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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL INTERACTION: RECONSTRUCTING SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY IN A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract - *This research examines the relationship between collectivist and individualist cultural norms and the quality of social interactions and psychological well-being, and modifies the framework of social exchange theory to explain cross-cultural variations in these phenomena. In individualist societies, happiness tends to be associated with personal achievement and self-expression, while in collectivist cultures, well-being is more influenced by social roles and group harmony. Although social exchange theory focuses on benefits and costs in interpersonal relationships, this framework needs to be adjusted to encompass broader social dimensions, such as solidarity and sacrifice in collectivist cultures. As such, the theory should be more sensitive to cultural differences, both in terms of personal achievement and social contribution. Such adjustments will enhance understanding of the reciprocal relationship between social interaction and psychological well-being across different cultural contexts. The findings provide insights for researchers and practitioners in developing more adaptive approaches to psychological well-being in an increasingly connected and multicultural world.*

Keywords: cultural norms, collectivism, individualism, psychological well-being, social exchange theory, social interaction, cross-culture

INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being and social interaction have long been understood as two closely interrelated constructs in the psychological literature, with many studies suggesting that the quality of interpersonal relationships plays an important role in influencing individual well-being (Kroencke et al., 2022). Cross-cultural studies have consistently revealed that meaningful interpersonal relationships are strong predictors of subjective happiness (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010), with this sense of social connectedness being an important element in psychological well-being. However, the concrete manifestations of these relationships are highly dependent on the socio-cultural context that shapes individuals' expectations and experiences of social interactions. For example, Western societies tend to associate happiness with personal achievement, identity seeking and authentic self-expression, while in collectivist societies, happiness is often more influenced by social role fulfillment, group solidarity and interpersonal harmony. This difference suggests that while social relationships contribute significantly to psychological well-being, the understanding of how these relationships are established and expressed is strongly influenced by the cultural values and social norms present in a society (Sun et al., 2020).

The phenomenon of social happiness shows a paradoxical pattern when examined in more depth in collectivist and individualist cultures. In collectivist societies such as Japan, social relationship satisfaction is higher when individuals are able to suppress negative emotions in order to maintain group harmony - a pattern that contrasts with individualist cultures where authentic emotional expression is more valued. This finding is reinforced by neuropsychological research showing that activation of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (related to emotion regulation) is stronger in Japanese than American participants when facing unpleasant social situations (Murata et al., 2022).

At the center of the cross-cultural study of social happiness lies an intractable cultural paradox. Collectivist societies, while statistically showing high levels of social cohesion, harbor a hidden dilemma where the pressure to always maintain group harmony becomes a psychological burden. The stronger individuals in collectivist cultures adhere to social norms, the higher their risk of experiencing physical manifestations of pent-up emotional distress. Meanwhile, individualist societies face the opposite problem - freedom of expression, a core value, turns into a double-edged sword. Over-expressed independence without adequate social support structures leads to an epidemic of loneliness that is now recognized as a public health crisis in the West (Suh & Oishi, 2002).

The dimensions of the problem are becoming more complex with the onslaught of globalization. Massive exposure to digital media content creates a generation that experiences cultural dissonance - on the one hand wanting to achieve Western-style individual freedom, on the other hand remaining bound to a collectivist value system that demands self-sacrifice (Oluwatoyin, 2021). This internal conflict affects mental health, and alters traditional patterns of social interaction that have been a buffer for psychological well-being.

The existence of a cultural paradox in the relationship between social happiness and psychological well-being demands an integrative and critical approach to literature review. Systematic studies are important for three fundamental reasons: first, the fragmentation of empirical findings spread across different disciplines (cultural psychology, social

neuroscience and sociology of mental health) creates a need for a coherent theoretical synthesis. Integration of cross-disciplinary perspectives can reveal blind spots in our understanding of how cultural mechanisms moderate the social-being relationship.

This study aims to analyze cultural differences in the mechanisms linking the quality of social interactions to psychological well-being, with a particular focus on comparisons between collectivist and individualist norms. Through a systematic exploration of cross-cultural literature, this study seeks to uncover how different socio-cultural contexts shape the patterns and impact of social interactions on mental health. This understanding is expected to explain why manifestations of social happiness and psychological well-being show significant variation across cultures, while identifying key factors that mediate the relationship.

It is also the ambition of this study to develop an integrative framework that extends conventional social exchange theory to include cultural and contextual variables that have often been overlooked. By combining insights from cultural psychology, social neuroscience and psychological anthropology, this research aims to create a more comprehensive and culturally sensitive conceptual model. This new framework is expected to be able to explain psycho-social dynamics in various cultural settings, and provide a more solid theoretical foundation for the development of psycho-social measurement and intervention instruments that are truly relevant to local contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research used a literature study approach to analyze the relationship between psychological well-being and social interaction in a cross-cultural perspective. The first stage involved searching the literature in academic databases such as Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect using a combination of keywords: “psychological well-being”, ‘social interaction’, ‘collectivism’, and ‘individualism’. Selection criteria included peer-reviewed journal articles published with a focus on relevant empirical studies and theoretical reviews. The selection process was conducted in stages through reading titles, abstracts, and full texts to ensure relevance to the research topic (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The content analysis was conducted qualitatively by identifying key themes that emerged from the literature, including patterns of the social-being relationship across cultures, underlying psychological mechanisms, as well as cultural factors that moderate the relationship. This approach enabled the integration of findings from different disciplines such as social psychology, anthropology and cultural studies (Oishi et al., 2019). To ensure depth of analysis, researchers cross-checked findings from multiple sources and compared different perspectives. The findings were then synthesized in a conceptual framework that highlights cultural differences in the dynamics of psychological well-being and social interaction.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Influence of Collectivist and Individualist Norms on Social Relationships-Psychological Well-being

Cultural norms play a very important role in shaping the pattern of reciprocal relationships between the quality of social interactions and psychological well-being. Cultural context influences how individuals interact with others, how they interpret social relationships, and how these relationships affect their psychological well-being. In general, collectivist and individualist cultures have different influences in shaping patterns of social relationships, which in turn affect individuals' levels of happiness and psychological well-being.

Collectivist cultures, which place more emphasis on group interests and social cohesion, typically encourage individuals to focus more on deep, interdependent interpersonal relationships. Individuals often prioritize group needs over personal needs, and strong social relationships are seen as a major source of psychological well-being. For example, in East Asian cultures, especially in countries such as Japan and Korea, feelings of having close relationships with family, friends, and coworkers are strongly associated with individual happiness and well-being (Cheng, 2011). Collectivist cultures when faced with a conflict or negotiation, they try to respect others and prioritize common interests compared to their personal interests. The satisfaction gained from fulfilling social roles and group harmony is key in maintaining psychological balance.

The concept of “interdependence” is central in collectivist cultures. In many collectivist cultures, individual well-being is often considered inseparable from the well-being of the group or community. For example, people who have strong social relationships with others and can contribute to collective well-being tend to experience lower levels of stress and feel happier (Triandis, 2001). Positive social interactions, such as sharing feelings, giving support and receiving help, are integral to how individuals experience their happiness. This creates a reciprocal relationship between the quality of deep social interactions and improved psychological well-being.

In contrast, in individualist cultures that place more emphasis on personal achievement and autonomy, social relationships are often seen as a means to an end or as a form of reward for individual achievement. In individualist cultures, such as in many Western countries, individuals are more likely to prioritize personal freedom and self-expression over social harmony or sacrifice for the sake of the group. Therefore, the quality of social interactions that can support the achievement of personal goals and fulfill the needs of the self becomes very important in maintaining psychological well-being (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In individualist cultures, psychological well-being is strongly associated with personal achievement and recognition of individual success. For example, in countries such as the United States, happiness is often associated with career achievement, educational success, and free self-expression without strict social restrictions (Heine et al., 2001). In this case, social relationships that support such achievements, such as support from friends or family in achieving personal goals, serve as reinforcing factors for psychological well-being (Sajjapong et al., 2022).

Moreover, in individualist cultures, relationships that are more functional or pragmatic in nature tend to be more valued, and social interactions are often perceived as something that must be gone through in order to achieve certain goals. For example, professional relationships that provide direct benefits or support in career achievement can strengthen an individual's psychological well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Therefore, while the quality of social interactions remains important in individualist cultures, the main focus is more on the fulfillment of personal needs and individual achievements that can bring a sense of satisfaction and happiness.

Although collectivist and individualist cultures have different approaches to the meaning of social interactions, both recognize the importance of social relationships in supporting psychological well-being. Essentially, good quality social relationships, in both collectivist and individualist contexts, can enhance a sense of social connectedness and happiness. However, the way in which these relationships are established and understood is strongly influenced by the prevailing cultural norms in that society.

In countries with collectivist cultures, individuals who feel connected to the family, community, or group to which they belong, will feel more psychologically secure and satisfied. They are more likely to feel constant emotional support, which further reduces feelings of loneliness and increases life satisfaction (Chen et al., 2013). Countries with this collectivist culture tend to be more open and more protective of their own privacy (Pakpahan et al., 2022). Nonetheless, the quality of these mutually supportive social relationships gives them a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, which is strongly associated with sustained psychological well-being.

In contrast, in individualist cultures, individuals who feel they have control over their lives and are able to pursue personal dreams and ambitions tend to feel greater happiness. They see social relationships as a means to develop their potential and achieve personal goals, which creates a sense of satisfaction that comes from personal achievement and self-actualization (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The quality of social relationships that can help them achieve these goals is important in strengthening their psychological well-being.

However, social relationships in collectivist and individualist cultural contexts are not static. In many cases, society is now increasingly influenced by the values of globalization, which can affect the way individuals in different cultures interpret social relationships. For example, in more individualist cultures, more individuals have begun to seek meaning in deeper, mutually supportive social relationships, while in collectivist cultures, there has been a shift in how personal achievement and individual well-being are viewed, emphasizing personal autonomy (Choi & Choi, 2015). Although the cultural values of collectivism and individualism are conflicting, both can be assumed to be associated with prosocial behavior, and both cultures can also be assumed to be associated with social behavior.

A key challenge in understanding the relationship between the quality of social interactions and psychological well-being is how to identify and understand how changing cultural norms can affect existing patterns of social relationships. The influence of social, economic and political factors in shaping the way individuals interact in different cultural contexts is increasingly important to study. Therefore, it is important to look at the relationship between culture, quality of social interaction and psychological well-being in a more dynamic and contextualized context.

For this reason, it is also important for researchers to develop a more integrative approach in studying how cultural factors affect social relationships and psychological well-being simultaneously. This will open up new insights into how social interactions can be used as a tool to enhance psychological well-being in both collectivist and individualist cultures, taking into account the relevant cultural values in these societies.

Modification of Social Exchange Theory for Cross-Cultural Contexts

The social exchange theory framework developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) suggests that social interaction is seen as a process of exchanging resources, both material and non-material, between individuals. There are three different concepts to explain social exchange, the first is activity which includes actual behavior described by individuals, the second is interaction as an activity that encourages or is encouraged by the activities of others, and the last is sentiment as an individual activity carried out on the subjective estimates and common sense of individuals (Cropanzano et al., 2017). In this model, happiness and psychological well-being are considered to be the result of beneficial interactions, where individuals engage in exchanges that provide benefits that outweigh costs. This theory has been a cornerstone in the understanding of social relationships and psychological well-being. However, when applied to cross-cultural contexts, this theory needs to be modified to take into account the different cultural norms that shape social interactions and the measurement of well-being.

In general, social exchange theory assumes that individuals act rationally, calculating the benefits and costs of social relationships. In individualist cultural contexts, such as in Western countries, this framework can work well because individuals tend to prioritize personal freedom, autonomy, and personal achievement (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In such societies,

social relationships are often regarded as a means to achieve personal goals, and individual happiness is often related to how much the individual can fulfill his or her needs and desires through social interactions (Irfan & Darmawan, 2021). Social Exchange has not been to blame for providing deep insights into human behavior and human relationships.

However, in collectivist cultures that emphasize group interests and social solidarity, social exchange theory needs to be modified to accommodate the role of social norms in shaping interpersonal relationships. In collectivist societies, such as in Japan or Korea, social relationships are not always considered as a means to achieve personal goals, but rather as a means to maintain group harmony and fulfill social roles (Triandis, 2001). Therefore, individuals' psychological well-being is often related to how well they can fulfill social obligations and contribute to the well-being of the group (Ismail, 2021).

Existing social exchange theories tend to overemphasize individual interests in social interactions. In collectivist cultures, social exchange is driven by personal gain, and by a sense of responsibility towards others and collective well-being. Therefore, this theory needs to incorporate a new dimension that emphasizes social solidarity and collectivist values, where happiness and psychological well-being are measured based on personal satisfaction, and based on contributions to the group and social harmony (Choi & Choi, 2015).

In collectivist cultures, individuals may be more inclined to accept personal sacrifices in social relationships to achieve common goals, which differs from the individualist approach that focuses more on personal fulfillment (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In this regard, social exchange theory needs to be expanded to include elements such as a sense of social responsibility, loyalty, and self-sacrifice, which may influence psychological well-being in collectivist cultures. Harmonious and mutually supportive relationships become more important than immediate personal gain.

Moreover, in some cultures, such as in countries with Confucian traditions, social relationships are based on hierarchies and clearly defined roles, and psychological well-being is influenced more by how well individuals can perform their social roles well, rather than simply from the outcome of equal or fair social exchanges. (Cheng, 2011). Therefore, social exchange theory must consider that in certain cultures, inequality in social exchange is acceptable, even considered as part of fulfilling a larger social role, which supports group welfare (Darmawan, 2022).

In addition, in some cultures, such as in countries with Confucian traditions, social relationships are based on hierarchies and clear roles, and psychological well-being is influenced more by how well individuals can perform their social roles well, rather than simply from the outcome of equal or fair social exchanges (Cheng, 2011). Therefore, social exchange theory should consider that in certain cultures, inequalities in social exchange are acceptable, even considered as part of fulfilling larger social roles, which support group well-being.

The influence of globalization should also be considered in modifying social exchange theory. In this increasingly connected world, cultures are no longer bound to rigid geographical boundaries, and many individuals across cultures are now adopting more flexible values and patterns of social relationships that lead to an integration between collectivist and individualist values (Choi & Choi, 2015). Thus, social exchange theory must take into account the influence of globalization in shaping more complex and dynamic patterns of social relations, which cannot always be understood through a separate cultural lens (Warin, 2021).

In modern societies, especially in countries that are more open to multicultural values, social relationships often involve more varied exchanges, where individuals may incorporate elements from both collectivist and individualist cultures in their daily lives. Therefore, a more inclusive social exchange theory, which is able to address different types of social exchanges - both individual and group-based - would be more relevant in explaining the relationship between social happiness and psychological well-being in this globalized era (Triandis, 2001).

Furthermore, it is important to include in the framework of social exchange theory a greater dimension of "trust" between the parties involved. In many cultures, trust and mutual respect are essential in forming deep social relationships. In collectivist cultures, trust is often a key prerequisite in establishing harmonious and mutually supportive social relationships, which can have a profound impact on individuals' psychological well-being (Gambetta, 2000). Therefore, the theory needs to adapt the concept of trust as an important element in social exchange that influences happiness.

Finally, the social exchange theoretical framework needs to be more sensitive to differences in the concept of time and delayed gratification in social relationships across cultures (Udjari et al., 2021). In some collectivist cultures, such as in India or Africa, rewards for contributions in social relationships are not always given immediately or directly, but rather are rewarded over the long term (Choi & Choi, 2015). Social exchange theory needs to consider how these differences in the concept of time affect individuals' perceptions of gains and costs in social relationships, which in turn affect their psychological well-being.

With these modifications, social exchange theory may be better able to explain cross-cultural variation in the relationship between happiness and psychological well-being. Changes in cultural norms and the effects of globalization require a more flexible theory that can accommodate the complexity of social relationships in an increasingly connected world. This theory must take into account the social, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of social relationships that shape happiness and psychological well-being across cultures.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the relationship between psychological well-being and social interaction from a cross-cultural perspective reveals significant complexity in existing social exchange theory. The conclusion of the discussion on how collectivist and individualist cultural norms shape the reciprocal relationship between the quality of social interaction and psychological well-being suggests that cultural dimensions play a key role in shaping individuals' expectations and experiences of social relationships. In more individualistic societies, social interactions often focus on personal achievement, self-expression, and individual freedom, which contribute to psychological well-being through the fulfillment of personal needs. In contrast, in collectivist societies, social relationships are more often seen as a means to maintain social harmony and fulfill larger roles within the group context. In this case, psychological well-being is often related to contributing to the group and maintaining harmonious relationships. Therefore, in a cross-cultural context, psychological well-being is influenced by the quality of social interactions and by how individuals make sense of their social roles within the group.

In responding to the problems regarding the framework of social exchange theory, modifications are needed to accommodate existing cultural differences. This theory must consider that in collectivist cultures, social exchange is not always direct or based on personal gain, but rather leads to values such as social solidarity, trust, and sacrifice for the common good. Therefore, existing social exchange theory needs to include broader elements, such as social responsibility and contribution to group harmony, which are important elements in psychological well-being in collectivist societies. Overall, this theory needs to be more inclusive and sensitive to the influence of culture in shaping social relationships that affect individual happiness in various cultural contexts.

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