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Cultural Communicative Styles: The Case of India and Indonesia

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Abstract

The present study highlights a number of similarities and differences among cultural communicative styles used in India versus Indonesia. The analysis is based on Hall's theory (1959, 1966, 1976, 1983) of high-context (HC) and low-context (LC) cultures, and Hofstede's (2008) cultural dimension of collectivism versus individualism. When viewed through the lens of Hall's theory, India and Indonesia can both be classified as HC cultures, although India appears to be moving in the direction of LC culture. When both cultures are observed via Hofstede's account of collectivism versus individualism, it is evident that Indonesia belongs to a collectivist culture, whereas India can be considered as both individualistic and collectivistic. There are marked differences in the ways that Indians and Indonesians interact, yet they also share a number of similarities, including respecting their elders and persevering in the accomplishment of tasks. This study also suggests how potential gaps between members of different cultures can be bridged by promoting intercultural acceptance.

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1. Introduction

Culture, cultural differences and similarities, and culture's antecedents have always been a hot research topic for many academicians and researchers, and this debate has gained considerable attention worldwide (Barkema, Chen, & Tsui, 2015; Guan & Li, 2017; Keaton & Giles, 2016). Culture can be defined as a social process of transferring or transmitting behavior that describes, defines, and directs people's way of living, communicated from one generation to the next (Keshtiari & Kuhlmann, 2016; Triandis, 1972). Culture can also be defined as "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group from another" (Hofstede, 1980, p. 25). It is referred to as innately surrounding every person, leading towards the formation of distinctive intellectual customs (Cho, Thyroff, Rapert, Park, & Lee, 2013). Different elements of humankind's mental practices and actions can be considered as universal. For instance, people's inclination towards their own heterogeneous in-group, pointing out individual differences that occur within a unit, while considering other communities as homogeneous or lacking individual differences (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). People also appear to have an innate tendency to fear out-group members, which may be a foundation for ethnocentrism, bias, violence, and even war (Buss, 2001). Therefore, cultural differences are very complex to recognize and understand because this involves specific mental software working between two cultures, which are based on intellectual understanding, knowledge, and distinct communicative styles (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Hall (1959) described culture as people's way of life—the total value of their understood behavioral patterns, perceptions, and material practices. Culture is very often instinctual, an unseen control mechanism constantly working in our minds (Hall, 1983). Context, meanwhile, can be characterized as the knowledge that encircles an occurrence, inextricably linked to the significance of that occurrence. Hall (1976) proposed categorizing cultures into high-context versus low-context cultures to better understand obvious differences in styles of communication that sometimes give rise to cultural problems. More precisely, rather than

being divided into binary terms between high and low context, Hall and Hall (1990) argue that "the world's cultures can be compared on a scale from high to low" (p. 6). According to the high/low context theory (Hall, 1959, 1976), individuals maintain communication styles based on social influence and relationships. Cross-cultural communication studies reveal that different values of cultures may lead to several differences and similarities in communication styles (Barkema, Chen, & Tsui, 2015; de Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Konings, & Schouten, 2013; Thovuttikul, Ohmoto, & Nishida, 2019). Meanwhile, Hofstede (1991) built on this model to describe differences in culture through a range of relevant scales, such as the attitudes and behaviors associated with individualism and collectivism, and the attitudes and behaviors associated with masculinity versus femininity. In line with these specific concepts, this study seeks to examine whether there are interconnections between culture, context, and behaviors (Leung & Morris, 2015), cultural communication styles (Culpeper & Kan, 2019; Thovuttikul et al., 2018; Ward, Ravlin, Klaas, Ployhart, & Buchan, 2016), and differences and similarities cross-culturally (Guan & Li, 2017; Vorobyov, Rochanavibhata, & Marian, 2019; Winskel, 2010).

The study is based on the concepts of Hall's theory (1959, 1966, 1976, 1983) of high-context (HC) and low-context (LC) cultures, and Hofstede's (1997, 2008) related dimension of collectivism versus individualism. Hall (1976) categorised culture into HC and LC to understand different communication styles. On the other hand, Hofstede's dimension conceptualised the extent to which individuals of a specific culture see themselves as embedded in their group settings. Furthermore, the study uses the concept of 'communication style' defined as the way in which individuals express themselves, and the methods they use to relay information to others. Cultural issues arising from differences in such styles can be traced back to sociological factors, which both inform and are informed by those styles; relevant factors include national identity, religious affiliation, and local or national customs (Keaton & Giles, 2016; Keshtiari & Kuhlmann, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to examine the cultural communicative styles cross-culturally and to prove that people from

different cultures communicate differently, and for this reason, this study considers India and Indonesia as a sample. Although both India and Indonesia can be regarded as HC cultures (Barrett, 2010), the paper investigates the similarities and differences in the communication styles used by the two nations. The paper also suggests how potential gaps between members of such distinct cultures can be bridged by promoting intercultural acceptance (Hiratsuka, Suzuki, & Pusina, 2019).

In today's globalized world, a number of studies have been conducted to understand culture and to identify similarities and differences between different cultures, considering several factors and antecedents of culture (Bai, 2016; Culpeper & Kan, 2019; Guan & Li, 2017; Keaton & Giles, 2016; Vorobyov et al., 2019; Yuan, Liao, & Bazarova, 2019). However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous studies have considered the cultural communication styles used by Indians versus Indonesians. Thus, the study presents the following research questions:

1. In the terms afforded by Hall's HC-LC continuum, what similarities and differences are there in the cultural communicative styles used in India and Indonesia?
2. In the terms afforded by Hofstede's related continuum of collectivism versus individualism, what similarities and differences are there in the cultural communicative styles used in India and Indonesia?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Culture

In today's globalized world, it is very difficult to explain the definition of "culture", as it has different meanings across different disciplines and contexts (Keshtiari & Kuhlmann, 2016). In this study, culture is defined as "the wrapping of human behavior which contains attitudes, norms, values, and beliefs that influences groups of people to think, interact, behave, and respond in a similar way" (Keshtiari & Kuhlmann, 2016; Triandis, 1972). Cross-

cultural researchers define culture as "the collective programming of the mind" (Guan & Li, 2017; Hofstede, 1980, p. 25).

2.2. Hall's HC and LC Cultural Taxonomy

Hall (1976) categorised cultures into HC versus LC cultures, in order to better comprehend obvious differences in communication styles, and the cultural problems to which contrasting styles can sometimes give rise. The positioning of culture on the scale stretching between HC and LC is determined by how its representatives deliver, obtain, and reply to messages, and also by their societal interpretation of relationships, social groupings, and management of time. Encoding messages as "covert" or "overt" can play a major role in deciding whether a given style stems from (and helps reinforce) an HC or LC orientation. The continuum of HC and LC cultures refers to the extent to which communication is inherent and requires an understanding of the context. HC cultures lead to sharing long-term relationships; they rely more on verbal and non-verbal signs for active communication (Ward et al., 2016). On the other hand, LC cultures depend upon the explicit style of communication, which shows exact meanings of the words used; individuals are likely to express and transmit effective communication and rely less on contextual signs and relationship-building (Bai, 2016; Ward et al., 2016). Eastern and Western societies are classified differently: Eastern societies are generally categorised as HC cultures; on the other hand, Western societies are referred as LC cultures (Bai, 2016; Ward et al., 2016). In line with these arguments, this study focuses on cultural communication styles differences (e.g., Hall, 1959, 1976). Furthermore, this study also focuses on cross-cultural boundaries, which may limit and have an impact on cultural communications styles. Meanwhile, research factoring in Hofstede's additional dimension has suggested that collectivist cultures most typically fall within the category of HC cultures, whereas individualist cultures can typically be classified as LC cultures.

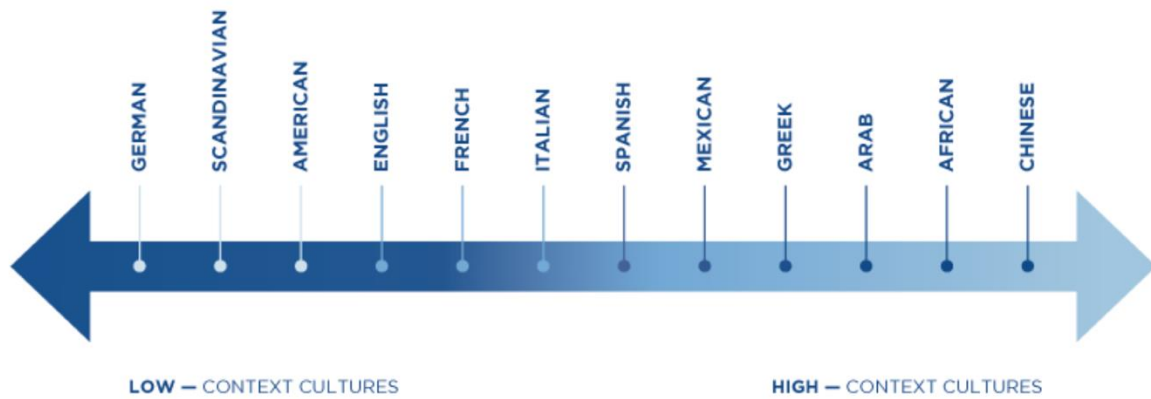


Figure 1

HC vs. LC Cultures. Retrieved from <https://online.seu.edu/articles/high-and-low-context-cultures/>

In Hall and Hall's (1990) scale, Indonesia and India are not listed, but in the present analysis, the two countries are classified as HC, through information collected by empirical and theoretical research on indicators of HC and LC cultures.

2.2.1. *Styles of Communication: HC Versus LC Cultures*

Communication plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of expertise in any field, and individuals' expertise can be judged by the way in which they communicate (Keaton & Giles, 2016; Yuan, Liao, & Bazarova, 2019). Communication styles are defined as "the ways in which an individual interacts and sends verbal, para-verbal and nonverbal cues in social interactions, denoting 1) who he or she is or wants to be, 2) how he or she tends to relate to people with whom he or she interacts and 3) in what way his or her messages should usually be interpreted" (de Vries et al., 2013). Studies argue that different cultural cues can define cross-cultural differences and similarities in communication styles and that several different situational factors affect individuals' communication behavior (Yuan et al., 2019). Cross-cultural communication studies found that Europeans and Americans are considered to have assertive communication styles, whereas Asians have indirect communication styles (Barkema, Chen, & Tsui, 2015).

In HC cultures, communication style is conditioned by the close proximity of

relationships between people, a highly structured social network, and agreed-upon societal norms (Kim, Pan, & Park, 1998). HC cultures are more dependent upon non-verbal communication and transmit information through informal relationships as well (Bai, 2016; Ward et al., 2016). Within HC cultures, internal context is typically ingrained in members' knowledge, so not everything needs to be stated explicitly in writing or when articulated in face-to-face interaction. In an HC culture, listeners should be capable of reading 'between the lines', to grasp the unspoken, through their understanding of the context. Hall (1976) stated that in HC interaction or communication, most of the requisite knowledge is either discoverable within the physical scene or is internalized, with proportionately less of that knowledge being found in the transmitted aspect of the message. Individuals generally speak linearly in an HC setting, so the speaker is rarely interrupted. According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), communication is indirect, mutually supportive, reserved, and subtle. The communication in an HC culture entails more knowledge being lodged in the physical setting, with greater reliance on non-verbal elements than the oral aspects (Hall, 1976, 1979).

By contrast, participants in an LC setting rely more heavily on language as the vehicle for their production and interpretation of messages. During interactions, members of such cultures will expect verbal clarification if something is not clear. The information should be present in the communicated message itself, to

compensate for what is lacking in the context both internally and externally (Hall, 1976). In an LC culture, more emphasis is on effective communication than on relationship protection (Bai, 2016; Ward et al., 2016). LC culture is defined by straightforward and direct interaction and frequent use of words. Communication is clear, accurate, dynamic, accessible, and centered on thoughts or motives (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

2.2.2. *Communication Issues in HC Versus LC Cultures*

According to HC and LC theory (Hall, 1959, 1976), HC communicators are more concerned with how a message is delivered or conveyed, and they avoid conflicts. HC communicators are more sensitive towards the in-group position with their colleagues. On the other hand, LC communicators are believers in the effective exchange of communication without considering relationship safeguarding (Bai, 2016; Ward et al., 2016).

In an HC culture, individuals tend to have implicit ways of communication, more than in an LC culture. Individuals in an HC culture typically rely on their background, social rank, relationships, and a variety of other details, including religious identification, to attribute significance to an occurrence, and they are more comfortable with the communication of emotions, feelings, and indirect non-verbal cues (Ward et al., 2016). By contrast, in an LC culture, individuals pay attention to receiving and sending information, using explicit words (Ward et al., 2016), and generally prioritize individualism over collectivism. Individualism is associated with representatives who prioritize individual needs and objectives over the needs of their community (Pryor, Butler, & Boehringer, 2005). Another significant difference between these two types of cultures concerns politeness. Politeness has been considered one of the most researched areas in language and communication (Sadeghghli & Niroomand, 2016); Brown and Levinson's (1987) study in this area has gained considerable attention. Politeness can be considered as an assessment relating to an individual's behavior towards a particular condition (Shafiee Nahrkhalaji, Khorasani, & Rashidi Ashjerdi, 2013). In an LC culture, it is considered polite to ask a lot of questions,

which may seem intrusive and perhaps even insulting in an HC culture.

2.3. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions was based on a study of IBM workers in over fifty countries. He defined five dimensions or 'problem areas' that reflect discrepancies among national cultures (Hofstede, 1997):

- (1) Power distance (superior/subordinate relationships): This refers to the hierarchies occurring between people with less power in organizations between people with differing power in organizations. High-power distance cultures are generally more concerned about inequalities in wealth or position; on the other hand, low-power distance cultures request and ask justifications for such disparities.
- (2) Avoidance of uncertainty: Society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity versus willingness for certainty.
- (3) Individualism versus collectivism: The extent to which people are categorized into interconnected groups versus people being categorized into interconnected groups.
- (4) Masculinity versus femininity: How gender affects different roles.
- (5) Long-term orientation: The extent to which society's beliefs are established, versus short-term customs and traditions.

Studies which identify cultural differences repeatedly use Hofstede's cultural dimension to examine behaviors and communication styles across nations (Bai, 2016; Guan & Li, 2017; Thovuttikul et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2019). Studies across various disciplines use the individualism-collectivism continuum (Guan & Li, 2017; Keshtari & Kuhlmann, 2016; Thovuttikul et al., 2019) to identify cultural differences (Bai, 2016). This study will investigate the individualism versus collectivism dimension in Hofstede's model in order to identify differences and similarities between Indian and Indonesian communication styles. Individualism (as opposed to collectivism) refers to some people's inclination to belong to a loosely affiliated community where individuality and autonomy are highly valued. Collectivist systems, in contrast, put more emphasis on interdependent social units, like the family, than on the individual. Employees in individualistic environments want the

flexibility to work independently and want fulfilling work—work that is sometimes considered more valuable than personal relationships as such—to help them achieve self-actualization. Unquestioned organizational frameworks in collectivist cultures are vital for the coordination of employee groups and the solidarity of the collective itself.

2.4. Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Cross-cultural studies have varied findings relating to communication styles in HC and LC cultures, as well as in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Different cultural orientations define differences and similarities in cultural communication styles (Barkema, Chen, & Tsui, 2015). Several cross-cultural studies find differences in content and communication styles, such as mother-child dyad communication differences cross-culturally, and communication patterns of bilingual and monolingual mother-child dyads and the differences between Thailand and the United States (Vorobyov et al., 2019). Another study compares narrative conversation styles in caretaker-child dyads between Thailand and Australia (Winkel, 2010). One study compares different advertisements from two cultures

(Bai, 2016); other studies examine family communication patterns cross-culturally (Guan & Li, 2017), explore cultural differences based on communication styles (Yuan et al., 2019), and explore culturally influenced communications patterns cross-culturally (Thovuttikul et al., 2019). In the current study setting, we seek to examine communication style and content, and the similarities and differences between Indians and Indonesians on the basis of Hall's HC and LC continuum and Hofstede's related continuum of collectivism versus individualism.

As shown in Table 1, decisions made by single persons are valued in an individualistic society, while group decisions hold more value in a collectivist society. Individuals in individualistic societies are never expected to take the viewpoint of anyone else while attempting to make decisions. A study by Hofstede (2010) argues that most Western nations are individualistic, while most Asian nations are collectivist. Those nations that score high on individualism are inclined toward individual responsibility, and individuals in those places will form their own opinions and be driven by their own desires and internal motives.

Table 1
Differences Between Collectivist and Individualist Societies

Differences	Individualism	Collectivism
1	Everyone is supposed to take care of him- or herself and his or her immediate family only.	People are born into extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty
2	"I" -consciousness	"We" -consciousness
3	Right of privacy	Stress on belonging
4	Speaking one's mind is healthy	Harmony should always be maintained
5	Others classified as individuals	Others classified as in-group or out-group
6	Personal opinion expected: one person vote	Opinions and votes predetermined by in-group
7	Transgression of norms leads to guilt feelings	Transgression of norms leads to shame feelings
8	Language in which the word "I" is indispensable	Language in which word "I" is avoided
9	Purpose of education is learning, how to learn	Purpose of education is learning, how to do
10	Task prevails over relationship	Relationship prevails over task

Note. Adapted from Hofstede, G., 2011. Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1), p. 8. Copyright 2011 by IACP.

3. Methodology

This study used empirical and theoretical research to establish and frame key investigative questions. This study also employed the library research method to obtain information on the topics of culture, HC versus LC cultures, individualism versus collectivism, and the negotiation of intercultural differences. Moreover, this study sought to contribute to research on cross-cultural learning, sociocultural interaction, and globalism. The approach used combines theoretical and empirical, review-based research. No previous research has contrasted the communication styles and other cultural characteristics of Indonesia and India in a single paper, thereby making this research considerably interesting. The empirical evidence obtained in this study was based on observations and personal experiences. The first author, being an Indian, has been living in Indonesia for thirteen years and has actively interacted with Indonesians. Therefore, the supporting data for the cultural communicative styles in India are mainly based on her intuitive sight. As for the communicative styles in Indonesia, the empirical data are based on the second author's intuitive judgment and the personal observations of both authors.

To answer the first research question, the authors applied Hall's (1959, 1966, 1976, 1983) taxonomy to identify the similarities and differences in the cultural communicative styles used in India and Indonesia. For the second research question, Hofstede's (1980, 1991, 1997, 2010) cultural dimensions of collectivism versus individualism were applied to recognize the similarities and differences between the two cultures.

4. Results

4.1. Communication Styles in India

India is a multiple-language subcontinent, with most Indians being bilingual or even tri-lingual.

In casual conversations, blended and intricate use of different languages is a common characteristic of Indian communication. The SIL Ethnologist cites 415 different languages in India, 24 of which are spoken by more than 1 million native speakers and 114 by more than 10,000 native speakers (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2006). Hindi is the main language, and Bengali is the second-largest language in India. English is the second language of 100 million speakers and also the language of politics and government. Indian English is used primarily by educated members of society and has continued to serve both as a bridge to other parts of the world and as a point of connection among the various speech communities within India (Zaidman, 2001).

3.1.1. India through the lens of Hall's Theory of HC vs. LC cultures

Predominantly, Indian styles of communication adhere to the discourse norms of HC culture, in Hall's sense of the term (see Table 2). In most Indian speech communities, people who talk to persons older than themselves use polite forms. For instance, among Hindi speakers, younger siblings never address their older siblings by their first name, but rather use *bhaiya* (elder brother) and *didi* (elder sister) instead. Indian English is both business-like and sensitive to the nuances of conversational interaction. It is used respectfully and with a sense of the importance of getting the language right (Zaidman, 2001). An instance of how individuals demonstrate their regard for another is through the use of the honorific suffix *jee/ji*, which is used frequently by those referring to elders or anyone deserving of respect—e.g., in a locution such as “Deliver this parcel to Gupta-ji.” Elaborate words and phrases with several meanings sometimes lead to confusion between Indians and people from other LC cultures (Zaidman, 2001).

Table 2
Cultures and their HC/LC Classification in Empirical Studies

Classifications			
HC Cultures		LC Cultures	
Countries	Empirical studies	Countries	Empirical studies
Argentina	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)	Australia	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003); Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey and Nishida (1996) (-)
Brazil	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)	Austria	Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004); Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)
Britain	Djursaa (1994) (+)	Belgium	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)
China	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003); Kim, Pan and Park (1998) (+)	Britain	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003); Djursaa (1994) (-)
Colombia	Wansink, Sonka and Cheney (2002)	Canada	Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004); Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)
Ecuador	Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004)	Denmark	Djursaa (1994) (°)
France	Biswas, Olsen and Carlet (1992)	Finland	Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004)
Hong kong	Adair (2003); Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004)	France	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)
India	Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004); Kapoor, Hughes, Baldwin and Blue (2003) (-)	Germany	Adair (2003); Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004); Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003); Djursaa (1994) (+)
Israel	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)	Israel	Adair (2003)
Italy	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)	New Zealand	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)
Japan	Adair (2003); Taylor, Franke and Maynard (2000); Kitayama and Ishii (2002); Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003); Okazaki (2004); Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey and Nishida (1996); Kim and Heyman, (1996) (-)	Russia	Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004); Wansink, Sonka and Cheney (2002)
Korea	Miracle, Chang and Taylor (1992); Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003); Thomas (1998) (-); Kim, Pan and Park (1998) (+); Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey and Nishida (1996); Kim and Heyman (1996) (-)	Sweden	Adair (2003)
Mexico	Dozier, Husted and McMahan (1998);	Switzerland	Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004)

	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)		
Philippines	Mintu-Wimsatt and Gassenheimer, (2000); Callow and Schiffman (2002)	US	Adair (2003); Mintu-Wimsatt and Gassenheimer (2000); Miracle, Chang and Taylor (1992); Taylor, Franke and Maynard (2000); Kitayama and Ishii (2002); Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004); Dozier, Husted and McMahon (1998); Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003); Okazaki (2004); Kapoor, Hughes, Baldwin and Blue (2003) (-); Thomas (1998) (-); Knutson, Komolsevin, Chatiket, and Smith (2003); Callow and Schiffman (2002); Leets (2003) (°); Kim, Pan and Park 1998); Biswas, Olsen and Carlet (1992); Dsilva and Whyte (1998); Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey and Nishida (1996) (-)
Russia	Adair (2003)		
Spain	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)		
Taiwan	Koeszegi, Vetschera and Kersten, (2004)		
Thailand	Adair (2003); Knutson, Komolsevin, Chatiket, and Smith (2003)		
Turkey	Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003)		
Vietnam	Dsilva and Whyte (1998)		

Note. Reprinted from “Beyond culture or beyond control?” by M. G. Kittler, D. Rygl, & A. Mackinnon, 2011 Reviewing the use of Hall’s high-/low-context concept. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 11(1), p. 75. Copyright 2011 by Sage Publishing.

For Indians, interaction is aimed at preserving social harmony and building ties, and not at exchanging accurate information, at least in many communicative settings. However, Indian people may now be advancing towards LC culture. Chella (2007) asserts that the four Ts—technology, trade, travel, and television—could be linked to this development. An orientation toward dialogue and strong support for direct communication is solid motivational factors for Indians to drift toward LC culture in their styles of communication. Therefore, India can now be categorized as having both an HC and an LC culture, or a culture that is HC in certain domains and LC in other respects.

Kapoor, Hughes, Baldwin, and Blue (2003) observed differences in the HC/LC interaction by investigating exchanges involving European

and American university students studying in the US, on the one hand, and Indian university students studying in India, on the other hand. The results showed that the two categories of students differed from each other both at the level of individual speakers and at the level of the larger groups. The Indian data set revealed more indirect communication and a stronger reliance on verbal silence than the US sample. The Indians rated themselves as more collectivistic and preferred more silence and indirect interaction than the European American students. In contrast to earlier theorization, Indians also considered themselves as more dramatic and more individualistic. These findings indicate that Indian communication is now more similar to LC culture than previously assumed.

4.1.2. India through the Lens of Hofstede's Dimension of Individualism versus Collectivism

Individualism relates to communities or cultures in which individuals' interests predominate over the group's interests (Hofstede, 2010; Eslamieh, 2018). Collectivism emphasizes collective strategic goals, group rights, cooperation, collective association, and unity (Kulkarni et al., 2010). As shown in Figure 2, India has an intermediate score of 48 for individualism and is both a collectivistic and an individualistic society (Hofstede, 2010). The collectivist aspect means that there is a strong preference for relating to a wider social structure, whereby individuals are supposed to behave according to the greater good of the identified in-group(s). In such cases, individual acts are affected by different factors such as perceptions of and attitudes toward one's immediate and extended family, friends, colleagues, and other broader social circles with which one is associated.

On the whole, Indians are quite family-oriented and faithful to their community and their place

of work. Indian culture is a hierarchical system, in which all responsibilities and obligations derive from being a family member, a member of a group, an employee, or an employer (Lewis, 1999). Indians are extremely collectivist in their community group, but they are individualistic when interacting with people from other countries (Lewis, 1999).

Indian society's individualistic dimension can be seen in its dominant religion, Hinduism. Hindus believe in the chain of death and reincarnation, and the form that each resurrection takes depends on how the person lived their previous life. People are thus independently responsible for the manner in which they live their lives and the effect this will have on their next life (India, n.d.). This emphasis on individualism cross-cuts other, more collectivist, tendencies of Indian society, in a way that contributes to its intermediate position on this dimension—such that it can be regarded as both individualistic and collectivistic. It should be noted, however, that Indian culture is currently being altered through urbanization.

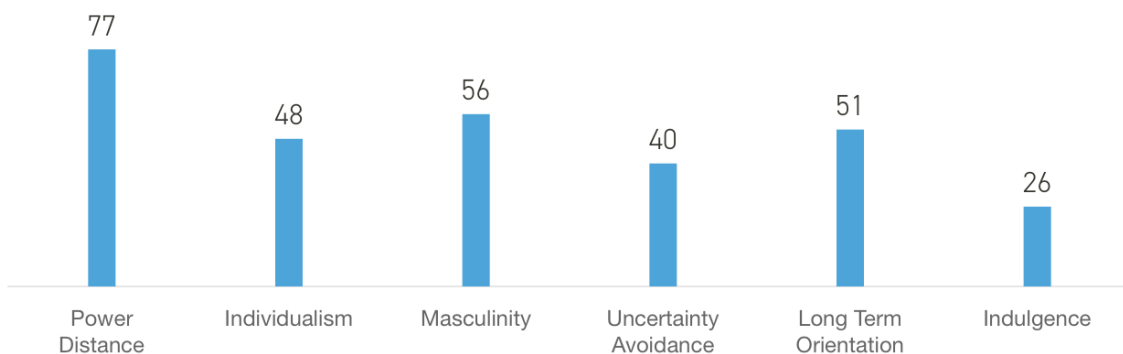


Figure 2

Individualism in India. Retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/india/>

4.2. Communicative Styles in Indonesia

Indonesia comprises more than 17,500 islands, of which 6,000 are inhabited. With an overall population of over 250 million people, it is home to the world's biggest Muslim population. Indonesia's religious norms, along with other cultural norms, play a significant role in everyday life and collective practices of the country. The national motto of Indonesia is *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* or *Unity in Diversity*, which highlights the diverse ethnic and linguistic groups of people throughout the

country ("Cultures of Indonesia - Unity in Diversity", 2020). Featuring over 700 local languages, Indonesia has a national language called *Bahasa Indonesia*. Being the official language in the country, *Bahasa Indonesia* is now a lingua franca in many different regions. Although Indonesia is a multilingual as well as a multicultural country, this report will focus on common practices across Indonesia's communication styles.

4.2.1. *Indonesia through the Lens of Hall's Theory of HC vs. LC Cultures*

Indonesia leans significantly toward the high context-end of the spectrum when examined via Hall's taxonomy. Indonesians generally have a quiet, indirect way of communicating, and for this reason, they are sometimes described as 'beating around the bush' when communicating. Indonesian people prefer indirect communication and conceal negative feedback. In Indonesian culture, when a man intends to marry, the parents of that man will deliver the proposal to the parents of the woman the suitor seeks to marry. This is similar to the norm practiced in India, yet Indians, by comparison with Indonesians, are more direct.

Generally speaking, Indonesians rarely interrupt an interlocutor when they are talking (Gesteland, 2002). For many Indonesians, interrupting is considered disrespectful or rude, especially if it is done by someone who has a lower social status or has less power. Some scholars have conducted studies on interruptions in some Indonesian conversational discourse, such as seminar settings (Jakob & Pertiwi, 2019) and talk shows (Faizah, 2015). The interruptions in seminar settings are mostly simple interruptions such as seeking clarification or giving an explanation, while those in the talk shows indicate that the one who has more power (usually male) produced more interruptions.

Social harmony is regarded as crucial (Lewis, 2005), and disputes or altercations should be avoided (Gesteland, 2002). Indonesian culture is hierarchical, and it is thus necessary to show regard for older people or for people who hold a higher social status. The use of the proper title when greeting persons of higher status is viewed as a sign of respect. The use of formal and informal registers of language quite often indicate 'polite' versus 'rude' behavior. For example, speaking too informally in a formal situation or to someone of higher social status is considered impolite. Conversely, speaking too formally in an informal setting or to a close friend can also be considered rude (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014), as well as inappropriate. Prolonged eye contact will usually make many Indonesians uneasy (Gesteland, 2002), and could be interpreted as a sign of aggressive behavior.

In general, Indonesians do not display extreme emotion (Frijda, 2013; Lewis, 2005). It is also common for them to smile or laugh when they are anxious or confused. Displays of impatience, annoyance, or bad temper could cause one or the other party to lose face and disrupt harmony (Gesteland, 2002). Indonesians normally value people who speak quietly, and noisy people may be construed as being confrontational.

4.2.2. *Indonesia through the Lens of Hofstede's Dimension of Individualism versus Collectivism*

Indonesia's low rating of 14 for individualism (see Figure 3) means that the system is strongly collectivist (Indonesia, n.d.). People view themselves as part of a community rather than as individuals and show a strong preference for adhering to the established social paradigms of the group to which they belong. This is evident in the role of the family in social relationships. The strong relationship between children and their parents is another example of a collectivist ideology in Indonesia. Indonesian children are devoted to their parents and wish to make life easier for them. Adult children desire to take care of their parents and give them support in their old age.

More generally, the need to retain cohesion, in part through face-saving actions, is linked to the collectivist tendencies of Indonesian culture, and also its strong emphasis on differences of social status. Face can be defined as a person's integrity, respect, and appreciation in regard to their social accomplishments. It relates to one's image and position in the social hierarchy (Dong & Lee, n.d.). The collectivist communicative style of Indonesia privileges face-saving and stigmatizes face-threatening actions.

It should also be observed that, in the case of a collectivist society, when business is conducted at a personal, one-to-one level, human relationships should be kept in the foreground, since such relationships are considered more important than profit-making as such. As collectivists, Indonesians adhere to this value hierarchy. In a business setting, therefore, it is crucial to create and maintain a personal connection with one's Indonesian counterpart in order to have smooth collaboration.

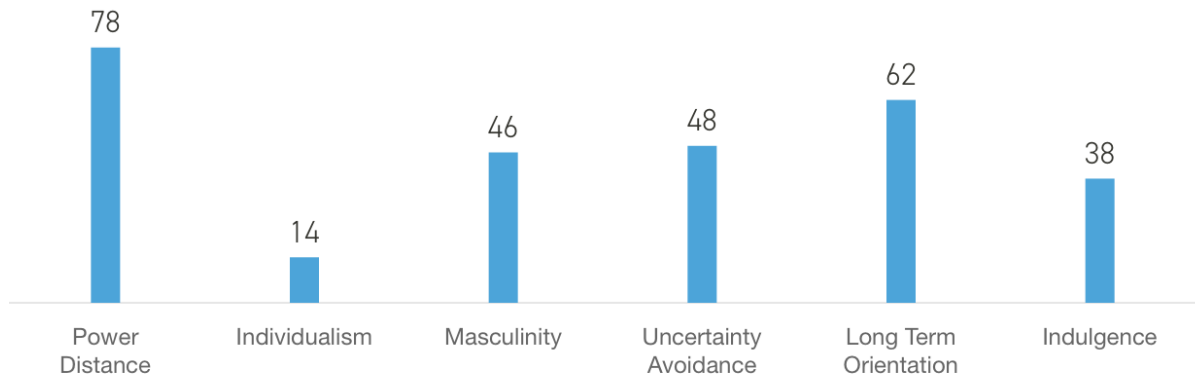


Figure 3

Individualism in Indonesia. Retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country/indonesia/>

5. Discussion

5.1. Summary of Cultural-Communicative Similarities and Differences between India and Indonesia

Both India and Indonesia are HC cultures; however, India seems to be trending toward LC culture. Indonesia, with a score of 14 for individualism in Figure 3, is clearly a collectivist society. By contrast, with a score of 48 for individualism (Figure 2), India can be considered to be both a collectivist and an individualistic culture. More precisely, Indians

are collectivistic within their communities, but individualistic vis-à-vis outsiders. Thus, as can be seen from Table 3, there are more cultural-communicative differences between the two nations than similarities. Indonesians display an abundance of politeness, while Indians appear to be more assertive. Indonesian people tend to think without speaking because they do not like being disturbed or interrupted; Indian speakers think out loud and accept interruptions. In Lewis's (2005) terms, Indonesians tend to be reactive, while Indians tend to be both multi-active and reactive.

Table 3

Summary of cultural communicative styles between India and Indonesia

Indian communicative styles	Indonesian communicative styles	Similar (S) / Different (D)
Extroverted	Mostly introverted	S
Interruptive	Non-interruptive	D
Use silence	Use silence	S
Think out loud	Think without speaking	D
Talkative	Good listeners	D
Overt body language	Covert body language	D
Multi-active and reactive	Reactive	D
Dialogue orientation	Distrust loud-talkers	D
Hierarchical	Hierarchical	S
High respect for elders	High respect for elders	S
Collectivistic in local group; individualistic with outsiders	Collectivistic	S and D
HC culture moving toward LC culture	High context culture	S and D

5.2. Accepting Cross-Cultural Differences

Successful cross-cultural interaction involves the appreciation of distinctive cultural values. Even if one has knowledge of differences among one's own and another's beliefs, customs, and values, one may nonetheless find

it difficult to adjust to these differences in a cross-cultural context. Knowledge of the potential barriers to cross-cultural communication barriers is the first step towards accepting—and negotiating—cross-cultural differences. Barna (1994) marks out six barriers: perception of similarities, dialect

differences, non-verbal misinterpretations, preconceptions and stereotyping, propensity to analyze in a detached manner, and high anxiety. Learning to overcome such barriers contributes to the development of cross-cultural communication skills. Although this study has revealed some cultural differences between Indians and Indonesians when it comes to communicative styles, these differences can be bridged through a mutual appreciation of the two cultures involved.

In line with previous studies in the literature that define differences and similarities cross-culturally, and considering different aspects of culture and communications styles (Guan & Li, 2017; Thovuttikul et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2019), this study presents varied findings. When viewed through the lens of Hall's theory (Hall 1959, 1966, 1976, 1983), India and Indonesia can both be classified as an HC culture, although India appears to be moving in the direction of an LC culture. When the two cultures are observed via Hofstede's (2008) continuum of collectivism versus individualism, it is evident that Indonesia is a collectivist culture, whereas India is both individualistic and collectivistic. As the study has also demonstrated, in the investigation of different cultures, aspects of Hall's theory of HC vs. LC cultures prove transculturally relevant, particularly when supplemented with other theories and models, such as those of Hofstede (1991, 1997, 2010) and Lewis (1999).

There are marked differences in the way Indians and Indonesians interact, yet they share a number of similarities, including respecting their elders and persevering in the accomplishment of tasks. More research is needed to explore both of these cultures, as the literature available on the topic of cultural-communicative differences is limited in this context. More generally, people from different cultures communicate in ways that could lead to misconceptions (Keaton & Giles, 2016; Thovuttikul et al., 2019). Communication spanning different cultures is a challenge. However, although cross-cultural communication might involve stresses and strains for participants, it also provides an opportunity for them to gain insights into other cultures. When cross-cultural interaction fails, prejudices are strengthened, beliefs are narrowed, and misconceptions increase. Coming to terms with

the complexity of cross-cultural interactions is a prerequisite for engaging in successful intercultural communication with people from different backgrounds. In turn, globalization calls for more and more intercultural communication and cooperation.

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