



Research Article

Pluralism in Cultural Research: Methodological Critique through Interdisciplinary Lenses

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Abstract

Cultural research is a dynamic field of social science research that investigates the intricate relationships between culture, human behaviour, and societal structures through diverse theoretical frameworks and methodologies. This systematic review aligns various theories such as positivism, constructivism, symbolic interactionism, cultural materialism, postcolonial theory, and feminist cultural studies, appreciating the interdisciplinary approach to understanding culture. As cultural research is more fluid and sensitive, it belongs to the subjective world in multi-real contexts. There must be more than one theoretical or blanket approach to address the complex cultural constructs and social interactions. It is shifting from a pure disciplinary or theoretical perspective to a more interdisciplinary and plural perspective. Therefore, the results highlight the crucial need to embrace methodological diversity, as it significantly enriches the interpretation of cultural studies, providing profound insights. The significant findings suggest cultural research is a diverse, methodologically plural and complex domain. By integrating different theoretical approaches from an interdisciplinary perspective, cultural research in future must gain profound insights into emerging cultural contexts and their narratives on individuals and communities, underscoring the field's relevance from post-structural and post-modern contexts too.

Keywords

Cultural research, interdisciplinary approach, theoretical frameworks, methodological pluralism

1. Introduction

Cultural research, a vast and rapidly expanding scientific field, plays a crucial role in understanding the intricate effects of culture on human lives, actions, and interactions. It delves into a wide array of intriguing questions, focusing on the

theories, assumptions, behaviours, and artefacts of the diverse cultures that exist today (Bryman, 2016; Van de Vijver & Leung, 2021). By employing various theories and methods, cultural researchers can explore different cultural behaviours

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across a spectrum of cultural contexts, providing a profound understanding of how cultural issues shape human relations. The application of cultural research is instrumental in deciphering how culture establishes guidelines and patterns that influence individuals and groups, thereby shaping societal roles and interactions (Chilisa, 2019; Geertz, 1973). However, the scope of cultural research is increasingly becoming large and contested. Moreover, the process and attributes of its shifting from disciplinary to interdisciplinary domain is less addressed in academic research.

Cultural research perspectives have expanded a lot, and many theories have been used to analyze culture. Distinguished theories, including symbolic interactionism, cultural materialism, and post-colonial theory, are best highlighted as theoretical frameworks so that they can be used in analyzing culture-social interaction. Symbolic interactionism reveals the importance of symbols and meanings, making it easier for researchers to study how people build their selves within culture. On the other hand, cultural materialism negates cultural influences of other aspects, such as the material condition and economic factors, to present a cultural analysis of culture and social institutions. On the other hand, post-colonial theory will continue to condemn the post-colonial impact on culture and identity and restore power relations in determining parts of culture. In discussing these and other theoretical perspectives, this paper can systematically review the major approaches in cultural investigation and contribute to understanding their development and applicability to current research.

Conventional cultural research is based on methodologies that cannot track the complex state of cultural exchanges in the continually integrating global society. This underlines the need for fresh thinking that is both technologically enabled and transdisciplinary to yield richer empirical understandings of emergent cultural processes particularly regarding globalization and digital influences. In this context, the primary goal of this paper is to identify key cultural research theories and methodologies, elucidating their contributions to the field and their ability to address cultural complexities. This paper aims to map the theoretical trajectory of cultural research by examining culture in the context of social organization, power relations, and subjection. It also advocates for a transdisciplinary approach that broadens the understanding of culture and its significance in a global context. In an increasingly globalized world, marked by technological advancements and shifts in the cultural landscape, the adoption of a comprehensive model of culture studies is crucial for effectively navigating and analyzing the intricate relationship between culture and behaviour. At the end, this research emphasizes the dynamic interplay between globalization and digital influences, particularly from an interdisciplinary perspective, shaping cultural identities, narratives and practices in diverse contexts.

2. Methods

The present study is a systematic review and follows the PRISMA guideline (Moher et al., 2015). An exhaustive database search was performed using queries from JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Scopus integral to articles and referred books from the last two decades, focusing only on peer-reviewed materials. The search terms included “cultural research,” “cultural theories,” “research methodologies in culture,” “cultural approaches,” “cultural studies,” and “cultural sociology.” The inclusion criteria followed in the study were stringent, comprising only publications that presented significant theoretical contributions to cultural research and offered insights into various methodologies. Initially, 130 articles and scientific publications were downloaded, and 78 were selected and synthesised purposively. Items published in conference proceedings, books written for course tutorials and those readings that did not offer theoretical and empirical analyses were excluded. The selected literature, therefore, forms a solid theoretical foundation for our study and was examined for synthesis regarding specific themes, theories, and approaches used in cultural research.

3. Result and Findings

The review identified several prominent theories and approaches that have significantly shaped and explored the field of cultural research in a disciplinary and multidisciplinary context. Key findings include:

Non-positivism and Constructivist Approach

Cultural studies is primarily rooted in the critique of positivist ontology. The core tenet of positivism is that culture can be measured and verified as the cultural world in itself an objective world. Positivism is a methodological approach that asserts that knowledge is only earned through data satisfied by observation and slow experimentation, thereby favouring science over metaphysics and personal belief. In contrast, non-positivism, particularly constructivist ontologies, offers alternative frameworks for understanding cultural research by emphasizing the subjective nature of knowledge and the pivotal role of individual and collective human experiences in shaping reality. Non-positivism challenges the assumptions of positivism, which asserts that knowledge can be derived solely from empirical observation and objective measurement. Instead, non-positivist approaches recognize that social realities are constructed through human interactions, interpretations, and meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This perspective asserts that researchers must engage with the complexities of cultural phenomena, acknowledging that multiple truths exist and that understanding is context-dependent. Therefore, in a non-positivist paradigm, cultural research is typically qualitative —

emphasizing knowledge that reflects the experiences and perspectives of participants, thereby valuing and including their diverse voices.

Constructivism builds on this ontological position by arguing that knowledge is constructed rather than passively acquired. In cultural research, this implies that researchers must consider how cultural meanings are generated through social processes, dialogue, and shared practices within communities (Adom et al., 2016; Crotty, 1998). Context is essential in constructivist ontologies because they recognize that people interpret their cultural experiences using their particular histories and social positions, which could be important for interactions. This results in a more decadent construction of culture in which investigators attempt to uncover the meanings individuals assign to their cultural practices or beliefs. Thus, by viewing culture as a product of reality negotiated between the research culture and the participant, researchers may tackle the co-constructive power of identity and social power and achieve greater complexity and depth of understanding of human experience from cross-cultural perspectives. By focusing on how cultural realities are constructed, researchers can explore the dynamic interplay between culture, identity, and social power, leading to richer insights into the complexities of human experience in various cultural contexts, thereby stimulating their intellectual curiosity and engagement.

Constructionism is often critiqued from a cultural studies perspective, as it over-values social constructions (also deconstructions) at the expense of material and structural conditions that frame culture, cultural systems, and cultural complexes in society. Some critics worry that this perspective will oversimplify cultural events as no more than discursive practices (Barker, 2008; Hua, 2015). In particular, constructivism does not take sufficiently into account the power relations and hierarchies that are integral to these approaches (Hall, 1997), often assuming as well a universal applicability of its narratives. This assumption can lead to the silencing or undermining of those which differ from the mainstream culture, a potential outcome that we must be aware of and actively work to prevent. Moreover, its emphasis on the fluid and contingent nature of cultural meanings can lead to relativism, which makes it more challenging to ameliorate actual social problems or injustices that could increase the risk and biases of elite domination.

Functionalist Approach

The functionalist perspective in cultural research, rooted in the works of sociologists like Émile Durkheim and later developed by scholars such as Talcott Parsons, emphasizes the role of culture as a crucial component in maintaining social order and cohesion (Durkheim, 1912; Parsons, 1951). From this perspective, culture is a mechanism that creates social solidarity and contains shared beliefs, values, and practices. Functionalists believe that different parts of culture, like

rituals, norms, and institutions, operate for specific functions that work together to function as a whole society. Functionalist ontology assumes that culture is purposively created by human society and the purpose is fundamentally for harmony, peace and unity. For instance, rituals help to create a sense of belonging and community among the members. In contrast, shared values create social norms that uphold expectations, ultimately creating a balanced society. Such analysis of these cultural functions will assist researchers in understanding how the culture helps maintain the continuity and stability of social structures because both are interdependent.

However, since then, functionalism faced criticism for oversimplifying cultural change, ignoring the more complex aspects of society and human beings of its notion to achieve social equilibrium (Giddens, 1984). This approach has been criticized because it needs to sufficiently consider how power relations and social inequalities impact cultural practices and beliefs, which render some groups or perspectives marginalized or overshadowed. For example, functionalists may focus on the cohesive elements of culture but ignore conflicts and contradictions embedded in cultural expressions accompanying diverse social identities and experiences (Beck & Grayot, 2021). Thus, the functionalist view, although critical in identifying the modesty and cohesion of cultural systems, appears inadequate when it comes to their complexity and diversity over time, necessitating additional theoretical dimensions able to capture the intricacies of change by creating a more holistic form that fulfils a better world (Thompson et al., 2016; Williams, 1977). On the other hand, functionalism often denies and suppresses the new alternative discourses, narrations and perspectives. It often rules out society as a grand narrative or theory based on modernist parading rather than constructivist and postmodernist. Consequently, this approach further ignores the emergence and possibility of new social movements, which have been characteristic of modern societies. Functionalist worldwide dismantles such issues and agendas, including the voices or movements for women's empowerment, caste/ethnic emancipation, Indigenous identity, and cultural heterogeneity.

Conflict Perspective and Marxist outlook

Conflict perspective in culture studies, mainly based on the theories of Karl Marx, stresses the importance of power and social inequality in cultural processes. It treats culture as a derivative of struggle in which different groups fight for power, resources and recognition. Conflict theory often argues that society and culture are not static structures. Rather, they remain in constant change, for which conflict is the driving force. Unlike functionalists, conflict theorists argue that culture is not constructed with solidarity, harmony and unity. Under this lens, culture is not just a reflection of a society in perfect alignment but rather an arena for disputing and conflicting interests of various social classes and groups. The second is a well-

developed socio-cultural theory where the ruling class uses cultural institutions (media, education, and religion) to exert power and an ideological arm of domestic forces (Marx, 1867). For Marx, the causes and consequences of conflict in society are materially conditioned and economically determined, as described in the theory of historical materialism. In the process of development, alternative voices, groups, and dissents are marginalized, and thus, societal inequalities are reproduced. Media representations, for instance, tend to reflect the interests of a powerful few and present those images as valid; simultaneously, they illustrate marginalized communities through simplistic portrayals that often maintain stereotypes and preserve social hierarchies.

Furthermore, the conflict perspective also underscores the potential of culture as a site for struggle and social transformation. Cultural expressions have the power to challenge dominant discourses and amplify voices that are often overlooked. The work of other theorists, such as Herbert Marcuse and bell hooks, has explored how counter-hegemonic cultural criticism can empower oppressed groups to expose systemic inequities and demand transformative social change (Marcuse, 1964; hooks, 1992). This perspective reminds us of the political nature of culture and how it is produced, shifting our focus to the realm where meaning is contested rather than created. For instance, countercultural movements, art, and literature can challenge dominant ideologies, inspiring collective action and solidarity among oppressed peoples. In summary, the conflict perspective underscores the importance of cultural analysis in addressing social injustice, inequality, and marginalization. It has been also highly emphasized in the theoretical notion of cultural Marxism (Bolton, 2018).

The neo-Marxist and post-Marxist perspectives expand upon traditional Marxist thought by incorporating contemporary social dynamics and emphasizing the role of culture in perpetuating and challenging power structures. Neo-Marxists, such as Antonio Gramsci, introduced the concept of cultural hegemony. This concept suggests that the ruling class maintains control not only through economic means but also by shaping cultural norms and values to gain consent from the subordinate classes. In other words, cultural hegemony is a form of control that operates through the consent of the governed, who are led to believe that the existing social order is just and legitimate (Gramsci, 1971; Jamin, 2018). This Method emphasizes ideology's significance in maintaining social order and suggests that we analyze how cultural institutions diffuse and solidify dominant ideologies while repressing alternative ones. Beyond Marx, as seen in thinkers such as Laclau and Mouffe, offer critiques of the deterministic aspects of Marxism and introduce a more dynamic understanding of power and identity that includes various social movements and cultural representation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Rishi, 2023). Neo-Marxists critically look into the notion of economic determinism and maintain that the super-structural

issues of society (including identity movements and postmodern values) are also powerful and cannot be avoided in contemporary societies. This perspective offers a more nuanced understanding of culture both as a site for repressive forces and as signifying struggle, where it has the potential to form new identities and affinities that interrupt institutional power formations.

The Gramscian perspective on cultural research revolves around cultural hegemony, explaining how dominant social groups maintain power not just through coercion but also through the consent of the subordinate classes. This consent is fostered through cultural institutions and practices. According to Antonio Gramsci, the ruling class controls society through a hegemonic narrative that encourages followers to adopt and promote the cultural values endorsed by those in high positions of the power structure (Gramsci, 1971; Howarth, 2015). The hegemony is primarily cultural, with coercion (or ruling elite or the state) and consensus (between the ruled and ruling ones). This perspective encourages researchers to explore how values derived from culture, media characterizations, and schooling perpetuate hegemony while suppressing other voices. By highlighting the active dialectic between culture, power, and social resistance, the Gramscian approach underscores the dynamic nature of cultural leadership and the potential for counter-hegemonic projects. Therefore, Gramsci's work provides a theoretical framework for understanding how any cultural expression either reinforces or challenges existing orders.

One of the first and most fundamental criticisms that can be directed toward Marxism and neo-Marxist approaches to culture is their reductionist nature in reading cultural phenomena only as reflections of the existing economic structures, mainly neglecting the agency and creativity of cultural actors. Approaches like these have been criticized for overlooking cultural autonomy, the symbolic nature of culture, and the potential power of culture to both resist and change oppressive ideologies (Storey, 2018). However, it's important to remember that culture has the transformative potential to resist and change oppressive ideologies, offering hope and optimism for cultural change. Furthermore, neo-Marxist theories — although they fill some of these gaps — are more concerned with hegemony and ideology at the expense of exploring multiple modes and localized forms of culture. In addition, critics point out that these frameworks fail to adequately engage with the transient and transforming scenarios of postmodern and globalized cultural contexts in which culture is itself a principal factor for economic change and restructuring of social forms and processes (Harvey, 1990; Therborn, 2018; Williams, 1980).

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism, a dynamic and foundational theory in the field of sociology, was established by George

Herbert Mead and further advanced by Herbert Blumer. This theoretical approach, with its emphasis on the importance of symbols and meanings, presents human behaviour and social interaction as an ever-evolving process. It suggests that individuals define themselves based on their interactions with others, even going so far as to propose that each person creates his or her reality through social interaction in the interpretation of symbols (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 2017). By stressing the subjective side of human experience, symbolic interactionism invites us to understand how people create meaning about their environment and others. Social constructionism, the theory that meaning does not exist in objects or situations per se but emerges from social processes, is a key component of this approach. It allows for the shaping of collective and individual identity, where persons reorganize their self-image based on constant changes in their perception of themselves and how they believe others see them in their socio-cultural context.

One of the key applications of symbolic interactionism is examining identity formation, particularly about race and ethnicity. For example, Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002) and Rock (2016) show how people manage their racial and ethnic selves by using concepts from daily interactions with others and stressing the role of context. In multicultural societies, individuals often find themselves in complex social situations where they must negotiate their identities against prevailing cultural narratives and societal expectations. The symbolic interactionism theory is helpful in explaining these negotiations, as it shows the value of language and gestures in constructing identity. It underscores the power of communication in shaping our understanding of ourselves and others. Identity is a fluid integrity of cultural construction. This approach also shows how cultural narratives are perpetuated and varied through social interactions, leading to a better understanding of the elasticity and complexity of culture in different contexts.

However, cultural studies often criticize symbolic interactionism for its micro-level focus, assuming independent action and agency while neglecting wider structural and institutional contributors to culture and social behaviour. This model has been critiqued for paying insufficient attention to how dynamics of power and inequality shape interaction and meaning-making processes, particularly in asymmetric or oppressive situations (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Giddens, 1984). That said, focusing on the individual experiences of authorial intent might be detrimental to an analysis of larger cultural systems and their historical emergence and spread.

Cultural Materialism

Cultural materialism is a theoretical approach established by Marvin Harris emphasizing the prominent influence of material conditions and economic mechanisms on cultural customs and ideologies (Brannigan, 2016; Harris, 1979). From this vantage, understanding culture is impossible in a vacuum but must be analyzed through the environmental realities,

technological capabilities and economic systems that define and shape cultural practices. We understand how this cultural materialism suggests that the material conditions of society—these might include its means and modes of production, resource availability, environment and climatic features—serve as basal elements in pushing forth their cultural evolution and adaptation process. Harris and other cultural materialists argue that focusing on material conditions allows scholars to more clearly gauge the parameters under which cultural phenomena arise and change over time, leading to a deeper analysis of human behaviour and social organization.

Cultural materialism promotes a comprehensive view of culture, which is a key aspect that intrigues researchers. This approach is particularly useful in the study of agricultural practices, where researchers have highlighted how economic conditions shape cultural rituals and beliefs surrounding food production and consumption (Lett, 2015; Wolf, 1966). From subsistence to industrialization and mechanized agriculture, there has been a dramatic overhaul of food-related life, including the eating practices, communal structures, and social traditions surrounding it. Using the cultural materialist approach, we can understand this transition and phenomenon as an agricultural economic imperative, ultimately shaping a specific form or culture of food. Researchers can show how material conditions, economic systems and cultural beliefs are intertwined by exploring the relationship between these aspects of life — generally and in specific contexts.

Critics have charged cultural materialism with reductionist determinism, a perspective that claims it over-emphasizes economic and material determinants of culture while oversimplifying the complexity of cultural phenomena (Ellenzweig & Zammito, 2017; Sandstrom & White, 2015; Storey, 2018). This perspective minimizes the impact of agency, symbolic meanings, and ideological constructs, which could influence the shaping of culture and the enduring methodological approaches of cultural studies. Furthermore, its origins in Marxism spur critiques of ideological biases that focus exclusively on class struggles while disregarding other critical dimensions, including race, caste/ ethnicity, gender and identity.

Post-Colonial Theory

With leading theorists like Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, post-colonial theory offers a critical lens that examines the long-lasting effects of colonialism on culture and identity (Bhabha, 1994; Lionnet, 2018; Said, 1978). In examining the power relations behind cultural representations and how these representations reproduce colonial hierarchies, this theoretical approach attempts to unpack its conception of representation. It reflects how the stories that colonial regimes made do not accurately represent the truths of colonized folks, as post-colonial theorists argue, but are still profoundly affected by them—showing a complicated power play between all meant narratives. The focus of this conversation is that colonized

societies are not simply the passive recipients of foreign influences — they engage with, resist, and reinterpret dominant narratives on their terms. Considering subtle details of cultural representation, post-colonial theory emphasizes the importance of investigating the modalities through which power functions in identities and traditions of cultures after colonialism, aiding analysis of cultural activities across contemporary contexts.

Moreover, post-colonial theory has made significant strides in understanding the reshaping of cultures through globalization, cultural hybridity, and the complexity of identity in a world that considers itself post-colonial. This understanding is crucial for engaging and interesting the audience. Post-colonial theorists have emphasized that modern identities are not fixed superficial concepts (Bhabha, 2023), but rather, they are dynamic and mobile contours, permeated with evolving high and hybrid forms of culture. These cultures are born from the fusion of a myriad of different traditions and influences (Boatcă & Costa, 2016). For instance, the experiences of diaspora communities vividly illustrate how people negotiate their identities in the context of the enduring effects of colonialism and globalization, shaping forms that mirror their roots and challenge various cultural practices (Hall, 1990).

Conversely, critics have pointed out that post-colonial theory often romanticizes hybridity and overlooks the structural inequalities that persist in post-colonial societies. This critique is essential for fostering a critical and analytical approach to the theory. It also highlights the theory's failure to fully engage with the material conditions of exploitation and power disparity (de Sousa Santos, 2016). Furthermore, the theory's focus on identity politics and cultural hybridity can obscure the necessity for collective contentiousness and socio-economic vulnerability, which are crucial in anti-colonial struggles. Some scholars even argue that the theory's inclination towards abstraction contributes to its weakness in providing concrete solutions to modern global disparities and long-lasting colonial remnants (Fowles, 2016).

Cultural Ecological Perspective

The cultural ecological perspective, rooted in the works of anthropologists like Julian Steward, emphasizes the dynamic relationship between culture and the environment in shaping human behaviour and social organization. This approach posits that cultural practices and beliefs are fundamentally influenced by the ecological context in which a society operates, including the availability of resources, climate, and geographical features (Steward, 1955; Zapf, 2016). Cultural ecology provides insights into how societies sustain themselves and evolve by focusing on the adaptive strategies that cultures develop in response to their environments. For instance, the agricultural practices of a community are often tailored to their specific environmental conditions, illustrating how cultural norms and economic activities are intertwined with ecological

realities. Understanding this interplay between culture and environment is of significant importance, as it can guide us in developing sustainable strategies for societal development.

Furthermore, the cultural ecological perspective critiques the reductionist tendencies of other theoretical frameworks by advocating for a holistic understanding of culture. It recognizes that cultural adaptations are not solely the result of economic factors or social structures but are also significantly shaped by ecological variables (Berkes et al., 2000; Sutton & Anderson, 2020). This framework encourages researchers to examine how cultural practices impact environmental sustainability and how changes in ecological conditions can lead to cultural transformations. For example, indigenous knowledge systems, with their intimate understanding of local ecosystems, demonstrate the potential of cultural beliefs and practices in fostering sustainable resource management. By integrating ecological considerations into cultural research, this perspective contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between culture and environment, enlightening us about the potential of cultural practices in sustainable resource management.

Despite this, the main critique of the cultural ecological perspective is that it tends to be too deterministic about environmental influences at the expense of a nuanced understanding of human agency and social complexities. However, this has drawn criticism as it threatens to oversimplify a more complex interaction between culture and environment where cultural adaptations may not just be mechanistic responses conditioned by environmental characteristics. Such an interpretation may need to be made aware of the historical-political-economy background, particularly regarding colonialism and the world system influencing cultural practices. In addition, its notion of cultures as distinct and fixed entities ignores the rich interdependence and ever-changing dynamics of cultural systems in this globalized world. These limitations have stimulated an urgent demand for integrative approaches, such as those found in political ecology, which seeks to integrate power relations and inequality and human ingenuity into analyses of the human-environment nexus (Biersack, 1999; Blaikie, 1985; Creanza et al., 2017; Varnum & Grossmann, 2017).

Feminist Cultural Studies

Feminist cultural studies, with their focus on the intricate intersections of gender, culture, and power, serve as a powerful tool for challenging and dismantling dominant cultural discourses. They provide a critical lens for analyzing how cultural representations shape and reflect gender relations (Gilbert, 1996; Probyn, 2016). By critiquing the prevailing cultural narratives that have long been dominated by a male perspective and have suppressed women's voices, feminist cultural studies advocate for the inclusion of women's roles in cultural research. They underscore the importance of women's

perspectives, reminding us of the pervasive nature of gender inequalities perpetuated through cultural practices and texts. The focus is not only on representation but also on how culture upholds and perpetuates the ideas of man and woman, especially in music. Thus, feminist scholarship attempts to dismantle dominant cultural discourses, exposing the ideologies that uphold patriarchy within societies.

A significant area of exploration within feminist cultural studies is the critical examination of media representations of women and their profound implications for societal perceptions of gender roles and identities (Dobson, 2015; Mulvey, 1975). Researchers focused on this area explain the portrayal of women in films, television programs, and commercials by stating that these images present stereotyped images that continue to perpetuate female roles. For instance, feminist film theory highlights how cinematic techniques can objectify women, reducing them to mere visual spectacles rather than fully realized characters with agency. Feminist cultural studies show that the media produces a cultural attitude toward gender based on representations that reveal particular stereotypes, thus informing social understanding and self-understanding. More than a critique of other representations, this analytical framework seeks out counter-narratives that highlight the experiences and achievements of women to help create an improved cultural landscape that is more diverse, fairer, and inclusive.

However, it is important to acknowledge the need for a more inclusive approach in feminist cultural studies. This field has been criticized for often focusing solely on gender, neglecting the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality (Ahmed, 2020; Crenshaw, 2013). Such a limited perspective risks oversimplifying the complexities of cultural constructs and overlooking the fact that systems of oppression intersect. Additionally, early feminist cultural studies have been critiqued for their Eurocentrism and for reducing and universalizing women of non-Western cultures in a manner that obscures their diverse voices and experiences (Kanai, 2020; Mohanty, 1988). Some also criticize feminist analysis that too rigidly contrasts pervasive patriarchy with equally essentialized female resistance, which they argue fails to fully acknowledge the power of cultural systems or the limitations of human agency.

4. Discussion

This paper shows what diverse approaches exist in cultural research. It proposes numerous theoretical frameworks within cultural studies and indicates that more subjects should be revealed in interdisciplinary contexts. Cultural research is not single-focus; it has multiple parts and pieces from diverse disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, and cultural studies. It bears many emerging issues as well as

critiques and contestations in modern-day cultural research (Bonnell & Hunt, 2023; Tosh, 2021). Starting from symbolic interactionism and cultural materialism and moving to post-colonial theory and feminist cultural studies, each theory elucidates the complexity of culture regarding its relation to human behaviour and social structure. With that, this paper explores how symbolic interactionism allows us to understand better identity construction in a social context or how cultural materialism helps us to see the relationship between material reality and culture. Integrating these theoretical traditions will allow researchers to capture the richness and complexity of cultural phenomena by integrating theoretical lenses that include both action-oriented macro-level approaches and more traditional micro-level psychological perspectives.

Also, through this review, we have found that cultural researchers need to use loose methods that account for the fluidity of culture; our old methodologies are based on a world attempting to be scientific and, therefore, positivist; they do not help us understand the vast size and number of multiscale, multinational exercises we encounter today. For example, the fast interchanging of cultural artefacts and ideas made possible by globalization has produced hybrid expressions of culture that elude precise classification. As a result, advocating for qualitative in addition to quantitative methods could significantly increase the depth and richness of research findings within cross-cultural studies. Qualitative tools (interviews, focus groups, participant observation) can help you better understand the types of lived experiences qualitative data may not be able to convey (Creswell, 2014). In particular, ethnographic methods allow researchers to immerse themselves in cultural communities and gain insight into how culture is practised. Not only is this a way of enriching the data collected, but it also means grounding research in more excellent ethical standards — respecting the voices and experiences of participants.

The role of technology in cultural research cannot be overstated. The emergence of digital ethnography and online cultural studies as seemingly productive fields of inquiry is partly due to how technology has reshaped how researchers make sense of singular cultural objects. The rise of social media as a research tool allows researchers to examine the processes of cultural enactment in these virtual spaces, addressing questions concerning the consequences of these online interactions for issues such as cultural identity, representation and power. The emergence of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram has transformed how people and communities develop cultural identities and create culture (Best & Kellner, 2020; Burgess & Green, 2009). For example, through digital spaces, marginalized groups can have their voices heard and tell their own cultural stories while subverting mainstream depictions of themselves and creating new modes of cultural production. This genre is often replicant, enacting, or positioning and relinquishing the means of production.

The changing landscape of cultural research, driven by globalization, migration and technological change, must contend with its many challenges. With globalization speeding up the spread of cultures, interactions across cultures have become widespread and often turned into cultural exchanges, blending in parts here and there, creating a different identity. Thus, consideration of culture and its intersectionality with the social, political, and economic should continue in future research on a holistic knowledge of this cultural landscape (Bonnell & Hunt, 2023). Examining the relationship between social, cultural, and political dynamics is key; looking at how cultural expressions might be influenced by economic conditions or how political structures might define cultural identities is one way we can work to expand broader issues with our research. This approach will help researchers deal with the complexities of cultural phenomena and contribute to a well-informed policy-making process and social practices through a more multidisciplinary interplay. Such collaborations can produce policies that reflect cultural diversity or recognize the needs of particular cultural groups more adequately and work positively for social inclusion and for creating understanding across cultures in the contemporary globalized world.

Culture is broader in disciplines, from pure social science to applied social science. For example, cultural evaluation in education in which investigators analyze how cultural frames affect the teaching-learning environment, the students, and the teaching techniques in the different parts of the world (for instance, Engerman & Otto, 2021; Paris, 2021). As with socio-political culture, media and cultural representation investigates how the global and local culture is embodied in television, film, and advertising and how the domination or subordination of one or the other is produced in textual description (Hall, 1997). The research examines the effects of social networking sites (SNS) on cultural identity in less intimate settings. It shows how they promote cultural creolization and transform conventional practice (Arnaboldi & Diaz Lema, 2022). The post-structuralist approach looks at meaninglessness and the ability to overturn culture regularly through the networks of global cultural identities, analyzing language and power from the perspective of cultural reproduction through discourse (Foucault, 1980). Subalterns represent cultural study as another critical approach to emphasizing the culture, narratives, and identities of those who cannot speak but have signally contributed to history. This perspective is a reminder of the often overlooked but significant contributions of those who cannot speak, and it inspires a sense of respect towards their narratives and identities. Within the digital context, the research deals with the influence of social media on cultural identity and how it facilitates the synthesis of cultural elements and alters conventional cultural practices (Vicari & Kirby, 2023). From the global post-structuralism of culture, meaning and representation focused on the fluidity of meaning and the analysis of cultural structures and techniques in the

mode of operation of cultural networks, semantics, and discourses (Foucault, 1980). Moreover, the subaltern perspective of the cultural study is another critical outlook for highlighting the cultural narratives and identities of those who cannot speak but have significantly contributed to making history (Behera, 2023). Altogether, these research works contribute to a more enhanced understanding of cultural processes in a globalization and digitization era in the changing political-economic context.

With this, the variety of the theories and methods described in this work underscores the richness and complexity of cultural research. This is because employing multiple perspectives with learning-oriented approaches can enable the researchers to apply more postmodern paradigms. The realities we claimed previously as absolute are inclined to change because the culture in the current world has become more dynamic and multi-real. In addition, acknowledging technology's influence on cultural practices and the need to respond to modern issues will allow researchers to advance a more complex appreciation of culture and its relevance in the world. Cultural research continuously evolves and acts as a compass for academic discourse and even for policy and community practice to make a society accepting of and encouraging cultural diversity. This relies more on the ontological notions of post-positivism and non-positivism rather than purely deductive and objective approaches of positivism.

5. Conclusion

Cultural research is inherently complex because it is the outcome of multiple theories and different approaches that mirror diverse human realities. This systematic review of the theoretical frameworks used to study culture has highlighted approaches, including symbolic interactionism, cultural materialism, postcolonial theory, and feminist cultural studies, emphasizing differing cultural aspects. Such theories also help us examine how different facets of culture can be shaped by human behaviour, institutions, and the power relations between these concepts. Bringing together these varied theoretical perspectives offers an expansive analysis of cultural practices while highlighting the necessity for a multidisciplinary lens. An interdisciplinary approach incorporating relevant insights from sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies can go a long way in researching culture where implications from different countries and their societies come alive. Future research should examine the intersections of culture with social, political, and economic dimensions as cultural dynamics continue to grow complex in an increasingly globalized world. This exploration will allow for a more pertinent picture of the cultural landscape that shows the integration of culture into social problems. It emphasizes the need for an integrative framework utilizing various theoretical perspectives and methodological

approaches.

In this context, an imperative for researchers would be methodological pluralism: integrating qualitative and quantitative methods that examine the cultural complexity and limitations of any individual method. In this way, cultural research can contribute to advancing academic discourse. Subsequent studies on culture may utilize digital approaches like big data analysis, virtual research studies on people and societies, and AI-assisted perception analysis. While these tools can be instrumental in uncovering the prevailing trends of cultural change and/or defiance, particularly in the context of contemporary crises like climate change, social movements and migration, it's important to note that they also have limitations. For instance, they may not fully capture the nuances of cultural practices or the subjective experiences of individuals. The application of monolithic perspectives or singular theories such as functionalist theory, Marxism, feminism, positivism, cultural ecologism and postmodernism should not be treated as a perfect theory of cultural research. They are increasingly interactive and interdisciplinary in providing a rich understanding of power, identity, and technology, and how cultural practices evolve under diverse political and economic contexts and globalization. It is within this context that the continued evolution of cultural research will be crucial to understanding our responses to the complexities of contemporary cultural phenomena.

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