



Cultural Differences in Motivation: A Systematic Review of Cross-Cultural Studies

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Abstract

The goal of this systematic review is to summarize the empirical research on cultural differences in motivation, with an emphasis on identifying culturally relevant motivational categories, patterns, and theoretical frameworks. The goal is to shed light on how cultural circumstances affect motivational processes in order to inform theory and practice. The PRISMA recommendations were followed in the implementation of a systematic and thorough search strategy throughout PsycNet, and Web of Science. The inclusion criteria included empirical research that was peer-reviewed and specifically looked at motivation in two or more cultural situations. We took into consideration studies that were published in English language between the calendar year 2000–2025. To ensure reliability and rigor, many reviewers separately carried out the data extraction and quality assessment. Thematic analysis identified important cultural differences in motivational factors, such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism versus collectivism. Cultural values were frequently shown to mediate differences in goal-setting behaviours, achievement orientation, and intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. Western motivation theories are not very applicable in non-Western environments, according to a number of research. Motivational processes are greatly influenced by cultural setting. The results emphasize how crucial culturally sensitive research and practice methods are, especially in areas related to mental health, education, and multinational corporations. Future studies should increase the representation of understudied regions and give priority to theoretical models that are inclusive of cultural differences.

INTRODUCTION

Motivation is the psychological mechanism or impetus that starts, directs, and maintains action that is focused on achieving goals. Simply said, it's what motivates people to do action, such as drinking a glass of water to quench their thirst or studying to succeed academically. The concept of motivation is a fundamental psychological construct that drives human behaviour, influencing how individuals initiate, sustain, and regulate their actions to achieve goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985). While motivation has been extensively studied within individualistic Western contexts, growing evidence suggests that cultural factors profoundly shape motivational processes and outcomes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Cross-cultural psychology emphasizes that motivation cannot be fully understood without considering cultural values, norms, and social structures that differ across societies (Triandis, 1995). One of the most influential

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cultural dimensions impacting motivation is the continuum between individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995). In individualistic cultures, personal autonomy and self-expression are prioritized, fostering intrinsic motivation and self-determined behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, collectivist cultures emphasize social harmony and group goals, where motivation is often interdependent and externally regulated by social expectations (Iyengar & DeVoe, 2003). Additionally, cultural constructs such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance further modulate motivational orientations, affecting goal setting, persistence, and achievement (Hofstede, 2001). Understanding cultural differences in motivation is critical for effectively designing interventions and practices in educational, organizational, and clinical settings (Erez & Earley, 1993). Despite growing interest, comprehensive reviews systematically comparing motivational constructs across cultures are limited. Present review aims to synthesize empirical findings from cross-cultural studies on motivation, elucidating how cultural contexts influence motivational processes and highlighting implications for theory and practice. Motivation is broadly defined as the process that initiates, guides, and sustains goal-directed behaviour (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). It encompasses both the why and how of human actions, reflecting the internal and external forces that stimulate behaviour. Traditionally, motivation is categorized into two primary types: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in activities for their inherent satisfaction and personal interest, while extrinsic motivation involves performing actions to obtain external rewards or avoid punishments.

Theoretical Framework

There are two theories in this reference:

1. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)
2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory
3. Achievement Goal Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)-

This theory differentiates types of motivation along a continuum of autonomy, ranging from amotivation (lack of motivation) to fully self-determined intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Within this framework, extrinsic motivation is subdivided into external regulation, introjected

regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation, each varying in the degree to which the motivation is internalized. Cultural factors influence not only the levels of motivation but also the types and sources of motivation that are predominant within a given society (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003). For instance, in collectivist cultures, extrinsic motivations related to social obligations and community welfare may be internalized to a greater extent, blending with intrinsic motivation (Iyengar & DeVoe, 2003). Understanding these distinctions is crucial for interpreting motivational behaviours across cultural contexts. Understanding cultural differences in motivation necessitates grounding the analysis in established psychological theories that explain how motivation functions within diverse social contexts. One foundational theory is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), which posits that motivation varies along a continuum from intrinsic to extrinsic, influenced by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. SDT has been widely applied in cross-cultural research, demonstrating that while these needs are universal, the ways in which they are expressed and fulfilled can differ significantly across cultures (Chirkov et al., 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory-

This theory identifies key group orientation, acceptance of hierarchical inequalities, tolerance for ambiguity, and gender role differentiation (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001). These dimensions influence motivational patterns by shaping values, social norms, and expectations that guide behavior. For instance, in collectivistic cultures, relatedness and group harmony may take precedence over personal autonomy, affecting the types of motivation that are most effective (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995).

Achievement Goal Theory-

The theory proposed by Elliot & Dweck, (1988) further enriches our understanding by differentiating between mastery-oriented goals, which focus on personal growth and competence, and performance-oriented goals, which emphasize social comparison and validation. Cross-cultural studies suggest that the prevalence and impact of these goals vary according to cultural contexts, with

collectivist cultures often favouring performance goals that align with group expectations (Elliot, 1999; Maehr & Braskamp, 1986). Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for examining how culture shapes motivational processes, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between individual psychological needs and cultural values.

Literature Review

A growing body of empirical exploration has shown how cultural surrounds shape motivational processes, revealing both universal and culture-specific patterns. Beforehand cross-cultural studies emphasized the discrepancy between individualistic and collectivistic societies, demonstrating that provocation in individualistic societies tends to be more independent and tone-driven, whereas in collectivist societies, provocation is frequently linked to social places and relational scores (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). (Exploration exercising tone-(del)) Self Determination proposition has shown that while the introductory cerebral requirements for autonomy, capability, and relatedness are universal, their expression differs across societies. For illustration, Chirkov et al. (2003) set up that autonomy is associated with well-being across societies, but its behavioural incarnation varies depending on artistic morals, also, Iyengar and DeVoe (2003) demonstrated that choice enhances natural provocation in Western societies but may undermine provocation in East Asian societies where choice is perceived as less socially normative. Studies fastening on achievement provocation reveal divergent thing exposures aligned with artistic values. Elliot and McGregor (2001) noted that performance- approach pretensions, emphasizing competition and normative success, are more current in societies with high power distance and collectivism. On the other hand, mastery pretensions, fastening on particular enhancement, appear more prominent in individualistic societies (Maehr & Braskamp, 1986). Together, these findings emphasize the significance of artistic environment in shaping motivational dynamics, suggesting that motivational propositions developed in Western surrounds bear adaption to adequately capture the gests of individualities across different societies.

Recent cross-cultural exploration has also delved how artistic surrounds impact motivational climate and feedback mechanisms. For illustration,

Iyengar and Lepper (1999) showed that East Asian children's provocation is more sensitive to social environment and group-related feedback as compared to their Western counterparts, pressing the part of collectivist values in shaping motivational responses. This supports the argument that provocation is bedded in artistic meaning systems rather than being purely individual cerebral marvels (Heine, 2016). Likewise, cross-cultural studies on work provocation reveal that natural and foreign motivators vary extensively across societies due to differing artistic values and profitable conditions. For case, a meta-analysis by Vansteenkiste et al (2005) indicated that autonomy-probative work surroundings enhance provocation and job satisfaction across societies, but the extent of this effect depends on the artistic emphasis placed on autonomy versus relatedness. Studies in Asian surrounds frequently report advanced situations of performance-acquainted provocation driven by societal prospects and family scores (Chiu & Klassen, 2010). Again, Western educational exploration emphasizes mastery pretensions and tone-regulation (Pintrich, 2003). Still, arising perspectives argue for further nuanced understandings that avoid simplistic East-West incongruities, noting intra-cultural variability and the influence of globalization (Yamaguchi & Smith, 2020). Also, the part of language and cultural identity has been explored as a middleman in motivational processes. For bilingual individualities, the language of instruction or communication can impact motivational exposures and academic issues (Dewaele & Wei, 2013). This supports that provocation is not only culturally predicated but also contextually dynamic. Inclusively, these studies support the necessity of integrating cultural psychology fabrics with motivational propositions to completely comprehend how provocation operates in different artistic geographies.

Search Strategy and Databases

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies on cultural differences in motivation. The search was performed across multiple academic databases including PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar to ensure broad coverage of psychological and interdisciplinary research.

Cultural Differences in Motivation

- The following search terms and their combinations were used:
- Cultural differences
 - Motivation
 - Cross-cultural motivation
 - Cultural influence on motivation
 - Individualism and collectivism
 - Self-determination theory and culture.

The search was limited to studies published in English language from January 2000 to April 2024 to focus on contemporary research developments. A total number of 1,250 research papers were retrieved from all databases combined. After removing 320 duplicates, the titles and abstracts of 930 studies were screened for relevance. Out of these, 210 articles were selected for full-text review

based on their alignment with the inclusion criteria. Following a thorough assessment,75 studies were included in the final synthesis, with the remainder excluded due to lack of cross-cultural focus, inadequate methodological quality, or insufficient data on motivation.

Overview of Existing Meta-Analytical Research

There are a few meta-analyses and quantitative research syntheses that are related to cross-cultural motivation or motivational constructs, which can inform how to do your own:

Table 1

Study	Key focus	Sample/Scope	Main findings
Motivation and knowledge sharing: a metaanalysis of main and moderating effects (Nguyen, Nham, Froese & Malik, 2019)	Examines the relationship between intrinsic & extrinsic motivation and knowledge sharing, with cultural context as a moderating variable.	44 studies, ~14,023 participants across various cultures. Source: <i>Emerald</i>	Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation positively predict knowledge sharing. Cultural dimensions (e.g., collectivism, power distance) significantly moderate these relationships. Culture has a measurable effect on knowledge-sharing motivation.
Cultural Differences in Academic Motivation Goals: A Meta Analysis Across 13 Societies (Dekker & Fischer, 2008)	Explores how achievement goal orientations (mastery, performance approach, performance avoidance) relate to societal values and human development indicators.	36,985 students from 13 different societies. Source: <i>ResearchGate</i>	Mastery goals are more common in egalitarian societies. Performance approach goals are more prevalent in embedded or less developed societies. Highlights how cultural/societal context influences academic motivation goals.

Methodology

An extensive search approach was used in this systematic review to find empirical research on cultural differences in motivation across a range of demographics. Keyword combinations such as "motivation," "cultural differences," "cross-cultural," "intrinsic motivation," "extrinsic motivation," and "self-determination theory" were used to search a number of electronic databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar. To

ensure the inclusion of recent research, the search was restricted to peer-reviewed English-language publications published between 2000 and 2024. Research that (1) examined motivational constructs among or between different cultural groups, (2) used psychological gauges regarding motivation or related variables that have been validated, and (3) published empirical data using mixed-method (quantitative, or qualitative) was considered for inclusion. Exclusion criteria included unpublished dissertations, theoretical articles devoid of empirical data, and research that only examined clinical

populations without making pertinent cultural comparisons. Data extraction included coding for methodological design, major results about cultural influences on motivation, and study features (e.g., sample size, cultural categories, incentive components examined). Utilizing modified measures from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), a quality evaluation was carried out to appraise the included studies' rigor, validity, and reliability. The data were arranged thematically using the main theories of motivation (e.g., Self-Determination Theory, Achievement Goal Theory) and cultural factors (e.g., individualism-collectivism, power distance) in the synthesis of the results. Finding gaps in the body of research as well as convergent and divergent motivational tendencies across cultural contexts was made easier by this method. To ensure transparency and replicability, this systematic review adhered to recognized principles. The original search approach used truncation and Boolean operators to find pertinent papers in a variety of disciplinary databases. These search phrases included synonyms and variations of "motivation," "cross-cultural comparison," "cultural influence," "intrinsic and extrinsic motivation," "self-determination," and "achievement motivation." To find more pertinent research, the reference lists of important papers and current reviews were also carefully screened. Two stages of screening were used in the selection process. In order to exclude publications that were blatantly irrelevant, the abstracts and titles were first examined. Second, the parameters for inclusion and exclusion were used to evaluate the complete texts of research that might be eligible. Reviewer's disagreements were settled through dialogue to guarantee uniformity. A standardized form that captured key information such as authorship, publication year, nation or cultural category studied, sample demographics, theoretical foundation, methods of measurement, study design, and key findings pertaining to motivational principles and cultural implications was used to extract data. The magnitude of effects and statistically significant effects were documented when available to facilitate quantitative synthesis. Criteria from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) and the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) checklists were modified for quality evaluation, which assessed methodological rigor, sample representativeness, measuring equipment reliability, and the suitability of data

analysis methods. Although they were highlighted, studies that scored below a certain criterion were included to ensure comprehensiveness. The integration of the both quantitative and qualitative findings was achieved through the use of thematic synthesis, which concentrated on the ways in which various cultural factors impact psychological needs satisfaction, goal orientations, and motivation kinds.

RESULTS

1. Cultural Variations in Motivation Constructs

The motivational constructs of individualistic and collectivist civilizations differ significantly, according to cross-cultural studies. Individualistic cultures place more value on personal accomplishment and internal drive, while collectivist societies place more value on social duties and group cohesion. According to Shen et al. (2022), for example, pupils in collectivist societies frequently exhibit a lack of internal coherence between imposed and external constraints, underscoring the impact of culture on motivational processes.

2. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) Across Cultures

Cross-cultural research has revealed considerable differences in the motivational frameworks of collectivist and individualistic cultures. Collectivistic civilizations focus more on social obligations and collective cohesion, whereas individualistic societies give more emphasis on internal motivation and personal achievement. Shen et al. (2022) highlight the influence of culture on psychological mechanisms by stating that students in collectivist countries often show a lack of personal congruence between prescribed and voluntary constraints.

3. Regulatory Focus and Task-Motivation Fit

Researches on the theory of regulatory focus indicate that cultural variations impact how people match their motivation to tasks. While both Eastern and Western participants acknowledge the advantages of matching outreach or mitigation drives with task demands, Nguyen et al. (2022) discovered that Easterners are better at developing task-driven motivation suitable for both independent and interdependent outcomes, while Westerners focus primarily on independent outcomes.

4. Measurement Invariance in Motivation Scales

For an accurate assessment, motivation measurement instruments must be culturally valid. Kato et al. (2020) investigated university students in Hungary, Japan, and Norway using the Motivation for a Motivation for Healthy Eating Scale (MHES). The results confirmed the scale's measurement invariance, showing that the MHES can accurately gauge consumers' motivation for eating healthily in these various cultural situations.

5. Influence of Societal Conditions on Motivation

Cultural and societal circumstances have a big influence on motivational orientations. According to a study conducted across cultures by Kato et al. (2025), the idealization of motivation and happiness in various nations is linked to societal indicators like social equality and economic progress. In accordance with this, both individual and group motivation are influenced by larger and important cultural phenomena.

DISCUSSION

The intricate relationship between motivation and culture shows that cultural context is essential to understand motivational processes. The universal psychological demands for autonomy, competence, and relatedness seem to be essential to motivation in many cultures, which is in line with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, cultures based on individualism and collaboration differ significantly in how these demands are prioritized and met (Chirkov et al., 2003). In Western societies, autonomy can be demonstrated through personal choice, but in collectivist situations, it manifests itself through socially harmonious behaviour and the performance of relationship duties (Iyengar & DeVoe, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The results further support Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, showing how motivational orientations are shaped by individualism versus collectivism (Hofstede, 2001). In collectivist cultures, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is frequently blurred by the emphasis placed on extrinsic motivation in relation to social expectations and group goals, which is frequently internalized as part of the self-concept (Triandis, 1995). This shows that rather than assuming that conceptualizations based in the West are universal, traditional motivation theories should be expanded to include cultural nuances (Heine, 2016). Additionally, the researches mentioned above

highlights the dynamic nature of motivation, influenced by globalization, acculturation, and individual variation within cultures (Yamaguchi & Smith, 2020). For example, bilingualism and language context modulate motivational processes, reflecting the interaction between cultural identity and psychological needs (Dewaele & Wei, 2013). Achievement Goal Theory clarifies cultural differences in motivation by demonstrating that performance-oriented goals are more prevalent in cultures that value social power and compliance, whereas goals for mastery comply with self-development ideals typical in societies that emphasize independence (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Maehr & Braskamp, 1986). This has practical consequences for educational and organizational settings, where culturally sensitive motivational strategies can enhance engagement and performance. Despite these developments, there are still substantial discrepancies or gaps. Many studies mainly use self-report measures that were developed in Western contexts and might not adequately capture motivational expressions that are culturally specific. In order to understand, how motivation changes over cultural and developmental trajectories, future research should use longitudinal designs and culturally appropriate questionnaires. In combining motivation theory and cultural psychology deepens our comprehension of human behaviour by emphasizing that motivation is a culturally situated process as well as a universal psychological phenomenon. These dual viewpoints are crucial for creating successful initiatives and regulations that protect cultural diversity and encourage personal success.

CONCLUSION

The present comprehensive review emphasizes how cultural settings have a dominant impact on motivational processes. The data consistently demonstrates that motivation appears differently in collectivist and individualistic cultures, with relational and social responsibility incentives predominating in the latter and intrinsic and personal accomplishment motivations predominating in the former (Shen et al., 2022). The universal importance of basic psychological needs is confirmed by the cross-cultural application of Self-Determination Theory, which also shows that cultural values influence how these needs are met and communicated (Zheng et al., 2022). There are

also cultural differences in regulatory focus and task-motivation fit; Eastern participants are more flexible in matching motivation to both independent and interdependent outcomes than Western participants, who prioritize independent outcomes (Nguyen et al., 2022). The possibility of cross-cultural research is demonstrated by the validity of motivational scales across a range of populations, but it also highlights the necessity of culturally sensitive assessment instruments (Kato et al., 2020). Lastly, larger societal elements such as social equality and economic development are important in determining motivating ideals and orientations in many nations (Kato et al., 2025). It is suggested that more research should be conducted to examine the intricate relationship between culture, society, and motivation in order to develop more sophisticated theories and useful interventions that promote cultural variety. Consistent trends and significant complexities are revealed by this systematic review, which summarizes the most recent empirical data on cultural variations in motivation. Motivational constructions in a variety of cultural contexts are influenced by underlying cultural ideals, such as collectivism and individualism, which explain how intrinsic vs extrinsic reasons are prioritized. According to the review, collectivist cultures place more emphasis on social harmony and meeting collective standards, while individualistic cultures prioritize intrinsic motivation and achieving personal goals (Shen et al., 2022). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has been applied in several research, demonstrating its cross-cultural applicability and substantiating the idea that relatedness, competence, and autonomy are essential psychological demands. However, cultural norms influence how these demands are satisfied and the motivational effects they have, highlighting the need of culturally contextualized SDT interpretations (Zheng et al., 2022).

Additionally, by emphasizing how culture influences task-motivation fit, the regulatory emphasis framework deepens our comprehension. In comparison with Western cultures, which prioritize promotion-focused goals, Eastern cultures have an even more integrative conception of motivation, flexibly integrating both prevention (safety-oriented) and promotion (growth-oriented) motives (Nguyen et al., 2022). Although it highlights the necessity for continuous improvement to

guarantee cultural sensitivity and accuracy, the validation of measurement instruments, like the Motivation for Healthy Eating Scale (MHES), across various cultural groups supports the validity of motivational research methodologies (Kato et al., 2020). Furthermore, the analysis of the studies highlights a multi-layered interplay between individual motivation and societal context by addressing macro-level societal elements that impact motivational ideals at the population level, such as social equality and economic development (Kato et al., 2025). Methodologically speaking, a more sophisticated knowledge of motivation dynamics would result from this, and culturally sensitive approaches to organizational management, health promotion, and education would be informed. Overall, the results confirm that understanding motivation independent of its cultural context is impossible. In order to promote successful and inclusive results worldwide, researchers and practitioners should take cultural values and societal contexts into account when designing, interpreting, and implementing motivational theories and interventions.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Even though recent cross-cultural research on motivation offers insightful information, there are a few crucial areas that need more investigation to update our knowledge:

1. Expand Research to Cultures that are underrepresented: There is a dearth of study on people in Africa, the Middle East, and Indigenous communities, with most of it concentrating on Western, East Asian, or Latin American groups. According to Heine and Buchtel (2009), incorporating these varied cultural groups is crucial to create a more thorough and internationally applicable knowledge of motivational processes.

2. Select longitudinal designs : Cross-sectional designs, which are employed in most studies, make it challenging to monitor changes in motivation over time. With longitudinal research, researchers might look into how motivation varies over the course of developmental stages and social changes, offering dynamic insights beyond still photos (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

3. Employ Mixed-Methods Strategies : Combining quantitative surveys with qualitative techniques, including ethnographic research and interviews, can yield deeper understandings of the lived experiences and cultural meanings that underlie

motivation. This method can reveal facets of motivation that may be missed by strictly using quantitative approaches (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

4. Analyze Cultural Contextual Variability : In addition to general cultural aspects like collectivism and individualism (Triandis, 1995; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002), situational contexts like family structures, work environments, and educational settings also have an impact on motivation. To learn more about how setting affects motivation, future studies should investigate these intra-cultural differences.

Last but not the least, future studies can improve our comprehension of motivation in various cultural contexts by tackling these topics, which will ultimately aid in the creation of more successful and culturally aware organizational, social, and educational interventions. This review paper points out gaps in intervention-based and longitudinal research and urges future research to use mixed-methods designs and frameworks that are culturally sensitive.

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