LEVERAGING SOCIAL CULTURE IN EMERGING ECONOMIES: ANALYZING TO THE POST-COVID-19 LANDSCAPE

Iliana E. Aguilar-Rodríguez, Universidad de Las Américas
Washington F. Padilla-Alarcón, Universidad de Las Américas
Carlos H. Artieda-Cajilema, Universidad de Las Américas
Carlos Artieda-Acosta, Universidad de Las Américas

ABSTRACT

The study evaluates the impact of COVID-19 on changes in the cultural values in Ecuador and Peru and establishes the differences between these countries. Electronic surveys were applied to a sample of 437 individuals. Data processing was performed using the PLS-SEM Model (partial least square) and the Mann-Whitney U Test, finding positive and significant relationships between COVID-19 and the values of Traditional – Secular/rational (TRAD) and Survival – Self-expression (SUN). The findings determine that Survival values become Self-expression, and TRAD is increasingly predominant than SUN, reinforcing religious beliefs as the basis of behavior. No significant differences were found between Peru and Ecuador in SUN and TRAD, even though they were in COVID-19, with predominance in Peru. This research is the first to include SUN and TRAD cultural values and highlights the importance of the knowledge of the cultural context in predicting people's behavior.

Keywords: Social culture, Cultural dimensions, Cultural values, COVID-19, Emerging economies, Survival, Self-expression, Traditional, Secular/ rational

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has infected about 20 million people, causing more than 731,000 deaths (de Filippis et al., 2023; Jakupec et al., 2020; Johns Hopkins University, 2023). Thus, it generated a new knowledge society, leading to transcendental changes in all areas (World Health Organization, 2020). On the one hand, the threat to the balance of society and, on the other hand, the challenge in the development dynamics of social modernization reveal a new approach to understanding the effect of the pandemic on social culture, more still, in countries described as sensitive to development (Bojorquez et al., 2021; Dam et al., 2022; Du et al., 2020; ECLAC, 2022; Shibata, 2021). Intercultural contact increasingly diversifies societies, which allows a more critical relationship with the host culture and dramatically impacts people's lives.

While culture typically establishes distinctive patterns that differentiate one group of people from another—whether at the national, regional, ethnic, or other levels (Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 2006) —it is not static and can undergo transformations (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011; Salehan et al., 2018; Schein, 1988; Solomon, 2008, 2013). The human mind adapts its programming to evolving conditions (Welzel, 2013). Given the significant surge in COVID-19 infections and the subsequent transition to post-pandemic normality, this study aims to comprehend how individuals have responded to the pandemic, potentially influencing their social culture. Yan et al. (2020) have noted that the spread of the virus has brought about changes in human behavior, but the specifics of these changes remain unknown.

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Furthermore, collectivist and democratic countries have been shown to perceive more effective responses to COVID-19 (Frey et al., 2020; Wang, 2021). The emotions individuals experienced during the pandemic could easily give rise to fearful attitudes and inaccurate risk assessments, thereby triggering heightened emotional and behavioral reactions in response to threats (Anderson & Stockman, 2022; Du et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Kok et al., 2014; Peiró et al., 2023; Ruiter et al., 2014). Thus, culture can be a determining factor of this behavior when the appearance of COVID-19 transforms it. The role of culture is believed to be vital in shaping people's responses.

Currently, despite studies revealing the impact of cultural differences on the transmission, mortality, and preventive measures of COVID-19 (Chen & Biswas, 2022; Dam et al., 2022; Grigoryev et al., 2022; Maaravi et al., 2021; Oey & Suwito Rahardjo, 2021), and the perception of the pandemic as a normal societal element that can be peacefully accommodated, there exists a critical gap for new research aiming to elucidate the relationship between COVID-19 and cultural values in the context of a potential transformation from traditional to modern societies. Additionally, Grigoryev et al. (2022) highlighted that countries with cultures emphasizing self-expression exhibited higher vaccination rates and lower disease scores. Hildebrandt and Jäckle (2020) explained that religion was linked to social conservatism in more developed countries. Consequently, people may exhibit highly predictable behaviors influenced by elements such as religion, family values, and social norms, which vary across countries of residence.

For this reason, this research (1) evaluates the impact of COVID-19 on Ecuador's and Peru's cultural values, that despite being traditionalist countries (Aguilar-Rodríguez et al., 2021) could be undergoing transitions between traditional/seculars values and survival/self-expression values (Inglehart, 1997, 2008, 2018), even more so, because Latin American culture is characterized by having more excellent physical proximity and gestures, contrary to European and North American cultures (Kramer et al., 2007; Páez & Zubieta, 2005; Wang, 2021). The study also (2) finds differences between Ecuador and Peru regarding the impact of COVID-19 and cultural values since it is known that around 25% to 30% of people in rich countries emphasize postmodern values, so emerging markets are moving in that direction, but this is likely to be more prevalent in later generations (Capistrano, 2018; Inglehart, 2018; Lin & Mancik, 2020).

The study makes an important contribution to the literature. Due to the growing interest in examining social culture in emerging markets, the article suggests COVID-19 as an influential and determining factor in the cultural transformation that causes different behavioral reactions. The impact of COVID-19 may be associated with more collectivist cultures, and more specifically, it is suggested that emotions related to fear explain having a culture oriented more towards self-expression values. Besides, the study provides new evidence on the role of religion as the basis of social behavior, offering a new perspective for decision-makers. Also, the study contributes to the managers having a global vision of the changes in consumer behavior.

The article presents a review of the literature on the study variables. Subsequently, the applied methodology is detailed, explaining the population and sample used, the applied instrument, and data collection. Afterward, the results of the research, the discussion, the conclusions, theoretical and managerial implications, as well as the limitations and recommendations for future research, are presented.

BACKGROUND

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This section provides a review of the relevant literature. First, it provides an insight into social culture. Succeeding, it explores the relationship between COVID-19 and social culture. Finally, it presents the research model and hypotheses.

A. SOCIAL CULTURE

Hofstede (1980) established that culture is collective mental programming. Therefore, culture defines the rules, rituals, norms, and procedures in the human being (Hofstede, 1983; Van Muijen & Koopman, 1994), determined through the dimensions: (1) Power Distance Index (PDI); (2) Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI); (3) Individualism/Collectivism (IDV); Masculinity/Femininity (MAS) (Hofstede, 2011). In this way, people could have different behaviors depending on the most predominant cultural dimensions since different cultures develop in societies, coming from different regions, generations, and socioeconomic groups (Aguilar-Rodríguez et al., 2021; Kirkman et al., 2017).

On the other hand, according to Inglehart (1997, 2008, 2007), cultural orientations are based on traditional values versus secular/rational and survival versus self-expression. Traditional values are defined as a combination of different attitudes and beliefs, such as that God is significant for people's lives; obedience and religion prevail instead of independence and determination. Secular/rational values express the opposite of these traditional values. This dimension relates to collectivism-individualism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) and integration-autonomy and power distance (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018; Hofstede et al., 2010; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Maleki & de Jong, 2014). At the same time, survival versus self-expression establishes generalization through intergenerational changes that emerge at high levels of economic development (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Self-expression becomes important after security (both physical and financial) is taken for granted. Security fosters tolerance and interpersonal trust, while insecurity fosters fear of the unknown (Inglehart, 2018).

It is know that self-expression focuses on self-actualization and meaningful work, where individual achievement could alleviate scarcity. Inglehart (2008) stated that a cultural shift from survival values to self-expression values also brings changing values. Consequently, when both security and freedom are in short supply, people prioritize security because it is necessary to survive, but as soon as people feel safe, they begin to prioritize freedom because it is essential to thriving (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018). In this way, individual values have developed constantly in the long term (Capistrano, 2018; Inglehart, 2018; Lin & Mancik, 2020).

Meanwhile, in a specific economic and technological environment, certain cultural components go together since they are mutually supportive and conducive to the survival of a society. Specific cultural and political changes are logically linked to the dynamics of the modernization process; among them are urbanization, industrialization, specialized occupation, and the extensive literacy process (Inglehart, 2018). Thus, most Latin American countries have experienced relatively rapid economic and social development. These developments led to favorable societal conditions and an increasing prevalence of self-expression values, particularly among the younger cohorts (Capistrano, 2018).

B. COVID-19 AND SOCIAL CULTURE

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every country since the beginning of 2020 (de Filippis et al., 2023; ECLAC, 2022). However, each nation reacted and managed prevention mechanisms differently. Collectivist and democratic countries experienced relatively effective responses (Frey et al., 2020). For Oey and Suwito Rahardjo (2021), the positive

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reaction of these nations is because their collectivist culture has been combined with a high rate of uncertainty avoidance and a long-term orientation, which has not occurred with individualistic cultures, which due to its high dimension of indulgence has worsened its conditions of prevention in the face of the pandemic. Maaravi et al. (2021) identified that the most individualistic cultures were associated with more cases of COVID-19 and, therefore, with high mortality. In addition, the more individualism, the greater the chances that they would not adhere to the prevention measures for epidemics. Something similar was identified by Chen and Biswas (2022) by including masculinity and uncertainty avoidance as dimensions that had a positive impact on confirmed cases of COVID-19.

In a subsequent study, Dam et al. (2022) found that demographics, ethnicity, gender, age, and education were significantly related to collectivism and uncertainty avoidance and that these trends were relevant to people's intention to adopt measures to prevent COVID-19. It has also been identified that the more religious a person is, the higher their level of social conservatism, although the effect of religiosity is more potent in more developed countries (Hildebrandt & Jäckle, 2020). Besides, more advanced countries with self-expression values have shown higher vaccination scores and lower disease scores (Grigoryev et al., 2022), as only 60% of immunosuppressed people increased their social participation over time after vaccination (Heesen et al., 2022).

In any case, it is known that when people are threatened by a disease such as COVID-19, they experience emotions related to fear (Du et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Kok et al., 2014; Peiró et al., 2023; Ruiter et al., 2014). Ruiter et al. (2014) explained that when health-threatening information is presented, it can elicit defensive responses. It has been determined that the pandemic is causing problems in people's mental health (de Filippis et al., 2023). Nishat et al. (2023) identified that in Bangladesh, rates of depression and anxiety in young-married girls as 60,9% and 23,7%, while Adkins-Jackson et al. (2023) found a negative impact on mental health, suggesting interventions that address collective healing.

Thus, fear is not enough to motivate people to act (Du et al., 2020). Kok et al. (2014) determined that fear works best when combined with a sense of efficacy, and Ruiter et al. (2014) provide instructions on how to successfully implement the recommended actions and convince people that they are susceptible to the threat. Thus, when people fear the disease and recognize the efficacy of protective behaviors, they are more likely to initiate behavioral changes (Anderson & Stockman, 2022; Kok et al., 2014; Peiró et al., 2023).

Hence, it is established that the consequences of COVID-19 have reshaped mental health and behavior in individuals (El Hayek et al., 2023; Kniffin et al., 2021), leading to the belief that it is also influencing in people's cultural values. Therefore, the diversity of identified findings motivates further studies on social culture and COVID-19. Combining the conceptual framework analyzed, the research model in Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between the analysis variables and presents the respective research hypotheses. The conceptual model presented in this research has the following constructs:

(1) Traditional – Secular/rational (TRAD)

(2) Survival – Self-expression (SUN) and

(3) COVID-19, focusing on finding out if COVID-19 has influenced people's cultural values. Structural equation models express research hypotheses through causal pathways between latent variables figure 1. For this:

> ***H1:*** *COVID-19 influence positively on values Traditional – Secular/rational of societies Ecuador and Peru.*
>
> ***H2:*** *COVID-19 influence positively on values Survival – Self-expression of societies Ecuador and Peru.*

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H3: *The distribution of Traditional – Secular/rational, Survival – Self-expression values and COVID-19 differ for Ecuador and Peru.*

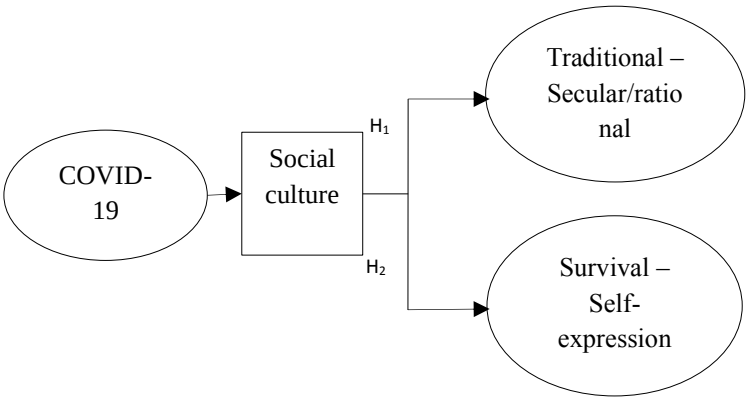

Figure 1
RESEARCH MODEL

METHODOLOGY

This research was quantitative with a correlational design. In SPSS (IBM, 2023), 437 surveys were processed. Subsequently, the statistical tests used Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). It was decided to use PLS because (1) the study aims to predict and explain the variations of the constructs (Hair et al., 2010, 2014; Henseler et al., 2015); (2) the distribution of the data was not normal, and PLS-SEM does not require an assumption of multivariate normality (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Finally, the Mann-U-Whitney test was used to determine differences between cultural values and COVID-19 between Ecuador and Peru.

A. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population comprised men and women residing in Peru and Ecuador. Through convenience sampling 5251, people were invited to participate in the study. It was decided to use this sampling technique due to the ease of access, mainly because it is a cultural study. Convenience sampling allows the use of intact groups of subjects and the collection of a large amount of information (Aguilar-Rodríguez & Arias-Bolzmann, 2021). For the final analysis, 437 valid samples were applied.

B. INSTRUMENTATION

The instrument was designed by the researchers and included demographic questions such as gender, country of residence, age, and marital status. Questions were structured on a Likert scale related to the cultural values proposed by Inglehart: (1) to measure the Traditional - Secular/rational values, 6 items were included, and (2) for the values Authority and Survival - Self-expression, 5 items were designed. The instrument also determined questions about the impact of COVID-19, establishing criteria such as (1) impact on quality of life (4 items), (2) interpersonal relationship (3 items); and (3) affectation of work and study (3 items). Experts validated the instrument to make the necessary modifications to the questionnaire, mainly to interpret the questions. To ensure a uniform understanding of the measurement items, multigroup invariance testing was employed to evaluate measurement

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equivalence across groups. Based on the results, no elements were identified as problematic or discarded.

C. DATA COLLECTION

Between April and November of 2022 and 2023, 2498 online surveys were collected through Google Forms. All participants received informed consent outlining the study's parameters and purpose, with a commitment to safeguarding their data. Two follow-up emails were sent to reinforce the survey invitation, one in early June and one in late October each year. No additional emails were dispatched for three reasons: (1) to prevent participants from feeling overwhelmed and providing biased responses; (2) to leverage the fact that participants were at home due to social distancing and remote work, allowing for prompt responses and facilitating ongoing research; and (3) following the structural equations methodology, where small samples help preserve the predictive and explanatory power of the model (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014).

Once the answers were validated, such as missing values and detection of univariate and multivariate outliers, duplicate information and invalid answers were eliminated from the database, leaving 437 valid surveys, obtaining a response rate of 38% (higher than the 15% rate recommended by Hair et al. (2014)).

RESULTS

A. DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

57.1% belonged to the male gender and 44,5% to the female gender, and only 0,6% did not mention their gender. On average, the female had 30 years old in Peru and 35 years old in Ecuador. In terms of marital status, majority of sample in both countries were single (61% in Peru and 56% in Ecuador). Among Peruvian, 18%, 9% and 6% were married, divorced, and widowed respectively. In Ecuadorian sample, 21%, 7% and 8% were married, divorced, and widowed respectively.

In terms of educational level, 53% were high school graduates, with the remaining 47% holding college degrees or more advanced qualifications. 52% of Peruvian sample completed had master’s degree or above. In the Ecuadorian sample, 48% completed had master’s degree or above.

B. MEASUREMENT ANALYSIS

The indicators of the three latent variables presented in the research model in Figure 1 exhibited a high level of dispersion, which confirmed the suitability of using PLS-SEM as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015) and Lowry & Gaskin (2014). Common Method Variance (CMV) was identified using Harman's single factor score (Hair et al., 2014; Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2012) since it is a widely used post-hoc approach for managing CMV and can identify potential bias in surveys. This technique aims to determine if a single factor can explain a significant portion of the variance. In our case, the factor matrix explained only 36% of the variance, which is well below the 50% threshold. Thus, the data and results were not significantly affected.

A factorial analysis was performed to determine if fewer variables could describe the observed items due to the correlation between questions (Wedel & Kamakura, 2000). Since there were no previously defined dimensions, as well as the researchers designed the instrument, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was applied to discover the critical dimensions (Whittaker, 2011) that established a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of 0,927 (Sig

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.>0,8) (Byrne, 2010; Hair et al., 2010; Hoyle, 2015) with a Bartlett's Test of Sphericity of 0.000. Using the Principal Component Extraction Method with Varimax rotation, the total variance explained was 83,654% for three factors: (1) COVID-19=7 items; (2) SUN=3 items; y (3) TRAD=3 items. Subsequently, 7 items were found for COVID-19, 2 for SUN, and 3 for TRAD, showing an adequate level of reliability for the measurement model (Kline, 2016) because, as presented in Table 1, alpha de Cronbach determined acceptable values above 0,6 (Hair et al., 2010; Powell, 1992) and the composite reliability index showed values equal to or greater than 0,80 (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Regarding convergent validity, 0.5 was used as a base for the mean-variance extracted (AVE).

Table 1
CONSTRUCT RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
COVID-19	0,901	0,918	0,922	0,630
SUN	0,602	0,613	0,833	0,714
TRAD	0,811	0,819	0,888	0,726

In Table 2, regarding the reliability of the observable indicators, the study determined external loads more remarkable than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2
OUTER LOADINGS

Indicators	Questions	COVID-19	SUN	TRAD
COVID-19_1	Today's life is affected by the problems related to COVID-19.	0,808		
COVID-19_2	The current quality of life is damaged by the problems related to COVID-19.	0,843		
COVID-19_3	You are currently concerned about issues related to COVID-19.	0,729		
COVID-19_4	You are currently experiencing stress regarding issues related to COVID-19.	0,869		
COVID-19_5	You are currently experiencing fatigue regarding issues related to COVID-19.	0,822		
COVID-19_6	You are currently depressed because of the problems related to COVID-19.	0,740		
COVID-19_9	Problems related to COVID-19 interfering in your interpersonal relationship.	0,731		
SUN_2	Importance of friends in your life.		0,816	
SUN_3	Importance of having leisure time.		0,873	
TRAD_1	Importance of God in your life.			0,881
TRAD_9	Importance of religion in your life.			0,875
TRAD_11	Trust in the Churches (mosque, temple, etc.).			0,799

The Fornell-Larcker criterion, as shown in Table 3, establishes that the square root of the AVE is greater than the correlation between the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Sarstedt et al., 2021).

Table 3
FORNELL-LARCKER CRITERION

	COVID-19	SUN	TRAD
COVID-19	0,793		
SUN	0,198	0,845	
TRAD	-0,317	-0,030	0,852

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The multicollinearity was analyzed with the variance inflation factor (VIF). In the context of the PLS-SEM approach, a VIF value less than 0, 20 or more significant than 5,0 indicates a potential multicollinearity problem. In this model, the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019) argue that an adequate level of VIF must be less than 4, demonstrating that the model is acceptable for using the structural equations methodology.

C. STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL (SEM)

Figure 2 shows adequate goodness-of-fit indices. Because the PLS-SEM approach assumes the non-normality of the data, to evaluate the structural model, the bootstrapping procedure was used by randomly creating 5.000 subsamples to estimate the PLS path model (Hair et al., 2019). The path coefficient determined the change of the endogenous variable (Hair et al., 2017, 2019) by the unit change of the exogenous variable (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Hair et al. (2017) state that the coefficients must be at least 0,20 and ideally above 0,30 (-0,317 y 0,198).

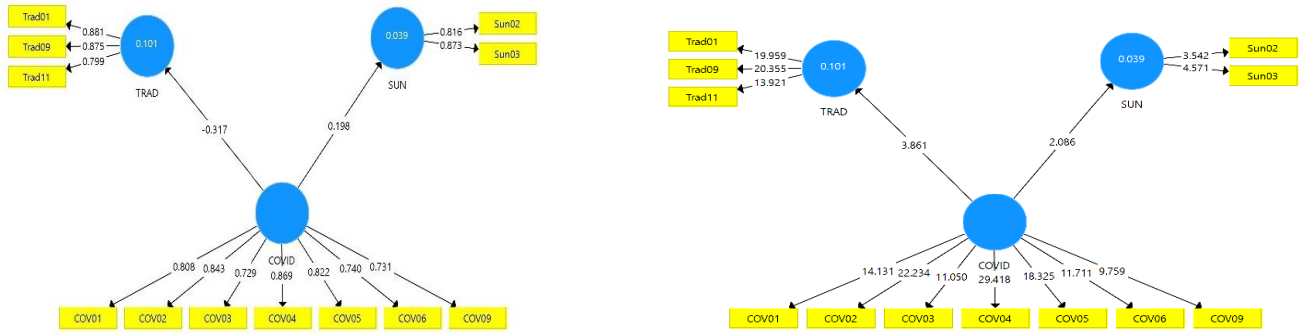

Figure 2
CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE FACTORS THAT EXPLAIN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COVID-19, SUN, AND TRAD. EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL MEASUREMENT ANALYSIS

Table 4 shows the test of the t statistic that verified the level of significance of the path coefficients. The higher the value of the t statistic, the greater the evidence against the null hypothesis, verifying H1 and H2 in the model. Thus, the COVID-19 variable has a statistically significant relationship with the SUN and TRAD variables.

Table 4
RESULT OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STEDEV)	P values	Description
H1: COVID-19 --->SUN	0,198	0,214	0,095	2,086	0,037	Supported
H2: COVID-19 --->TRAD	-0,317	-0,333	0,082	3,861	0,000	Supported

The coefficient of determination (R2) of each explained latent variable was also obtained to evaluate the structural model (SUN=0,039 y TRAD=0,101). The variability of the data suggests a significant trend by providing information by the predictor variable (Kline, 2016). The Cohen effect size (f2) made it possible to determine the magnitude of the predictive latent variable (Chin et al., 2003; Hayat et al., 2019), which for SUN was 0,041

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and for TRAD 0,112. Thus, H1 and H2 are verified by considering the relationship between SUN, COVID-19, and TRAD valid.

D. D. COMPARISON BETWEEN ECUADOR AND PERU

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was applied as shown in Figure 3, where H3 is partially verified, finding significant differences between Ecuador and Peru only for the COVID-19 category (p=0,003), while for TRAD (p=0,114) and SUN (p=0,254), no significant relationships were found. Despite this, Peru's average ranges were higher in SUN (73,84) and COVID-19 (81,39). Only TRAD (73,12) was higher in Ecuador.

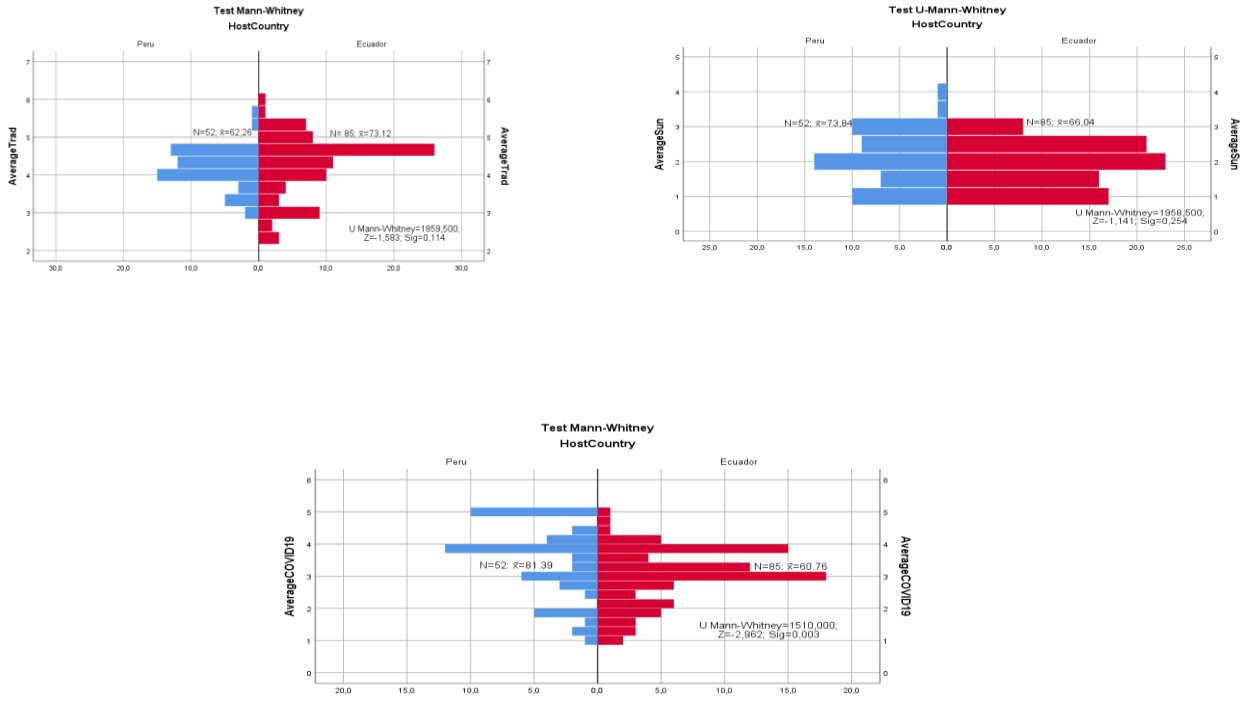

Figure 3
TEST U-MANNWHITNEY FOR DIFFERENCES RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COVID-19, SUN, AND TRAD

DISCUSSION

This research extends beyond previous studies that primarily focused on identifying the impact of culture on the spread of COVID-19, its mortality rates, and preventive measures (e.g., Kandampully, Chen & Biswas, 2022; Grigoryev et al., 2022; Maaravi et al., 2021). The present study explores the influence of COVID-19 on the transformation of social culture among the residents of Ecuador and Peru. Drawing on the evolutionary theory of emancipation, as proposed by Welzel (2013), it posits that the human mind adapts its programming in response to changing existential conditions, leading societies to undergo shifts in their cultural values.

The findings affirm that societies in Ecuador and Peru have experienced cultural shifts in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prominent cultural changes encompass the adoption of new social norms, driven by the pandemic's requirements for physical distancing, widespread use of masks, and meticulous hand hygiene. These practices

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have influenced public interactions and shaped perceptions of health and safety. Additionally, the widespread transition to remote work, necessitated by social distancing measures and workplace restrictions, has brought about a profound transformation in work dynamics and altered how individuals perceive the balance between professional and personal life.

Furthermore, there has been an intensified reliance on technology and digital platforms. From online education to internet shopping, people have swiftly embraced digital solutions to fulfill their daily needs. COVID-19 has also prompted a reassessment of priorities in people's lives, with an increased emphasis on connections with family, community, and quality time, prioritizing them over material goals. Despite the challenges, the pandemic has underscored the resilience of communities and the solidarity among individuals, as many have demonstrated empathy and mutual support during these trying times.

The study's results showed statistically significant relationships between the variables included in the model (SUN, TRAD, COVID-19). According to previous research (Chen & Biswas, 2022; Dam et al., 2022; Grigoryev et al., 2022; Maaravi et al., 2021), H1 is confirmed by demonstrating that COVID-19 has a more significant impact on cultural values. This research confirms that Self-expression values are more significant than Survival values. The result demonstrated that the inhabitants of Ecuador and Peru had changes in their cultural values due to the COVID-19 pandemic since (1) they are societies that have experienced fear due to COVID-19 but have recognized the effectiveness of their protective behaviors by generating changes in behavior, as established by previous studies in similar societies (Anderson & Stockman, 2022; Du et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Kok et al., 2014; Peiró et al., 2023; Ruiter et al., 2014); and (2) having overcome the fear of the unknown, self-expression has led them to appreciate changing cultural values, prioritizing quality of life, emphasis on imagination, and tolerance over hard work.

The study also shows compliance with H2, that is, COVID-19 has a priority impact on Traditional values rather than Secular/rational. It is ascertained that Ecuador and Peru emphasize the importance of God and religion in their lives, crucial elements of these societies' behavior (Hamin et al., 2018). Contrary to the transition from Survival to Self-expression values, the Traditional values prevail here, which are getting stronger every time.

The findings of this study contradict the research conducted by Hildebrandt and Jäckle (2020), who suggested that religiosity tends to weaken as countries develop, becoming less socially conservative and more tolerant. In contrast, the current study reveals that in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, both Ecuador and Peru experienced a strengthening of religious beliefs, with a heightened appreciation for their respective deities. The high mortality rates resulting from the pandemic have driven the collective hysteria in these countries, leading individuals to rely on their supreme being to protect their lives and those of their families. It is worth noting that this culture of religious belief is deeply rooted in the Andean region, where various religions such as Catholicism, Protestantism, Lutheranism, Evangelicalism, and Orthodoxy coexist (Irarrázaval, 1999). In Ecuador, 79% of the population identifies as Catholic, while in Peru, the figure stands at 76% (Pew Research Center, 2014). Additionally, Cleveland and Chang (2009) emphasized that the pursuit of satisfaction and status through material possessions is likely to be temporary unless individuals embrace other values, such as religion. Thus, this study provides further evidence that religion significantly influences attitudes and behaviors, and that religious affiliation may play a crucial role in sociocultural and psychological adjustment.

On the other hand, according to Aguilar-Rodríguez et al. (2021), Latin American cultures such as Ecuador and Peru have a high level of collectivism, which implies having a group mentality and taking responsibility for them. This study confirms that, as a side effect of the pandemic and under religious precepts, collectivism increasingly predominates in these

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countries, giving greater strength to the family union and the physical and psychological protection of people since it is evident that COVID-19 increased the importance of having (1) time for leisure; and (2) friends in her life. These findings represent that the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the social culture of people for the benefit of families by strengthening the bonds of friendship. These results extend the findings of Heesen et al. (2022), who stated that the social participation of people increased from the prevention mechanisms. Specifically, the study demonstrates that strong collectivist cultures are characterized by group identification that values the general well-being of society.

The results partially verify H3 by finding that Ecuador and Peru have similar cultural values. However, people's perceptions of COVID-19 differed for these countries because Peru and Ecuador's state public health policies to combat COVID-19 were very distinct. In the case of Peru, political instability affected the prevention and action programs during the pandemic (Jaramillo-Baanante & López-Vargas, 2021), while, in the case of Ecuador, given the assumption of a new government, in its health policy plans planned to carry out a massive vaccination of the population (first 100 days of administration to vaccinate nine million people) (Primicias, 2022).

Likewise, regarding the vaccine supply to combat COVID-19, emerging countries faced the lack of availability of vaccines and the effect of price on demand and reduced budgets for public health. For this reason, in addition to vaccine purchases, Ecuador and Peru received international aid from donations from developed countries such as those of the European Union, including Spain, among the main ones (Unicef, 2021). With this, Peru ranks number three out of 20 Latin American countries with at least 100 cases detected by 2023 of total deaths from COVID-19 (211.856), and Ecuador ranks number seven (36.014) (GitHub, 2023).

The results of this research also show mainly in Peru the effect of the pandemic on (1) stress; (2) quality of life; and (3) fatigue problems. It demonstrates the various consequences of the pandemic, not only in economic terms but also at a social and health level. Many aspects of daily life have been affected by COVID-19, considering individual factors and sociocultural dynamics that include norms, values, and religions. Even though Ecuador and Peru had different ways of handling COVID-19, these societies are driven by their dominant cultural dimension.

CONCLUSION

This study determines how the behavior of the societies of Ecuador and Peru is transformed due to COVID-19, specifically, how Survival values become Self-expression and Traditional values are becoming more assertive. The findings reveal the important participation of God and religion as determining elements of social behavior. Also, it is shown that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these societies are increasingly collectivist, valuing family union and physical and psychological protection at a personal and collective level. Finally, the study observes differences between Ecuador and Peru regarding perceptions of the effect of COVID-19. It is mainly in Peruvian society, presumably, because the public health state policies applied were dissimilar for each country, in addition to the fact that, COVID-19 mainly affected stress, quality of life and fatigue problems. Nevertheless, they are societies stimulated by the dominant cultural dimensions of Self-expression and Traditional.

The study has certain limitations that must be considered: (1) The study collected data from people between the ages of 28 and 38 of indistinct gender and marital status without classifying them by type of work occupation, which could generate personal biases in the responses when concentrating on a demographic group. (2) More surveys were carried out in

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Ecuador than in Peru, which could have directed the study to prevail over criteria of interest for this country, although it was evident in the results that specific findings were more significant for Peru. (3) Fear, emotions, and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic could have changed perceptions, also causing changes in the cultural values of the people evaluated.

Although the statistical relationships found in the research indicate important findings regarding the change in social behavior as an effect of the pandemic, future studies could (1) be extended to other emerging countries with a cultural similarity to Ecuador and Peru and include new evidence that confirms the results of this study when incorporating other cultural dimensions, (2) analyze other variables such as gender roles and generational diversity that determine differences or similarities in cultural values as a contribution to society due to the effect of the catastrophe of the COVID-19 pandemic, (3) Through a multigroup analysis, additional research can identify different criteria such as employability, industry, occupation, and job seniority to assess the relationships between social and organizational culture since there are probably differences depending on the type of companies people relate to each other were affected by the pandemic.

A. THEORETICAL IMPLICACIONES

This research has the potential to make several contributions of theoretical importance, as the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a growing interest in examining the social culture of emerging markets.

First, this study documents new evidence by determining that traditional values and Self-expression in collectivist societies have a meaningful participation in their cultural transformation. It shows that Self-expression values become more relevant only if these societies feel safe after facing fear due to COVID-19, while Traditional values are becoming stronger, emphasizing religious beliefs as key elements of their behavior.

Secondly, the study shows that despite transitioning from Survival to Self-expression values, people, depending on what they experienced with COVID-19, accentuate their collectivist culture, reinforcing the value and importance of family and friends as fundamental axes of social behavior.

Third, the study shows that, although cultural values do not differ between the societies under analysis, perceptions of the effects of COVID-19 do vary. In this way, the findings suggest that emerging markets should recognize their social culture and assess whether it is evolving in generational cohorts, affecting the behavior of people, so that later, the governments in power can trace similar behaviors in the face of other pandemics and make better decisions regarding public health issues and the like.

B. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This research also supports specific practical implications for decision-makers in emerging economies regarding the behavior of these societies. In the first place, despite the far-reaching impact of COVID-19, especially on the economy and cultural values, the actions developed by the governments of the day had different impacts on these markets. Therefore, the study offers a perspective for rethinking public health strategies with more effective interventions in depressed communities.

Secondly, by addressing the strength of Traditional values, specifically religious beliefs, this research confirms that emerging countries need social norms to adapt their behaviors, patterns, and daily practices. However, the importance of Self-expression values highlights that these societies can adapt to the cultures of developed countries, emulating different behaviors.

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Ultimately, these findings have important implications for companies in business practices aimed at identifying home and host countries to understand local and multi-generational immigrant consumers better and develop global marketing strategies.

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