RESOURCE · METHODS TOOLKIT · CO:RE AT TUNI ·
PUBLISHED: 12 MAY 2022

Culturally specific vs. culturally universal

A **culture-specific** approach (aligns with an <u>emic</u>   approach) to the phenomena of interest is based on the idea that all the concepts which we study are based on the specific cultural understanding of the participants. They are the everyday creators of those phenomena that the researcher is interested in. Therefore, the participants of a study are asked how they would describe phenomena of interest or how they would define it in their own words (especially in new areas of research). Culture-specific research also generates ideas about what cultural universals can be drawn from the data.

A **culture-universal** approach (aligns with an etic approach and cross-cultural approach) is based on the notion of cultural universals. A cultural universal is a social element, behavioural pattern, human trait, or institution that is common to all <u>human cultures</u>   worldwide and is already defined by the researcher before the study begins. In short, behaviours or categories that occur in all cultures are cultural universals.

A **mixed approach** (both culture-specific and culture-universal) is also possible and would provide a rich data set with several types of data. A mixed approach in this context refers to the possibility to do research in consecutive stages (culture specific stage followed by culturally universal stage (Jane Punnett et al., 2017)).

Although the culture-specific and culture-universal approaches may seem like two different approaches, cross-cultural research results can be more meaningfully structured when the researcher is aware of culture specifics when coding certain cultural universals. For example, in every culture it is possible to code quite similarly what is extremely moral and what is extremely immoral behaviour. However, when only these categories are used, coding the behaviours that are somewhere between those extremes as moral or immoral may depend highly on the cultural background of the coder (Buckley et al., 2014).

Pros and cons of culture-specific approach

Pros

Culture-specific approach provides careful documentation and analysis of a cultural setting or a phenomenon that enables to understand this setting or phenomenon

Culture-specific approach is often a qualitative approach that enables to find patterns that may enable generalizations and the emergence of new concepts.

Cons

The downside of the culture-specific approach is that planning of data collection must be very thoughtful and it requires a lot of experience in order to gather the material that is important and useful.

The data analysis of the culture specifics requires a lot of human labour and may remain vague. Also, the researcher bias (how one prefers to see the situations under study) may be influencing results.

Sometimes it is positive (improving understanding of the culture specifics) and sometimes it may have negative influence (providing only one side of the story).

Pros and cons of culture-universal approach

Pros

Culture-universal approach is useful approach for developing of general theories and concepts of children's online behaviour.

The approach of asking the same thing exactly in the same way in all cultures enables to research the essence or scientific laws of a phenomenon.

It is also useful for researching the variations of the variable of interest.

Cons

The minus of this approach is that the meaningful relationships within and between culture-specific concepts can be lost.

⌄ Examples

⌄ References

Authors

TEAM MEMBER, CO:RE AT TUNI
Iiris Tuvi

Iiris Tuvi, PhD, is a post-doctoral Research Fellow a the Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences of Tampere University. She has long experience in experimental psychology and methods involving psychometrics and data analysis. Currently working on methods used to research children in digital environments.

CO:RE AT TUNI
Methods

The team at the Faculty of Information Technology and Communication of TUNI identifies, develops and provides access to resources on qualitative, quantitative and mixed research methods together with evaluating their validity in research practice. These resources are collated in the CO:RE methods toolkit that cross-references resources from the evidence base, the compass for research ethics, and the theory toolkit, to give users tools to apply to their individual research contexts.