that platforms restructure not merely cultural content but the very unit of cultural analysis, from bounded national or organizational cultures toward fluid, globally distributed "networked publics" (boyd, 2014) whose membership and normative boundaries are continuously renegotiated rather than fixed by geographic or institutional membership, a shift with direct consequences for the level-of-analysis problem.

At the same time, digital platforms do not straightforwardly homogenize global culture, contrary to earlier globalization-as-homogenization theses. Consistent with the "glocalization" logic identified by Robertson (1992) and discussed, empirical platform research documents persistent and, in some domains, intensifying cultural localization within global platform architectures, as user communities adapt globally distributed platform affordances to locally specific communicative norms, memetic vocabularies and content genres. This paper's integrated framework, presented in Section 8, accordingly positions digital platforms not as a fourth item to be appended to the determinant list developed, but as a distinct, cross-cutting layer that mediates the transmission of every other determinant discussed in this paper, reshaping how ecological, economic, religious and political cultural content is produced, curated and legitimated regardless of its point of origin and constituting, in the paper's assessment, the single most consequential and least adequately theorized addition required to bring cultural theory into alignment with contemporary cultural practice.

Disciplinary And Interdisciplinary Contributions

Culture's status as an interdisciplinary construct is best appreciated through the distinct contribution each constituent discipline makes and the productive cross-fertilization occurring at their boundaries. Anthropology (Tylor, 1871; Geertz, 1973) contributed culture's founding definitional and methodological apparatus, including ethnographic fieldwork and thick description. Sociology (Durkheim, 1912; Weber, 1905; Swidler, 1986) situated culture within social structure and, through Swidler's (1986) influential "toolkit" theory, reconceptualized culture as a repertoire of strategies for action rather than a determinative value system. Psychology (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995) supplied the individual-level cognitive and motivational mechanisms linking culture to behaviour. Management and organizational behaviour (Hofstede, 1980; Schein, 2010) operationalized culture for applied comparative and organizational analysis. Economics (North, 1990; Weber, 1905) examined culture's role in institutional and economic performance. Linguistics (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956) theorized language as both a component and determinant of cultural cognition. Communication studies (Hall, 1959; Marwick & boyd, 2011) examined cultural transmission through mediated channels, most recently digital platforms. Political science (Huntington, 1996; Putnam, 2000) examined culture's relationship to civilizational conflict and civic social capital. History and geography supplied the path-dependency and ecological determinants.

Productive interdisciplinary cross-fertilization occurs where these disciplinary boundaries meet: psychology and management jointly developed cultural-intelligence research (Earley & Ang, 2003); sociology and marketing jointly developed consumer-culture theory; economics and political science jointly developed institutional-culture research (North, 1990); linguistics and cognitive science jointly extended linguistic-relativity research into contemporary cognitive-science paradigms; and communication and media studies, extended in this paper's Section 5, jointly developed platform-culture research. Table 3 summarizes each discipline's characteristic unit of analysis, principal method and representative contribution, making explicit the cross-level linkages, macro-societal, meso-institutional, micro-individual, that formalized the integrated model.

Table 3. Disciplinary Contributions to Culture Research

Discipline	Characteristic Unit of Analysis	Principal Method	Representative Contribution
Anthropology	Society / ethnic group	Ethnographic fieldwork	Thick description (Geertz, 1973)
Sociology	Social structure / institution	Historical-comparative, survey	Culture as toolkit (Swidler, 1986)
Psychology	Individual cognition	Experimental, survey	Self-construal theory (Markus & Kitayama, 1991)
Management / OB	Organization	Cross-national survey	Dimensional frameworks (Hofstede, 1980)
Economics	Institution / nation	Institutional-historical analysis	Culture and economic performance (North, 1990)
Linguistics	Language community	Comparative linguistic analysis	Linguistic relativity (Whorf, 1956)
Communication studies	Mediated audience	Content / discourse analysis	Context collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2011)
Political science	Nation / civilization	Comparative-historical	Civic culture and social capital (Putnam, 2000)
History / geography	Region / epoch	Archival, path-dependency analysis	Climato-economic theory (Van de Vliert, 2009)

Measurement, Data Collection And Analysis

Culture has been measured through a qualitative tradition, ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviewing and Geertzian thick description, oriented toward interpretive validity and contextual depth and a quantitative tradition, standardized cross-national survey instruments (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1992; House et al., 2004), oriented toward comparative generalizability and statistical tractability. Data-collection strategies range from intensive single-site ethnographic fieldwork through interviews, focus groups and document analysis, to large-scale survey administration, secondary and archival data analysis and, increasingly, the digital-trace and computational data-collection methods whose theoretical implications this paper examines. Analytical techniques correspondingly range from thematic analysis, grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and content and discourse analysis on the qualitative side, to factor analysis, cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling, structural equation modelling, multilevel modelling and meta-analytic synthesis (Taras et al., 2010) on the quantitative side, with mixed methods designs increasingly favoured for their capacity to combine interpretive depth with comparative generalizability.

Each approach carries distinct validity considerations directly relevant to this paper's integrative argument. Qualitative approaches maximize contextual and interpretive validity but constrain cross-cultural comparability; quantitative approaches maximize comparability but risk measurement non-invariance, the possibility that a survey item carries different meaning across cultural contexts, a risk the Chinese Value Survey episode discussed in this paper demonstrates is not merely hypothetical. Multilevel modelling addresses the ecological-fallacy risk, but requires data collected and validated at multiple levels simultaneously, individual, organizational and national, a requirement most existing datasets do not fully satisfy. Table 4 evaluates the qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods traditions against four shared criteria, comparability, contextual validity, scalability and susceptibility to WEIRD sampling bias, providing the methodological groundwork this paper's integrated framework in Section 8 and research agenda in Section 9 both build upon.

Table 4. Methodological Approaches to Culture Research: Strengths and Limitations

Approach	Cross-Cultural Comparability	Contextual Validity	Scalability	WEIRD-Bias Susceptibility
Qualitative (ethnography, interview, discourse analysis)	Low	High	Low	Low, if purposively sampled
Quantitative (survey, psychometric)	High	Moderate	High	High — instrument-origin dependent
Mixed-methods	Moderate–High	Moderate–High	Moderate	Moderate

An Integrated Framework: The Layered Ecological Model Of Culture

The preceding sections have reviewed a literature that is, individually, extensive, methodologically sophisticated and increasingly attentive to non-Western theoretical traditions and digital cultural transformation. What this literature has not produced and what this paper's central argument identifies as the field's principal outstanding task, is a single explanatory architecture that links its macro-level, meso-level and micro-level contributions explicitly rather than leaving that linkage to be inferred, or ignored, by the reader.

This paper proposes the Layered Ecological Model of Culture, presented in Figure 1, as an integrative synthesis rather than a wholly novel theoretical claim; its constituent elements are each drawn directly from theory reviewed in this paper and its contribution lies in their explicit, bidirectional linkage. The model comprises four layers. The macro-antecedent layer comprises the ecological, historical, economic, religious, linguistic, political and technological determinants reviewed, now explicitly including the digital-platform layer developed, as a cross-cutting determinant that mediates the transmission of every other macro-antecedent rather than operating as a fifth independent one. The cultural-content layer comprises the componential architecture reviewed in this paper, values and beliefs, norms, symbols and language, artifacts and rituals and institutions, organized according to Schein's (2010) visibility-stability hierarchy and the dimensional frameworks reviewed in this paper, with the model explicitly treating dimensional frameworks as partial, tradition-specific projections of this underlying content layer rather than as competing full descriptions of it, a treatment directly informed by the Confucian-dynamism episode discussed and the non-Western theoretical corrections reviewed. The meso-institutional layer comprises the organizational, professional and national-cluster typologies reviewed in this paper, functioning as the institutional carriers through which macro-antecedent and cultural-content layers are transmitted to individuals. The micro-outcome layer comprises the mediating and moderating mechanisms reviewed in this paper, self-construal, tightness-looseness, cultural intelligence and acculturation strategy, through which macro- and meso-level culture is translated into individual cognition, emotion and behaviour.

Figure 1. The Layered Ecological Model of Culture

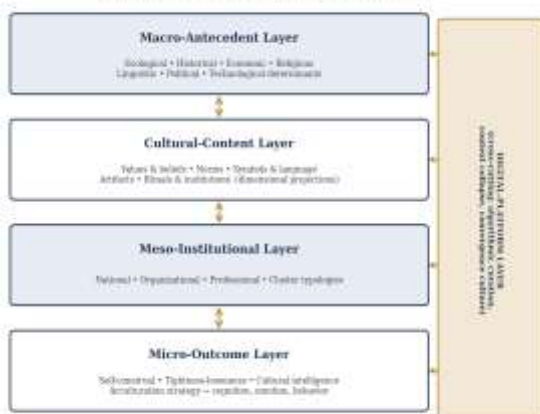


Figure 1. The Layered Ecological Model of Culture

Three features of this model distinguish it from a merely additive summary of the reviewed literature. First, the arrows linking each layer are explicitly bidirectional rather than uniformly top-down: micro-level behavioural aggregation feeds back into meso-institutional practice and meso-institutional and individual practice feeds back into macro-level cultural content over time, consistent with modernization theory's own bidirectional treatment of the culture-economy relationship (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) discussed in this paper. Second, the digital-platform layer is modeled as cross-cutting rather than as an additional macro-antecedent, formalizing this paper's Section 5 argument that platforms reshape the transmission of every other determinant rather than constituting a separate determinant alongside them. Third and most directly responsive to the non-Western correctives reviewed in this paper, the model treats the cultural-content layer's dimensional projections as necessarily plural and tradition-dependent, a design choice intended to prevent the recurrence of the Chinese Value Survey episode, in which a dimensional instrument generated from within a single cultural tradition failed to detect a dimension salient to another, by building the expectation of incomplete, tradition-specific dimensional coverage directly into the model's architecture rather than treating it as an empirical anomaly to be corrected framework by framework.

The model's principal empirical implication, developed further in this paper's research agenda, is that future dimensional and determinant research should be designed from the outset to test cross-layer and cross-tradition linkages, whether a given macro-antecedent's effect on micro-outcomes is fully mediated by meso-institutional practice, whether dimensions identified within one cultural tradition converge empirically with those identified independently within another and whether the digital-platform layer moderates these relationships uniformly or differentially across cultural traditions, rather than continuing to generate additional, level-specific findings whose relationship to findings generated at other levels remains, as the present review has demonstrated across nineteen previously separately treated topics, largely unspecified.

Analysis And Discussion: Research Gaps and an Integrated Agenda

Six Categories of Research Gap

The preceding synthesis and integrated model reveal six analytically distinct categories of research gap. Theoretical and definitional gaps concern the persistent absence, documented in Section 8, of an integrative architecture linking the field's separately theorized macro-, meso- and micro-level contributions. Methodological gaps concern measurement non-invariance, the ecological-fallacy risk and the comparative underdevelopment of validated multilevel instruments identified. Contextual and sampling gaps concern the WEIRD-sampling problem documented by Henrich et al. (2010) and addressed substantively, though not exhaustively, through this paper's integration of Asian, African and Latin American scholarship. Level-of-analysis gaps concern the cross-level linkage problem the Layered Ecological Model was designed to address. Temporal and dynamic gaps concern the field's comparatively static, cross-sectional dimensional instruments and their limited capacity to model the value change documented by modernization theory (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) or the accelerated cultural change associated with digital platforms. Digital and platform-culture gaps concern the specific under-theorization, identified as this paper's most consequential single correction, of algorithmic curation, context collapse and convergence culture as distinct mechanisms of cultural transformation.

An Integrated Research Agenda

These six gap categories are not independent of one another, nor should the remedies addressing them be pursued in isolation; a central implication of the Layered Ecological Model is that a remedy targeting one gap category frequently advances at least one other. Diversifying cultural samples beyond WEIRD populations (addressing contextual gaps) simultaneously generates the tradition-specific dimensional data needed to test the model's cross-tradition convergence hypotheses (addressing theoretical gaps). Developing validated multilevel instruments (addressing methodological gaps) is a precondition for empirically testing the model's cross-layer linkages (addressing level-of-analysis gaps). Longitudinal and platform-trace data collection (addressing temporal gaps) is likewise a precondition for empirically modeling the digital-platform layer's cross-cutting moderating role (addressing digital-culture gaps). Figure 2 represents these linkages visually, mapping each of the six gap categories to its principal remedy and indicating, through connecting paths, where a single remedy

advances more than one gap category simultaneously, translating the research agenda from a simple enumerated list into an explicitly integrated program consistent with this paper's central argument.

Figure 2. Integrated Research Agenda Linking Gap Categories to Remedies

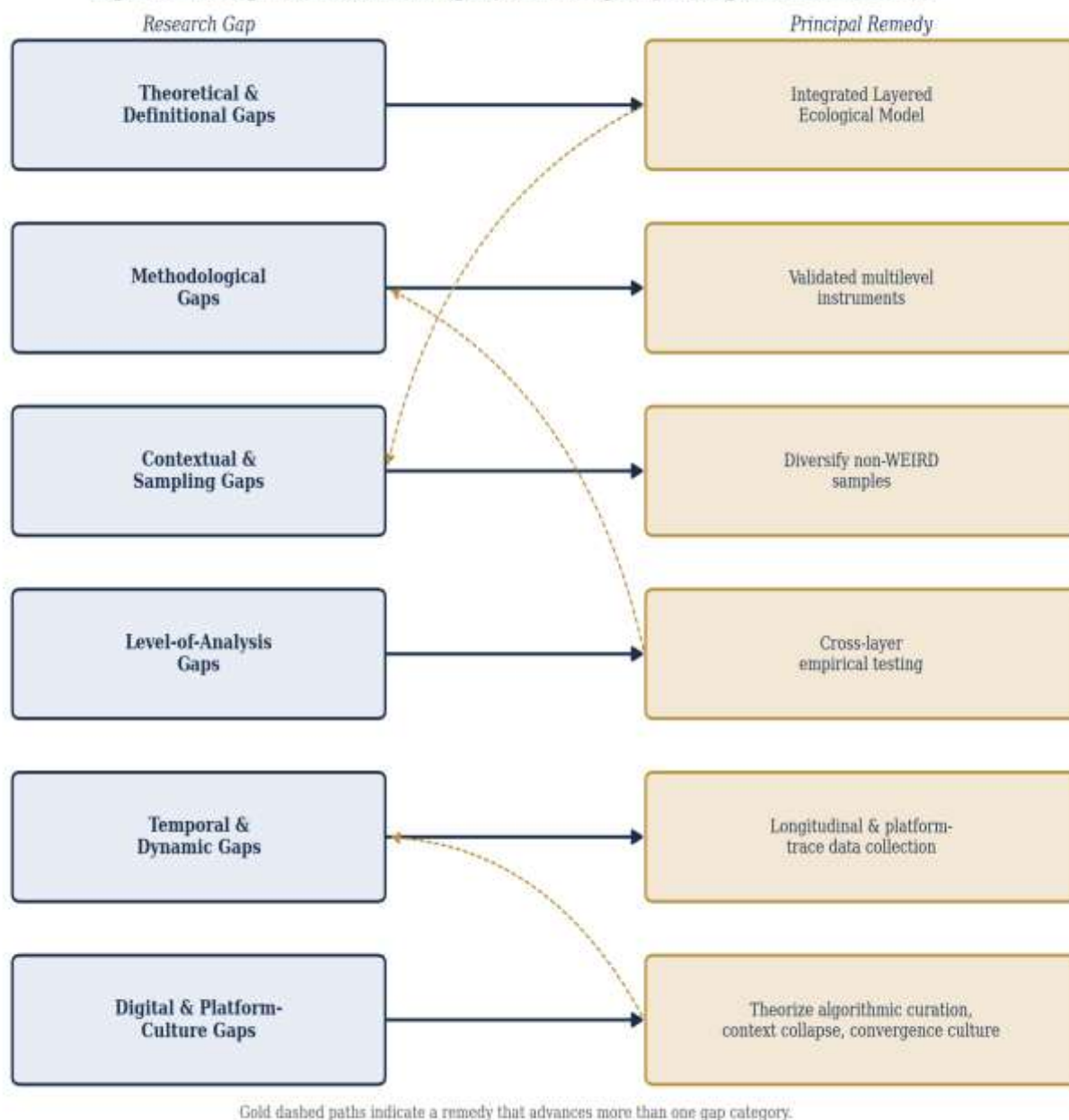


Figure 2. Integrated Research Agenda Linking Gap Categories to Remedies

Implications for Theory and Practice

For theory, this paper's central contribution is the demonstration that cultural scholarship's most pressing task is integrative rather than additive: the field does not principally require new dimensions, new determinants, or new contexts, though the digital-platform and non-Western corrections remain genuinely necessary, so much as an explicit architecture linking what has already been extensively documented. For practice, managers, policymakers and practitioners operating across cultural contexts should treat single-framework dimensional scores, whether Hofstede's, Schwartz's, or GLOBE's, as partial, tradition-dependent projections of a richer underlying cultural-content layer rather than as complete descriptions and should attend explicitly to the meso-institutional layer through which macro-level cultural values are, or are not, actually transmitted into micro-level

organizational behaviour and to the digital-platform layer through which that transmission is increasingly mediated regardless of geographic or organizational context.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to demonstrate that culture scholarship's central limitation is integrative rather than definitional or empirical and to substantiate that argument through three linked contributions: a synthesis of the field's historical, definitional, dimensional and disciplinary literatures that foregrounds Asian, African and Latin American theoretical traditions systematically marginalized within a WEIRD-dominated canon; an extension of that synthesis into the under-theorized domain of digital platforms as a cross-cutting determinant of contemporary cultural production, transmission and change; and the Layered Ecological Model, an integrated framework linking macro-antecedent, cultural-content, meso-institutional and micro-outcome layers already separately established within the reviewed literature. The comparative tables and figures developed throughout operationalize this integrative logic directly, translating what could otherwise remain an abstract call for synthesis into specific, testable propositions regarding cross-layer and cross-tradition linkage.

Culture will continue to be studied, productively, from anthropological, sociological, psychological, managerial, economic, linguistic, communicative and political-scientific vantage points and the pluralism Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) documented seventy years ago is neither remediable nor, this paper has argued, undesirable in itself. What remains genuinely remediable and what constitutes the field's most consequential unfinished task, is the disciplined linkage of those vantage points, across levels of analysis, across cultural traditions and now across the digital platforms increasingly mediating cultural life itself, into the kind of integrated explanatory architecture this paper has sought to advance.

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