

Contrasting Research Paradigms: A Comparative Study of Hofstede's Quantitative Model and Schreiter's Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract: *This paper compares two distinct research paradigms—quantitative and qualitative—through the studies conducted by Hofstede (1997) and Schreiter (2015). While Hofstede's research follows a structured, hypothesis-testing approach grounded in statistical methods, Schreiter's work employs an exploratory, inductive framework based on Grounded Theory. The strengths and limitations of both paradigms are evaluated, offering insights into their applicability to intercultural research. The paper concludes by reflecting on the potential for integrating both paradigms for a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena.*

Keywords: Cross-cultural research; Quantitative and qualitative methods; Cultural dimensions; Methodological integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, cultural diversity has become an integral part of workplaces, international collaborations, and social interactions. Understanding how individuals perceive and navigate cultural differences is crucial for fostering effective communication and cooperation in intercultural settings. This has led to the development of various research paradigms aimed at studying culture, each with distinct methodologies and epistemological assumptions. Among these, quantitative research and qualitative research represent two dominant approaches, offering complementary perspectives on cultural phenomena.

Quantitative research is grounded in positivist epistemology, focusing on the measurement and analysis of observable variables. It aims to identify generalizable patterns and relationships through statistical methods, often emphasizing breadth over depth. A prominent example of this approach is Geert Hofstede's seminal study on cultural dimensions, which quantified cultural differences across nations and provided a framework widely used in cross-cultural management, international business, and organizational studies. However, quantitative methods have been critiqued for their reductive nature, as they may oversimplify the complexity and fluidity of cultural practices.

In contrast, qualitative research adopts a constructivist perspective, prioritizing the understanding of subjective experiences and social meanings. It seeks to explore the richness and nuances of cultural phenomena through methods such as interviews, ethnography, and grounded theory. Anne Schreiter's qualitative study on German-Chinese workplace interactions exemplifies this paradigm by focusing on how individuals construct normality and navigate cultural challenges in specific organizational contexts. While qualitative methods provide in-depth insights, they often face challenges regarding generalizability and researcher subjectivity.

This paper aims to compare and critically evaluate these two research paradigms through the concrete examples of Hofstede's quantitative study and Schreiter's qualitative study. The central research questions guiding this analysis are:

- 1) How do quantitative and qualitative research paradigms differ in their approaches to studying culture?
- 2) What are the strengths and limitations of each paradigm in the context of cross-cultural research?
- 3) How can these paradigms be applied or integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural phenomena?

By examining the methodologies, findings, and implications of both studies, this paper seeks to highlight the complementary nature of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Furthermore, it reflects on the broader implications for cultural research, emphasizing the importance of methodological pluralism in addressing complex and dynamic intercultural issues.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of culture, particularly in the context of globalization and intercultural interactions, has been a central focus in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, organizational studies, and international business. Over time, two dominant research paradigms — quantitative and qualitative — have shaped the way cultural phenomena are analyzed. This section reviews key literature on these paradigms, highlighting the contributions and limitations of Hofstede's and Schreiter's studies while situating them within the broader academic discourse on cultural research methods.

2.1 Hofstede's Quantitative Approach to Cultural Research

Geert Hofstede's work remains one of the most influential contributions to the quantitative study of culture. His seminal study, based on data collected from IBM employees in over 40 countries, introduced the cultural dimensions theory, which identifies key dimensions such as individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity vs. femininity (Hofstede, 1997). These dimensions provided a systematic framework for comparing national cultures and have been widely applied in fields such as cross-cultural management, international marketing, and human resource practices.

Hofstede's research offered a groundbreaking way to quantify cultural differences, making culture a measurable construct that could be incorporated into statistical models. This approach enabled researchers and practitioners to identify broad cultural patterns and predict behaviors in organizational and international contexts.

Despite its popularity, Hofstede's framework has faced significant criticism. Scholars have questioned its construct validity, arguing that the dimensions oversimplify the complexity of culture and fail to account for intra-national diversity. For instance, China's ranking as a collectivist society overlooks regional differences, such as the more individualistic tendencies observed in urbanized areas like Shanghai. Furthermore, the external validity of Hofstede's findings has been debated, as the study primarily reflects the corporate culture of IBM rather than the broader national cultures. Critics also note that the data, collected in the 1970s, may no longer reflect contemporary cultural dynamics shaped by globalization and technological advancements (McSweeney, 2002).

2.2 Schreiter's Qualitative Exploration of Intercultural Normality

In contrast to Hofstede, Anne Schreiter adopted a qualitative approach to explore intercultural interactions in German-Chinese workplace settings. Schreiter's study examined how individuals construct normality in intercultural contexts, focusing on their strategies for navigating cultural differences and the challenges they encounter. Using semi-structured interviews and Grounded Theory, Schreiter's research emphasized the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes of participants (Schreiter, 2015).

Schreiter's study provides rich, in-depth insights into intercultural experiences, highlighting the dynamic and context-dependent nature of cultural interactions. By exploring how individuals perceive and respond to cultural differences, her work complements the macro-level findings of quantitative studies like Hofstede's. Schreiter's use of Grounded Theory also underscores the value of inductive methods in generating new theoretical insights directly from empirical data.

However, Schreiter's qualitative approach is not without limitations. The sample size of 14 participants, while appropriate for qualitative research, raises questions about the generalizability of her findings. Additionally, the researcher's positionality and the potential influence of her cultural background on data interpretation highlight the challenges of achieving objectivity in qualitative studies. Furthermore, the language barrier in interviews, conducted in German with Chinese participants, may have constrained participants' ability to fully articulate their experiences, potentially affecting the validity of the findings.

2.3 Debates on Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research in Cultural Studies

The academic discourse surrounding quantitative and qualitative research methods reflects a broader debate on the philosophical underpinnings of cultural studies. Quantitative research, rooted in positivism, emphasizes objectivity, replicability, and generalizability. It is particularly effective in identifying broad patterns and testing hypotheses across large samples. However, critics argue that its reductive nature often ignores the fluid, dynamic, and context-dependent aspects of culture (Brosius & Koschel, 2001).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, aligns with constructivist epistemology, prioritizing the exploration of subjective experiences and contextual nuances. It provides depth and richness but is often critiqued for its limited generalizability, potential researcher bias, and lack of standardization (Flick, 2014). Recent studies advocate for methodological pluralism, suggesting that combining both paradigms can provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural phenomena. For example, integrating Hofstede's quantitative model with Schreiter's qualitative insights could bridge the gap between macro-level patterns and micro-level experiences.

By comparing Hofstede's and Schreiter's research, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative methods in cultural research. It highlights the complementary nature of these paradigms, demonstrating how they address different but interconnected aspects of culture. Additionally, this paper underscores the importance of aligning research methods with the specific goals and contexts of cultural studies, offering insights for both academic researchers and practitioners in fields like intercultural management and organizational development.

3. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This section outlines the research methods and materials used in the studies by Hofstede and Schreiter, focusing on their research design, data collection processes, and data analysis methods. By examining these aspects, the methodological differences between the two paradigms—quantitative and qualitative—are highlighted, along with their respective strengths and limitations in studying cultural phenomena.

3.1 Hofstede's Quantitative Research Design

Hofstede's study represents a quantitative, hypothesis-testing approach, grounded in the principles of positivism. The goal of his research was to identify and measure cultural differences across nations, ultimately developing a universal framework for understanding cultural dimensions.

3.1.1 Research Design

Hofstede's research followed a deductive, structured design, beginning with predefined hypotheses about cultural differences. The research process was linear and focused on testing these hypotheses through statistical analysis. His study was nomothetic, seeking to uncover generalizable patterns and relationships that apply across large populations.

3.1.2 Data Collection

Sample: Hofstede's sample consisted of over 100,000 employees from IBM subsidiaries in more than 40 countries. The sample was selected based on representativeness, as it aimed to reflect national-level cultural characteristics.

Instrument: Data was collected using a standardized questionnaire with closed-ended questions and predetermined response options. This ensured uniformity and comparability across participants and countries.

Data Collected: The questionnaire focused on aspects such as attitudes toward authority, uncertainty, individualism, and gender roles, which later became the basis for Hofstede's five cultural dimensions.

3.1.3 Data Analysis

Hofstede employed a reductive data analysis process, leveraging statistical techniques such as factor analysis to identify underlying dimensions of culture. These dimensions were then ranked and compared across countries, providing a macro-level perspective on cultural differences. The results were presented in numerical and graphical formats, making them accessible for application in cross-cultural management and business practices.

Hofstede's quantitative approach offered several advantages, including objectivity, reliability, and the ability to analyze large datasets across diverse contexts. However, its reliance on standardized questionnaires and statistical methods has been criticized for oversimplifying cultural complexity. The study's construct validity was questioned, as the predefined dimensions may not fully capture the dynamic and context-dependent nature of culture. Moreover, the use of IBM employees as the sole sample population limits the study's external validity, as the findings reflect corporate culture as much as national culture.

3.2 Schreiter's Qualitative Research Design

In contrast, Schreiter's study adopts a qualitative, exploratory approach, rooted in constructivist epistemology. Her research aimed to understand how individuals construct normality and navigate cultural differences in German-Chinese workplace interactions.

3.2.1 Research Design

Schreiter's study followed an inductive and open-ended design, allowing for flexibility and adaptation throughout the research process. Unlike Hofstede's linear approach, Schreiter's process was iterative and circular, with data collection and analysis occurring simultaneously. The study was idiographic, focusing on the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes of individuals.

3.2.2 Data Collection

Sample: Schreiter used theoretical sampling to select participants, refining her sample based on emerging insights during the research process. A snowball sampling method was also employed, where initial contacts (e.g., two German managers) referred her to additional participants. The final sample included 14 participants (7 Germans and 7 Chinese) working in German subsidiaries in China and Chinese subsidiaries in Germany. The participants were aged 30–40 and had varying lengths of employment (from less than 5 years to nearly 20 years).

Instrument: Data was collected through semi-structured interviews guided by a flexible interview protocol. This approach ensured that key topics were covered while allowing participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences.

3.2.3 Data Analysis

Schreiter employed a Grounded Theory methodology for data analysis, using open coding to identify recurring themes and patterns in the interview transcripts.

First Stage: Short statements from participants were analyzed to develop initial concepts. These concepts were iteratively refined through comparisons across participants and contexts.

Second Stage: Larger excerpts were coded to confirm or differentiate emerging categories. Schreiter sought to identify underlying logics and patterns in how participants constructed normality and managed cultural differences.

Schreiter's qualitative approach provided deep insights into the lived experiences of participants, capturing the nuances and dynamics of intercultural interactions. Her use of Grounded Theory allowed for the generation of new theoretical frameworks directly from the data. However, the study faced challenges related to sample size and generalizability, as the findings were context-specific and limited to a small group of participants. Additionally, language barriers and the researcher's positionality as a German interviewer may have influenced the data collection and interpretation processes.

3.3 Comparative Methodological Insights

The methodologies used by Hofstede and Schreiter illustrate the fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms, each offering distinct strengths and limitations.

Hofstede's study emphasized breadth, aiming to generate generalizable insights across large populations through standardized questionnaires and statistical analysis. This approach enables broad comparisons and provides statistically reliable findings that are particularly valuable for practical applications, such as cross-cultural management and international business strategy.

By contrast, Schreiter's qualitative research prioritized depth, focusing on the subjective experiences of individuals within a specific context. Her approach captures the richness and complexity of human experiences, offering context-specific insights that allow researchers to explore cultural dynamics in greater detail. Furthermore, Schreiter's inductive methodology generates new theoretical frameworks grounded in empirical data, making it particularly useful for understanding the fluid and dynamic nature of culture.

Together, these two approaches highlight the potential for methodological pluralism in cultural research. By combining the macro-level insights of quantitative methods with the micro-level depth of qualitative studies, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of culture. This integration allows for both the identification of broad cultural patterns and the exploration of how these patterns manifest in specific contexts, offering a richer and more nuanced perspective on cultural phenomena.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Quantitative Research and Broad Cultural Patterns

Hofstede's quantitative study provides a macro-level perspective on cultural phenomena, offering broad and generalizable insights into cultural differences across nations. By employing standardized questionnaires and statistical analyses, Hofstede identified key cultural dimensions such as individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. These dimensions allowed for the categorization and comparison of national cultures, creating a framework that has been widely applied in areas such as international business, cross-cultural management, and organizational studies. For example, Hofstede's findings demonstrated that countries like the United States score high on individualism, emphasizing autonomy and self-expression, while countries like China score high on collectivism, prioritizing group harmony and interdependence. Such insights have proven invaluable for understanding cultural tendencies at a national level and for designing strategies that accommodate cultural diversity in global contexts.

However, the strengths of Hofstede's approach also highlight its limitations. The reductive nature of quantitative research simplifies the complexity of culture by framing it as a set of fixed dimensions, which risks ignoring the fluid and dynamic aspects of cultural practices. For instance, while China is categorized as collectivist in Hofstede's framework, urban areas like Shanghai exhibit more individualistic tendencies due to rapid globalization and economic development. Moreover, Hofstede's reliance on data collected exclusively from IBM employees limits the external validity of his findings, as corporate culture may not reflect broader national cultural dynamics. The study has also been critiqued for its static view of culture, as the dimensions do not account for cultural evolution in response to globalization, technological advancement, and migration. While Hofstede's quantitative approach is valuable for identifying broad patterns, it does not capture the nuanced and situational nature of cultural interactions.

4.2 Qualitative Research and Micro-Level Cultural Insights

Schreiter's qualitative study addresses the limitations of macro-level approaches by focusing on the micro-level dynamics of cultural interactions. Her research, which examines German-Chinese workplace interactions, provides rich, context-specific insights into how individuals navigate cultural differences. Using semi-structured interviews and Grounded Theory, Schreiter explored how cultural normality is constructed and negotiated in everyday workplace settings. For instance, her findings revealed that German employees often struggled with hierarchical structures in Chinese subsidiaries, perceiving them as rigid and formal, while Chinese employees in Germany faced challenges adapting to the informal and egalitarian work culture. By emphasizing the subjective experiences of participants, Schreiter's study highlights the dynamic and context-dependent nature of cultural practices, shedding light on how individuals adapt their behaviors and develop strategies to bridge cultural gaps.

Despite its depth, Schreiter's qualitative approach has its own limitations. The small sample size of 14 participants, while appropriate for qualitative research, limits the generalizability of her findings. Additionally, the researcher's positionality and cultural background may have influenced data collection and interpretation. Schreiter, as a German researcher, may have shaped the responses of Chinese participants, who might have been hesitant to fully express critical views. Language barriers also posed challenges, as interviews conducted in German with non-native speakers could have constrained participants' ability to articulate their experiences fully. Nevertheless, Schreiter's study provides a nuanced understanding of cultural interactions that complements the broader patterns identified in Hofstede's research.

4.3 Complementary Nature of Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

The comparative analysis of Hofstede's and Schreiter's studies highlights the complementary nature of quantitative and qualitative research paradigms in cultural studies. Hofstede's work provides a macro-level view of cultural differences, offering generalizable insights that are useful for cross-cultural comparisons and large-

scale applications. In contrast, Schreiter's study delves into the micro-level dynamics of cultural interactions, capturing the nuances and fluidity of individual experiences. Together, these approaches bridge the divide between broad cultural patterns and the lived realities of individuals, providing a more comprehensive understanding of culture.

For example, Hofstede's framework identifies collectivism as a dominant characteristic of Chinese culture, while Schreiter's findings illustrate how collectivism manifests in specific workplace interactions, such as prioritizing group harmony over individual achievement. Similarly, Schreiter's qualitative insights could inform the design of future quantitative studies by highlighting emergent themes and variables that may not be captured by standardized survey instruments. Conversely, Hofstede's dimensions can serve as a foundation for qualitative studies, guiding researchers in identifying key areas of focus and potential points of cultural tension.

The integration of these paradigms offers significant benefits for both academic research and practical applications. Methodological pluralism enables researchers to address the limitations of each approach, combining the generalizability and replicability of quantitative methods with the depth and contextuality of qualitative insights. In practice, global organizations could use Hofstede's dimensions to develop overarching cultural strategies while drawing on Schreiter's findings to design localized interventions for specific intercultural challenges. For instance, multinational corporations might use Hofstede's findings to understand general cultural tendencies in their target markets and then apply Schreiter's insights to train employees on navigating specific workplace dynamics.

4.4 Implications for Cross-Cultural Research

The results of this analysis underscore the importance of methodological pluralism in cross-cultural research. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, researchers can develop a fuller understanding of cultural phenomena, addressing their complexity and multidimensionality. Quantitative methods provide the breadth needed to identify overarching patterns, while qualitative methods offer the depth required to explore the nuances of individual experiences. Together, they enable a more holistic exploration of culture, capturing both its macro-level structures and micro-level dynamics.

However, integrating these paradigms is not without challenges. The epistemological differences between positivist and constructivist approaches require careful navigation to ensure methodological coherence. Researchers must also consider the practical difficulties of combining large-scale data collection with in-depth qualitative fieldwork, as well as the potential for conflicting interpretations of results. Despite these challenges, the benefits of combining quantitative and qualitative methods far outweigh the difficulties, as such integration enhances the rigor and relevance of cultural research.

In sum, Hofstede's and Schreiter's studies illustrate the strengths and limitations of their respective research paradigms, while also demonstrating their potential for complementarity. Hofstede's quantitative approach provides a valuable foundation for understanding broad cultural patterns, while Schreiter's qualitative research captures the richness and complexity of cultural interactions at an individual level. Together, these paradigms offer a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective on culture, addressing both its structural and dynamic dimensions. By bridging the gap between macro-level patterns and micro-level experiences, this integration contributes to a deeper understanding of intercultural dynamics and provides practical insights for navigating the complexities of globalization.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study has critically examined the quantitative and qualitative paradigms through the lens of Hofstede's and Schreiter's research on cultural phenomena. Both approaches contribute unique strengths to cultural studies: Hofstede's quantitative framework provides broad, generalizable insights into national cultural differences, while Schreiter's qualitative study offers nuanced, context-specific understandings of how individuals navigate cultural interactions. Together, these paradigms address different dimensions of culture—macro-level patterns and micro-level dynamics—demonstrating their complementary nature and the potential for integration in cross-cultural research.

One of the central findings of this analysis is that quantitative approaches, such as Hofstede's, excel in identifying overarching cultural patterns that are applicable across large populations. These patterns have informed a wide range of academic research and practical applications, particularly in fields like international business, cross-

cultural management, and organizational studies. However, their reliance on standardized instruments and statistical generalizations often fails to capture the complexity and fluidity of cultural practices. By contrast, qualitative methods, exemplified by Schreiter's work, prioritize depth and contextuality, allowing researchers to explore the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes of individuals in specific settings. This approach provides valuable insights into the dynamic and evolving nature of culture, although its findings are often limited in generalizability.

The integration of these two paradigms represents a promising avenue for advancing cross-cultural research. Methodological pluralism—combining the breadth of quantitative research with the depth of qualitative inquiry—can address the limitations of each approach and provide a more comprehensive understanding of cultural phenomena. For example, quantitative studies can identify broad cultural trends that serve as a foundation for qualitative exploration, while qualitative findings can inform the design of quantitative instruments by uncovering emergent themes and variables. Such an integrated approach enables researchers to bridge the gap between macro-level patterns and micro-level experiences, creating a richer and more nuanced understanding of culture.

Future research should focus on developing frameworks and methodologies for effectively combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in cross-cultural studies. One potential direction is the use of mixed-methods research designs, which incorporate both paradigms in a single study to leverage their respective strengths. For instance, large-scale surveys could be complemented by in-depth interviews or ethnographic fieldwork to explore how statistical patterns manifest in specific contexts. Additionally, researchers should consider adopting longitudinal designs that capture cultural changes over time, addressing the static nature of many existing frameworks. By tracking both broad trends and individual experiences, such studies could provide a more dynamic and holistic view of culture in an increasingly globalized world.

Another critical area for future research is the development of new methodologies that transcend the traditional boundaries of quantitative and qualitative paradigms. The rapid pace of globalization, technological advancement, and cultural hybridization has created complex and fluid cultural landscapes that may not be adequately captured by existing methods. Emerging approaches, such as network analysis, computational linguistics, and participatory action research, offer innovative tools for studying culture in this new context. These methods could be particularly valuable for examining how cultural identities are constructed and negotiated in digital and transnational spaces, where traditional geographic and national boundaries are becoming less relevant.

In addition to its academic contributions, this analysis has significant implications for practice, particularly in the areas of cross-cultural management, education, and policy development. Combining the insights of Hofstede and Schreiter can help organizations design more effective training programs for multicultural teams, addressing both the broad cultural tendencies identified by Hofstede and the situational dynamics explored by Schreiter. For example, global companies could use Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a foundation for understanding general cultural tendencies in their target markets, while Schreiter's findings could inform strategies for managing specific intercultural challenges, such as communication barriers or differing workplace norms. Similarly, policymakers and educators could apply these insights to develop culturally sensitive curricula and policies that promote intercultural understanding and cooperation.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of Hofstede's and Schreiter's research underscores the importance of integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in cross-cultural studies. By combining the generalizability of quantitative methods with the contextual richness of qualitative inquiry, researchers can develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of culture. Such integration not only advances academic knowledge but also provides practical tools for navigating the complexities of globalization and intercultural interactions. As the field of cultural research continues to evolve, future studies should strive to bridge methodological divides, embrace innovation, and address the dynamic and multifaceted nature of culture in the 21st century.

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