

From Culture to Behaviour: Exploring the Link between Cultural Context and Self-Monitoring Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined how cultural context shapes the lay philosophies of social behaviour of its inhabitants and predisposes them to a particular type of self-monitoring behaviour. Samples of young adults aged 18-22 years from urban (Varanasi), rural (Bada gaon) and tribal (Naugarh) sites were collected. The total sample size was 300. Males and females were equally represented in the samples selected from all three sites. Measures of lay philosophies of social behaviour developed by Bauman and Skitka in 2006 and self-monitoring developed by Church et al. in 2012 were administered to them. Cultural context was manipulated in terms of the three sample types (urban, rural and tribal). Univariate ANOVA was conducted to examine the main effect and interaction effects of sample type and participants' gender on the two dependent variables i.e., lay philosophies and self-monitoring behaviour. Results show that the urban sample differed significantly from the rural and tribal samples on lay philosophies of dispositionism and interactionism. However, no difference was found in situationism. A significant interaction effect of sample type and gender was found for the self-monitoring behaviour suggesting that males and females imbibe relatively different values in urban, rural and tribal contexts. Study findings have important implications for understanding social cognition and social behaviour of males and females coming from different contexts.

Key words: Culture, Lay Philosophies of social behaviour, dispositionism, situationism, interactionism, self-monitoring behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Culture is a shared way of life of a group of people (Berry et al. 2002). It is also defined as a network of knowledge, consisting of learned routines of thinking, feeling and interacting with other people, a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about the world (Hong, 2009). Culture impacts individuals' lives directly and indirectly through its implicit and explicit components. The ecology-culture-behaviour link is vividly elaborated in Berry's eco-cultural model (1966). Later on, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979) also presents a detailed description of the immediate and remote layers of the developmental niche and their impacts on the behavioural and psychological characteristics of the growing individual. Hence, there is strong research evidence in favour of 'Relativism' a paradigm

advocating cultural patterning of behaviour, and understanding the same within the appropriate cultural context. To do so, it is necessary to understand the pathways through which the effect of culture is transferred to individuals. Hofstede (1971) proposed six major dimensions of culture namely (i) individualism-collectivism, (ii) power distance, (iii) uncertainty avoidance, (iv) masculinity-femininity, (v) short-term vs. long-term orientation and (vi) indulgence-restraint. Out of these, the individualism/collectivism dimension has been much explored for its impact on the dimensions of independence-interdependence, relatedness-autonomy and world view of the individuals. Individualism can be characterized by its emphasis on independence, autonomy and the individual as the main agency of regulating behaviour whereas collectivistic cultures emphasize interdependence, sharing and nurturance. Role expectations, social norms and situational constraints are the main agents regulating social behaviour in collectivistic societies. Therefore, it is apt to believe that people living in individualistic or collectivistic societies have different lay philosophies for understanding social behaviour. The lay philosophies of social behaviour refer to the implicit theories people acquire about social behaviour. Two major approaches explaining human behaviour are dispositionism and situationism (Church, 2009). The dispositionist approach refers to the fact that behaviour is determined by the traits one possesses, therefore it is also known as traitedness. Contrary to this, the situationist approach suggests that the behaviour is determined by the context in which it takes place. This proposition brings it another name called contextualism. People who believe in dispositionist approach usually prefer to project their traits irrespective of the situation they are in. whereas, people advocating the situationist approach carefully monitor their behaviour and shape it according to the social environment. This gives rise to another construct of self-monitoring (first proposed by Snyder 1979). This refers to how much a person's behaviour varies across situations and over-time.

In collectivistic cultures, where context has a relatively stronger influence on behavior than dispositions, cultural psychologists have downplayed the importance of traits (Heine, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1998). Individuals from collectivistic cultures will view their behavior as more situationally adaptive, while individuals from individualistic cultures will view their behavior as largely traited or consistent across situations (Choi & Choi, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1998; Suh, 2002). In fact, some research suggests that compared to European Americans, persons in East Asian nations report lower levels of trait consistency across settings (Church et al., 2008; English & Chen, 2007, 2011; Suh, 2002). Similar results were found in other studies (e.g. Church et.al., 2012) comparing United States of America, Mexico, Philippines and Japan. USA showing the highest mean score on traitedness followed by Mexico, Philippines and Japan.

Though India has been classified as a culture high in collectivism (Hofstede, 1971), there are intra-cultural differences for the same. The fact that there are significant differences in the ecology and economic activities in different pockets of the country leads to obvious differences in

socialization goals, practices (Barry, Child & Bacon, 1959) and shared perception of the social environment (Triandis, 1972) in different areas. The most pronounced expression of it is found in the differences observed in urban rural and tribal (rudimentary agricultural) societies with respect to their norms, values and way of life. the following paragraphs describe the salient features of urban, rural and tribal communities in India.

The urban areas have dense and culturally diverse populations rural and tribal. These are known for their developed educational, medical, and employment facilities. About 75% of the male workforce in urban areas is involved in non-agricultural activities. Urban social interaction often relies on technology and electronic devices such as emails, messages, and texts. Face-to-face and direct human interaction is limited in urban areas. People are generally preoccupied with their own lives. Formalized interaction, impersonal behavior, and non-familial relationships are commonly observed in urban settings. Nuclear families are prevalent in urban areas, and family breakdown is more common than in rural areas. Young adults may choose to live independently from their parents for education or employment opportunities.

Rural societies are known for their dependence on agriculture and related occupations. Joint family system and interdependence on each other are the salient characteristics of rural society. Face-to-face interactions are more common. Community life is intertwined with each other. The level of collectivism is relatively higher than in urban and tribal communities.

The tribal community has mixed characteristics. Inside the community, tribals show many features of individualism such as nuclear family, autonomy, and independent decision-making even in women. However, as a community, they show strong cohesion with each other. Following norms and traditions are more important for tribals than the other two cultural groups.

A review of literature has established the link between culture, lay philosophies and self-monitoring behaviour. However, the studies are mostly conducted in urban settings so no record of rural or tribal context is found. Besides this Indian society is unique in itself in the following ways. Urban settings experience strong acculturative currents, which results in an increase in individualism but without compromising for collectivism (Sinha & Mishra, 2010). So urban, rural, and tribal people may differ in terms of individualism but they are similar in the level of collectivism. Another interesting aspect is the complex cultural structure of the tribal community. Unlike urban and rural contexts which predominantly show characteristics of individualistic and collectivistic cultures respectively, the tribal context shows a fusion of these patterns. So, studying lay philosophies and self-monitoring behaviour in tribal communities may reveal interesting aspects of this relationship. Besides this, Indian society has a unique way of responding to acculturative influences. In addition to the popular acculturative strategies, India is known for its psyche of co-existence in which different response styles may co-exist which can be used as per requirement. All these facts taken together

make this study unique and important to understand the inter-relationship of culture lay philosophies and self-monitoring behaviour.

Objectives

1. To compare the urban, rural and tribal (rudimentary agricultural) samples for the lay philosophies of behaviour
2. To compare the three samples drawn for self-monitoring behaviour
3. To examine gender differences for lay philosophies and self-monitoring

Hypotheses

1. The urban sample would report higher levels of dispositionism and interactionism than the rural and tribal samples.
2. The rural sample would report a higher level of situationism than the urban and tribal samples
3. The rural sample would report the highest level of self-monitoring behaviour followed by the urban and tribal communities
4. Females would score higher on self-monitoring behaviour than males

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study followed a more-than-two randomized groups design. The sample comprises 300 participants, 18-22 years of age, randomly drawn from three different sites namely, Varanasi city (urban n=100), a neighbouring village called Bada gaon (rural n=100) and Naugarh (tribal n=100). Males and females were equally represented in the sample. These sites were carefully chosen as these are not too far geographically but represent different ecosystems including their level of acculturation and economic activities generally prevailing in these areas. Varanasi city represents a wage-earning society and the acculturative forces are very strong here, Bada gaon is a typical agricultural society, moderately acculturated as it is situated on the fringe of the city and the habitants regularly get exposure to city life. However, Naugarh is traditionally a tribal area. People collect Mahua flowers and prepare 'Taadi' (a local liquor) from it. During the rainy season, rudimentary agricultural practices are also observed. However, these are completely dependent on rain for irrigation and the production is meager so that it can not be stored for later use. As Naxals dominated the area for years, the area remained secluded and did not experience much acculturative influence like the other two sites.

All the participants were financially dependent on their parents. Urban participants were enrolled in college/university and pursuing their graduation, the rural sample was also doing graduation or its equivalent vocational courses. However, most of the participants from the tribal community left schools after 10th or 12th class. Only 20 of them were doing vocational courses equivalent to graduation. Others used to help their parents in their jobs like collecting Mahua flowers or managing the small shop of their family. All the participants were Hindu. Urban and rural samples were from the middle-income group whereas the tribal sample came from the lower- and middle-income group

Instruments

The following instruments were used for the data collection

1. **Lay philosophies of social behaviour**- this scale was originally developed by Norenzayan et al. in 2002 and later revised and abbreviated by Bauman and Skitka in 2006. The abbreviated version of the scale was used for data collection. The instrument employs a scenario approach. It presents a brief description of dispositionism, situationism and interactionism (bridging the two extreme positions) each accompanied by a 6-point rating scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 6= strongly agree. All three scenarios are treated as independent items representing different dimensions, hence no reliability coefficient was computed for them. However, these are not treated as mutually exclusive categories as there may be partial agreement with all these depending on the context. The descriptions of items are as follows

Dispositionism- “How people behave is mostly determined by their personality. One’s behaviour is remarkably stable across time and consistent across situations because it is guided by personality. Therefore, if we know the personality of a person, we can easily predict how the person will behave in the future and explain why the person had behaved in a particular way in the past.

Situationism- “How people behave is mostly determined by the situations in which they find themselves. Often people in a particular situation behave very similarly, despite large individual differences in their personality. Therefore, in order to predict and explain one’s behaviour, we have to focus on the situation rather than personality.

Interactionism- “How people behave is always jointly determined by their personality and the situation in which they find themselves. Therefore, we can not predict and explain how someone will behave by personality or situation alone. To predict behaviour, one has to know something about both, the situation and the person’s personality.

2. **Self-monitoring measure-** Lennox and Wolfe developed a measure of self-monitoring and concern for appropriateness in 1984. Later this scale was adapted by Church et al. in 2012 to a 21-item forced choice format where each stem of item is accompanied by two statements indicative of self-monitoring or autonomous self-expression to be chosen by the participant. This forced-choice version of the scale was used in the present study. Alternatives of autonomous self-expression were given 1 and the self-monitoring option was given 2. So a higher score on the scale indicated more behavioural adaptability as compared to a low score referring to behavioural fixedness. Alpha coefficients separately computed for the urban, rural, and tribal samples were 0.711, 0.535 and 0.595 respectively.

Both scales were translated in Hindi using the translation back-translation method and their psychometric properties were checked for the samples.

Procedure

Samples were randomly selected from different sites. In Varanasi, the sample was selected from Banaras Hindu University and its affiliated colleges. In Bada gaon the sample was selected from government girls' college and government boys' college. Whereas, in Naugarh, due to a lack of educational facilities and lack of interest in regular education, the sample was picked up with the help of Gram panchayat registers where people register themselves as beneficiaries of various government schemes. Local assistants were employed to help in data collection. All team members were properly trained for data collection. The purpose of the study was duly explained to the participants and written consent was taken from them. They were all assured about the confidentiality of their responses and the voluntariness of participation. No monetary refund was promised for participation. The data were collected in small groups. Little more assistance was needed by the participants of the tribal community in understanding the process of responding to items as compared to their urban and rural counterparts. The data collected were fed into SPSS data files for further analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis was done with the help of Multivariate and univariate ANOVA. To analyze the first four hypotheses a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted where the sample type and gender were taken as fixed factors and lay philosophies of social behaviour were taken as dependent variables. The output is summarized in the following tables.

Table 1: showing mean scores of lay philosophies of behaviour

Variables	Urban		Rural		Tribal	
	Male (N=50)	Female (N=50)	Male (N=50)	Female (N=50)	Male (N=50)	Female (N=50)
LPB 1 Dispositionism	3.32	3.32	3.88	3.36	3.74	3.50
LPB 2 Situationism	3.54	3.70	3.78	3.74	4.00	3.66
LPB 3 Interactionism	3.50	3.54	3.92	4.28	4.20	4.20
Self-monitoring measure	32.32	32.26	30.46	34.04	34.22	31.96

Table 2: Overall mean scores

Variable	Urban	Rural	Tribal	Male	Female
LPB 1 Dispositionism	3.32	3.62	3.62	3.64	3.39
LPB 2 Situationism	3.62	3.76	3.83	3.77	3.70
LPB 3 Interactionism	3.52	4.10	4.20	3.87	4.00
Self-monitoring measure	32.29	32.25	32.45	32.33	32.54

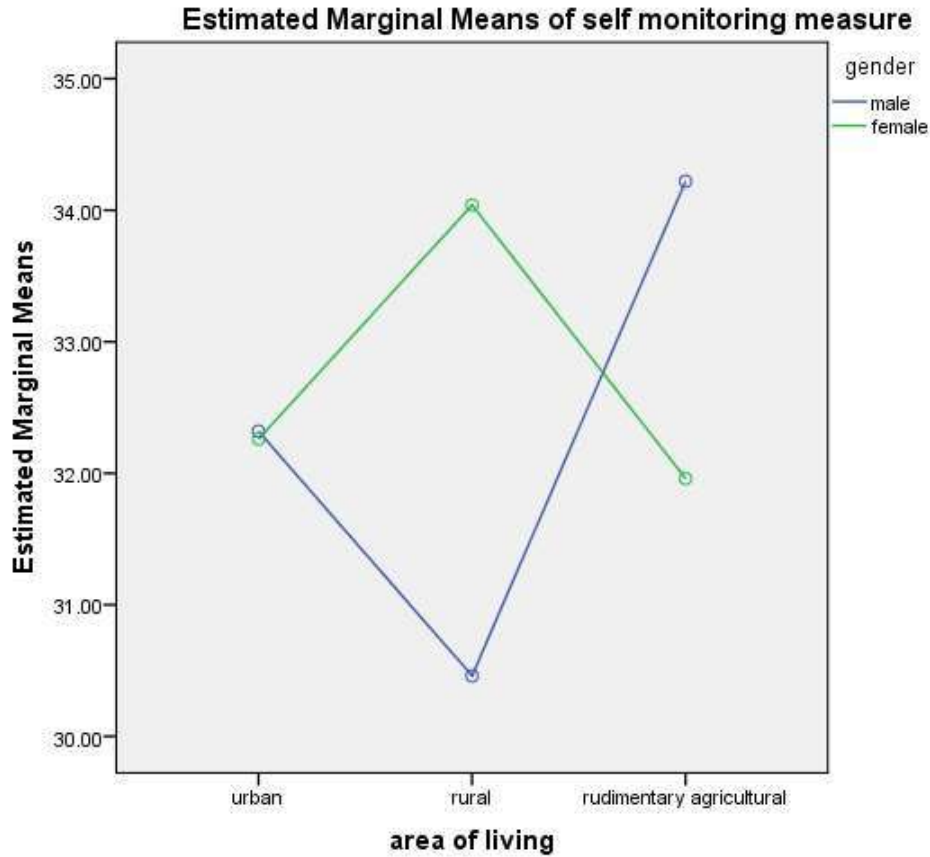
Table 3: Results of univariate F-test

Source	F	Sig.	Partial Eta ²
Sample type	3.258	.040	.022
Gender	5.228	.023	.017
Area X Gender	1.839	.161	.012
DV: Dispositionism			
Sample type	1.291	.277	.009
Gender	.455	.500	.002
Area X Gender	1.788	.169	.012
DV: Situationism			
Sample type	13.728	.000	.085
Gender	1.358	.245	.005
Area X Gender	.991	.372	.007
DV: Interactionism			
Sample type	0.509	.602	.003
Gender	0.300	.584	.001
Area X Gender	4.932	.008	.032
DV: Self-monitoring measure			

Results of Univariate ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of sample type and gender on dispositionism. A significant difference among the three samples was also found in interactionism. Out of these the magnitude of the F- ratio for interactionism was much higher suggesting a sharp contrast. The LSD post hoc test revealed that the urban sample differed significantly from the rural and tribal samples but the latter two did not differ from each other. contrary to expectation urban sample scored lower than the other two samples. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was rejected. Males scored significantly higher than females on dispositionism. The three samples did not differ from each other for situationism leading to the rejection of hypothesis 2 also. Similarly for self-monitoring measure,

the main effects of sample type and gender were not significant but the interaction effect of these two was significant for self-monitoring. Hence, hypotheses 3 and 4 are only partially accepted.

Figure 1: showing interaction effect for Self-monitoring measure



The graph shows that urban males and females have similar standing on SMM, but the difference accentuates for the rural sample, with females scoring much higher than males. The pattern gets reversed for the tribal community where males score much higher on Self-monitoring than females. Broadly urban males come in between the rural and tribal males for self-monitoring. Here, rural males showed the lowest level of self-monitoring and the tribal males showed the highest level. Whereas urban and tribal females showed similar levels of self-monitoring compared to rural females who showed the highest level of self-monitoring among the three.

The present study was planned to examine the effect of socio-cultural milieu on the psyche of individuals living there. It was proposed that different developmental niche may give rise to different philosophies which are used for the attribution of past actions and predictions of future behaviours. It was also hypothesized that the urban sample may differ from the rural and tribal samples due to their higher level of acculturation. In the study it was found that the urban sample significantly differs from the rural and tribal samples on dispositionism and interactionism but contrary to the expectation the

urban sample scored less than the other two samples. This led to the rejection of hypothesis 1 and 3 which proposed urban sample to be higher than the other two on the aforesaid lay philosophies. Hypothesis 2 proposing no significant difference among the three groups on situationism got empirical support. For self-monitoring the main effects of sample type and gender were not significant. However, the interaction between these two variables turned out to be highly significant.

Contemplation of these findings revealed some interesting facts about the samples. It re-establishes the fact that despite of imbibing individualistic values, people have not compromised collectivism and interdependence. The three samples were very similar in their belief that behaviour is largely contextual. This may also be possible because of the deep-rooted perspective of time place and person which decides the appropriateness of intention and action. This explains the three samples showing similar concern for self-monitoring behaviour. However, when it was mixed with the gender of the participants interesting pattern emerged. There was a clear overlap between the scores of the urban males and females but the difference was accentuated in rural settings. Rural females were the most concerned about adapting their behaviour to the situation whereas rural males were the least among the three samples. Tribal participants took a moderate position but the pattern was the opposite for males and females. In this sample, males were more concerned about self-monitoring than females. This is evident from this finding that the gender-specific socialization practices and prevailing social norms operating together induce such effects in behavioural adaptation.

Another important observation was the higher scores of rural and tribal participants on dispositionism and interactionism than the urban participants. This indicates the co-existence of multiple perspectives in the psyche of rural and tribal samples whereas the urban sample differed significantly in this respect. This can be explained by two theoretical paradigms one is the acculturative coping strategies and the other perspective is of dialecticism. Dialecticism is the tendency to accept and agree with logical opposites and sometimes contradictory (Riegel, 1973). This is a salient feature of Hindu worldview that proclaims the existence of multiple truths not just one. Gradually it makes the basis of the typical psyche of coexistence among Indians which they employ while dealing with acculturative changes. This helps them acquire new cultural features without leaving the older ones. Further cross-cultural researches suggest that in collectivistic cultures, people have a synthetic cognitive style, which supports intra-psychic dialecticism (Grossman, Varnum, Kitayama & Nisbett, 2010).

Implication and limitation

To conclude, it can be said that the study provides insights into the lay philosophies of social behaviour prevalent in different intra-cultural pockets. The urban differs significantly from rural and tribal samples with respect to dispositionism and interactionism but not on situationism. It also sheds light on the significance of behavioural adaptation in various social contexts over the autonomous manifestation of self. The role of gender-specific socialization is pivotal in determining self-

monitoring behaviour. Greater gender-role specification is correlated with higher levels of self-monitoring behaviour. One can also understand how intra-psychic dialecticism helps people avoid cognitive dissonance when forced to experience contradictory facts or values and successfully adjust to that. This is also evident by the findings that the urban sample due to excessive exposure to acculturative influences has a behavioural drift which makes it different from the much more traditional rural and tribal samples. The findings are important in understanding and predicting social behaviour. Besides this it can help understanding the complex attitude-behaviour link and attribution process. So, the findings can be applied in two ways. Forst, they can be used to develop culture-specific models of persuasion about desired social change. Another application of the findings is in developing intervention programmes of self-monitoring for adolescents and young adults. People can be sensitized for gender role expectation and its link with the level of self-monitoring prevailing in a particular cultural context. Therefore, it can be said that the present study has made significant contribution in unwinding the mysteries of social cognition.

In further studies, various culture-level variables like individualism/collectivism and dialecticism can be measured along with other related variables such as personality beliefs to understand the topic better.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare that no competing interests exist.

Author's contributions

Both the authors contributed equally to the theoretical development, analysis, interpretation and writing of the manuscript.

Shubhra Sinha is the communicating author. She contributed to the planning and execution of the research, data collection, preparation of data files and data analysis. She prepared the first draft of the paper and made revisions suggested by the second author.

Ramesh Chandra Mishra the co-author of the paper contributed in the formulation of the study. He gave constructive suggestions for the selection of research tools, data analysis and improvement of the first draft.

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