

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17703/JCCT.2024.10.4.295>

JCCT 2024-7-32

제품/서비스 수용에 대한 문화적 영향: Hofstede 지수를 활용한 탐색적 연구

Cultural Influence on Product/Service Acceptance: Explorative Research Utilizing Hofstede's Dimensions

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Abstract Understanding cultural diversity is tremendously important to academia and businesses. The Central Asia is strategically important to Korea specially for businesses. Of the about two million foreign residents living in Korea, Central Asians take fifth place and the region is a home of 300,000 Korean decedents called “Koryoin.” With its increasingly recognized the potential and relevance, the former Soviet region has gained importance for businesses and academia in South Korea. This study uses the Hofstede's classifications to exploratorily analyze the relationship between Central Asian people's experience of Korean products and services and their loyalty to Korean products and services.

Key words : Cultural diversity, Central Asia, Hofstede's index, Explorative research

요약 글로벌 환경에서 문화적 다양성을 이해하는 것은 학계와 기업에 매우 중요한 의미를 가진다. 중앙아시아는 한국에 전략적으로 중요한 지역이며, 한국에 거주하는 약 200만 명의 외국인 중 중앙 아시아인이 5위를 차지하고 있으며, 이 지역은 '고려인'이라 불리는 30만 명의 한국인이 거주하는 곳이다. 잠재력과 관련성이 점점 더 인식됨에 따라 구소련 지역은 한국의 기업과 학계에서 중요성이 커지고 있다. 본 연구는 호프스테드 지수를 활용하여 중앙아시아 지역민들이 한국 제품과 서비스를 경험하는 정도와 한국 제품과 서비스 충성도의 관계를 탐색적으로 분석하고자 한다.

주요어 : 문화적 다양성, 중앙 아시아, 호프스테드 지수, 탐색적 연구

I. Introduction

In today's globalized world, businesses and organizations are increasingly operating across national borders. This globalization has created opportunities and challenges related to cross-cultural interactions. Understanding the cultural differences and their impact on international business operations

is crucial for the success of organizations in the global marketplace. This research seeks to investigate cultural characteristics of the Central Asia region, using Hofstede's cultural dimensions, product/service acceptance in the region, and to test findings of current cross-cultural research can be applied to explain cultural phenomenon in the related region.

The Central Asia region, comprising countries such

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접수일: 2024년 4월 22일, 수정완료일: 2024년 5월 25일
게재확정일: 2024년 6월 12일

Received: April 22, 2024 / Revised: May 25, 2024

Accepted: June 12, 2024

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as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, holds significant strategic importance in various aspects, including economic partnerships, geopolitical interests, and cultural connections with South Korea. Of the over two million foreigners living in Korea, a number of people from the region are estimated to be 125,000 taking fifth position followed by China, Vietnam, Thai, and America. Further, those regions is home of 300,000 Korean decedents known for "Koryoin" who are forced to immigrate during the late 19th century to early 20th century. Now with its increasingly recognized the potential and relevance, the former Soviet region has gained importance for businesses and academia in South Korea. Korean services or products have not only gained increased popularity in the region but also, its strategic importance to those countries are tremendous. Further, as a home for fifth largest ethnic group, it is imperative to understand their national cultural characteristics and their work place related issues. Despite the rising popularity of Korean culture and products within the area, research findings targeting cross-cultural aspects in this region are sparse [1,2].

Thus, this study pursues to exploratorily analyze the relationship between Central Asian people's experience of Korean products and services and their loyalty to Korean products and services, utilizing the Hofstede's classifications. More specifically, the current research aims to achieve several objectives. First, it seeks to investigate the cultural characteristics of the region by applying Hofstede's dimensions, considering that these countries were not included in his extensive global research, which encompassed 50 countries alongside three geographical regions. Second, the study aims to gauge the acceptance or inclination towards Korean products or services in the region. Additionally, the research aims to establish the explorative research by leveraging existing knowledge in cultural research. By exploring the cultural characteristics of the region,

it is estimated that behavioral motivation of engaging in Korean-product usage could be more reasonably anticipated.

II. Literature Review

1. Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede sees national culture as a unique characteristic, which distinguishes itself from others. He defines the culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of the one human group from another" [3]. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a seminal framework in the field of cross-cultural research and international business. Developed in the late 1970s through extensive surveys of IBM employees from various countries, his research identifies several fundamental dimensions of culture that have a profound impact on our understanding of how cultural differences affect motivation of human behavior, communication, and decision-making in diverse international settings. His research is based upon extensive data covering 72 countries from more than 116,000 questionnaires [3]. Initially, he has introduced the four cultural dimensions and later on the dimension are expanded to six. The initially discovered four dimensions are more actively discussed and the dimensions, along with the Long-term orientation, will be covered in the following section. His framework not only systematically demonstrates how one culture can be compared with other group, but also can give insight how people with-in's behavioral motivation deviated from the people form the out-side.

1.1. Individualism vs. Collectivism

One of Hofstede's dimensions is the contrast between individualism and collectivism (IND). Individualistic cultures emphasize individual goals, autonomy, and self-reliance. In contrast, collectivist cultures prioritize group cohesion, interdependence, and loyalty to the family or community.

Understanding where a culture falls on this dimension can have significant implications for how businesses structure their teams, motivate employees, and design marketing campaigns.

1.2. Power Distance

Power distance (PDI) refers to the degree of social hierarchy and inequality that is accepted in a culture. In cultures with high power distance, there is a significant gap between those in authority and those with less power, and there is often a greater reliance on formal structures and rules. In cultures with low power distance, there is more equality and accessibility between individuals in different positions. Recognizing power distance variations can help organizations adapt their leadership styles and decision-making processes when operating in different cultural contexts.

1.3. Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) reflects a society's tolerance for ambiguity and risk. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to favor structured environments, rigid rules, and formal procedures to minimize uncertainty and ambiguity. In contrast, cultures with low uncertainty avoidance are more adaptable and comfortable with ambiguity. Businesses need to consider this dimension when introducing new products, processes, or innovations in markets with different uncertainty avoidance levels.

1.4. Masculinity vs. Femininity

Hofstede's dimension of masculinity (MAS) vs. femininity refers to the degree to which a culture values traditionally "masculine" traits like competitiveness, assertiveness, and ambition, as opposed to "feminine" traits such as cooperation, nurturing, and quality of life. Understanding where a culture falls on this dimension can inform marketing strategies, product design, and organizational values.

1.5. Long-term Orientation

Long-term orientation (LTO) is an extent to which a society exhibits a programmatic future oriented perspective rather than a conventional short-term point of view. Values included in LTO are perseverance, ordering relationships by status, thrift, and having sense of shame. The opposite is short-term orientation and perusing immediate happiness rather than pursuit of peace of mind.

2. Alternative Cultural Model

An alternative framework, providing comprehensive and multidimensional perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by organizations when operating in a globalized world, was proposed by [4]. Unlike traditional views, such as definition from Hofstede, that often focus solely on cultural differences, Ghemawat's framework recognizes that various types of distance, including cultural, geographic, administrative, and economic, called CAGE model, collectively influences international business decisions and strategies.

2.1. Cultural Distance

Cultural distance refers to the differences in cultural practices, norms, values, and behaviors between countries [4]. While this concept aligns with Hofstede's cultural dimensions to some extent, Ghemawat's framework goes beyond culture alone to consider other dimensions of distance. Understanding cultural distance is essential for companies seeking to tailor their products, services, and marketing campaigns to the specific preferences and behaviors of consumers in different countries.

2.2. Geographic Distance

Geographic distance encompasses the physical separation between countries and this factor remains significant in the era of globalization [4]. Physical distance affects transportation costs, supply chain logistics, and the ease of communication. Moreover, it

can influence market entry strategies, as companies must consider the feasibility of exporting, setting up local production facilities, or forming partnerships based on geographical considerations.

2.3. Administrative Distance

Administrative distance encompasses the variations in legal systems, regulations, and political environments between countries. Navigating different administrative frameworks can be a formidable challenge for multinational corporations, impacting decisions related to market entry, compliance, taxation, and intellectual property protection. His framework emphasizes that understanding and adapting to administrative distance are critical for international business success.

2.4. Economic Distance

Economic distance includes differences in income levels, economic development, and market size between countries. It influences pricing strategies, product positioning, and investment decisions. Ghemawat's framework acknowledges that economic distance can significantly affect the attractiveness of foreign markets and the potential for profitable operations. His framework argues that these various dimensions of distance collectively shape the opportunities and challenges organizations face when expanding into international markets. Yet, how to apply the CAGE model in reality opens a debate.

3. Economic engagements of Central Asia with Korea

Uzbekistan, the largest country in the Central Asia with 33 million population, consists of diverse ethnic groups, with the Uzbek ethnicity most comprising about 80 percent of population. The country engages in active economic exchanges with South Korea. As of 2020, South Korea holds the fourth position in trade relations with Uzbekistan, followed by China, Russia, and Kazakhstan [1]. Even more, about 125,000 of Central Asians are currently residing in Korea

taking fifth position followed by China, Vietnam, Thailand, and America. Further, those regions is home of 300,000 Korean decedents known for "Koryoin," who are forced to immigrate during the late 19th century to early 20th century. Among the multi-ethnic population of the Central Asia, Korean products and contents are being embraced without significant resistance, despite the differences in customs, religions, and values, which might otherwise make them unfamiliar.

The leading pioneers which introduced Korea to the Central Asian countries are dramas and movies. With the establishment of internet, the upload of Korean dramas began, estimating an enthusiastic audience of approximately 100,000 members. Following Korean movies and dramas, Korean variety shows and 'K-Pop' have also significantly contributed to the proliferation of Korean content [5]. The Uzbekistan Ministry of Education, for the first time, has published and adopted Korean language textbooks among foreign language textbooks, excluding English. This indicates the widespread dissemination of Korean language and culture to a level where it will be utilized in education [1]. In Kyrgyzstan, there was a notable interest in Korea, to the extent that, a domestic film titled "The Way to Marry Jun-Pyo," based on the protagonist of a Korean drama, was released in 2001. Similarly, in Uzbekistan, a Korean movie-exclusive theater was established within the National Library, in 2014. The drama "Winter Sonata" was re-aired four times and gained significant popularity, reaching a viewership rating of 60% [2].

The interest in Korean culture in these countries has been consistently increasing with each passing year, showing a 35% higher awareness in 2018 compared to the previous year. Furthermore, there has been a significant shift in perception, with a 60% acknowledgment of a change in evaluation towards Korea or Korean products among individuals who have experienced Korean culture even once. This perception change indicates a substantial impact of

the Korean Wave (Hallyu) [6].

4. Culture and its influence on workplace

Recently, there has been exploration into the relationship between cultural characteristics by countries and the activities of workplace learning [7,8]. They utilized Hofstede's five cultural dimensions to examine the effects of cultural factors on informal learning activation. The analyses reveal differences based on Power Distance within groups regarding participation in feedback, information sharing, autonomy, and preferred educational methods. Workers in collectivistic cultures prefer group participation as an educational method, while those in individualistic cultures favor informal learning through informal relationships with peers. Additionally, workers in feminine cultures prefer values aligned with social harmony, whereas those in masculine cultures focus more on goal-oriented values such as learning outcomes. Depending on the degree of Long-term Orientation in culture, workers placed learning goals on long-term objectives such as future success and change, as well as short-term goals such as current problem-solving or job competency enhancement. [9].

III. Methodology

1. Research Model and Hypotheses

How nation's cultural priorities mirror the fundamental challenges societies grapple with to govern human actions was highlighted by [10]. These cultural priorities serve to foster specific values and mindsets that align with the cultural emphasis. Meanwhile, [11] underscores that communication predominantly occurs among similar individuals, while interactions within diverse groups might trigger cognitive dissonance. Exposure to conflicting ideas or beliefs can lead individuals to an uneasy psychological state when their own convictions clash with external concepts. Given the idea of national

culture and how information moves between people, it's suggested that the extensive availability of foreign services and products might be promoted or hindered in their acceptance at a destination by satisfying their cultural needs.

2. Survey Instruments

In order to perform the current research, it is necessary to define national cultural characteristics of Central Asia, which was omitted from Hofstede's research [3]. Replicating his research for calculating cultural scores are to be performed with his latest version of VSM 2013. Of the six cultural dimensions, the four academically well discussed dimensions are tested, namely Individualism vs Collectivism (IDV), Power Distance (PDI), and Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Masculinity Feminism (MAS). To test the linkage between the perception and loyalty measurements (namely Word of Mouth (W. O. M.) and Patronage), respondents are asked if they have previous experience with the Korean products or services. Loyalty indicators will be measured based upon customer loyalty scales developed by [12]. The scales are measured with 5-point Likert scale.

3. Samples

This study was conducted from May and August 2023. The survey targeted respondents living in Central Asia in such counties as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan and Russia who speak the Russian. The targeted samples are initially reached to those who are attending a local church in Uzbekistan, where majority of attendances are Korean decedents, called "Koyoin." Thorough their interpersonal-network referrals, the respondents expanded to the near countries in the region. It is estimated that approximately 50% of respondents might be the third-generation of Korean descendants. A total of 160 surveys were collected, of which 159 were analyzed for this study, excluding one with insufficient content. The initial English written survey

was translated into Russian. All respondents answered in Russian survey form.

IV. Results

1. Demographics

The respondents are composed with 32.7% male and 67.3% female as in Table 1 and Table 2. They are ranged from under 20s to above 60s, however 30s(41.5%) and 20s(21.3%) represent the most. Their levels of educations are relatively high. Four-years college graduates represent the most(36.5%) followed by two-years college graduates(27.7%). Based upon their current nationality, they are mostly from Uzbekistans(65.6%) where the initial survey was targeted, followed by Russians(25.6%). Other nationalities such as Kazakhstans, Kyrgyzstans, Tajikistans or Ukraines also represent about 10% of respondents, including two individuals who did not indicate their nationality.

표 1. 인구통계학적 특성(표본 160명)
Table 1. Demographic profile(n=160)

| Gender | Count | % | Gender | Count | % |
|----------------|-------|------|--------|-------|------|
| male | 52 | 32.7 | female | 107 | 67.3 |
| Education | Count | % | Age | Count | % |
| elementary | 2 | 1.4 | -20 | 9 | 5.7 |
| middle school | 9 | 5.7 | 20-29 | 34 | 21.3 |
| high school | 26 | 16.4 | 30-39 | 66 | 41.5 |
| 2 year college | | 27.7 | 40-49 | 29 | 18.2 |
| 4 year college | | 36.5 | 50-59 | 12 | 7.5 |
| masters | 20 | 12.6 | 60~ | 8 | 5.0 |

The respondents were born from nine different countries and percentage of people whose current nationality is different from their birth place is 19.5%. Their diverse nationality may indicate complex of socio-political changes occurred during the 1990s in former Soviet countries.

표 2. 응답자의 국적

Table 2. Nationality of the respondents

| Nationality | Nationality at birth | | Current nationality | |
|---------------|----------------------|-------|---------------------|------|
| | Count | % | Count | % |
| Kazakhstan | 5 | 3.1 | 4 | 2.5 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 5 | 3.1 | 3 | 1.9 |
| Korean | 1 | 0.6 | 1 | 0.6 |
| Russian | 20 | 12.5 | 41 | 25.6 |
| Former Soviet | 8 | 5.0 | - | - |
| Tajikistan | 3 | 1.9 | 1 | 0.6 |
| Ukraine | 3 | 1.9 | 2 | 1.3 |
| USA | 1 | 0.6 | - | - |
| Uzbekistan | 111 | 69.4 | 105 | 65.6 |
| Missing | 2 | 1.3 | 2 | 1.3 |
| Total | 159 | 100.0 | 159 | 100 |

2. Survey Instruments and Reliability

Utilizing international value survey questionnaire (VSM 2013), cultural scores of the respondents are calculated. Hofstede has introduced the concept during the 1970s from his IBM data set, covering 50 countries and three regions, and has updated since. Then he has expanded the uncovered countries including Russia. However, the cultural score for some countries, such as Russia and China, are only estimate. Thus, it is imperative to conduct cultural survey utilizing the standardized questionnaire to the region, where a reliable scale of cultural research has not performed. Reliability and methodology of the measurements are well discussed in their paper.

Regarding the reliability test of the scale, the authors explain that because country-level correlations contrast with individual-level correlations, responses to questions gauging a country-level aspect may not consistently correlate among individuals. To accurately assess reliability, such as using Cronbach's alpha, it's essential to base it on country mean scores rather than individual scores. However, this requires data from a substantial number of countries, ideally a minimum of ten, for reliable results. When comparing across fewer countries, the reliability of the VSM at the country level must be assumed and indirectly supported through the validity of scores in predicting

dependent variables. Thus, the current research takes the cultural dimensional scores from their original formula without further scrutiny.

표 3. 호프스테드 지수

Table 3. The Cultural Dimensional Scores

| Country | IDV | PDI | UAI | MAS | LTO |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Central Asia | 66.64 | 74.62 | 21.38 | 41.36 | 34.16 |
| S. Korea* | 18 | 60 | 85 | 39 | 75 |
| Russia** | 36 | 93 | 95 | 36 | NA |
| China** | 20 | 80 | 30 | 66 | 118 |

*S. Korea are from Hofstede [3]

**Russia and China are estimates from [3]

The results show that the cultural scores of the Central Asian countries have its unique characteristics as in Table 3. They are somewhat individualistic (66.64), and tend to show general acceptance in un-even power distribution (74.62). However, in terms of dealing with uncertain situation, they are more willing to face the circumstances (21.38). For gender role orientation, they tend to show not strong acceptance on fixed role of gender (41.36). Their life goal might not pursue for longer term values (34.16). For the research question, cultural scores shown in Table 3 can give general insight of cultural characteristics of Central Asia.

Descriptive analyses are performed for frequency of Korean products/services usage data. Respondents of the survey indicate that about 89.94 per cent of them have had experience with the Korean products or services as in Table 4. It is quite higher than expected. Considering about 50% of respondents are descendants of Korea and rest of them are also somehow related to with them, it may give a clue for the high percentage of the Korean product or service experience. Respondents are allowed to choose multiple cases, if applicable, for their experiences with Korean products or services. Of the types of Korean Service/Products, 'Foods or Groceries' represents the most with the percentage of 62.89, followed by watching Korean 'Movie or Drama' represents the

second highest percentage. Other choices such as 'Learning Korean Language (55.20%),' 'Songs or Concerts (30.19%),' or 'Cosmetics (3.77%)' also represent significantly high percentage of experience. Of the respondents, 16 respondents (10.06%) indicated that they have not had any previous experience with Korean products or services. Thus, the numbers are to be removed from the data set and for the further analysis. Their frequency of use is elaborated in Table 4.

표 4. 한국 제품/서비스 이용 현황

Table 4. Experience with Korean Products or Services

| | Movie or Drama | Songs or Concerts | Foods or Groceries | Learning Korean | Cosmetics |
|-------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Count | 88 | 48 | 100 | 83 | 6 |
| % | 55.35 | 30.19 | 62.89 | 55.20 | 3.77 |

Respondents' loyalty on Korean products or services varied by their nationality as is in Table 5. Koreans indicate the highest loyalty, yet the sample size was very small, followed by a somewhat higher level of loyalty indicators from Tajikistans and Kyrgyzstans. However, the numbers was not statistically significant.

Table 5. 국가별 고객 충성도

Table 5. Customer loyalty by nations

| Customer loyalty \ Nationality | 1 | 1-2 | 2-3 | 3-4 | 4-5 | mean |
|--------------------------------|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| | Kazakhstan | - | - | - | 2 | 2 |
| Kyrgyzstan | - | - | - | - | 3 | 3.75 |
| Korean | - | - | - | 1 | - | 4.00 |
| Russian | - | - | 3 | 15 | 21 | 3.67 |
| Tajikistan | - | - | - | 1 | - | 3.76 |
| Ukraine | - | - | - | 2 | - | 3.67 |
| Uzbekistan | - | 1 | 6 | 80 | 32 | 3.50 |

Next, we examined the relationship between the degree of experience with Korean products and loyalty. 'Several times in a month' was highest, however, it was also not statistically significant.

From the data shown 'Food or groceries' and 'Movies and Dramas' are the most popularly accepted Korean products/services to the people of the region. And they tend to show moderate to strong loyalty on Korean products, considering their loyalty indicators from the Table 5.

Table 6. 한국 제품/서비스 경험과 고객 충성도
Table 6. Korean product/service usage and customer loyalty

| Customer loyalty \ Frequency | 1 | 1-2 | 2-3 | 3-4 | 4-5 | Total (%) | mean |
|------------------------------|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------|------|
| Once in a life time | - | - | 1 | 2 | 4 | 7 (4.96) | 3.57 |
| Once in a year | - | - | 1 | 6 | 3 | 10 (7.09) | 3.57 |
| A couple of times a year | - | 1 | - | 19 | 5 | 25 (17.73) | 3.41 |
| Once in a month | - | - | - | 16 | 3 | 19 (13.48) | 3.56 |
| Several times in a month | - | - | 4 | 35 | 41 | 80 (56.74) | 3.77 |

Frequency analysis from the Table 6 indicates that the group shows the highest frequency of usage represents 56.74 % of the sample, which implies that Korean product/services are mostly well known to the people from the region, and their loyalty level is also the highest from the sample.

V. Discussions

1. Results

The popularity of Korean products/services in Central Asia is increasing and there are new business opportunities in the Central Asia region by exploring their culture uniqueness. In this study, the region's cultural dimensions are examined using Hofstede's classifications, and the experience of using Korean products and services and the customer loyalty was also measured. Culturally they tend to show unique characteristics and Korean products/services are well accepted to them and their loyalty on the products/services are also moderately high.

2. Managerial implications

Korean products/services to the central Asia is

widely and frequently accepted in now a days. Of the product variations, 'food and groceries' and 'movies and dramas' are the most widely accepted items. It is imperative to develop a business strategy targeting the people from the region considering their high frequency and loyalty on Korean products and services. Moreover, many of them have had experience with Korean products through their working or residing in S. Korea. Managers need to understand the necessity of applying customized human resource management methods which are in accordance with their cultural values.

3. Limitations

In this study, due to the small sample size, a statistically significant causal relationship could not be identified, and it remained an exploratory study. Future research hopes to establish a causal relationship between cultural diversity and customer loyalty. Furthermore, types of products or services are not categorized by types of use. Respondents showed their previous experience with Korean products/services, ranging from daily necessities to luxury items, such as automobiles.

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※ This research was supported by 2023
Hannam Research Fund.