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Individualism vs. collectivism in a Sharing Economy context:

A study on what determines Portuguese consumers' participation

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Abstract

The reasons behind consumer participation in the *Sharing Economy* (SE) are analyzed in this research. Two experiments, both aimed at measuring correlation, mediation and moderation, showed that (i) both individualistic and collectivistic oriented consumers participate in the SE, (ii) what motivates each of these two groups to participate in *sharing-based programs* (SBP) of the SE depends on their “goal-framing” to be *hedonic, instrumental* or *normative*, and (iii) what determines each of the two groups to intensify their participation in SBP is the level of “pure sharing” or “pure exchange” characteristics that a given SBP has. This work presents a research that fills-in a current gap in literature, as, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first in investigating the relationship between individualistic and/or collectivist orientation and consumers’ participation in SBP of the SE.

Keywords: *Sharing Economy; Sharing-based programs; Pure Sharing; Pure Exchange; Consumer Behavior; Goal-Framing; Individualism; Collectivism.*

1. Introduction

A wide range of Sharing Economy (SE) practices, or as Davidson et al. (2018) call them *sharing-based programs* – SBP – of the SE, have been flourishing at a steady pace along the last few years. Such booming perplexed and induced us to question why this new market trend has been getting great attention from a variety of stakeholders, namely the consumers themselves, and ultimately, question why these end up opting for SBP, thus, participating in the SE. Are there more profound and hidden motives for this consumer behavior, such as the orientation of the culture – *individualistic/idiocentric* or *collectivist/allocentric* (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) – in which they are inserted, for example? Meaning: does an *individualistic/idiocentric* orientation (in a “selfish” and “opportunistic” perspective without any kind of collectivist concerns that they are participating in something that is for the good of society and/or community as a whole), or/and a *collectivist/allocentric* orientation (in an “altruist” perspective, towards a collectivist/communal orientation) play a central role in determining consumers’ willingness to participate in SBP of the SE? Furthermore, what are the reasons behind such correlational, as well as, what does intensify it? Meaning: what mediates and moderates the relationship between such three variables (independent variables: individualism and collectivism; and dependent variable: willingness to participate)?

In searching for an answer, this research conducted one study, divided into three phases: 1) with the aim to find out whether these three variables – (i) Individualism and Collectivism and (ii) Willingness to Participate – are associated or related in some way, in other words, whether Individualism and/or Collectivism have a positive, negative or no effect whatsoever on the willingness to participate in SBP of the SE; 2) with the aim to find out what mediates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables; 3) with the aim to find out what moderates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

In doing so, and having the Portuguese consumers as our targeted population, our findings reveal that (i) consumers participate in the SE in both scenarios – meaning: both individualistic and collectivistic oriented consumers participate in the SE –, (ii) what motivates each of these two groups to participate in *sharing-based programs* (SBP) of the SE depends on their “goal-framing” to be *hedonic*, *instrumental* or *normative* and (iii) what determines each of the two groups to intensify their participation in SBP is the level of “pure sharing” or “pure exchange” characteristics that a given SBP has.

We present a research that, to the best of our knowledge, is the first in investigating the relationship between individualistic and/or collectivist orientation and consumers’ participation in *sharing-based programs* (SBP) – of the SE.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Participation in SBP of the SE based on a Consumer Orientation Continuum –

Individualism vs. Collectivism

People (consumers) may judge, perceive and, ultimately, socially behave and make market decisions based on a variety of reasons, namely, their culture orientation, being *individualist* or *collectivist* (more broadly known as *idiocentric* or *allocentric*). Meaning: according to Triandis (1989), these two dimensions play a central cultural value with determinant influences on social behavior from citizens and consumers of any given culture. This dichotomy is believed to be the most significant cultural dimension in cross-cultural studies and explains more cross-cultural variations than other dimensions (Triandis, 1995). It is seen as being a bottom down structure of cultural differences (Greenfield, 2000) and a sort of “umbrella concept” that is rich in content (Triandis, 2005). It becomes indispensable to take into account these two dimensions upon studying consumer behavior and their market decisions, because, as Chen et al. (2007) suggest, idiocentrism and allocentrism are within-culture individual differences consubstantiating internalized cognitive structures that

could guide people via “basic principles of right and wrong” (social judgements, therefore) in their decision-making processes. Moreover, Triandis (1994, 1995) and Triandis et al. (1985) suggest that individualism and collectivism (or idiocentrism and allocentrism at the individual level) are two distinct, separate constructs not part of a same continuum (each located at the end of it) that may coexist in varying degrees. Oyserman et al.’s (2002) meta-analysis study supported this notion of the existence of two separate independent constructs.

Deepening more the discussion, Triandis (1995) goes further in suggesting that the two constructs go beyond being two pure dichotomies, showing signs to also be “polythetic” constructs. Meaning: individualism and collectivism are countered by four main elements and diverse *species* of these constructs can be explained by additional elements given body to several archetypes of each of the constructs (example: Korean collectivism vs. Japanese collectivism). These four defining elements of individualism and collectivism are: (a) the definition of the self, which can accentuate personal or collective features (Triandis, 1989) or may be independent or interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991); (b) personal goals that may have pre-eminency over so called *in-group goals* or vice versa (Triandis, 1990; Yamaguchi, 1994); (c) the prominence on exchange rather than communal relationships (Mills & Clark, 1982) or the prominence on rationality rather than relatedness (Kim et al., 1994); and (d) the role of attitudes and norms in determining social behavior (Triandis, 1995). Further, there is a clear distinction between idiocentric and allocentrism cultures: in the former ones, attitudes are more important than norms, whereas, in the latter ones, norms prevail over attitudes (Bontempo & Rivero, 1992; Trafimow & Finlay, 1996; Davidson et al., 1976; Kashima et al., 1992). Furthermore, the construct of individualism and collectivism consists of two sub-dimensions: (i) it may be horizontal (emphasizing equality) – HI and HC – or (ii) it may be vertical (emphasizing hierarchy) – VI and VC. In HI, there is a perception of the self as fully autonomous and a belief that equality between individuals is the ideal. In HC, there is a perception of the self as part of a collective, but all members of that collective are equal. In VI there is a

perception of the self as fully autonomous but recognizing that inequality will exist among individuals and there is an accepting of this inequality. In VC, there is a perception of the self as being part of a collective and individuals are willing to accept hierarchy and inequality within the collective. All these dimensions may be measured by a 16-item scale, where all items are answered on a 9-point scale, ranging from 1= *never or definitely no* and 9= *always or definitely yes*. Each of the dimension's items are summed up separately to create a HI, HC, VI and VC score. (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

In a SE context, it becomes important to clarify whether consumers tend to participate in SBPs based on their individualistic or collectivistic orientation, because it will help us conclude in a “consumer orientation continuum” whether they do it (1) in a “selfish” and “opportunistic” perspective without any kind of collectivist concerns that they are participating in something that is for the good of society and community as a whole, or/and (2) in an “altruist” perspective, towards a collectivist/communal orientation.

Adding to this, we reckon that consumer behavior should also be studied from a second layer of analysis: what activates, drives (what mediates) individuals (being individualistic or collectivistic) to participate in SBPs of the SE? In searching for an answer to this, we make use of the goal-framing theory (Lindenberg, 2006, 2013; Lindenberg & Foss, 2011), which explains the motives behind individual behavior from the point of view of goals. The explanation of this follows below.

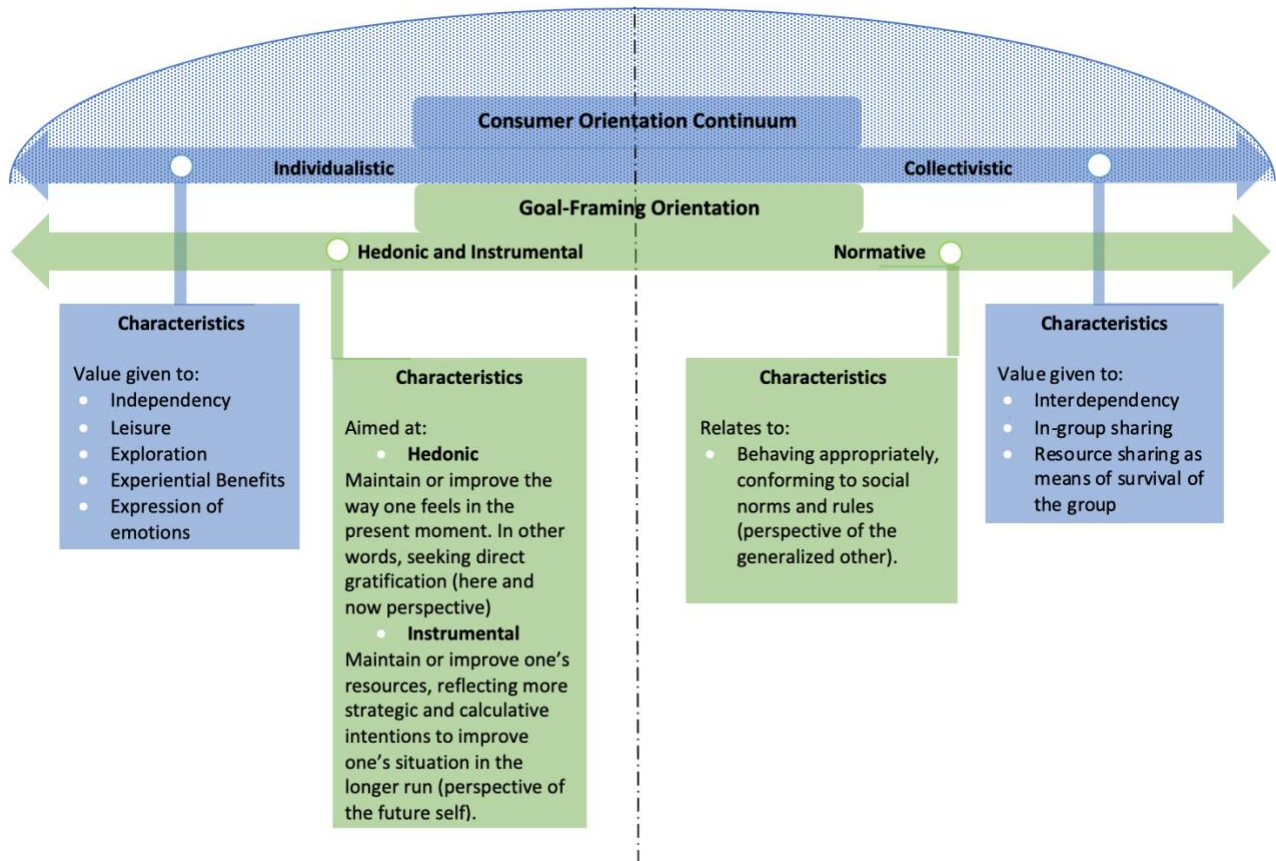
2.2. Participation in SBP of the SE based on a Goal-Framing Perspective

The goal-framing theory is too extensive to be reviewed here, nevertheless, we may summarize it in key relevant notions for the purposes of this research (for further details, please see Table 1 in Lindenberg & Foss, 2011): it focuses on the motivational force of a collective orientation and its direct competitors (Lindenberg & Foss, 2011). It has its founding roots on (social) cognition research, which basically stresses that (i) mental constructs have to be activated in order to affect

behavior and (ii) goals are particularly decisive mental constructs in which cognitions and motivations are intercrossed in an intricate way (Lindenberg & Foss, 2011). Further, the starting point for the theory is the making of what Brewer and Caporael (2004 and 1997 cited in Lindenberg & Foss, 2011) call a distinction between an *individual* and a *supra-individual* mindset; and, depending on the activation of three specific overarching goals on the mindsets of individuals, one or the other may be predominant. These goals are (Dijkstra et al., 2015): *hedonic*, *instrumental* (also called *gain*), and *normative*. While the first one aims at maintaining or improving how one feels in the present moment (the “here and now perspective” – seeking direct gratification), the second one aims at maintaining or improving the resources one has at his/her disposal (the “future self-perspective” – linked with more strategic and calculative intentions in order to improve one’s situation in the longer run). The latter one refers to how one behaves appropriately conforming to social norms and rules (the “generalized other perspective”).

In short, both hedonic and instrumental goal frames are connected to an *individual orientation* (thus, more individualistic), while the normative goal frame is connected to a *supra-individual orientation* (thus, more collectivistic). Following this rationale, we therefore may construct an integrated framework between the goal-framing orientation and the individualistic/collectivistic consumer orientation continuum (Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 – Goal-Framing Orientation integrated in a Consumer Orientation Continuum.

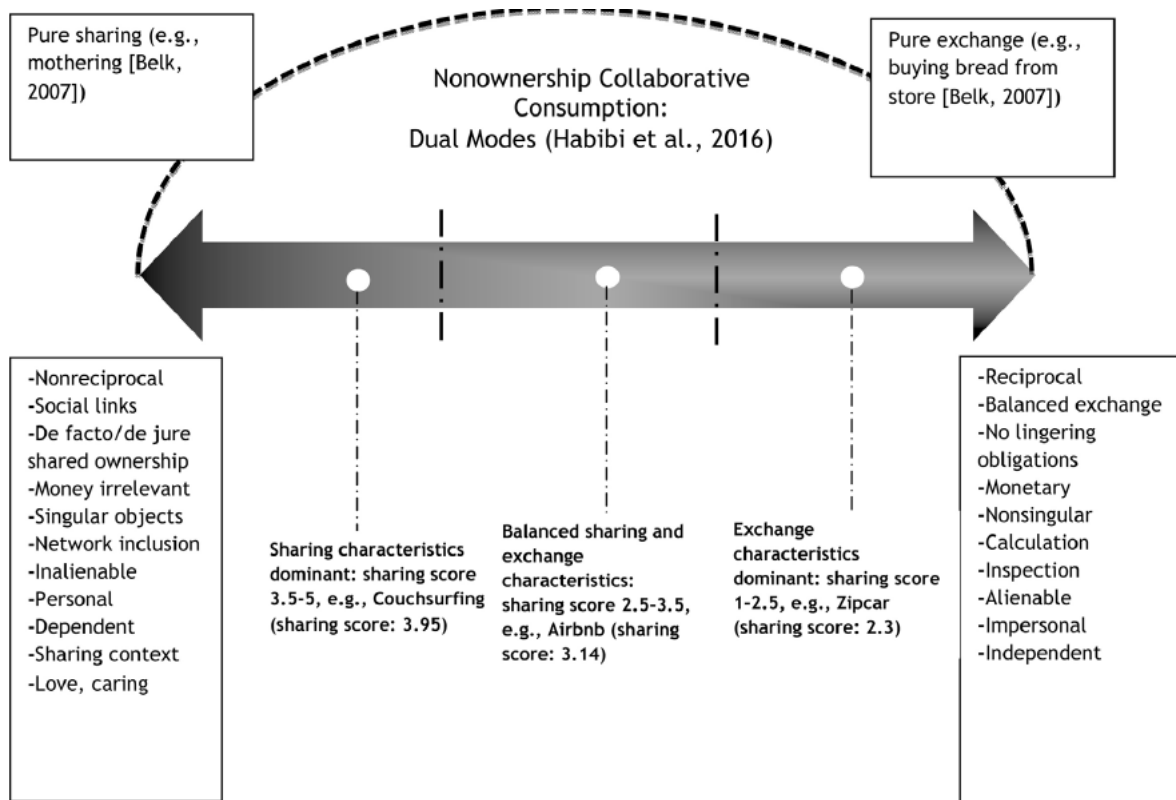


Complementarily to the mediation analysis around what drives participation in SBP of the SE, we also reckon that it should be brought forward a third layer of analysis into the present discussion: what intensifies (what moderates) the degree of which consumers tend to participate in SBP? In searching for an answer to this, we make use of Habibi et al.’s (2016) “sharing-exchange continuum”, which is a tool that helps to map out the level of “pure sharing” or just “pure exchange” of any given SBP of the SE. The explanation of this follows below.

2.3. Participation in SBP of the SE based on a Sharing-Exchange Continuum

Habibi et al (2016) developed the sharing-exchange continuum as way of helping distinguish the degree to which actual sharing is being offered by a SE practice (SBP). The continuum helps tracing any SBP in order to determine how much nonownership forms of consumption consist of sharing-related attributes (Habibi et al., 2017) – please see Figure 2, below.

Figure 2 – The sharing/exchange continuum (Habibi et al., 2017)



The continuum is designed based on a rating given to a SBP in measuring its “sharing scores” (in a 5-point Likert scale), which, on the other hand, is based on a number of sharing and exchange-related characteristics that are drawn out of Belk (2007, 2010). The description of these may be seen in Table 1 below, which is extracted from Habibi et al. (2017). The procedure Habibi et al. (2016) used to determine the sharing scores consisted of giving a reading task to a sample of participants where, confronted with a description of a nonownership consumption practice, they would rate each characteristic. This led to draw a sharing score that was calculated by extracting the mean score for each SBP. Habibi et al.’s (2016) results reveal that (1) Zipcar SBP was rated as being in the “pure exchange” end of the continuum, (2) Couchsurfing SBP was rated as being in the “pure sharing” end of the continuum, and (3) Airbnb SBP was rated as being a “hybrid” practice, having mix “pure exchange” and “pure sharing” characteristics, thus, falling into the middle of the continuum.

Table 1– Characteristics of sharing vs. exchange (Habibi et al., 2017)

Sharing	Exchange	Description
Nonreciprocal	Reciprocal	Reciprocation is not expected in sharing but it is an important element of exchange
Social bonds	No social bonds	Sharing creates some sort of social bonds but this is not necessarily the case in exchange
Joint ownership	No joint ownership	In sharing both parties feel responsible toward the object being used (feelings of joint ownership) but this is not the case in exchange
Money irrelevant	Money relevant	Sharing does not require transfer of money but exchange does
Dependent	Independent	Consumption through sharing depends on other people involved but exchange is independent
Similarity to real sharing	Similarity to exchange	
Social reproduction	Lack of social reproduction	Sharing produces social capital and links, exchange usually does not
Singular	Nonsingular	Objects are singular in sharing but not in exchange
Money not important	Money important	Money is important in exchange but there is a lack of money exchange in sharing
Lack of calculation	Calculation	Precise calculation is a property of exchange

Having the explanation of both the goal-framing theory and the sharing-exchange continuum in mind, and for the purposes of the present research, we elaborate that: 1) individualistic consumers will tend to participate in a SBP because of “hedonic and/or instrumental” motives and likewise, collectivistic consumers will tend to participate in a SBP because of “normative” motives; 2) depending on what quadrant (“pure sharing”, “pure exchange” or “hybrid” – featured by mix “pure sharing” and “pure exchange” characteristics) of the continuum a given SBP is, the more intention a consumer will have to participate in it. Meaning: our assumption is that (i) an individualistic consumer will tend to participate more in a SBP of the SE if this SBP is located in the “pure exchange” end (e.g. Zipcar), and (ii) a collectivistic consumer will tend to participate more in a SBP of the SE if this SBP is located in the “pure sharing” end (e.g. Couchsurfing). However, we also make assumption that (iii) individualistic consumers may equally participate in “pure sharing” SBP of the SE in case they are induced (primed) with “normative” goal-framing advantages for them, as well as, (iv) collectivistic consumers may equally participate in “pure exchange” SBP of the SE in case they are induced (primed) with “hedonic” and/or “instrumental” goal-framing advantages for

them. In other words, the co-relation between consumer orientation and willingness to participate in SBP of the SE is (i) mediated by goal-framing motives and (ii) moderated by the degree of “pure exchange” or “pure sharing” characteristics a given SBP has.

Provided that to the best of our knowledge to date there isn't any research on investigating (i) how *individualism/idiocentrism* and *collectivism/allocentrism* do play a determinant role on how consumers behave towards SBP of the SE, (ii) what mediates (what activates, drives) their participation in SBP of the SE, and (iii) what moderates (what intensifies) their participation in SBP of the SE, we fill-in this gap by making an experimental research design, which is divided into two phases. In doing so, we hypothesize the following:

Both “Individualism” and “Collectivism” (the independent variables) are correlated with the “Willingness to participate in SBP of the SE” (the dependent variable). In other words, participation in SBP of the SE may be due to either individualistic and collectivistic orientations, and, at the same time, such participation may particularly be activated and driven by goal-framing behavior motives (“hedonic”, “instrumental”, and/or “normative”), as well as, the intensity with which consumers participate depends on the SBP service to be of “pure sharing” – example: Couchsurfing – or “pure exchange” – example: Zipcar. Moreover, there may occur cross relations between all these variables. Meaning: (i) an individualistic consumer may equally participate in a “pure sharing” SBP service, (when primed with “normative” goal-framing advantages for him/her), and (ii) a collectivistic consumer may equally participate in a “pure exchange” SBP service (when primed with “hedonic” and/or “instrumental” goal-framing advantages for him/her). More formally:

H1 – There is a correlation (positive) between Individualism and Willingness to Participate in SBP of the SE;

H2 – Such correlation is driven (mediated) by “hedonic” and/or “instrumental” goal-framing behavior motives;

H3 – Moreover, such correlation is intensified (moderated) by the degree of which a given SBP of the SE has characteristics of “pure exchange”;

H4 – However, individualistic consumers may also participate in “pure sharing” SBP of the SE if induced (primed) with “normative” goal-framing advantages for them;

H5 – There is a correlation (positive) between Collectivism and Willingness to Participate in SBP of the SE;

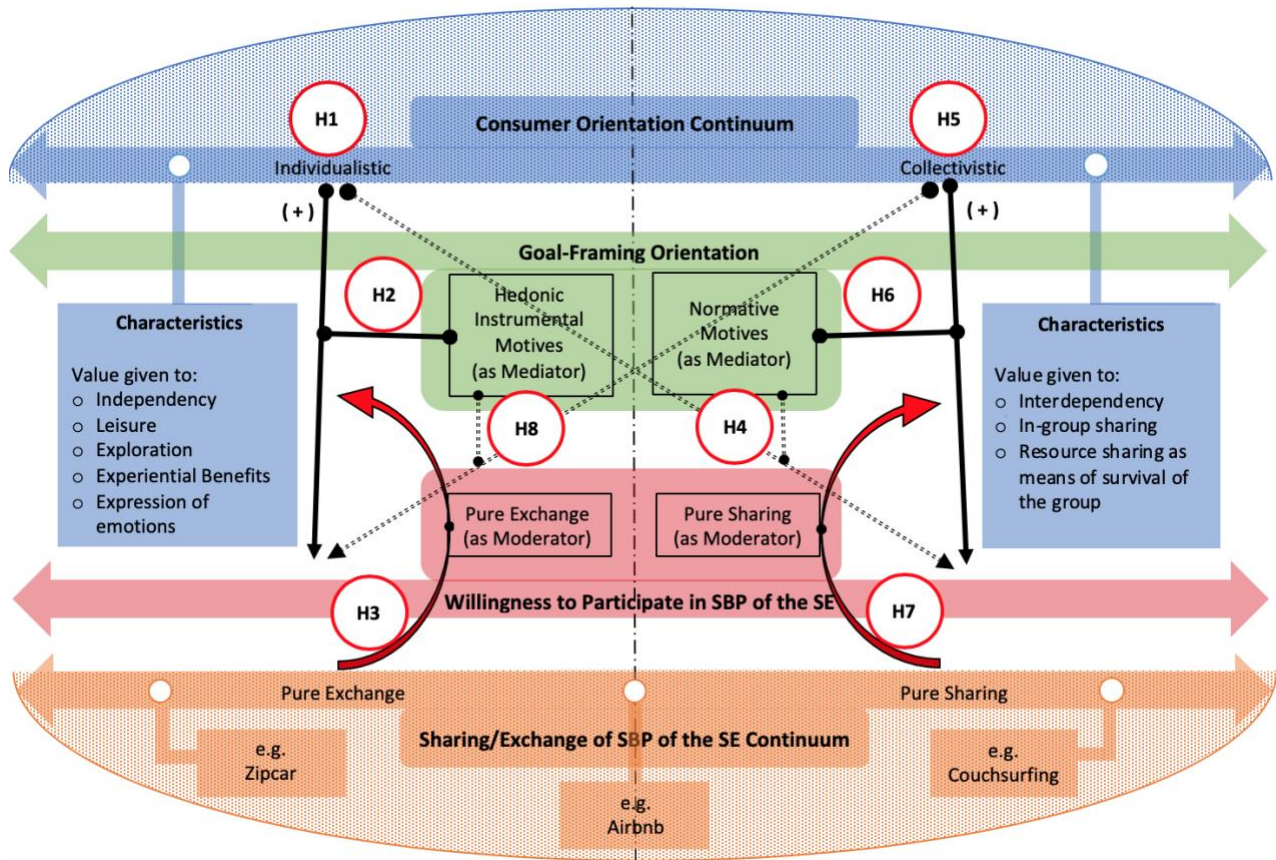
H6– Such correlation is driven (mediated) by “normative” goal-framing behavior motives;

H7 – Moreover, such correlation is intensified (moderated) by the degree of which a given SBP of the SE has characteristics of “pure sharing”.

H8 – However, collectivistic consumers may also participate in “pure exchange” SBP of the SE if induced (primed) with “hedonic” and/or “instrumental” goal-framing advantages for them.

Summing up and integrating the literature and hypotheses described above, below follows the proposed research model of the current study in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Research Model – Overview of proposed relationships between Consumer Orientation (Individualistic vs. Collectivistic), Goal-Framing Behavior Motives, Pure Exchange, Pure Sharing and Willingness to Participate in SBP of the SE.



3. The studies

3.1. Experiment 1: correlation, mediation and moderation between individualistic/collectivistic consumers and their intention to use “pure sharing” and “pure exchange” services.

3.1.1. Sample and procedure

Participants (University Students) (N = ??; ??% female; ages “...”-“...”, M = “...”) at ISCTE Business School took part in two survey questionnaires (one applied to Couchsurfing and another applied to Zipcar).

Firstly, participants were asked to respond to Triandis and Gelfand’s 16-item individualism/collectivism scale (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) with the objective of measuring their

HI, VI, HC and VC dimensions (4 questions per each dimension). The second part consisted of a reading task about the SBP in question: description of Couchsurfing (with a priming manipulation on its service to be of “pure sharing”, with no money exchange occurrence) in one questionnaire and Zipcar (with a priming manipulation on its service to be of “pure exchange”, with money exchange occurrence) in the other questionnaire. As a way of preventing participants from being influenced by brand familiarity, Couchsurfing was referred as “share your couch” and Zipcar was referred as “iCar”. Inspired in Davidson et al.’s (2018) measurements used to evaluate familiarity and willingness to participate in Couchsurfing programs, we then asked participants to indicate how much they agreed (in seven-point scale, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) with six statements in order to evaluate their familiarity and willingness to participate in each of the programs. The first three statements related to their familiarity: “I am familiarized with *share your couch* / *iCar* programs”, “I have had experience in participating in *share your couch* / *iCar* programs” and “My knowledge about how a *share your couch* / *iCar* program works is low”. The remaining three statements related to their willingness to participate: “I would most likely choose a *share your couch* / *iCar* option the next time I travel / need a transportation”, “I would prefer a *share your couch* / *iCar* option instead of booking a hotel room / another transportation service” and “I would likely choose a *share your couch* / *iCar* program instead of booking a hotel room / another transportation service”.

Inspired in Davidson et al.’s (2018) mediator scales and Dijkstra et al.’s (2015) measurements to assess the motives for individual behavior, we then asked participants to indicate how much they agreed (in seven-point scale, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) with eight statements (four of which related to hedonic motives and the remaining four related instrumental motives) in case of *iCar*’s questionnaire, and 4 statements (related to normative motives) in case of *share your couch*’s questionnaire. These statements were respectively: a) in terms of Hedonic items, “If I used *iCar* service... (1) I would get more fun, (2) I would have a really interesting experience, (3) I could

enjoy life more, (4) I would enjoy a pleasant experience; b) in terms of Instrumental items, “If I used *iCar* service... (1) I would save money, (2) I would be making a good deal, (3) I would be doing a more reasonable management of my resources, (4) I could save resources to invest in the future; c) in terms of Normative items, “If I used *share your couch* service... (1) I would be contributing to a fairer society, (2) I would help other people to monetize their resources, (3) I would be contributing to a better world, (4) I would be doing what should be done in present times”. To finalize, participants were thanked in the end.

Finally, we collected some demographic information, such as, age, gender, education, financial status and country of residence. Participants were thanked in the end.

3.1.2. Analysis and findings

(work in progress)

3.1.3. Discussion

(work in progress)

3.2. Experiment 2: cross correlation, mediation and moderation between individualistic/collectivistic consumers and their intention to use “pure sharing” and “pure exchange” services.

3.2.1. Sample and procedure

Participants (University Students) (N = ??; ??% female; ages “...”-“...”, M = “...”) at ISCTE Business School took part in two survey questionnaires, both applied to Airbnb. The same procedure and questions of experiment 1 were used in both of them, but of course, concerning Airbnb. Again, as a way of preventing participants from being influenced by brand familiarity, the service was referred as “sharing for good”. Two main differences were intentionally drawn between the two questionnaires: Firstly, the description of the service was slightly altered – in one, there was a priming manipulation on its service to be of “pure sharing”, with no money exchange occurrence; whereas in the other, there was a priming manipulation on its service to be of “pure exchange”, with money exchange occurrence –; Secondly, regarding the statements measuring the motives for individual behavior (once again inspired in Davidson et al.’s (2018) mediator scales and Dijkstra et al.’s (2015) measurements), we asked participants distinct questions between the two questionnaires – in one, they were asked to indicate how much they agreed (again, in a seven-point scale, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) with eight statements (same as used in experiment 1 – four of which related to hedonic motives and the remaining four related instrumental motives); whereas in the other, they were asked to indicate how much they agreed (again, in a seven-point scale, from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) with four statements (same as used in experiment 1 – related to normative motives).

Finally, we collected some demographic information, such as, age, gender, education, financial status and country of residence. Participants were thanked in the end.

3.2.2. *Analysis and findings*

(work in progress)

3.2.3. *Discussion*

(work in progress)

4. General discussion and conclusion

(work in progress)

5. Limitations and future research

(work in progress)

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