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How do cultural differences affect the participation in, loyalty to, and purchase intention through online brand communities?

A cross cultural study in Belgium and India

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INTRODUCTION

Community-building around a brand has become a topic of concern since the end of the nineties. Inspired by successful stories and enabled by Web 2.0 technologies, marketers in different industries have been busy trying to build communities around their own brands.

Research conducted by Muñiz and O'Guinn and published in a paper in 2001 became widely acknowledged, used, and accepted in the brand community literature. Their paper, entitled "Brand Community", notably revealed several implications of brand communities for branding. For example, the shift from the traditional consumer-brand dyad to the consumer-brand-consumer triad, and therefore, the social nature of brands. Also, it asserts that the consumers are actively involved in the creation and that a brand community clearly affects brand equity.

Claimed by some as the 'holy grail of brand loyalty' (Hook et al., 2018), brand communities have the potential to offer brand differentiation and a sustainable competitive advantage (Thompson & Sinha, 2008). They offer the opportunity to develop and foster long-term relationships with customers.

In his pioneering article, Cova (1997), analyses how people create and maintain bonds through consuming products and experiences in a postmodern society. According to his findings, individuals form 'tribes' through these consumption processes. What forms each brand community contains unique social and interpersonal dynamics, which are often related to the shared product or brand (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). However, it seems that the nature itself of the brand community presents challenges, such as the plurality of meanings that can create the co-existence of sub-tribes. This is especially true for global brands where meanings are shaped by varying cultures (Cova et al., 2007). Therefore, a community attached to a global brand constitutes a complex phenomenon.

In the era of information technology, with the growing interactivity and usage of internet and social media, the concept of online brand community has become popular. The online brand community appeared as a new form of brand communities that takes place virtually.

Research Question

To date, several hundreds of articles have been published in the field of brand communities, with a rapidly increasing number in recent years. Even though researchers have investigated many issues about online brand communities, studying online brand communities in a cross-cultural context has not drawn the attention of many researchers. There are few studies that investigated online brand communities located in different countries. However, it seems these online brand communities are not culturally neutral, but culture-bond (Madupu & Cooley, 2010).

My personal experience with cross-cultural contexts, my fascination for brand community building, and the lack of literature linking the two of them led me to the following question:

How do cultural differences affect the participation in, loyalty to, and purchase intention through online brand communities? A cross cultural study in Belgium and India

Moreover, it is important to mention that this research on brand communities does not directly focus on the relationship between brands and their online brand community members, but rather on the relationship between the members of brand communities themselves.

The managerial interest is to understand the consumer's approach to the product or service, for two different consumer groups, differing in their cultural predispositions. First, the national culture will be explored and used to divide respondents into two groups: one from the Belgian culture, and the other from the Indian culture. Another way to explore how cultural dimensions can have an impact is by analysing data according to individual cultural preferences on these dimensions (i.e., regardless of the citizenship). Indeed, certain cultural predispositions can be activated at the individual level regardless of the citizenship.

Structure of the thesis

This study seeks to identify and assess cultural factors linked to an online brand community and which are likely to impact the participation in, loyalty to, and purchase intention through this branded community.

The first section of this thesis is a literature review about the topic. The goal is to treat the literature related to the research question in its globality by defining and exploring concepts, cultural dimensions, and variables of interest. Chapter 1 is fully dedicated to presenting brand communities with a focus on online brand communities. Chapter 2 is devoted to participation in online brand communities and its drivers. In chapter 3, a cultural framework is presented and cultural differences between Belgium and India are explored and contextualised. Chapter 4 contextualises digitalisation in India and in Belgium. The last chapter, chapter 5, is dedicated to introducing and grasping on Airbnb as the practical part is based on it.

Secondly, the practical part has the goal to come up with potential hypotheses that could explain the problematic. To do so, a survey was launched among Indian and Belgian Airbnb users. Indeed, Airbnb has a successful online community with 150+ million members worldwide. The aim of this study is to investigate if members coming from different national cultures behave differently. After covering the methodology, analyses extracted from SPSS explore the cultural differences that could impact the three variables of interest. Results were discussed and some managerial and theoretical implications were drawn.

Finally, a conclusion and the main limitations of this present research are given. Accordingly, several future research directions are presented.

PART 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 1: BRAND COMMUNITIES

1.1. Definition

Brand communities are defined by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) as "social entities that reflect the situated embeddedness of brands in the day-to-day lives of consumers and the ways in which brands connect the consumer to the brand, and consumer to consumer". This definition and the work done by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) have been widely acknowledged and accepted in the brand community literature.

According to Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001), brand community members possess a well-developed understanding of their feelings toward the brand and their connection to other users. However, members know it is not the most critical aspect of their lives – not even close – but neither is it trivial. They value sharing a social bond around a branded commodity.

1.2. Growing interest

Numerous success stories in various industries have shown that a brand community can transform a brand. For example, the brands *Harley-Davidson*, *Coca-Cola*, *Lego*, or *Apple* may at first give the impression to have little in common. However, the four of them, in four different industries, use a brand community (or multiple) as part of their marketing strategy (Hook et al., 2018).

In recent years, topic of value co-creation through branded communities has been more and more explored by a new stream in the literature. For example, Schau et al. (2009), have investigated how brand communities' practices create value. They identified four categories of practices: social networking, impression management, community engagement, and brand use. Further research, such as Laroche et al. (2012), confirm that online brand communities contribute to create value for both members and the company.

As there is a growing interest in the topic among marketers, research on brand communities have become a major concern. Their timing is right. In today's turbulent world, people are craving for a sense of connection; and in tough economic times, every company needs new ways to do more with what it already has (Fournier & Lee, 2009).

At first, brand communities have been explored in the case of face-to-face interactions. However, nowadays and for the aim of this present study, it is relevant to give a digital perspective on brand communities by focusing on online interactions.

1.3. Brand community forms: offline, online, social-media-based

Research and findings cover three main forms of brand community participation: offline, online, and social-media-based. As previously mentioned, this research is focused on the online brand community, and social-media-based communities are a derivative form of it.

The ***offline brand community*** is characterized by the in-person face-to-face meetings of community members united around a focal brand, for example during events organised by the brand. Their interaction is not frequent, and the high involvement of the brand is necessary (Hook et al., 2018).

On the other hand, the growing interactivity and usage of internet have enabled speedy and simple communication among internet users over the past years. Indeed, in the era of emerging technologies, the internet, and social media, the creation of a second form of brand community has come to light: the ***online brand community***. An online brand community is a platform allowing companies to strengthen relationships with customers and involve them in brand co-creation (Tsai et al., 2012). The brand community is located in a virtual environment where members can share information about a common branded product or service (Hook et al., 2018).

In the early history of the internet, online brand communities were made of companies Web portals, Web 1.0 platform [1] or established by customers. In this regard, online brand communities were known as a forum where customers consume content passively. This vision has changed alongside with the emergence of social media, the usage of Web 2.0[2] platforms, and the user-generated content. Nowadays, companies use social networking sites as part of their strategy and support brand communities.

[1] Web 1.0 refers to platforms where one can find static information that is owned and considered proprietary, fact checked and attributed.

[2] Web 2.0 applications are web pages that visitors can add information to or change.

Therefore, in recent years, it appears to be a trend towards research on a third form of brand community; the ***social-media-based brand community***. It is a community formed on social media platforms such as *Facebook*. This new form of brand community enables content creation and brings a new dimension, which is the influence of participants and users on each other (Kamboj & Rahman, 2017).

This third form of brand community comes along with some challenges. Indeed, every individual can now perform as a content creator on social networking sites, and the community does depend on this user-generated content. The challenge, which is also the goal, is to encourage participation and to create a thriving community (Kamboj & Rahman, 2017).

1.4. Three forms of community affiliation

In their paper published in 2008 about brand community and its leverage as a tool for corporate value and capture, the strategy consultancy Jump Associates identified three basic forms of community affiliation: pools, webs, and hubs. They claim that community as a system can be engineered for maximum strength. These three forms of community affiliation have thereafter been covered by the authors themselves in an article in the Harvard Business Review (Fournier & Lee, 2009).

In "***pools***" people are united by shared goals or values but have lost associations with each other. For example, Apple devotees or political parties. The traditional management theory has fostered the pool-based approach to brand building, which consists of identifying and consistently communicating a clear set of values that emotionally connect consumers with the brand. However, this approach offers only limited community benefits as people build little interpersonal relationships. Moreover, as the brand grows, the common meaning that holds members together is often weakened.

In order to strengthen and expand the community, the solution is to use webs and hubs.

Indeed, "***web***" affiliations are based on one-to-one connections. For example, social networking sites or the Cancer Survivors Network (CSN[3]). Webs are a stronger and more stable

[3] CSN is for members who support and inspire one another, share personal experiences, and offer practical tips for dealing with the side effects of cancer and its treatment (Source: American Cancer Society).

model of community affiliation than the pool. There are many varied links between members, these bond people more tightly to the community.

In contrast to the web affiliations, the "***hub***" affiliations are a strong but unstable form of community. Members of hubs are united by their admiration of an individual. For example, Deepak Chopra or Hannah Montana. It is not stable in the sense that it often breaks apart once the central figure is no longer present.

In the context of this master thesis, it is the web affiliation that is of interest, as it focuses on online brand communities. However, astute companies leverage community by engaging all three forms of affiliation – pools, webs and hubs – in ways that are relevant to consumers and the brand (Fournier & Lee, 2008).

1.5. Brand community characteristics

Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) have identified three characteristics as essential markers of community: consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. Even though there are differences in their expression as compared to traditional communities, these characteristics are also valid for branded communities. To date, a range of terms have been applied to characterise all kind of brand communities, however, these three have remained consistent and widely acknowledged.

What is said to be the first element of community is ***consciousness of kind***, referring to the connection an individual feels towards the brand and community members. Some refer to the triangular social constellation that, "the link is more important than the thing" (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Members feel an important connection and they "kind of know each other" at some level, even though they have never met. According to Muñiz and O'Guinn's observations and analysis (2001), the consciousness of kind found in brand communities specifically transcends geographic boundaries. Although brand communities prove to be consistent with other communities regarding consciousness of kind, there are few particularities in how this aspect is constructed in brand communities particularly. For example, there is a certain self-awareness and sensitivity regarding the commercial nature of the community; consumers are aware that they have feelings about mass-produced and mass-advertised branded products (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Members also see it as an open community: the gender, class, race do not matter: "all you got to do is to appreciate it".

The second main characteristic is ***shared rituals and traditions***. They are vital social processes which allow the community to be reproduced and transmitted within and beyond the community. It usually focuses on shared consumption experiences with the brand. It is important to note that some of these rituals and traditions are shared by all members of the community, while others are more localised in their origins and applications. Brand communities differ from more traditional communities by their commercial nature which drive their rituals and traditions. On the contrary, traditional communities are often influenced by strong external institutions, such as a church or religion.

The third main marker of brand communities is ***moral responsibility***, referring to the sense of duty to the community as a whole and to individual members of the community. Moral responsibility characterises the assistance that community members have towards one another regarding the brand-related resources. Therefore, it is the moral responsibility which fosters members' participation in the community, and which enhances group cohesion and collective action (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Moral systems are highly contextualised, and when it comes to brand communities, they all share two traditional and critical missions: first, integrating and retaining members, and secondly, assisting members in the proposer use of the brand (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001).

In 2012, an empirical study with 441 respondents was conducted and showed that online brand communities have positive correlation to these three brand communities' characteristics (Laroche et al., 2012).

1.6. Ascribing online communities

Social media have turned into media conglomerates with user audiences in the millions. Over the last few decades, investments in social technologies turned into real businesses and online communications became the mainstream way we communicate.

The radical changes predicted in the 1990s (e.g., Castells 1996) for the network society have happened and are still happening. Social media networks influence and interfere with social norms and systems that inspire and reinforce interpersonal connections (Kozinets, 2019). For example, online review rating systems such as *Airbnb* or *TripAdvisor* have changed the way people make travel decision and other important decisions. This shift provides a role in decision-making to what was previously accorded to institutional actors such as travel agents

(Kozinets, 2019). What motivates people who use social media and online communications to connect with each other is constantly evolving. The online space has reunited in a smooth and easy way those who seek purchase advice, camaraderie and connection, influence, followers, and commercial sponsorship. Likewise, platforms which at first provided appropriate media for intimate conversation have turned into platforms whose business models offer connections for free, tracking in private data, and usage of social information to serve targeted advertising (Kozinets, 2019).

Mahrous and Abdelmaaboud (2016) highlighted that searching for information is one of the most important motives for joining and participate in online communities. However, when it comes to online communities, it is crucial to highlight their ever-changing nature notably due to the social media changes, people's adoptions of it and adaptations to it are altered. Likewise, there are constantly new configurations and networks assembling and dispersing affecting the notion of community itself (Kozinets, 2019).

1.7. Online brand communities' consequences and impact

As previously mentioned, there are two main types of relationships within online brand communities, first between the brand and the brand community members, and secondly, between the members themselves. The focus of this study is on the second type of interaction.

Consumer-to-consumer communications have significant consequences of different nature (Kozinets et al., 2010). Most of the brand community studies focused their research on consequences in terms of positive implications towards the brand as a whole. However, it is worth mentioning that there are also social-related consequences (Hook et al., 2018).

Brand-related consequences: Loyalty

Brand communities have been claimed by some as the "Holy Grail of brand loyalty" (Thompson et Sinha, 2008). Therefore, a stream of the brand community literature has given its focus on it. For example, in their research, Laroche et al. (2012) have supported the impact of brand community on brand loyalty via the concept of value co-creation.

According to their empirical study, brand communities established on social media positively enhance community characteristics (i.e., shared consciousness, shared rituals and traditions, and sense of moral responsibility /obligation to society). These three community markers have positive effects on value creation practices (i.e., social networking, community engagement, impressions management, and brand use). Finally, they have shown that brand trust has a mediating role in converting value creation practices into brand loyalty. Their model can be found in *Figure 1*.

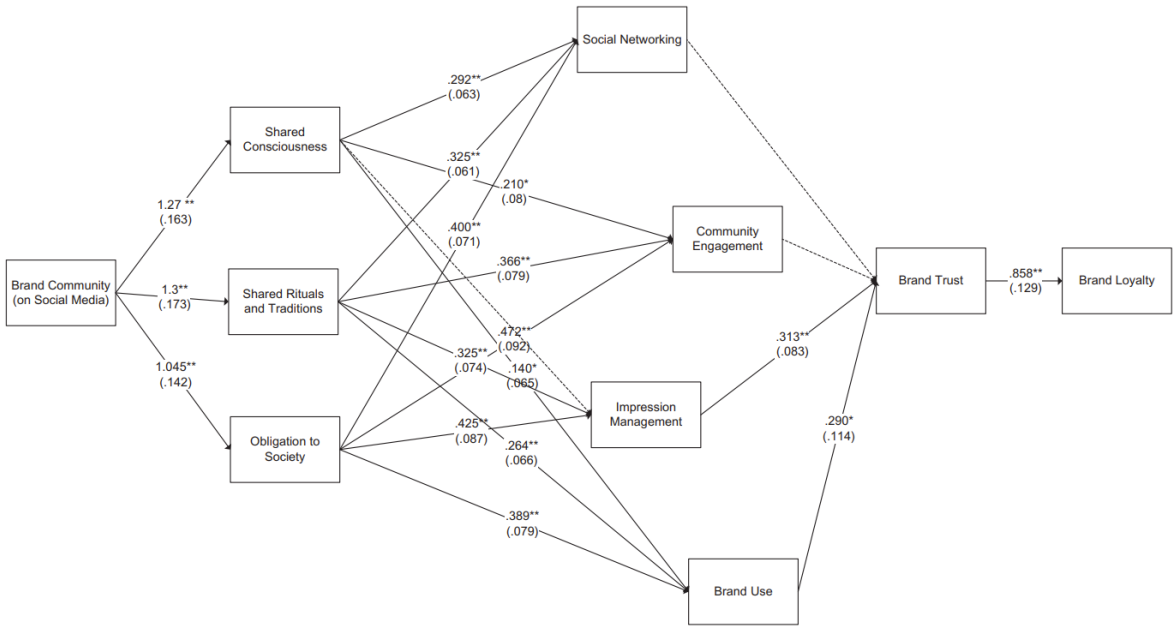

Figure 1 – Model of the effects of brand community (Laroche et al., 2012)

Certain studies take the positive impact of brand community on brand loyalty for granted (e.g., Madupu & Cooley, 2010) as it has been widely demonstrated in the past (e.g., Algesheimer et al., 2005; McAlexander et al., 2002). In essence, it is unsurprisingly recognised in the literature that brand loyalty is reinforced by a community.

Furthermore, the concept of brand loyalty through brand communities has been extended to the concept of 'oppositional brand loyalty', meaning that certain brand community members have such a high loyalty to the brand that they strongly oppose competing brands (Hook et al., 2018).

Some further research found out that a key outcome of online brand communities is to create a loyalty to the community itself, which generates further brand-related consequences.

Brand-related consequences: Purchase and repurchase intention

Other aspects that have been analysed as positively correlated to online brand communities are purchase and repurchase intentions.

In the specific digital world, the use of digital platforms to share (assets, point of views, advice, etc.) with unknown people has been steadily growing. Furthermore, studies have shown that an increasing majority of customers rely on social media to make purchase decisions. For example, in 2014 a survey asserted that 71% of consumers changed their brand preferences based on reviews they read on an online brand community (Mahrous & Abdelmaaboud, 2016). It is more and more acknowledged that content generated by other users and community members have an influence on purchase decisions.

In 2013, a study about virtual communities and their influence on consumers' purchasing decisions came up with evidence that purchasing intentions and behaviour can be altered because of interactions among members (Leal et al., 2013). The online community provides its members with information and reduces perceived risk. Therefore, the influence of the community helps its members to achieve their objectives.

Later, Chen & Chang (2018) have developed a study to understand the factors affecting the purchase intention on online community-based platforms such as *Airbnb*. It supported that the consumer review system was a key determinant to purchase intention. In essence, it has been shown that information provided by other buyers, other community members, have a significant impact on consumers' purchase intentions and decisions.

Social-related consequences

One of the most social-related consequences explored by the literature is the notion of word-of-mouth. Early scholarship identified these consumer-to-consumer communications as a significant social force. For example, Ryan and Gross's (1943) study revealed that conversations among buyers were more important than marketing communications in influencing adoption (Kozinets et al., 2010).

It is interesting to notice that most studies have focused their research on the positive implications of word-of-mouth rather than the negatives ones. However, word-of-mouth is

difficult to control, and there is a high probability that negative word-of-mouth occur as much as positive word-of-mouth.

CHAPTER 2: PARTICIPATION IN BRAND COMMUNITIES

2.1. Brand community participation definition

It is worth noticing that there is no specific definition of participation in online brand communities agreed in the literature. However, after having reviewed 41 articles to build their literature review on the topic, Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski (2018) place social intention at the heart of brand community participation definition. Social intention is notably linked to the sense of moral responsibility as per mentioned in the brand community characteristics (see *Chapter 1*, *section 1.5*). The notion of 'intention' is interesting as it means that in some cases, member participation or interaction is not visible, or hard to observe. It means that, for example, browsing the brand community or 'scrolling' without visible interaction occurring can also be considered as brand community participation. In some other cases, participation has been measured based on observable behaviours, such as being involved in activities or providing help to other members (Hook & al., 2018).

Indeed, there are two types of members involved in community participation: active members, who are source of most of the content, and passive members, who browse and take advantage of the benefits (Malinen, 2015). Passive members increase the popularity of the community through figures as they generate website traffic and increase hits, but they do not directly contribute to the success of an online community regarding the content. Active users, however, do.

In essence, a simple way to define a participant in an online community is, "anyone who has visited a site and engaged with it in some way" (Malinen, 2015).

2.2. Antecedents to and motives for brand community participation

There are various models and theories used to study the social and psychological behaviour of online brand communities. The current section explores the antecedents to and motives for online brand community participation.

Understanding factors motivating members' participation in online brand communities has become a key topic of interest among brand community research. The literature review conducted by Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski (2018) has identified five categories of motives for participation in brand community: self-related, social-related, information, entertainment-related and technology-related. Each category has itself several motives for brand community participation, and even though they are studied independently, they are all interconnected.

In certain cases, motives can also be called antecedents as they are not conscious motives. Except for the technology-related antecedents, this section will focus on antecedents from the perspective of the consumer.

Self-related motives

There are three main self-related motives that have been covered by the brand community literature: social identity, daily usage of a social media platform, and opportunity seeking. Self-related motives focus on aspects that have to do with the individuals themselves – how they relate to the brand community, or the personal benefits they will gain from participation.

The most common self-related antecedent that has been studied is the individual's social identity. Social identity is defined as "when an individual sees themselves as part of the group (brand community) and feels an emotional significance by being part of the group" (Hook et al., 2018, p.283). Even though social identity can also be associated to the social-related category of antecedents, it focuses on how the individual sees themselves in relation to the community group, which is seen as a self-related antecedent rather than a social-related one (Hook et al., 2018). Social identity is likely to vary from individual to individual and more broadly across cultures due to the diversity in context and experiences that shape our behaviours (Feitosa & Salas, 2012).

Secondly, an individual's daily usage of a social media platform will foster their participation in the brand communities active on this same social media platform. It is due to what is called the 'information technology habit' (Hook et al., 2018), referring to an individual's use of certain information technology based on previous behaviours. For example, a *Facebook* user will be more likely to participate on a social-media-based brand community on *Facebook* than someone who is not used to the platform (Hook et al., 2018).

The opportunity seeking of an individual is the last self-related antecedent identified. It refers to self-related motives such as self-discovery and personal rewards (Hook et al., 2018). The self-discovery motive is driven by the individual need to interact with other members to obtain social resources, understand and deepen salient aspect of themselves, reach future goals, and define and elaborate their preferences, tastes, and values (Madupu & Cooley, 2010). This aspect is also enabled by the relative anonymity members are entitled to. Thanks to it, community members are able to express themselves with minimal cost and risk of social sanctions (Madupu & Cooley, 2010).

Social-related motives

Social-related motives refer to desired interpersonal relationships formed within a brand community. They are called 'social benefits' or 'social needs' (Hook et al., 2018). Brand community participation provides the ability to connect and interact with other individuals interested in the brand. Four motives and antecedents have been identified in this category: trust, others' approval, social integration, and status enhancement.

According to the literature review realised by Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski (2018), it seems that in the online contexts, consumers need to establish a certain trust prior participation in the brand community (Hook et al., 2018). Therefore, a minimal level of prior trust is an enabler of participation.

Another factor enabling participation in online brand communities is others' approval. It is more likely to observe an individual participating in a brand community if their family and friends approve the concerned brand community and its members. This approval of others is part of what researchers calls the 'subjective norms' defined as, "the felt social pressure from significant others to perform a particular behaviour" (Bagozzi & Dhalakia, 2006; Hook et al., 2008).

Social integration for its part is a big motive for participation in online brand communities. It is characterised by establishing and maintaining contact with others. It can involve support given by community members, friendship, and intimacy (Madupu & Cooley, 2010). Thanks to interaction in the form of discussions, private contact, and other means, members can nurture social bonds with like-minded people. The specific structure of online brand communities

makes it easier to find others in similar situations than it is in real life (Madupu & Cooley, 2010).

Finally, status enhancement is the last social-related motive. It involves an increase of one's self-esteem thanks to their visibility in the brand community. This visibility can be gained through their postings and involvement in the brand community. Status enhancement is defined as, "the value that a participant derives from gaining acceptance and approval of other members and the enhancement of one's social status within the community on account of one's contribution to it" (Madupu & Cooley, 2010).

Information-related motives

The third category of motives are information-related antecedents. They are especially crucial for online brand communities, the information-related motives are crucial. Members identify an information benefit and/or want to fulfil an information need from the community (Hook et al., 2018). There are two aspects to this category: receiving information and giving information.

When it comes to receiving information, members go through the branded community-based platform driven by a desire to get information from other members. Due to the context-rich interaction of online brand communities, these are often source of much information (Madupu & Cooley, 2010). Some members seek a brand community with the expectation of receiving information about the products or services of the brand (Hook et al., 2018).

Giving information also proves to be a motive for participation in online brand communities. Some members, with the desire to respond to the needs of other community members, provide information they have in their possession by posting messages or answering to other member's requests (Madupu & Cooley, 2010).

Entertainment-related motives

In some cases, individuals gain certain entertainment-related benefits thanks to their participation in online brand communities (Madupu & Cooley, 2010). There is evidence suggesting that the need for entertainment is lower as compared to the need for information, but it has still been observed and highlighted by Hook, Baxter and Kulczynski (2018). The

motive behind this category is termed as 'entertainment value' and is defined by "the level of enjoyment or fun that a member can have in the brand community" (Hook et al., 2018).

Technology-related motives

The technology-related category is about the design and features of the community itself, rather than the individual members or the benefits the brand community offers. This category exclusively concerns online and social-media-based brand communities.

Even though they are sometimes uncontrollable by the brand itself (e.g., a *Yahoo!* forum or social media platforms), the platform itself can be a motive for participation in the brand community. Moreover, the quality of the system used to run the brand community proves to be a motive for participation as well. These motives have been less covered by the research, yet they are important to consider as they still influence brand community participation (Hook et al., 2018).

CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

After covering the topic of online brand communities, it is essential to discuss culture.

It is important to highlight the relevance of culture for a global organisation. People, countries, and organisation have been able to exchange communication and goods in easier ways through globalisation. There are many sides of globalisation which affect many aspects of life, one of them is further interactions between different cultures.

Therefore, understanding culture's meaning and implications has drawn the attention of global managers and marketers over the past decades and has become a key concern in international business. Not only is culture a strong driver of people's behaviour (both customers and employees), but also leveraging culture helps to accomplish goals and achieve strategic aims in an organisation (Hitt et al., 2005).

Despite of the global growing cultural awareness, a common meaning of culture has not been widely acknowledged by the literature. Anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz define culture as "systems of shared meaning or understanding which drive or explain the behaviour observed". Another thorough definition has been given by Harris Bond: "culture is a shared system of beliefs, values, behaviours and behaviours meanings developed

by a group over time to provide the requirements of a communal life in a particular geography" – where the system of beliefs refers to what perceived as the truth, the values to what is important, and behaviours and their meanings to what is implied by engaging in a given action.

It is crucial to be aware that culture does strongly influence important human behaviours. A basic example is how culture influences how people observe and interpret an advertisement. Not only is it necessary to be aware that there are differences, but it is key to step back and take the time to analyse them.

3.1. Framework to analyse culture

Establishing a specific framework to analyse culture is complex. Indeed, a wide number of definitions and tools used to explore culture have been developed over the past decades. It is complex to find a single methodology able to address the inclusive set of criteria relevant to culture assessment in business studies (Soares et al., 2007).

Plus, the term 'culture' is commonly used in different contexts. For example, it can be applied to ethnic groups, to nations, to social classes, or to organisations. However, changing the level of aggregation studied changes the nature of the concept of 'culture'. Societal, national and gender cultures, which children acquire from their earliest youth onwards, are deeper rooted in the human mind than organizational cultures acquired on the job for example (Hofstede, 2011).

In this research, it is the national culture which is studied. When it comes to observing national cultures, there are explicit and implicit aspects. On the one hand, explicit aspects include behaviours and practices (such as rituals, symbols, language). These reside in (visible and conscious) practices. On the other hand, implicit aspects refer to (unconscious) values and interpretation, in the sense of broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others (Hofstede, 2001).

Moreover, there is a difference between etic and emic views which lies in the way research investigates culture. While the etic culture explores culture from the outside and strives to build predefined concepts or dimensions, the emic culture research is a view from inside which

tries to understand meanings behind actions. As this thesis wants to identify variation between cultural categories and compare them, the etic approach is used.

A description of main Belgian and Indian explicit aspects is given in the two following sections. Thereafter, the Hofstede Model is used to compare further implicit aspects between Belgian and Indian cultures. Greet Hofstede said, “culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from those of another”. This model wants to put its focus on dimensions representing differences among national cultures: individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, and long-term orientation.

3.2. Key explicit aspects of culture: Belgium

Orientation

Belgium is a 11-million inhabitants country located at the west of Europe. It has always been situated at the junction between Germanic and Latin Europe. Belgium has inherited from a rich cross-fertilisation of cultures. The nation’s cultural diversity has been enriched by international and local immigration, and Brussels; capital of Belgium has become the capital of the European Union as well as the location of NATO headquarters.

From a demographic point of view, Belgium is one of the most urbanised and densely inhabited countries worldwide, with most people living in urban centres.

Language

There are two main languages spoken across the country, Dutch and French. German is recognised as the third national language, but it is spoken by a minority of Belgian citizens and not frequently used in administration.

It is worth noticing that language is an important explicit component of culture. As von Humboldt (1836) said, “the diversity of languages is not the diversity of signs and sounds but a diversity of views of the world”. Language shapes the way we think and influences the perception of reality.

Social stratification

As compared to the world average, the distribution of wealth is relatively equal in Belgium with most of the population in the middle class. Also, Belgium provides its citizens with an inclusive social security system.

The major cleavage in Belgium is ethnocultural, French speakers versus Dutch speakers. Not only are there linguistic borders, but French speakers and Dutch speakers have their own region. Each of them has their own government, educational system, etc. Brussels region is supposed to have both French and Dutch as official languages, but in practice, French is the lingua franca in the capital.

Regarding the way wealth is expressed, there are generally few external behavioural class markers, but it is rather expressed through houses and cars.

Gender Roles and Statuses

When it comes to the occupational gender gap, it has been decreasing with new generations. However, most of part-time workers are still women. Wage differentials between men and women are amongst the lowest in the European Union.

Economy

Belgian economy is a modern, capitalist economy mainly based on the country's central geographic location. Indeed, the economy of Belgium has highly developed the transport network, notably with the Port of Antwerp at the heart of Europe. It is Europe's second-largest seaport. Belgium is also a diversified industrial and commercial base.

Religion

Catholicism is the main religious faith in Belgium. The Catholic Church controls an important network of schools with 70 percent of the pupils in secondary education and two main universities in the country – the UCLouvain and the KULeuven. However, religious beliefs and practice declined during the 20th century. According to Statista (2022), most Belgian citizens do not believe in God. Only 13 percent of the participants in the survey stated to be certain that God exists.

The Belgian government financially supports the Catholic and Protestant churches as well as the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

3.3. Key explicit aspects of culture: India

Orientation

India is a 1.40 billion inhabitants country located situated in Southern Asia. India is home to one of the largest populations in the world and constitutes a complex phenomenon which is not easy to grasp. Indeed, with their large number of religions and the numerous different spoken languages, some claim that India is not even a culture but a continent itself which contains a wide diversity and complexity. Shashi Tharoor (2006), an Indian himself said, “Any truism about India can be immediately contradicted by another truism about India”. However, India is more than a sum of contradictions.

Throughout Indian history, constant change has led to the emergence of new cultural settings and meanings referred to as localisation and syncretism. Localisation is when “a new external influence is adapted to the specific cultural context wherein it is received” (Mahadevan et al., 2019), and syncretism is when “two cultural influences are combined and create something new” (Mahadevan et al., 2019).

Language

There is no national language in India, but the two official languages are English and Hindi. Indeed, most parts of India share a British heritage which has created a common language, English. Hindi is the most spoken language across Indian homes, with over 528 million native speakers (Statista, 2011). However, it represents only approximately 40 percent of the population. There are 22 other scheduled languages as per the eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India, such as Bengali and Marathi.

Social stratification

The Indian society is fragmented into castes which are present in most aspects of life. It implies a hierarchy of birth-ascribed groups, each of which traditionally is characterised by a distinctive occupation and a level of social status (see *Appendix 1*)

In India, people’s meaning system evaluate the cast as a different way of unity, which comes from interdependency between each other.

Due to the features that distinguish castes between them, each caste tends to have its own sub-culture. Symbols of class differentiation are, for example, the way people are dressed up, their personal names, their local dialect, and especially their occupation.

Major Indian cities – Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, New Delhi, and Bangalore – have been more in touch with Western cultures notably due to their strong British heritage, and therefore have been developing a class system overlying and, in some cases, displacing the traditional caste system. Even though the caste practice remains the best practice to follow, there are many modern cases of inter-caste marriage in all these cities.

Gender Roles and Statuses

Gender has a huge impact on the division of labour in India. It provides the basis for a fundamental division of the work force. However, for the most modern professions, or at the opposite, for the lowest day-labour jobs, people of both genders are more commonly accepted.

In the family and the couple, the man has a prominent position. Indian society is said to be patriarchal, which refers to the traditional notion that males are breadwinners and women are homemakers.

Economy

India is the sixth-largest economy, behind the U.S., China, Japan, Germany, and the U.K. The one thing India has that most of those countries do not is people. Indeed, with more than 1.4 billion people, India has more than three times the population of UK, France, and Brazil all together. Their economic growth rate is one of the strongest worldwide ranging from 4% to 8% (The Indian Express, 2022).

The rising and long-term outlook Indian economy is supported by several key growth drivers. A major positive factor for India is its large and fast-growing middle class, driving to higher and education and consumption.

Religion

Even though around 80% of Indian population are enumerated as Hindu, India is home to every world religion and several less well-known ones. As 12 percent of Indians are Muslim, it

makes India the third largest Muslim country worldwide. The Christian community make up over 2 percent of the population and are closely followed in number by Sikhs. A bar chart of Indian's adult population by religion can be found in *Appendix 2*.

Religious tolerance is crucial in India. Indeed, tolerance is not only a religious value but also a civic value, which enables the country to come together as a nation.

3.4. Belgian brands building online communities

As in most European Union countries, Belgian citizens are increasingly using online platforms as part of their daily lives – a development that has been further accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the Belgian population has had to expand their use of online platforms, notably to facilitate interactions during the pandemic (in the classroom, at work, or in their personal lives).

According to the results of the European Investment Bank (EIB) Investment Survey, 46% of firms in the EU report that they took action to become more digital during the Covid-19 pandemic. This unprecedented digitalisation rate in Europe has also been an opportunity for brands to enable digital trade and communication with potential consumers. Also, this digitalisation has increased their choice and convenience, and improved efficiency and competitiveness of industry.

According to the European Commission (2021), 32 percent of EU citizens use collaborative economy platforms. Another figure related to the community aspect is that 51 percent of EU citizens read or write reviews, give ratings of products or services on rating platforms. Similarly, 61 percent of the EU population read blogs, comment on articles or news websites.

Furthermore, online platforms come in many different forms and sizes in Europe. However, has been observed that in Europe few successful online platforms and communities can influence the nature of EU citizens communications and interactions as they become powerful gatekeepers to markets.

3.5. Indian brands building online communities

Over the past years, there has been an increasing number of brands building their own online communities in India. For example, *Pepper Content*, an Indian content marketplace platform,

has hired in 2021 a new Community and Partnerships Lead, Pawan Rochwani. In few months, he has grown the community to include 50,000 freelancers, writers, translators, and designers. He strongly believes that monetising communities will become a growing trend.

On April 24, 2020, the #TwitterChat held by *Adgully*, an Indian advertising and market news website, dwelled on Potential of Online Communities Unleashed. Certain Indian esteemed leaders of online communities, mobile markets and influencer marketers led the discussion and the following insights have been highlighted.

First, Aditya Maheshwari, Leads Strategic Growth & Customer Success, *AppsFlyer India*, expressed that brand communities helps Indian people make utility of their purpose. He added that many people are feeling helpless and brand communities have the potential to bring them connection and uplift.

Furthermore, Shishir Joshi, Founder and CEO of *Project Mumbai*, talked about the key drivers leading to the formation and growth of online communities. According to him, these are transparency in operation, ability of outreach and scale, and the cause resonating with people.

Neela Kaushik, Founder & CEO *GurgaonMoms*, a 34K+ strong community for women in Delhi-NCR, said that "there are different pockets of society requiring different form of aid. Getting organised as communities can greatly help in structuring and delivering relief and support." Neela Kaushik not only highlighted the importance of the content, but also expressed that the tone is critical and defines the personality and character of the community. It enhances relevance which is key to members' engagement in the community. Importance of the tone has also been highlighted by Aditya Maheshwari.

One of the first major advertisers which has fostered online brand communities in India is *Samsung Mobile*. In 2004, *Samsung* launched a Fan Club Site for its Indian Samsung phone users. The site, which gained more than three million users between 2004 and 2010, aimed to provide a range of exclusive ringtones, games and videos, and more.

Since November 2016, Samsung Members mobile app is available for download in India. This app offers forums online where members can share their experiences, tips and tricks, and discuss their favourite features with a peer-led community. It is an all-in-one app providing many options for customer communication, feedback services, and offering special benefits for the users.

Another example of successful online brand communities in India is Canon Edge – a platform to connect and share your experience with other members. *Canon India* has shown its dedication towards building a sustainable and large community for Canon Users in the country. The platform's target country is India with 98.92% of its users located in the Indian territory last month (Canon, 2022). It welcomes around 100K users per month.

Former Canon India executive, Dr Alok Bharadwaj said, "Since a lot of consumers participating in our community are interested in serious photography, this translated into nearly 100% growth in the digital SLR camera business". This community provides a space where users can easily find their way to product updates, product warranty, Gallery feature, or exciting offers and contests.

3.6. Positivist approach: Hofstede Model

The Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory ranks countries in comparative terms. This framework has inspired many empirical studies in various fields. It is one of the most popular frameworks which uses a positivist approach to understand differences in culture across countries. The positivist approach considers knowledge primarily as informative of the way things are. This approach aims to report a given situation as it is. Then, it focuses on identifying patterned behaviour and establishing laws and predictive models from them.

There are six implicit aspects analysed: power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, long-term orientation, and indulgence. Each country has been positioned relative to other countries through a score on each dimension. Country scores do not aim to provide absolute country positions, but only their positions relative to other countries in the set (Hofstede, 2011). Moreover, dimensions are considered as societal characteristics (and not individual ones).

Power distance

Power Distance has been defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 2011, p.9). It is a measure of whether there is a strong sense of position and status.

A high score in power distance would indicate a culture that accepts and encourages bureaucracy and a high respect for authority and rank. A low score in this dimension suggests a culture which encourages flatter organisational structures and a greater emphasis on personal responsibility and autonomy.

Individualism / Collectivism

This cultural dimension aims to measure the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. It explores the extent to which people in a society are integrated into groups.

An individualist score suggests that members are looking for themselves and their core loved members. Collectivism means that people feel part of group and they have tendency to take care of each other in exchange of unquestionable loyalty.

Uncertainty avoidance

This category aims to deal with a society's tolerance for ambiguity (Hofstede, 2011). Hofstede looked at the level of anxiety people feel when they are in uncertain or unknown situations.

A high level of uncertainty avoidance suggests more support for rules, data, clarity of roles and responsibilities. People like and feel more comfortable with structured and predictable environment. A low score in this dimension indicates a willingness to accept more risk, work outside the rules and embrace change.

Masculinity / Femininity

This dimension is also sometimes related to as “tough versus tender” cultures. This dimension refers to the distribution of values (Hofstede, 2011). On the one hand, masculinity indicates a society driven by competition, achievement, and success, with success being defined by the winner or best-in-the-field. On the other hand, femininity means that dominant values in society are caring for others and the quality of life. Quality of life becomes a success indicator.

Long term orientation

This dimension describes how every society prioritise links with its own past versus the challenges of the present and future.

A high score on long term orientation would encourage thrift and efforts in modern education to thrive in the future. A low score in this dimension suggests a tendency to maintain time-honoured traditions and norms, for example.

Indulgence / Self-restraint

The Indulgence Index wants to measure the extent to which people try to control (or not) their desires and impulses with regard to enjoying life and having fun (Hofstede, 2022).

A high score stands for a society that relatively allows free gratification of basic and natural human drives and emotions. For example, a society in which the success is really enjoyed. A low score stands for a society which tends to suppress gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.

3.7. Hofstede Model applied to online brand communities: Belgium and India

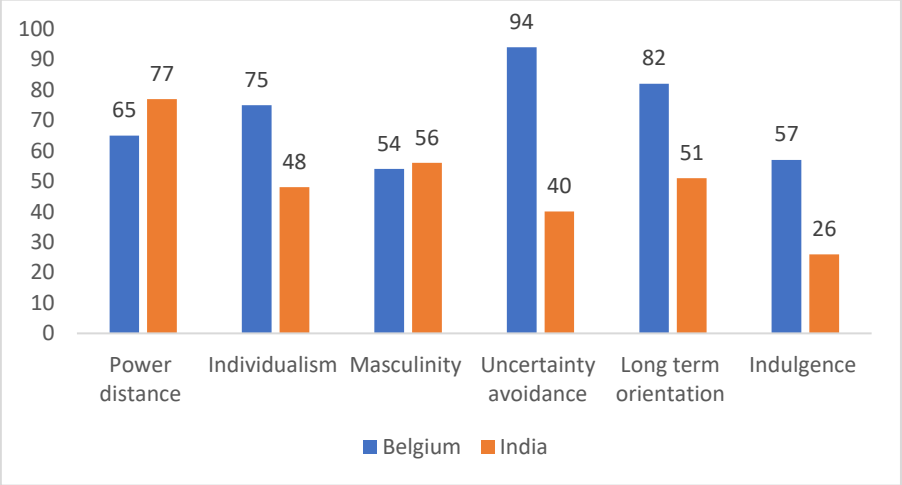

Figure 2 – Hofstede Model: Belgium and India (Source: Hofstede Insights)

Power distance

This dimension is high in both countries yet higher in India than in Belgium. Indeed, in India birth highly determines destiny.

Even though power distance is less prominent in Belgium than in India, hierarchy is needed if not existential in both countries. A difference in power distance between the two countries can stimulate inequalities in certain areas such as wealth, power, prestige, and law (Hofstede Insights, 2022).

In terms of online brand communities, a difference in power distance influences individuals' decision-making process. Indeed, Pornpitakpan (2004) supports that low-power-distance people rely more on factual sources. On the other hand, people issued from high power distance cultures depend more on others' recommendation to help them in their consumption decisions. They tend to actively seek for others' opinion rather than looking for impersonal sources. Therefore, when it comes to purchase intention, individuals with high-power distance may tend to depend more on the online brand-community members opinion than individuals with a lower power distance.

Individualism / Collectivism

According to the Hofstede model, India is a society with both collectivistic and individualistic traits while Belgium tends to be more individualistic.

As reflected in their religious tolerance (see *Chapter 3*, *section 3.3*), Indian people tend to honour the nation as a whole. The are many different groups coexisting in mutual harmony despite the differences of language and religion. Likewise, the caste system implies a certain interdependency among society's members, which is representative of collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 2011). Belgium tends to be more individualistic, meaning that people are less willing to progress as a nation. Belgians favour individual and private opinions and prefer to take care of themselves and immediate family rather than belonging to a group (Hofstede Insights, 2022).

When it comes to online brand communities, it means that Indian members tend to care more about each other, and therefore develop a higher sense of moral responsibility. Moral responsibility fosters group cohesion and collective action (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Moreover, collectivism also fosters assistance that community members have towards one another regarding the brand related resources, which in turn motivates participation in the community (Hook et al., 2018).

Another aspect impacted by collectivism is trust propensity within the online community. Indeed, research has widely suggested that there are cross-cultural differences in trust propensity, particularly through the cultural value of collectivism (Westjohn & al., 2021). Collectivist societies are trust-based societies where reciprocity norms and mutual interdependence prevail (Hofstede, 1988). Within an online brand community, this aspect is

highly important as individuals do not personally know one another (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Therefore, as they are more collectivists, Indian members have the broad tendency to trust more members of their online community, as compared to Belgian members.

Collectivism also has a positive effect on loyalty to the group. Indeed, in collectivistic societies, people who feel part of group have a tendency to take care of each other in exchange of unquestionable loyalty (Hofstede, 2011).

Masculinity / Femininity

No major difference stands out from this dimension. Both India and Belgium have an intermediate score on this dimension. Meaning that these two societies are balanced between wanting to be the best and fostering a good quality of life.

Uncertainty avoidance

According to the Hofstede comparison model, this dimension is the biggest gap between India and Belgium.

With a score of 94, Belgium has one of the highest scores on the Uncertainty Avoidance Index. Structure, rules, and security are important and if lacking, can create stress (Hofstede Insights, 2022). On the contrary, in India, there is acceptance for imperfection. Things do not systematically need to be perfect nor to go exactly as planned. India is traditionally a patient country where there is high tolerance for the unexpected. There is a saying that "nothing is impossible" in India, as long as one knows how to "adjust" (Mahadevan et al., 2019).

Applied to online brand communities, it means that Belgian individuals will find it difficult to develop trust, especially when their interactions are with strangers. On the contrary, Indian members tend to trust strangers and foreigners even if they do not share common beliefs or attitudes. As online brand communities are characterised by interactions with strangers, members with low uncertainty avoidance tend to develop higher purchase intention through an online community than members with high uncertainty avoidance (Lee et al., 2021).

Long term orientation

Again, there is a significant gap between Belgium and India in this dimension.

With a very high score of 82, Belgium is a highly pragmatic culture. People tend to easily adapt traditions if it helps to thrive and perform in achieving results (Hofstede Insights, 2022). India has a score of 51 in this dimension. Thus, a dominant preference cannot be determined. They are, however, more attached to traditions and norms.

Ryu and Moon (2009) argue that members of long term-oriented societies tend to ultimately build up inter-member trust. Therefore, this aspect is in contrast with the previous one. Indeed, due to their uncertainty avoidance Belgian members find it difficult to develop trust with other online brand community members. However, long term orientation may mitigate this effect.

Indulgence

With a score of 57 versus 26, Belgium seems to be a more Indulgent society than India.

On the one hand, the Hofstede model suggests that when it comes to enjoying life and having fun, Belgian people are willing to realise their impulses and desires. On the other hand, Indian society is more driven by social norms and tends more to control the gratification of people's desires (Hofstede Insights, 2022).

In terms of online brand communities, it means that Indian members may have more limited wants and desires than Belgian members. Therefore, in contrast with indulgent-oriented people, with equal incentive, restraint-oriented people may not be willing to try out new services or products (Lee et al., 2021).

However, neither the Indian nor the Belgian society can be considered as having a highly indulgent-oriented cultures.

CHAPTER 4: DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

By now, it is impossible to imagine the world without internet. The rapid development of information and communication technologies have blurred the boundaries between online and offline. Internet has become a key pillar of the modern information society.

As of April 2022, there were five billion internet users worldwide, which represents 63 percent of the global population. Out of these 5 billion internet users, 4.65 billion were social media

users. These numbers are growing every year, with a year-on-year growth rate of 4 percent between 2021 and 2022 (Statista, 2022).

Northern Europe's internet penetration rate is the highest with a score of 98 percent (Statista, 2022). When it comes to online users, Asian region is ranked first with over 2.8 billion internet users in 2021. Europe is ranked second with almost 744 million internet users.

4.1. Digital Belgium

As of January 2022, the number of internet users in Belgium was nearly 11 million, representing 94 percent of the total population. Likewise, most households have internet connection as per shown on the below *Figure 3*.

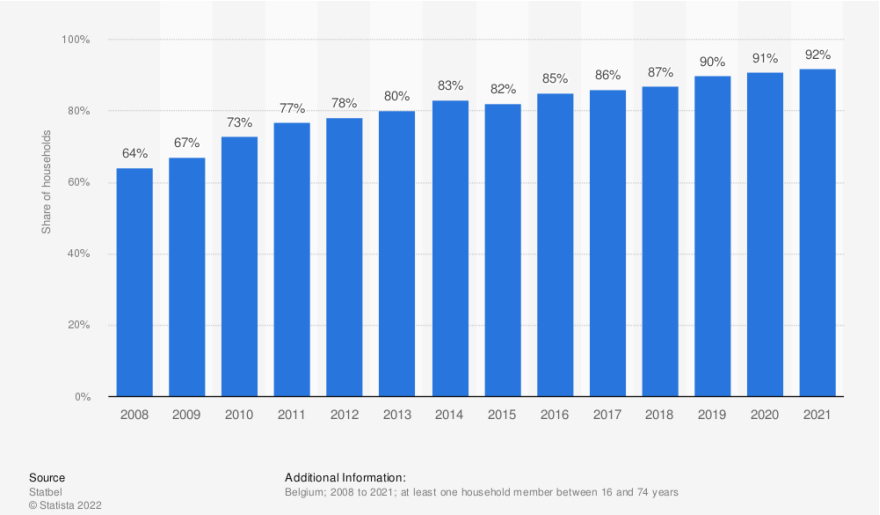

Figure 3 – Share of households with internet connection in Belgium from 2008 to 2021

4.2. Digital India

Alongside with China and the United States, India ranks ahead all other countries in terms of internet users. In 2020, India had approximately 749 million online users. Even though the number of internet users is increasing (see *Figure 4*), India still has a large part of its population that are offline – the internet penetration rate stands around 50 percent of the total population.

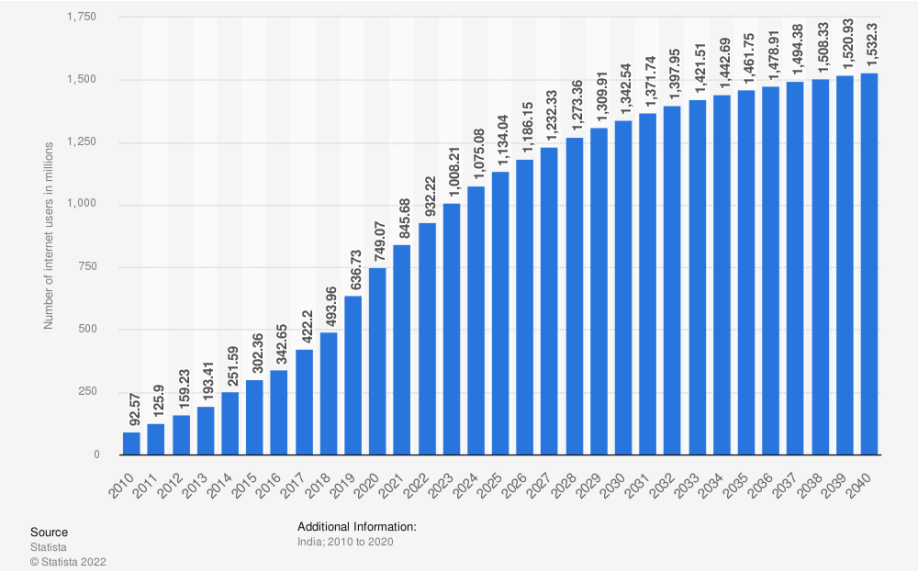

Figure 4 – Number of internet users in India from 2010 to 2020, with estimates until 2040

4.3. Purchase intention and purchase behaviour online: cultural predispositions

When it comes to generating online purchase intentions and behaviour, there are disparities among consumers with different customs and values of the place of birth (Peña-García et al. 2020). Not only is it cultural, but there are also substantial differences between consumers in an emerging country and consumers in a developed country.

The Kingdom of Belgium is a small, highly developed, and urbanized country in Western Europe, while India is an emerging and developing country (EDC) found in southern Asia.

Therefore, the precursors of online purchase intention in an emerging economy differ from the precursors in a developed economy.

First, self-efficacy in online stores and platforms. Emerging economies have less experience in electronic purchases. While in developed economies, online purchasing is most of the time considered as something inherent, normal, and secular. Therefore, it affects consumers' perceived capability to navigate, search for information, and make purchase on the Internet (Peña-García et al. 2020). In the coming years, it is expected that consumers will be more and more able to better evaluate the accuracy and usefulness of the information found online.

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), indulgence in the consumer personality can affect the relationship between the ease of use (EOU) and buying impulse. Indeed, a lower perceived effort means greater tendency towards satisfying the impulses to enjoy life and have fun

(Hofstede et al., 2010). Therefore, it means that with equal EOU, people from indulgent cultures will have a greater tendency to surrender to buying impulses.

CHAPTER 5: AIRBNB AS A BRAND COMMUNITY

A chapter of the literature review is dedicated to Airbnb in the literature review as it will be used further in the practical part.

Since its creation in 2008, considerable research has been devoted to Airbnb. Often studied in the sharing economy literature, it has also been considered as a brand community (e.g., Mandl & Hogreve, 2020). It is important to remind that this present case study is aimed to focus on the relationship between members of brand communities themselves in the digital world. However, in the definition of brand community itself, there is also the relationship between the brand and its brand community members. In addition, traditional brand communities interact via face-to-face interactions. Nevertheless, these two aspects will not be covered in the present study.

5.1. Description of Airbnb

Founded in 2008, Airbnb has become one of the most successful online marketplaces worldwide. The platform lets property owners rent out their spaces to travellers looking for a place to stay. As of 2021, Airbnb has obtained over six million active listing in more than 220 countries and 100,000 cities and towns (Airbnb, 2022). In 2017, Airbnb had attracted 100 million hosts and guests worldwide, earning $100 million that year (Hati et al., 2021).

Airbnb has based its internet-based business model on a compelling value proposition for its stakeholders. For customers, an Airbnb accommodation is typically cheaper than a traditional accommodation like a hotel (Guttentag, 2015; Gyódi, 2019, Varma et al., 2016). Moreover, it provides them with a trusted marketplace and a strong community base. For property owners, Airbnb enables them to maximise the utilization of their underutilised assets, making Airbnb one of the most successful sharing economy platforms (Hati et al., 2020).

Not only is Airbnb a platform for sharing accommodation services, but it is also a way to co-create value within its guests' experiences. Indeed, Airbnb has a strong consumer review and rating system.

5.2. The role of culture on Airbnb

According to the literature, the attitude towards performing a certain behaviour (e.g., participating in the Airbnb community) is influenced by social beliefs like culture (Lee et al., 2021). Meaning that the attitude towards sharing services on online community-based platforms (such as Airbnb) can be explained from a cultural perspective.

Four out of the six Hofstede dimensions were used in this paper to explore the role of culture in the specific use of Airbnb platform. Indeed, there was not enough past research providing evidence of effects of neither the Power Distance nor the Masculinity on the attitude of individuals in this specific context.

Uncertainty avoidance

Lee et al. (2021) found in their research that people with high uncertainty avoidance have a negative attitude towards booking on Airbnb. Indeed, individuals from high uncertainty avoidant societies find it difficult to develop trust, especially when their interactions are with strangers. On the contrary, people from low uncertainty avoidant societies can trust strangers and foreigners even if they do not share common beliefs or attitudes.

Collectivism – Individualism

Collectivistic cultures share a strong belief that members of a community matter to one another and to the group, and collectivist people do not care about being dependent on others to use products (Lee et al., 2021). Wong (1997) argues that people from collectivistic cultures do not tend to be materialistic nor possessive. On the contrary, individualists tend to be more materialistic, meaning more possessive to their belongings, and therefore less likely to appreciate Airbnb's services.

This cultural aspect also suggests that individualists tend to engage in a relationship with the purpose of making profit and terminate a relationship when the costs of participation exceed the benefits. On the other hand, collectivists acquire stronger perceptions of trust when interacting with people. In their recent research, Westjohn et al. (2021) came up with strong evidence that one's own collectivism value influences trust propensity. This means that the

effect of trust perception on the intention to perform the online transaction on Airbnb is stronger for collectivistic people than for individualistic people.

Moreover, the Airbnb community-based system enables its members to help, advice and interact with each other. This is highly appreciated by collectivists. In contrast, privacy proves to be significantly more important for individualists. Therefore, individualists may perceive less privacy and bigger risk towards the use of Airbnb services.

Long term orientation

When it comes to long term orientation, certain values such as perseverance and thrift associated with it. In addition, individuals from long term-oriented cultures highly value relationship building, meaning that they avoid instant conflict and care about future rewards rather than instant benefits. Even though there has not been much research on this specific cultural dimension effect on Airbnb, Ryu and Moon (2009) argue that members of long term-oriented societies tend to ultimately build up inter-member trust. Therefore, trust enhances a positive attitude towards Airbnb as per explained earlier in this section.

In their Airbnb study, Lee et al. (2021) have been able to support the hypothesis stating that long-term orientation has a positive effect on attitude within the Airbnb community.

Indulgence – Restraint

The indulgence-restraint dimension reveals the extent to which people attempt to control their desires and impulses. People from restraint-oriented cultures are likely to have limited wants and desires, leading to a feeling of pessimism and negativism as well as a lack of trust. Indeed, a negative attitude and minimal trust may lead people to not be willing to try out new services or products. In contrast, people with high indulgence tend to adopt positive feelings and optimism, and therefore develop trust more smoothly.

Furthermore, people with high levels of restraint tend to focus on the negative aspects, such as the vulnerable aspect of Airbnb: its non-standardised offer. In contrast, people with high indulgence may be excited about a one-of-a-kind experience as they are generally fun-oriented and interested in entertainment (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Therefore, based on theoretical grounds, a person from an indulgent society has a more positive attitude towards Airbnb than a person from a restraint society (Lee et al., 2021).

5.3. Drivers of purchase intention on Airbnb

According to the Airbnb literature, there are three main factors that affect purchase intention on this online marketplace: information quality, media richness and the consumer review system. These three main factors have a direct impact on perceived value and satisfaction, which have been proved to positively influence purchase intention (Chen & Chang, 2018).

Information quality refers to the completeness, accuracy, clarity, usefulness, reliability, and comprehensibility of information system data outputs (Chen & Chang, 2018). The online space provides the customer with information free of time or space constraints. However, as consumers face a large amount of online information with uncertain reliability, they give a high importance to information quality. The literature supported that information quality directly positively impacts satisfaction, which has itself an impact on purchase intention.

Furthermore, media richness refers to the different types and levels of communication media used. Media richness inspires greater trust (Lu et al., 2014). For example, an effective integration of social media presence and advertising enhances a sense of media richness, which can positively influence purchase intention. Another example is to evolve from text and graphics to interactive virtual experiences (Chen & Chang, 2018).

Finally, the aspect of high interest in this study is the consumer review method, as it is directly related to the consumer-to-consumer relationship through an online branded community. Consumers tend to seek out the opinions of peers to reduce the risk of expectation failure (Chen & Chang, 2018). Airbnb has made use of this well-known pattern and has created a community at the heart of its online marketplace. The platform provides both quantitative (ratings and rating volume) and qualitative (review content) aspects, which, ultimately have an impact on purchase intention.

- Rating: scale of 1–5 stars reflecting previous consumers ratings. Chen and Chang support that guests' rating on Airbnb positively impacts the value other potential consumers perceive in a booking. This increased perceived value positively influences purchase intention.

- Rating volume: the number of consumer rating for a particular Airbnb property. According to a study led by Ye et al. (2011), a 10% increase in the rating volume produces an increase in bookings of > 5%. This positive correlation has been confirmed in 2018 by Chen and Chang.
- Review: the text evaluation of the consumer's experience with the Airbnb property and interaction with the landlord. All reviews on Airbnb are written by authenticated guests following their stay, and Airbnb hosts are not allowed to delete negative reviews. The content of the individual reviews influences Airbnb users' perceived value and therefore, impacts their purchase intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW CONCLUSION

This study seeks to explore and assess cultural factors linked to the online brand community and which are likely to impact the participation in, loyalty to, and purchase intention through to this branded community. The literature review was aimed to gain a better understanding of the problematic and its underlying topics.

To do so, defining online brand communities and their context was necessary as they may come in different forms and through different channels. An online brand community refers to a platform allowing companies to strengthen relationships with customers and to involve them in value co-creation. Furthermore, the literature review supported that online brand communities have a positive impact on consumer loyalty and (re)purchase intention.

Then, a focus was given on online brand communities participation as it is the third variable of interest in this research – alongside with loyalty and purchase intention. There are several motives and antecedents leading to participation, and these might be affected by cultural dimensions.

Chapter 3 analysed Belgian and Indian cultures with a particular focus on the specific online brand communities' context.

The chapter 4 was necessary to contextualise digitalisation in India and in Belgium. Indeed, it is necessary to consider and evaluate the digitalisation in both countries studied as it may be a barrier to entry for online brand communities, regardless of the culture.

Finally, before proceeding to the practical part of the thesis, it was crucial to introduce and contextualise Airbnb in this study. Indeed, Airbnb is used in the field experiment to test the cultural differences in the consumer-to-consumer relationship.

PART 2: PRACTICAL PART

After having constructed a theoretical part that has enabled the treatment of the literature related to the topic in its globality, the practical part has the goal to come up with potential hypotheses that could explain the problematic. The managerial interest is to understand the consumer's approach to the product or service, given that there are two different consumer groups – one issued from the Belgian culture, and the other issued from the Indian culture.

The goal is to explore how the two different groups of consumers differ in their behaviour when they are in online brand communities. To do so, a survey has been launched among Indian Airbnb community members and Belgian Airbnb community members. Indeed, building a community and creating interaction within its members is the essence of Airbnb.

As mentioned before, the present case study does not cover the relationship between the brand and its community members. Therefore, the impact on the brand is not directly studied, instead we rather study how its online community members interact and behave.

1. HYPOTHESES

Potential hypotheses have been extracted to explore the behavioural differences and similarities between two different consumer groups in online brand communities – those belonging to the Indian culture and those belonging to the Belgian one.

There are two different levels of hypothesis. On the one hand, the three first hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) evaluate the impact of national culture on three outcome variables (participation, loyalty, and purchase intention) by making use of a specific Hofstede dimension (see *Figure 5*). On the other hand, the three last hypotheses (H4, H5, and H6) test the impact of individual cultural aspects other than citizenship on participation and purchase intention (see *Figure 5*). Indeed, certain dimensions can be activated at the individual level regardless of the national culture. Therefore, the sample will be divided into sub-groups, for example, those with a high collectivism and those with a low collectivism, regardless of whether they are Belgian or Indian.

Operational definitions are listed in *Table 1* and *Figure 5* depicts the constructs and 6 hypotheses of the research model.

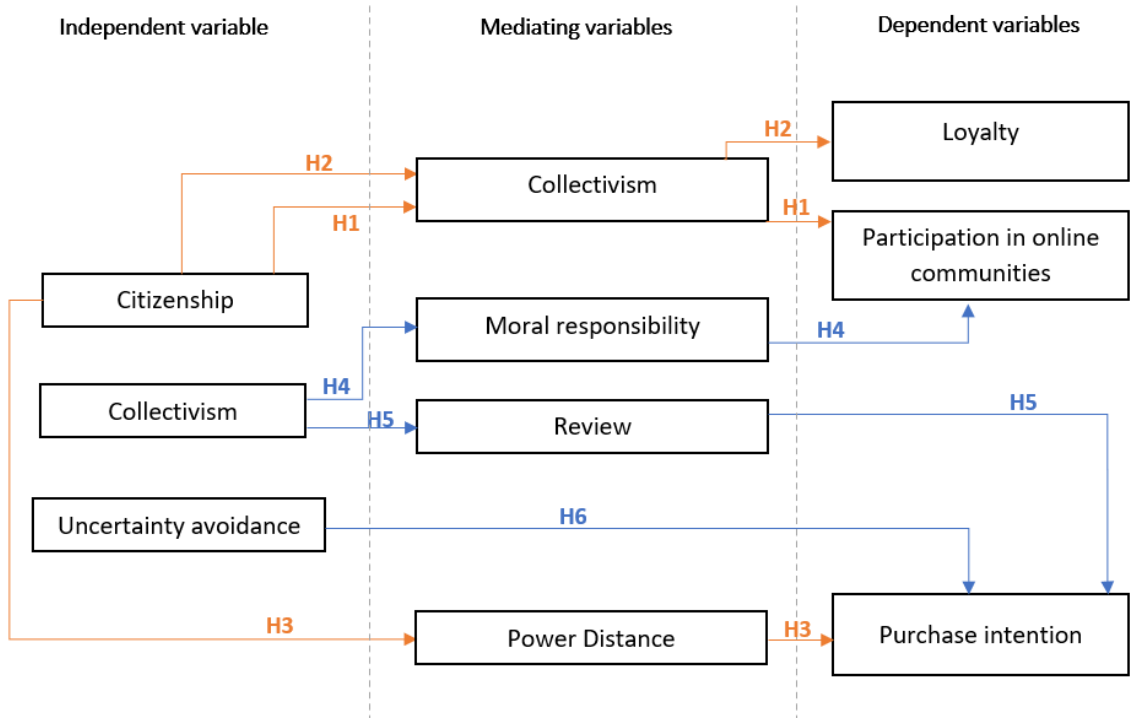

Figure 5 – Research Model

Construct	Definition
Moral responsibility	The sense of duty to the community as a whole and to individual members of the community (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001)
Review [Measure of the extent to which a respondent trusts the reviews]	Text evaluation of the consumer's experience of the property and interaction with the landlord, providing useful reference for potential future consumers (Chen & Chang, 2018).
Loyalty	When the user consistently prefers it over all others (Hamilton et al. 2017).
Participation in online communities	Visiting and engaging in some way in the online brand community (Malinen, 2015).
Purchase intention	Willingness or intention of a consumer to make transactions via online online brand communities.

Table 1 – Definition of the constructs

Hypotheses from 1 to 5 are based on mediation models, meaning that mediating variables were added to the models. Mediating variables are intermediary or intervening variables, rather than the direct causal relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable (see *Figure 6*). The mediating model is used to explore an underlying mechanism through which an independent variable influences a dependent variable.

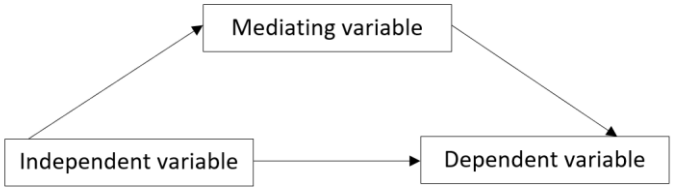

Figure 6 – Mediation Model

According to the Hofstede Model, the Indian population is significantly more collectivist than the Belgian population. Collectivism suggests cohesiveness among individuals and prioritization of the group over the individual. Collectivists acquire stronger perceptions of trust when interacting with people (Westjohn & al., 2021). In contrast, individualists tend to engage in a relationship with the purpose of making profit and terminate a relationship when the costs of participation exceed the benefits. As per reported in the literature, social integration is a motive for participation in online communities (Madupu & Cooley, 2010). Indeed, it nurtures social bonds with the community which is a key aspect of collectivist societies. Therefore, collectivist societies tend to participate more into online brand communities (see *Figure 7*).

→ ***H1****: Indian people present higher level of collectivism, which in turn positively influences participation in online communities.*

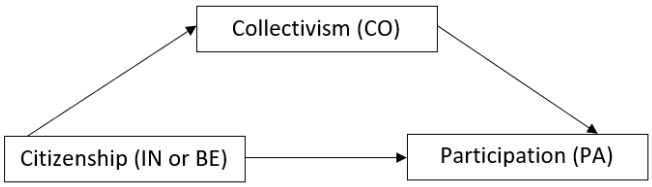

Figure 7 – Mediation Model 1

Likewise, there is evidence that loyalty to a community is likely to be stronger in a collectivist society than in an individualistic one (Hofstede, 2011) (see *Figure 8*). Indeed, members of collectivist societies are more strongly bonded with in-group members (Hofstede & Bond, 1988).

→ ***H2****: Indian people present higher level of collectivism, which in turn positively influences loyalty to online communities.*

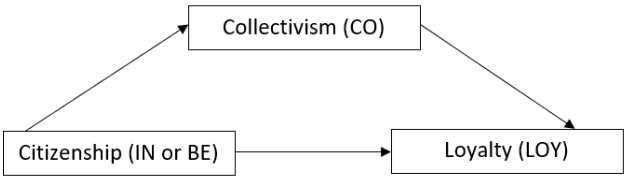

Figure 8 – Mediation Model 2

On the one hand, individuals from low power distance cultures rely more on factual sources in their decision-making process (Pornpitakpan, 2004). On the other hand, people from high power distance cultures rely more on others' recommendation to help them make their consumption decisions. Therefore, they are actively seeking for others' opinion rather than looking for impersonal sources of information (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

As compared to the Belgian population, the Indian population presents a higher level of power distance. Therefore, the context of an online brand community positively influences their purchase decision (see *Figure 9*).

→ ***H3****: Indian people present higher level of power distance, which in turn positively influences purchase intention in online communities*

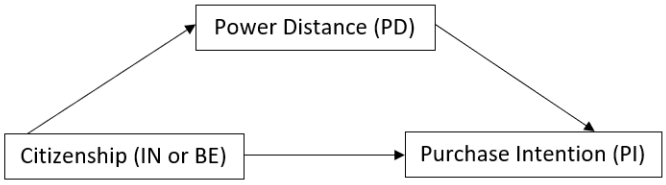

Figure 9 – Mediation Model 3

Moral responsibility refers to the sense of duty to the community as a whole and to individual members of the community. It is the assistance that community members have towards one another (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). The higher the moral responsibility is, the higher the participation in the community will be as well (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). As per represented in *Figure 10* below, collectivistic cultures tend to share a higher sense of responsibility as they have tendency to take care of each other.

Furthermore, people's participation in online communities, such as Airbnb, is motivated by several social related factors (see *Section 2.2*). Not only does participation enables a certain connection and interaction, but it contributes to helping each other (Hook & al., 2018). Therefore, based on these theories, collectivist individuals will demonstrate a higher participation in the Airbnb community.

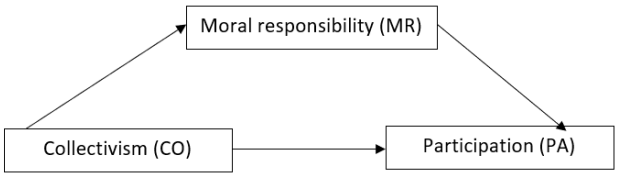

Figure 10 – Mediation Model 4

→ ***H4****: Collectivism positively influences sense of moral responsibility in online communities, which in turn positively impacts their members' participation.*

Reviews on Airbnb are free-form text comments through which previous guests describe their experience with the Airbnb, providing useful reference for potential future consumers (Chen & Chang, 2018). Lee and Shin (2014) noted that such reviews have a significant impact on purchase intention (see *Figure 11*).

Furthermore, collectivists acquire stronger perceptions of trust when interacting with people. As per analysed in the literature review, the effect of trust perception on intention to perform the online transaction on Airbnb is stronger for collectivistic people than for individualistic people (Westjohn et al., 2021).

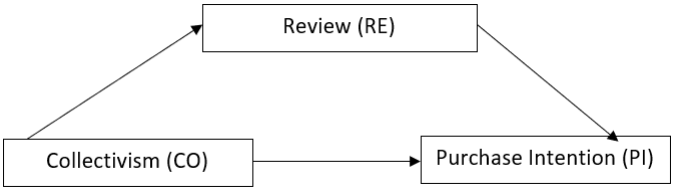

Figure 11 – Mediation Model 5

→ *H5: Collectivist people will tend to trust more their peer's reviews, which in turn positively influences purchase intention.*

Finally, the uncertainty avoidance cultural aspect will be tested as the theory says that high uncertainty avoidance negatively influences purchase intention through online brand communities.

Indeed, individuals with high uncertainty avoidance will find it difficult to develop trust, especially as online brand communities' members do not personally know one another (Lee et al., 2021). Therefore, in this context, members with high uncertainty avoidance will be more sceptical regarding information coming from the online community. Hence, they can tend to have a negative attitude towards booking on Airbnb.

→ *H6: A higher uncertainty avoidance will negatively impact purchase intention on online community-based marketplace.*

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Sample and data collection

The targeted respondents were Belgian and Indian users of Airbnb's online community-based marketplace. In this study, the term 'users' includes all people who have actively used the platform at least once during the past three years (i.e., performed a booking on the Airbnb platform).

A survey has been created on Qualtrics. The original questions were in English as they have been extracted from previous scales in the literature. A translation in French has been created for Belgian respondents. The translation was carefully monitored by a French native speaker bilingual in English with the help of a Master student in multilingual communication (English).

Before definitively publishing the survey, a pre-test was carried out with three people having different mother tongs – two native French speakers and one native English speaker. Their feedback enabled to adjust certain questions slightly and to delete few of them. The deleted questions were reverse worded questions that were said to be "confusing" and "too long".

Thereafter, the survey has been distributed via social media – Facebook and WhatsApp – to acquaintances, via both public and private messages.

After discarding incomplete responses, there were 59 usable responses from the Indian group and 79 usable responses from the Belgian group. The demographic information regarding the sample of respondents can be find in the below *table 2*.

Variable	Items	India		Belgium	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	54	91.5	16	21
	Female	5	8.5	60	79
Age	12 - 24 years old	6	10.2	31	40.8
	25 - 34 years old	51	86.4	10	13.2
	35 - 44 years old	2	3.4	6	7.9
	45 - 65 years old	0	0	27	35.5
	65 +	0	0	2	2.6

Table 2 – Demographic Information of the sample

2.2. Measures

The constructs were measured using existing scales and have been slightly adapted to match the present study and after the pre-test feedback. All constructs were measured with 7-point Likert scales with 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree. The scale of measurement table can be found in *Table 3* and the translation in French can be found in *Appendix 3*.

Moreover, the variables "Attitude" towards Airbnb (AT) and "Familiarity" with Airbnb (FAM) were used as control variables to assess the appreciation and familiarity of the two sub-groups (Indian and Belgian) with the Airbnb platform.

VARIABLE	**Questions**	**Source**
Collectivism (CO)	• CO1: Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group. • CO2: Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties. • CO3: Group welfare is more important than individual rewards. • CO4: Group success is more important than individual success. • CO5: Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group. • CO6 Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer	(Yoo et al., 2011)
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	• UN1: It is important to have instructions spelled out in detail so that I always know what I'm expected to do.	(Yoo et al., 2011)

	• UN2: It is important to closely follow instructions and procedures. • UN3: Rules and regulations are important because they inform me of what is expected of me. • UN4: Standardized work procedures are helpful. • UN5: Instructions for operations are important.	
Power distance (PD)	• PD1: People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in lower positions. • PD2: People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions. • PD3: People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions made by people in higher positions. • PD4: People in higher positions should not delegate important tasks to people in lower positions.	(Yoo et al., 2011)
Attitude towards Airbnb (AT)	• AT1: For me, using Airbnb when traveling is good • AT2: For me, using Airbnb when traveling is favourable • AT3: For me, using Airbnb when traveling is wise • AT4: For me, using Airbnb when traveling is positive	(Han et al., 2010)
Familiarity towards Airbnb (FAM)	• FAM1: I am familiar with Airbnb • FAM2: I am experienced with Airbnb • FAM3: I am knowledgeable about Airbnb	(Han et al., 2010)
Participation in online communities (PA)	• PA1: I try to be cooperative with the Airbnb process • PA2: Prior booking, I read other customers' reviews about the Airbnb • PA3: I spent time searching for information about the Airbnb accommodation • PA4: I adequately completed all the expected behaviours as an Airbnb guest	(Jiang et al., 2019)
Purchase intention (PI)	• PI1: I am willing to use Airbnb when traveling • PI2: I plan to use Airbnb when traveling • PI3: I will make an effort to use Airbnb when traveling	(Chen & Chang, 2018)
Loyalty (LOY)	• LOY1: I would recommend this platform to friends, neighbours, and relatives • LOY2: I arrange more than 50% of similar transactions with Airbnb	(Clauss et al., 2019)
Moral Responsibility (MR)	• MR1: Helping other members with their decision-making process is very important to me • MR2: I feel obligated to help other members when directly asked • MR3: It is my duty to help other members of this community • MR4: I help other members of this community in their consumption decisions	(Madupu & Cooley, 2010)

Review (RE)	• RE1: I think the tenant's comment is objective • RE2: I think the tenant's comment is reliable • RE3: I think the tenant's comment is close to facts	(Chen & Chang, 2018)

Table 3 – Scale of measurement

3. RESULTS

a. Assessing the measures

First, ten exploratory factor analyses were performed on all the items of each of the ten constructs. This study used the principal components extraction to examine the factor structures. For each construct, SPSS extracted two empirical indices revealing whether the sample's correlation matrix is suitable for factor analysis: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity. The minimum acceptable value for KMO is 0.6 and the ideal is above 0.8. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity compares an observed correlation matrix to the identity matrix. In other words, it checks if there is a certain redundancy between the items that can be summarized within a single factor. The null hypothesis of the test is that the items are not correlated.

The KMO measures and the Bartlett's tests of sphericity are reported in *Table 4*.

Variables	**Number of items**	**KMO**	**Bartlett's tests of sphericity**
Collectivism (CO)	6	0.772	χ^2 (15) = 198.16, *p* (<.001)
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	5	0.809	χ^2 (10) = 255.66, *p* (<.001)
Power Distance (PD)	4	0.674	χ^2 (6) = 70.72, *p* (<.001)
Attitude towards Airbnb (AT)	4	0.794	χ^2 (6) = 335.01, *p* (<.001)
Familiarity towards Airbnb (FAM)	3	0.732	χ^2 (3) = 201.93, *p* (<.001)
Participation (PA)	4	0.713	χ^2 (6) = 124.61, *p* (<.001)
Purchase intention (PI)	3	0.609	χ^2 (3) = 186.65, *p* (<.001)
Loyalty (LOY)	2	0.500	χ^2 (1) = 29.33, *p* (<.001)
Sense of moral responsibility (MR)	4	0.726	χ^2 (6) = 175.01, *p* (<.001)
Review (RE)	3	0.727	χ^2 (3) = 159.84, *p* (<.001)

Table 4 – KMO measures and Bartlett's Tests (Source: SPSS)

Except for the Loyalty variable, all the KMO measures were all above 0.6, which is considered as acceptable and the Bartlett's tests of sphericity were all significant, as the *p-values* < 0.001. Except for Loyalty (LOY), results ensure the strength of the partial correlation between the items of a same construct, and therefore enabled to validate the grouping of items associated with the same variable.

The item LOY1 was dropped from further analysis. Indeed, the scale used to measure Loyalty (LOY) was made of two items difficult to label to the same variable. Between LOY1 and LOY2, LOY2 is more directly linked to the definition of loyalty (see *Table 1* and *Table 3*).

Therefore, the 9 other variables are measured by a set of several items. To test the reliability of those variables, a calculation of Cronbach's alpha was performed in SPSS. Indeed, it is a measure of internal consistency, meaning a measure of how closely related a set of items are as a group. Results have been recorded in *Table 5*.

A generally accepted rule is that a Cronbach's alpha of 0.6-0.7 indicates an acceptable level of reliability, and a value of 0.8 or greater is considered as a very good level.

The Cronbach's alpha showed acceptable results for 9 out of 9 variables as their Cronbach's alpha are higher than 0.6 (see *Table 5*). After this step, items of a same scale were regrouped into a single variable. This was done by calculating the average of the different items that make up the scale.

Variables	**Number of items**	**Cronbach's alpha**
Collectivism (CO)	6	.766
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	5	.826
Power Distance (PD)	4	.644
Sense of moral responsibility (MR)	4	.783
Attitude towards Airbnb (AT)	4	.895
Familiarity towards Airbnb (FAM)	3	.870
Participation (PA)	4	.715
Purchase intention (PI)	3	.777
Review (RE)	3	.836

Table 5 – Cronbach's alpha of variables (Source: SPSS)

b. Results

To analyse the results of the survey, all the hypotheses previously discussed were tested and analysed with the goal of drawing conclusions.

The analyses have been done in SPSS and the threshold used is 0.05 for the significance of the p-value. Meaning that a p-value inferior to 0.05 leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, which in turn leads to the support of the related hypothesis. However, marginally significant results (i.e., p-value < 0.1) were analysed as well.

***Attitude and familiarity to Airbnb**: control variables*

Before analysing the results, a measure of the attitude and familiarity with the platform of both groups of consumers was done. They are not of direct interest in this study, but they were added to verify that the positioning of Airbnb in India and Belgium is similar.

To do so, an independent sample t-test was performed using SPSS to detect mean differences between the two groups of respondents on those two variables.

As per reported in *Table 6*, the attitude (AT) towards Airbnb is highly similar in both countries, India and Belgium and the H_0 (of equal means) cannot be rejected.

However, the independent sample t-test revealed that Indian respondents are more familiar (FAM) with the Airbnb platform than Belgian respondents. Indeed, Indian members scored 5.72 versus 4.79 for Belgian members, and this mean difference is significant as p <.001.

According to this study, Indian Airbnb users consider themselves to be more familiar, experienced, and knowledgeable about Airbnb than Belgian Airbnb users.

This is a difference to keep in mind in further analyses as it may bias certain results.

		Mean	***Std. error***			*t-test for Equality of means*		
AT	Belgium	5.27	0.12	**AT**		t	df	Sig.
	India	5.18	0.14		Equal variances assumed	.524	133	.601
FAM	Belgium	4.79	0.15	**FAM**		t	df	Sig.
	India	5.72	0.15		Equal variances assumed	-4.308	133	<.001

Table 6 – Attitude and Familiarity Independent Sample T-test (Source: SPSS)

To perform the mediation analyses, hypotheses 1 to 5 will be tested according to the following three steps:

- 1st step: testing the impact of the Independent Variable on the Dependent Variable
- 2nd step: testing the impact of both, the Independent Variable and the Mediating Variable, on the Dependent Variable
- 3rd step: testing the impact of the Dependent Variable on the Mediating Variable

Hypothesis 1: *Indian people present higher level of collectivism, which in turn positively influences participation in online communities.*

H1: 1st step

To test the first hypothesis, an independent sample t-test was performed using SPSS to detect mean differences in Participation (PA) between the two groups (Belgian and Indian).

H1, which stated that participation in the online community will be stronger for Indian members (Mean = 5.79, std. error = 0.11) than for Belgian members (Mean = 5.59, std. error = 0.11), is not supported as t (133) = – 1.241, p (.217) > .05. This means that there is a probability of 21.7% of observing such a difference in means under the assumption of H_0 of equal means. As this is above the accepted threshold of 5%, the first step of **H1 cannot be validated** (see data reported in *Table 7*).

		Mean	***Std. error***
PA	Belgium	5.59	0.11
	India	5.79	0.11

		t-test for Equality of means		
		t	df	Sig.
PA	Equal variances assumed	-1.241	133	.217

Table 7 – H1 T-test (Source: SPSS)

H1: 2nd step

After testing the direct impact of Citizenship on Participation (PA), a multiple linear regression was performed with Collectivism (CO) and Citizenship as predictors of Participation (PA) (see *Figure 12*). The aim is to observe the impact when both predictors are into the model. To do so, the citizenship variable was transformed into a binary variable and the multiple regression was performed on SPSS.

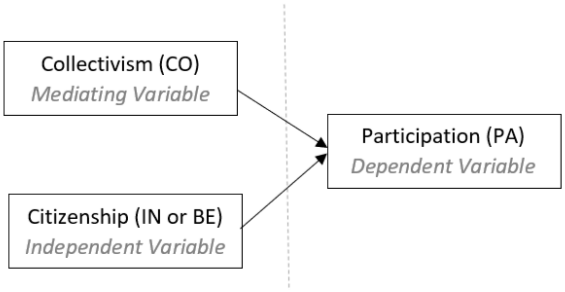

Figure 12 – Multiple Regression H1

This regression failed to validate that collectivism and citizenship as significant predictors of participation in the Airbnb online community. Indeed, the p-value associated with the ANOVA's F-test is *p* (.466) > .05 (see *Appendix 4*). Meaning that the predicted model cannot be trusted.

H1: 3rd step

Furthermore, as opposed to the theory, this study was not able to prove the higher collectivism in India as compared to Belgium (see *Table 8*). Indeed, another independent sample t-test was performed to compare the cultural dimension between the two countries and the difference was not significant according to the test, as *p-value* = .427 < .05.

		Mean	***Std. error***			***t-test for Equality of means***		
CO	Belgium	4.44	0.12	**CO**		t	df	Sig.
	India	4.59	0.12		Equal variances sassumed	-0.797	133	.427

Table 8 – Collectivism T-test (Source: SPSS)

H1 rejection:

It was predicted that Indians tend to look for a higher group cohesion and group interdependency. Indeed, there are many cultural factors that theoretically led to think that Indian users are more collectivists (see *Chapter 3*, *section 3.7*). However, there is no significant difference between Indian respondents and Belgian respondents regarding the collectivist dimension (see *Table 8*). This might explain the inability of this study to prove a difference in their participation within the community.

After comparing the boxplots (see *Figure 13*), it can be observed that when it comes to participation to the online community, Belgian respondents ended up with interquartile

ranges larger than Indian respondents. Despite of the non-ability of this research to prove that Indian members participate more in online brand communities than Belgian members, this rapid comparison suggests more unity on this variable for Indian members.

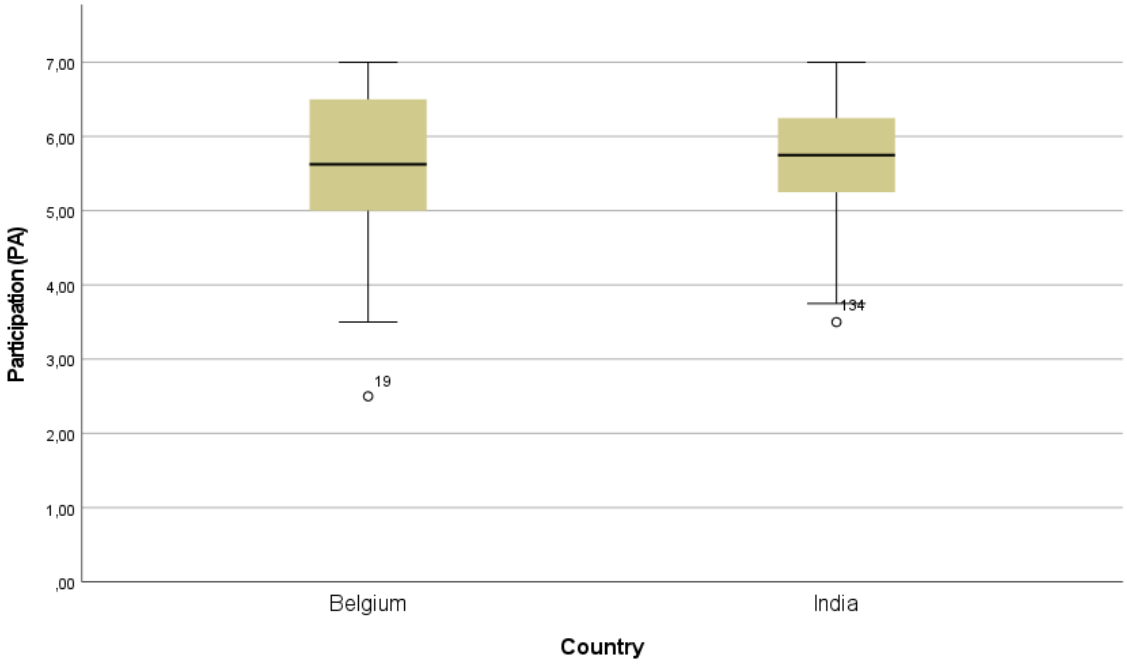

Figure 13 – Simple boxplot of participation in Airbnb community by country (Source: SPSS)

Another factor that might explain the lack of significant difference between Indian members' participation and Belgian members' participation is the long-term orientation dimension. Theoretically, Belgian members tend to have a higher long-term orientation as compared to Indian members (see *Figure 2*). Indeed, it was not tested in the scope of this study, but members of long term-oriented societies tend to build up inter-member trust, which in turn impacts positively participation (Ryu & Moon, 2009). This dimension might counteract the collectivist dimension and lead to insignificant result for H1.

***Hypothesis 2**: Indian people present higher level of collectivism, which in turn positively influences loyalty to online communities.*

H2: 1st step

An independent sample t-test was performed with SPSS to detect the mean difference between Indian users' loyalty and Belgian users' loyalty.

As per stated in H2, Indian Airbnb users prove to be more loyal to the Airbnb platform and its community (Mean = 4.41, std. error = 0.20) than Belgian Airbnb users (Mean = 3.72, std. error = 0.20). So far, the first step of H2 is supported as t (133) = – 2.319, p (.022) < .05, meaning that there is only a slight probability of 2.2% of observing such a difference between the means under H_0. As this is below the accepted threshold of 5%, it can be concluded that Indian Airbnb users are significantly more loyal to the platform than Belgian Airbnb users. **H2 is partially supported** according to data reported in *Table 9*.

		Mean	***Std. error***
LOY	Belgium	3.72	0.20
	India	4.41	0.20

		t-test for Equality of means		
LOY		t	df	Sig.
	Equal variances assumed	-2.319	133	.022

Table 9 – H2 T-test (Source: SPSS)

H2: 2nd step

To pursue with the mediation analysis, a multiple regression was performed to observe the impact of both Citizenship and Collectivism (CO) on Loyalty (LOY), as per reported in *Figure 14*.

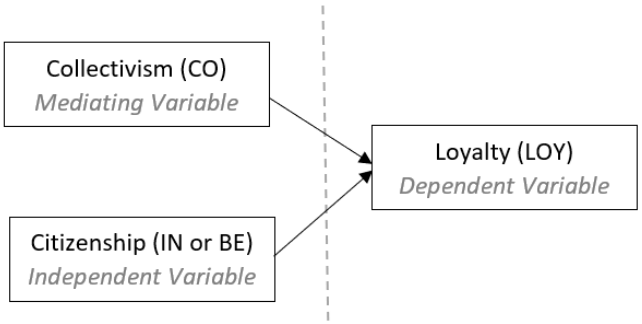

Figure 14 – Multiple Regression H2

The predicted model provided marginally significant results as the p-value associated with the ANOVA's F-test is .05 < p (.073) < .1 (see *Table 10)*.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15,510	2	7,755	2,670	,073[b]
	Residual	383,423	132	2,905		
	Total	398,933	134			

a. Dependent Variable: LOY2

b. Predictors: (Constant), CitizenshipDummy, CO

Table 10 – ANOVA Multiple Regression H2 (Source: SPSS)

The regression failed to validate that Collectivism (CO) is a significant predictor of loyalty to the Airbnb community-based platform. Indeed, when it comes to Collectivism (CO) as a predictor of Loyalty (LOY), the results turned out to be statistically not significant (p-value = .950 > .05) (see *Table 11*). However, it was confirmed by the multiple regression that Citizenship is a statistically significant predictor of Loyalty (LOY) as p-value = .023 < .05.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3,683	,670		5,496	<,001
	CO	,009	,144	,005	,063	,950
	CitizenshipDummy	,682	,296	,197	2,300	,023

a. Dependent Variable: LOY2

Table 11 – Coefficients Multiple Regression H2 (Source: SPSS)

<u>H2: 3rd step</u>

As per observed previously in *Table 8*, this study failed to demonstrate that Indian members of the Airbnb community are more collectivist than Belgian members of the Airbnb community.

<u>H2 partial rejection</u>:

Even though Indian are more loyal to the Airbnb community-based platform, this study was not able to support that it is because they are more collectivists (see Step 3). Therefore, other factors might explain this significant difference in loyalty between the two different groups.

One of them may be the difference in the familiarity with Airbnb (see *Table 6*). Indeed, the higher loyalty among Indian respondents might be due to their higher familiarity with Airbnb as compared to Belgian respondents. To verify if familiarity with the platform could explain this result, a linear regression was performed with the two variables, Familiarity (FAM) and Loyalty (LOY). The linear regression has proved a positive effect of the familiarity to Airbnb on the loyalty towards the platform. Indeed, results, reported in *Appendix 5*, show that familiarity is a statistically significant predictor of loyalty in this case. Moreover, 32.6% (R^2 = .326) of the variation (see *Appendix 5*, *Table 32*) in the loyalty to the Airbnb online community-based marketplace can be explained by variation in the familiarity one has with it.

Therefore, the underlying reasons of the Indian's higher loyalty might not be explained by cultural factors, but rather by the higher familiarity of Indian respondents with the platform as compared to Belgian respondents.

As citizenship is a predictor of loyalty while collectivism is not, the results of the multiple regression could suggest that cultural factors other than collectivism could eventually mediate the impact of citizenship on loyalty. However, those other cultural factors are not studied in the present thesis.

Hypothesis 3: *Indian people present higher level of power distance, which in turn positively influences purchase intention in online communities.*

H3: 1st step

In contrast with the predictions based on the theory, this study failed to prove that Indian people (Mean = 5.40, std. error = 0.17) have a higher predisposition to purchase intention through the Airbnb community-based platform than Belgian people (Mean = 5.24, std. error = 0.14). Indeed, data reported on *Table 12* below led to the first step of **H3 rejection**.

		Mean	***Std. error***			*t-test for Equality of means*		
PI	Belgium	5.24	0.14			t	df	Sig.
	India	5.40	0.17	**PI**	Equal variances assumed	– .723	133	.471

Table 12 – Hypothesis 3 T-test (Source: SPSS)

H3: 2nd step

In order to evaluate whether Citizenship and Power Distance (PD) have an effect on Purchase Intention (PI), a multiple regression was performed between the variables as per illustrated in *Figure 15*.

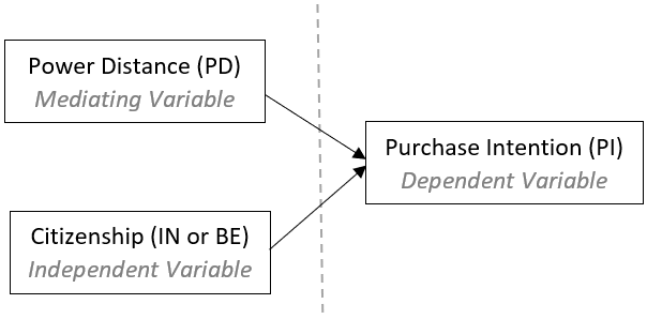

Figure 15 – Multiple Regression H3 (Source: SPSS)

The model provided by SPSS cannot be trusted as the p-value associated with the ANOVA's F-test is *p* (.685) > .05. Furthermore, this study failed to prove that neither Power Distance (PD) nor Citizenship are statistically significant predictors of Purchase Intention (PI). Computations of the multiple regression can be found in *Appendix 6*.

H3: 3rd step

Data recorded on power distance per country did not confirm what the Hofstede Model predicted. Indeed, the theory predicted a higher power distance within the Indian population than within the Belgian population. However, according to this specific data's study, the difference proves not to be significant (see *Table 13*)

		Mean	***Std. error***			***t-test for Equality of means***		
PD	Belgium	1.73	1.1			t	df	Sig.
	India	1.84	0.92	**PD**	Equal variances assumed	-0.815	133	0.427

Table 13 – Power Distance T-test (Source: SPSS)

H3 rejection:

As per explained in the literature review, purchase intention is influenced by many aspects, but according to this model, the national culture proves to have no significant impact on it. This might be explained by the many different cultural dimensions affecting one's purchase intention. Not only has power distance an impact on one's decision-making process

(Pornpitakpan, 2004), but also other cultural dimensions influence one's buying decision (Lee et al., 2021). For example, higher uncertainty avoidance can increase the perceived risk, which in turn will reduce the purchase intention. Another cultural aspect which might have an impact is higher collectivism. Indeed, collectivism enhances trust propensity within the online community (Westjohn et al., 2021), which in turn will increase the purchase intention (Chen & Chang, 2018).

To sum up, there are many cultural dimensions that can positively or negatively influence purchase intention. This study failed to prove that there is significant evidence that the Indian members are more prone to purchase intention within an online brand community than the Belgian members.

Hypothesis 4: *Collectivism positively influences sense of moral responsibility in online communities, which in turn positively impacts their members' participation.*

H4: 1st step

The first and main step to test this hypothesis is to perform a linear regression between Collectivism (CO), as the independent variable, and Participation (PA), as the dependent variable.

This regression failed to validate that collectivism is a significant predictor of participation in the Airbnb online community. Indeed, the p-value associated with the F-ratio is p (.977) > .05 (see *Table 14*). Here, as it is a simple linear regression, the F-test is corresponding to the t-test of the slope (coefficient) as there is only 1 regressor. Meaning that the first step of the model cannot be trusted.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	,001	1	,001	,001	,977[b]
	Residual	118,201	138	,857		
	Total	118,201	139			

a. Dependent Variable: PA

b. Predictors: (Constant), CO

Table 14 – ANOVA Linear Regression (Source: SPSS)

H4: 2nd step

The second step is a multiple regression with Collectivism (CO) and Moral Responsibility (MR) as predictors of Participation (PA) as per represented in *Figure 16*.

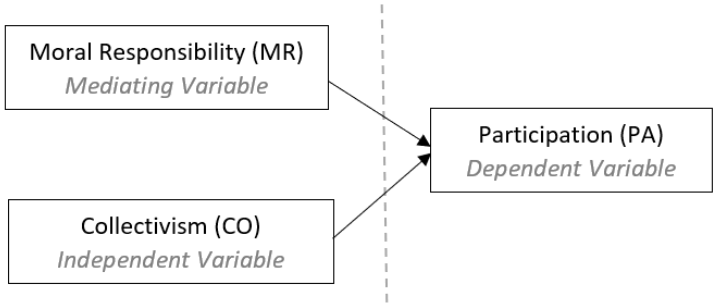

Figure 16 – Multiple Regression H4 (Source: SPSS)

The predicted model provided significant results as the p-value associated with the ANOVA's F-test is *p* (.049) < .05 (see *Table 15)*.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4,982	2	2,491	3,087	,049[b]
	Residual	106,501	132	,807		
	Total	111,483	134			

a. Dependent Variable: PA

b. Predictors: (Constant), MR, CO

Table 15 – ANOVA Multiple Regression H4 (Source: SPSS)

According to this second regression, when the moral responsibility is higher, the participation is higher (coefficient = 0.153 in *Table 16*). This result is statistically significant as *p-value* = .014 < .05. On the other hand, as the first step announced, this second regression failed again to validate that collectivism is a significant predictor of participation in the Airbnb online community (*p-value* = .572 < .05).

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	5,184	,392		13,229	<,001
	CO	-,045	,079	-,050	-,566	,572
	MR	,153	,062	,221	2,479	,014

a. Dependent Variable: PA

Table 16 – Coefficients Multiple Regression H4 (Source: SPSS)

Additionally, the model suggests that 4.5% (R^2 = .045) of the variation in the Airbnb community is explained by the model (see *Table 17*).

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,211[a]	,045	,030	,89824

a. Predictors: (Constant), MR, CO

Table 17 – Model Summary Multiple Regression H4 (Source: SPSS)

H4: 3rd step

For the third step, a linear regression was performed on Collectivism (CO), as the independent variable, and Moral Responsibility (MR), as the dependent variable

As predicted by the theory, when the collectivism is higher, the moral responsibility is higher (coefficient=0.379 in *Table 20*). Moreover, the model suggests that 8.9% (R^2 =.089) of the moral responsibility's variation is explained by variation in collectivism (see *Table 18*).

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,298[a]	,089	,082	1,23879

a. Predictors: (Constant), CO

Table 18 – Model summary (CO & MR) (Source: SPSS)

The ANOVA reported in *Table 19* and computed on SPSS confirmed the relationship between Collectivism (CO) and Moral Responsibility (MR) as the p-value associated with the F-ratio is *p* (.000) < .05.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20,626	1	20,626	13,441	,000[b]
	Residual	211,774	138	1,535		
	Total	232,400	139			

a. Dependent Variable: MR

b. Predictors: (Constant), CO

Table 19 – ANOVA (CO & MR) (Source: SPSS)

Lastly, as per reported in *Table 20*, the coefficient of CO has a p-value *p* (.000) < .05. This confirms what is stated above, meaning that collectivism is a statistically significant predictor of moral responsibility.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2,833	,476		5,958	,000
	CO	,379	,103	,298	3,666	,000

a. Dependent Variable: MR

Table 20 – Coefficients (CO & MR) (Source: SPSS)

H4 rejection:

To sum up, the collected data and analyses performed have shown a positive relationship between collectivism and moral responsibility as the theory predicted. Likewise, the model has been able to prove the positive effect of moral responsibility on participation in the Airbnb community. However, this study has not been able to prove the direct effect of the collectivism on participation in the Airbnb community (see *Figure 17*). Due to this last failed regression, the mediation analysis cannot be proceeded, and **H4 cannot be validated**.

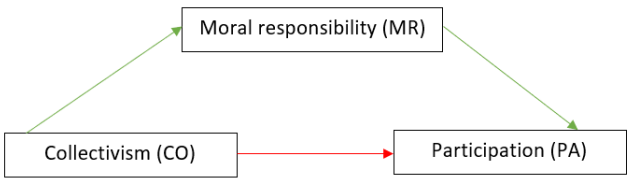

Figure 17 – H4 Model Effects

There are many social factors (e.g., trust, social integration, taking care of each other) that led to think that a higher collectivism would increase participation. However, this study failed to demonstrate the link between those two.

However, it is worth noticing a significant difference in moral responsibility between Belgian and Indian respondents. Indeed, an independent sample t-test was performed to compare means on moral responsibility among these two groups of respondents: Belgian respondents have a mean = 4.00 (std. error = .14) and Indian respondents have a mean = 5.24 (std. error .14). The model was supported as t (133) = – 6.129, p (<.001) < .05. The independent sample t-test results on SPSS were reported in *Appendix 7*.

Hypothesis 5: *Collectivist people will tend to trust more their peer's reviews, which in turn positively influences purchase intention.*

H5: 1st step

A linear regression was performed with Collectivism (CO) as the independent variable, and Purchase Intention (PI) as the dependent variable. Indeed, according to the theory, collectivism positively influences the purchase intention of other potential consumers on a community-based platform.

This regression provided a marginally significant result as the p-value associated with the F-ratio is 0.05 < p (.065) < .1 (see *Table 21*). It implies that there could still be some kind of real effect going on between collectivism and purchase intention.

As it is a simple linear regression, the coefficient the coefficient of CO has a p-value corresponding to the t-test of the slope (i.e., p-value = 0.05 < p (.065) < .1), implying that collectivism is a significant predictor of purchase intention on the Airbnb platform (see *Table 22*).

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5,467	1	5,467	3,468	,065[b]
	Residual	217,568	138	1,577		
	Total	223,036	139			

a. Dependent Variable: PI

b. Predictors: (Constant), CO

Table 21 – ANOVA (CO & PI) (Source: SPSS)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	4,803	,482		9,966	,000
	CO	,195	,105	,157	1,862	,065

a. Dependent Variable: PI

Table 22 – Coefficients (CO & PI) (Source: SPSS)

The effect could be that when one's collectivism is higher, their purchase intention on the Airbnb community-based platform tends to be higher (coefficient = 0.195 in *Table 22*). According to the model, 2.5% (R^2 = .025) of the variation in Airbnb users' purchase intention is explained by variation in their collectivism (see *Table 23*).

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,157[a]	,025	,017	1,25562

a. Predictors: (Constant), CO

Table 23 – Model Summary (CO & PI) (Source: SPSS)

H5: 2nd step

As per represented in *Figure 18*, the second step is a multiple regression with Collectivism (CO) and trust in the Reviews (RE) as predictors of Purchase Intention (PI).

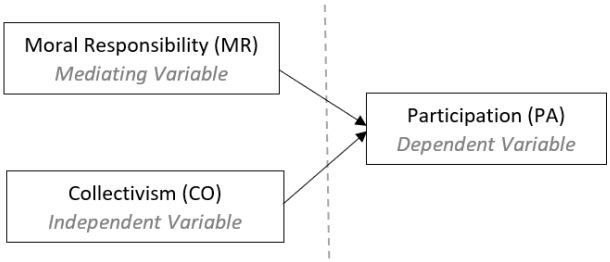

Figure 18 – Multiple Regression H5 (Source: SPSS)

The ANOVA reported in *Table 24* and computed on SPSS confirmed that the predicted model can be trusted as the p-value associated with the F-ratio is *p* (.000) < .05.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	38,183	2	19,092	14,369	,000[b]
	Residual	175,384	132	1,329		
	Total	213,567	134			

a. Dependent Variable: PI

b. Predictors: (Constant), RE, CO

Table 24 – ANOVA Multiple Regression H5 (Source: SPSS)

The results of the multiple regression confirmed that when one's trust in the reviews is higher, their purchase intention is higher (coefficient = 0.404 in *Table 25* and *p-value* = .000 < .05). However, as in the first step, it is confirmed that the variable Collectivism (CO) cannot be considered as a statistically significant predictor of the variable Purchase Intention (PI) (*p-value* = .105 > .05).

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2,783	,545		5,110	,000
	CO	,161	,098	,130	1,633	,105
	RE	,404	,084	,383	4,795	,000

a. Dependent Variable: PI

Table 25 – Coefficients Multiple Regression H5 (Source: SPSS)

To be more concise, a linear regression between Review (RE) and Purchase Intention (PI) was performed and suggests that 11.7% (R^2 = .117) of the variation in respondents' purchase intention is explained by variation in their trust in the Airbnb community members' reviews (see *Appendix 8*).

Even though the multiple regression failed to consider Collectivism (CO) as a significant predictor of Purchase Intention (PI), the linear regression between the two (CO and PI) provided a marginal significant result as .05 < p-value = .065 < .1 (see *Appendix 9*).

H5: 3rd step

Finally, the last linear regression was performed on Collectivism (CO), as the independent variable, and Review (RE), as the dependent variable. Indeed, according to the theory,

individuals with high collectivism collectivists tend to trust more the community than individualists (Westjohn et al., 2021).

This model failed to validate that collectivism is a significant predictor of trust in the reviews in the Airbnb online community. Indeed, the p-value associated with the F-ratio is *p* (.115) > .05 (see *Table 26*). Meaning that the predicted model cannot be trusted, and **H5 cannot be validated**.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3,553	1	3,553	2,510	,115[b]
	Residual	195,367	138	1,416		
	Total	198,921	139			

a. Dependent Variable: REVIEW

b. Predictors: (Constant), CO

Table 26 – ANOVA Linear Regression (CO & RE) (Source: SPSS)

H5 rejection:

To sum up on H5, several effects between variables have been analysed (see *Figure 19*). The relationship between trust in the peers' reviews and purchase intention has been positively supported by the model. In contrast, the effect of one's collectivism on their trust in their peers' review has failed to be proven by the model. Lastly, there could be some kind of effect between an Airbnb user's collectivism and their purchase intention on the platform. However, as the three relationships have not been supported by the model, **H5 is rejected**.

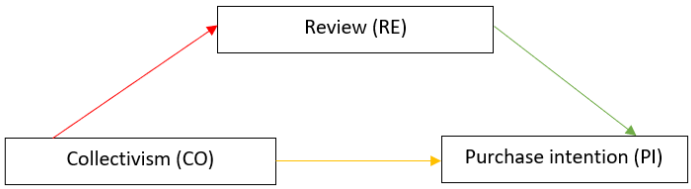

Figure 19 – H5 Model Effects

Hypothesis 6: *A higher uncertainty avoidance will negatively impact purchase intention on online community-based marketplace.*

To test this hypothesis, a linear regression was performed on SPSS between Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) and purchase intention (PI). Uncertainty avoidance – the cultural dimension tested – was the independent variable, and purchase intention on the Airbnb community-based marketplace was the dependent variable.

This regression failed to validate that uncertainty avoidance is a significant predictor of purchase intention on the Airbnb online marketplace. Indeed, the p-value associated with the F-ratio is *p* (.137) > .05 (see *Table 27*). Meaning that the predicted model cannot be trusted.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3,567	1	3,567	2,243	,137[b]
	Residual	219,469	138	1,590		
	Total	223,036	139			

a. Dependent Variable: PI

b. Predictors: (Constant), UA

Table 27 – ANOVA H6 (UA & PI) (Source: SPSS)

4. Discussion

The first implication to draw from the results is that none of the measured Hofstede dimensions in the practical part did match the theoretical Hofstede model studied in the literature review. First, according to the theory, individuals from the Indian society should present higher collectivism and higher power distance as compared to individuals from the Belgian society (Hofstede Insights, 2022). However, no substantial differences were observed on either dimension. Therefore, hypotheses from one to three have failed to be supported as they were based on these theoretical cultural predispositions. Moreover, it is worth noticing that according to theoretical predictions, Belgium has one of the highest scores on the Uncertainty Avoidance Index, making uncertainty avoidance the biggest theoretical cultural gap between Belgium and India (Hofstede Insights, 2022). Nevertheless, the data of this study supports a significant difference, but the opposite of what is predicted in the theory (see *Appendix 10*). All of these observations lead to the conclusion that the Hofstede Model is not supported by this study.

When it comes to the first outcome variable, participation in online brand communities, this study failed to support a significant difference between Belgian and Indian respondents. However, moral responsibility was found to be a statistically significant predictor of participation in an online brand community. Moreover, in this study, Indian individuals have a higher moral responsibility than Belgian individuals.

As theoretically predicted, Indian members tend to have a higher loyalty to online brand communities they belong to. However, this result has to be carefully interpreted. Indeed, theoretically, Indian collectivism was a predictor of loyalty (Hofstede, 2011), which this study failed to support. Furthermore, Indian respondents' higher familiarity with Airbnb as compared to Belgian respondents may bias the result. Hence, the result would have nothing to do with a cultural difference, but simply with the familiarity with the platform.

The last outcome variable observed was purchase intention through an online brand community. The hypothesis that Indian members tend to score higher on this variable has failed to be supported by the model. However, trust in community members' opinions was found to be a statistically significant predictor of purchase intention. Furthermore, when one's collectivism is higher, their purchase intention through an online brand community tends to be higher.

To sum up, even though predictions based on the Hofstede Model have failed to be supported, certain implications could be drawn from this study.

5. Managerial Implications

So far, a survey was constructed and then the results were analysed and discussed. This section aims to deduce theoretical and managerial implications based on the answers that the sample provided. This section could be useful in the context of a company that has developed or is developing digital communities in different countries.

The very first implication that can be drawn from the consolidation of the literature is that regardless of the cultural group targeted, there is value in long-term strategic efforts to build a brand community.

When it comes to the present study, it is worth noticing that this study failed to align with the theoretical and scientific Hofstede Model. It is a reminder that analysing culture is a complex phenomenon difficult to consolidate. As Hofstede argued himself, even though culture does differ from one country to another, it is among others strongly bonded to a social group and to gender. This is important to bear in mind. For example, when setting up a targeting strategy, sub-cultural analysis may be required to segment the market and meet specific needs and motivations.

As the cultural framework used has failed to be consistent in this research, no specific implications regarding India and Belgium can be drawn.

However, a gripping finding of this study is the effect of collectivism on purchase intention through an online brand community. Indeed, this study suggests that when one's collectivism is higher, their purchase intention through an online brand community tends to be higher. Therefore, when operating in proven collectivistic cultures, it may be interesting for a company to invest into building an online brand community as it will enhance purchase intention of its members.

Similarly, based on the results of the survey conducted for this thesis, members with higher moral responsibility tend to participate more in online brand communities they belong to. Additionally, this study has given evidence that one's moral responsibility differs according to their national culture. Therefore, it might be more interesting for a company to invest in online communities in countries where individuals present a high moral responsibility. Indeed, in order for an online community to be successful and perennial, it needs a significant number of active members, who are source of most of the content.

THESIS CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify and assess cultural factors linked to an online brand community and which are likely to impact the participation in, loyalty to, and purchase intention through to this branded community. The countries covered by this study were India and Belgium.

Theoretically, there should be substantial cultural differences in the way two different cultural groups behave in an online brand community. To test some of these differences, this research collected data from two different cultural groups (i.e., Belgian citizens and Indian citizens), and measured their behaviour and attitude in an online brand community. Despite the diversity of the two samples, none of the hypotheses drawn from the theory were entirely supported. However, some conclusions and implications were drawn.

Findings provided evidence that members with higher moral responsibility tend to participate more in online brand communities. Moreover, predispositions regarding trust in community members' opinions were found to be a statistically significant predictor of purchase intention through an online brand community. Findings also support that collectivist members tend to have higher purchase intentions through an online brand community than individualistic members.

Limitations and directions for future research

Even though this study provides first insights on how culture has an influence on consumer behaviour through online communities, this research still contains some important limitations to highlight. Further research directions are also given.

One of the main limitations is that the practical part of this study was based on a case study, the Airbnb case. Even though the practical part was built to reflect the literature review as best as it possibly can, this study cannot be seen as a generalization. Indeed, online brand communities may differ from one another due to many different factors and dimensions (e.g., the industry). Therefore, caution must be exercised when extending the findings of this study to online communities formed around other brands. One area for future research is refining

the scales developed in this study. Indeed, this model could be tested further in various other contexts to gain a better understanding of customers' behaviour, and their influence on the three outcome variables.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning that people from different cultures respond to Likert scales differently (Madupu & Cooley, 2010). It suggests that differences observed in cross-cultural studies like this one may be due to the way members form different cultures respond to the scales rather than cultural differences.

Third, respondents were not asked in detail about their past experience with Airbnb. A favourable experience may have a positive impact on consumer behaviour, while an unfavourable experience may have a negative impact on future usage intentions.

Other limitations are convenience sampling and small sample size. This thesis used a questionnaire to collect data on friendship network as they were the easiest people to reach or contact. It is a form of convenience sampling, meaning that it involves participants being drawn from a close population group. Therefore, it is necessary to step back from the results and analyse the social and educational background of the respondents, particularly for Indian respondents. Indeed, all Indians respondents were MBA students from the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIM B), meaning that they come from a highly privileged environment as compared to the average Indian population. The IIM B is one of the top three management institutes in India and is located in close proximity to many leading corporate houses in the country. Moreover, in line with the gender gap at IIM B, 91.5% of Indian respondents are men. In total, there were 59 usable responses from the Indian group and 79 usable responses from the Belgian group. Even though it is considered as an appropriate number for most quantitative studies, a small sample size leads to a higher variability, which may lead to bias.

Therefore, a selection bias might have affected the findings. Future research could look at the demographic factors (such as gender, social classes) and examine their influence in such contexts.

Culture is a complex phenomenon and analysing it requires a lot of investment, a lot of time, and a well-defined framework. This thesis was driven around culture at a national level. However, in reality, it is difficult to generalise about national cultures as there might be important subcultures.

Furthermore, this study focused on three cultural dimensions by Hofstede, which allowed to reduce the questionnaire length and minimize participant fatigue significantly. However, for a given variable of interest, there are several cultural factors that can have a positive or negative influence. These may counterbalance each other and affect the results of this research. For example, if both collectivism and long-term orientation impact participation in online communities, but only collectivism is measured and not long-term orientation, bias may appear. Future research may yield more insightful results by including all the cultural value dimensions in the empirical analysis.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – India's Caste System

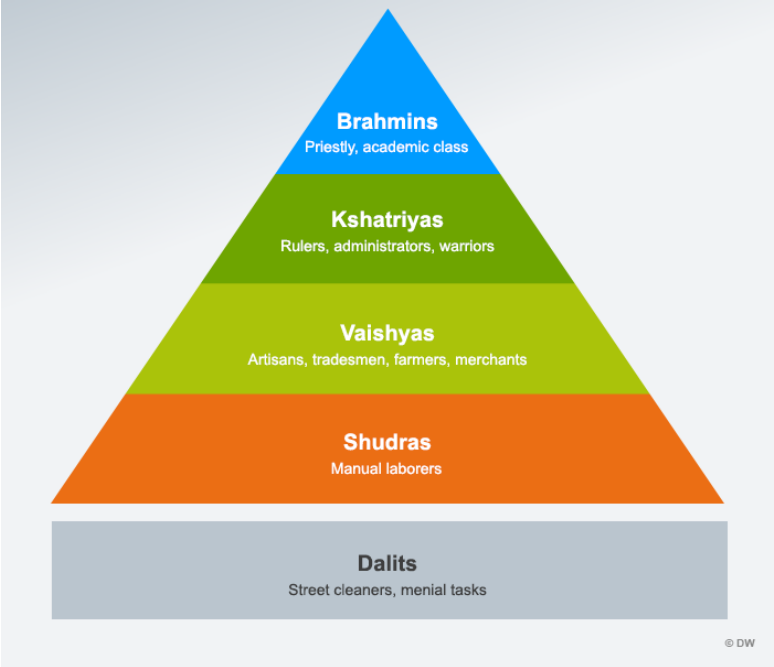

Figure 20 – India's Caste System (Source: DW)

Appendix 2 – India's population by religion

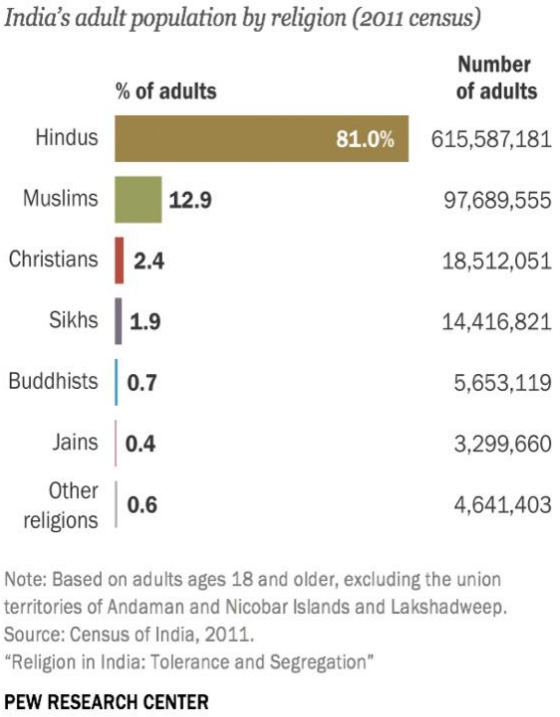

Figure 21 – India's adult population by religion (Source: Pew Research Center)

Appendix 3 – Survey French translation

VARIABLE	Questions in English	Questions in French
Collectivism (CO)	• CO1: Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group. • CO2: Individuals should stick with the group even through difficulties. • CO3: Group welfare is more important than individual rewards. • CO4: Group success is more important than individual success. • CO5: Individuals should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group. • CO6 Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer	• CO1 : Les individus devraient sacrifier leur intérêt personnel au profit du groupe. • CO2 : Les individus devraient être solidaires du groupe même en cas de difficultés. • CO3 : Le bien-être du groupe est plus important que les récompenses individuelles. • CO4 : Group success is more important than individual success. • CO5 : La réussite du groupe est plus importante que la réussite individuelle. • CO6 : La loyauté envers le groupe doit être encouragée même si les objectifs individuels en pâtissent
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	• UN1: It is important to have instructions spelled out in detail so that I always know what I'm expected to do. • UN2: It is important to closely follow instructions and procedures. • UN3: Rules and regulations are important because they inform me of what is expected of me. • UN4: Standardized work procedures are helpful. • UN5: Instructions for operations are important.	• UN1 : Il est important que les instructions soient expliquées en détail afin que je sache toujours ce que l'on attend de moi. • UN2 : Il est important de suivre de près les instructions et les procédures. • UN3 : Les règles sont importantes car elles m'informent de ce que l'on attend de moi. • UN4 : Les procédures de travail standardisées sont utiles. • UN5 : Les instructions opérationnelles sont importantes
Power distance (PD)	• PD1: People in higher positions should make most decisions without consulting people in lower positions. • PD2: People in higher positions should avoid social interaction with people in lower positions. • PD3: People in lower positions should not disagree with decisions made by people in higher positions.	• PD1 : Les personnes occupant des postes hiérarchiquement élevés devraient prendre la plupart des décisions sans consulter les personnes occupant des postes hiérarchiquement inférieurs. • PD2 : Les personnes occupant des postes hiérarchiquement élevés devraient éviter les interactions sociales avec les personnes occupant

	• PD4: People in higher positions should not delegate important tasks to people in lower positions.	des postes hiérarchiquement inférieurs. • PD3 : Les personnes occupant des postes hiérarchiquement inférieurs ne devraient pas être en désaccord avec les décisions des personnes occupant des postes hiérarchiquement supérieurs. • PD4 : Les personnes occupant un poste hiérarchiquement supérieur ne doivent pas déléguer des tâches importantes aux personnes occupant un poste hiérarchiquement inférieur.
Moral Responsibility (MR)	• MR1: Helping other members with their decision-making process is very important to me • MR2: I feel obligated to help other members when directly asked • MR3: It is my duty to help other members of this community • MR4: I help other members of this community in their consumption decisions	• MR1 : Il est très important pour moi d'aider les autres membres dans leur processus de décision. • MR2 : Je me sens obligé d'aider les autres membres lorsqu'on me le demande directement. • MR3 : Il est de mon devoir d'aider les autres membres de cette communauté. • MR 4 : J'aide les autres membres de cette communauté dans leurs décisions de consommation.
Attitude towards Airbnb (AT)	• AT1: For me, using Airbnb when traveling is good • AT2: For me, using Airbnb when traveling is favourable • AT3: For me, using Airbnb when traveling is wise • AT4: For me, using Airbnb when traveling is positive	• AT1 : Pour moi, utiliser Airbnb pour voyager est une bonne chose • AT2 : Pour moi, utiliser Airbnb lors d'un voyage est favorable • AT3 : Pour moi, utiliser Airbnb en voyageant est judicieux • AT4 : Pour moi, utiliser Airbnb en voyage est positif
Familiarity towards Airbnb (FAM)	• FAM1: I am familiar with Airbnb • FAM2: I am experienced with Airbnb • FAM3: I am knowledgeable about Airbnb	• FAM 1 : Je suis familier avec Airbnb • FAM 2 : J'ai de l'expérience avec Airbnb • FAM 3 : Je suis bien informé sur Airbnb
Participation in online communities (PA)	• PA1: I try to be cooperative with the Airbnb process • PA2: Prior booking, I read other customers' reviews about the Airbnb	• PA1 : J'essaie d'être coopératif avec le processus d'Airbnb (donner une note, laisser un commentaire...) • PA2 : Avant de faire ma réservation, j'ai lu des avis de précédents occupants du Airbnb • PA3 : Avant de faire ma réservation, j'ai passé du temps à chercher des

	• PA3: I spent time searching for information about the Airbnb accommodation • PA4: I adequately completed all the expected behaviours as an Airbnb guest	informations sur l'hébergement Airbnb. • PA4 : J'ai adopté tous les comportements que l'on attend de moi en tant que locataire d'Airbnb
Purchase intention (PI)	• PI1: I am willing to use Airbnb when traveling • PI2: I plan to use Airbnb when traveling • PI3: I will make an effort to use Airbnb when traveling	• PI1 : Je suis prêt à utiliser Airbnb lors de mes voyages. • PI2 : Je prévois d'utiliser Airbnb pour mes futurs voyages • PI3 : Je ferai un effort pour utiliser Airbnb lors de mes voyages
Loyalty (LOY)	• LOY1: I would recommend this platform to friends, neighbours, and relatives • LOY2: I arrange more than 50% of similar transactions with Airbnb	• LOY1 : Je recommanderais cette plateforme à mes amis, mes voisins et mes proches. • LOY2 : J'effectue plus de 50 % des transactions similaires avec Airbnb
Review (RE)	• RE1: I think the tenant's comment is objective • RE2: I think the tenant's comment is reliable • RE3: I think the tenant's comment is close to facts	• RE1 : Je pense que le commentaire du locataire Airbnb est objectif • RE2 : Je pense que le commentaire du locataire Airbnb est fiable • RE3 : Je pense que le commentaire du locataire Airbnb est proche des faits.

Table 28 – Research measurement, French version (*Table 3* translation)

Appendix 4 – Multiple regression: CO and Citizenship on PA

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,107[a]	,012	-,003	,91370

a. Predictors: (Constant), CitizenshipDummy, CO

Table 29 – Model Summary Multiple Regression H1 (Source: SPSS)

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1,282	2	,641	,768	,466[b]
	Residual	110,201	132	,835		
	Total	111,483	134			

a. Dependent Variable: PA

b. Predictors: (Constant), CitizenshipDummy, CO

Table 30 – ANOVA Multiple Regression H1 (Source: SPSS)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	5,563	,359		15,482	,000
	CO	,007	,077	,007	,085	,932
	CitizenshipDummy	,195	,159	,106	1,228	,222

a. Dependent Variable: PA

Table 31 – Coefficients Multiple Regression H1 (Source: SPSS)

Appendix 5 – Linear regression between LOY and FAM

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,571[a]	,326	,321	1,403

a. Predictors: (Constant), FAM

Table 32 – Model Summary Linear Regression LOY & FAM (Source: SPSS)

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	131,354	1	131,354	66,731	,000[b]
	Residual	271,639	138	1,968		
	Total	402,993	139			

a. Dependent Variable: LOY

b. Predictors: (Constant), FAM

Table 33 – ANOVA Linear Regression LOY & FAM (Source: SPSS)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	,196	,481		,407	,684
	FAM	,736	,090	,571	8,169	,000

a. Dependent Variable: LOY

Table 34 – Coefficients Linear Regression LOY & FAM (Source: SPSS)

Appendix 6 – Multiple Regression: PD and Citizenship on PI

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,076[a]	,006	-,009	1,26833

a. Predictors: (Constant), PD, CitizenshipBinary

Table 35 – Model Summary Multiple Regression H3 (Source: SPSS)

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1,223	2	,612	,380	,685[b]
	Residual	212,344	132	1,609		
	Total	213,567	134			

a. Dependent Variable: PItout

b. Predictors: (Constant), PD, CitizenshipDummy

Table 36 – ANOVA Multiple Regression H3 (Source: SPSS)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	5,357	,286		18,755	,000
	CitizenshipBin	,166	,221	,066	,753	,453

Table 37 – Coefficients Multiple Regression H3 (Source: SPSS)

Appendix 7 – Independent samples t-test to compare MR between Belgium and India

Group Statistics

	In which country do you live?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MR	Belgium	76	4,0000	1,22565	,14059
	India	59	5,2373	1,07755	,14029

Table 38 – Group Statistics: MR between Belgium and India (Source: SPSS)

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
MR	Equal variances assumed	1,214	,273	-6,129	133	<,001	-1,23729	,20186	-1,63657	-,83801
	Equal variances not assumed			-6,230	130,900	<,001	-1,23729	,19861	-1,63019	-,84439

Table 39 – Independent Samples T-test: MR between Belgium and India (Source: SPSS)

Appendix 8 – Linear Regression RE and PI

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,342[a]	,117	,111	1,19451

a. Predictors: (Constant), RE

Table 40 – Model summary RE & PI (Source: SPSS)

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	26,130	1	26,130	18,313	,000[b]
	Residual	196,906	138	1,427		
	Total	223,036	139			

a. Dependent Variable: PI

b. Predictors: (Constant), RE

Table 41 – ANOVA RE & PI (Source: SPSS)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	4,056	,392		10,339	,000
	RE	,362	,085	,342	4,279	,000

a. Dependent Variable: PI

Table 42 – Coefficients RE & PI (Source: SPSS)

Appendix 9 – Linear Regression CO and PI

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,157[a]	,025	,017	1,25562

a. Predictors: (Constant), CO

Table 43 – Model Summary CO & PI (Source: SPSS)

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5,467	1	5,467	3,468	,065[b]
	Residual	217,568	138	1,577		
	Total	223,036	139			

a. Dependent Variable: PI

b. Predictors: (Constant), CO

Table 44 – ANOVA CO & PI (Source: SPSS)

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4,803	,482		9,966	,000
	CO	,195	,105	,157	1,862	,065

a. Dependent Variable: PI

Table 45 – Coefficients CO & PI (Source: SPSS)

Appendix 10 – Independent samples t-test to compare UA between Belgium and India

Group Statistics

	In which country do you live?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
UA	Belgium	76	5,0184	1,00036	,11475
	India	59	5,3932	,97129	,12645

Table 46 – Group Statistics: UA between Belgium and India (Source: SPSS)

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
UA	Equal variances assumed	,513	,475	-2,187	133	,031	-,37480	,17139	-,71381	-,03579
	Equal variances not assumed			-2,195	126,511	,030	-,37480	,17075	-,71271	-,03689

Table 47 – Independent Samples T-test: UA between Belgium and India (Source: SPSS)

Abstract:

This research explored the influence of cultural dimensions on online brand communities with a focus on the consumer-to-consumer relationship. To do so, this paper explored the current literature about the topic, and then developed hypotheses aimed to explain the impact of cultural dimensions on participation in, loyalty to, and purchase intention through online brand communities. This research used a specific case to test the consumer-to-consumer relationship: Airbnb, which has a successful online brand community with members from different countries. To do so, a survey was sent to Airbnb users coming from two different national cultures (Belgium and India). This study also covers how certain cultural predispositions can be activated at the individual level regardless of the citizenship. Findings provide evidence that members with higher moral responsibility tend to participate more in online brand communities. Moreover, predispositions regarding trust in community members' opinions were found to be a statistically significant predictor of purchase intention through an online brand community. Findings also support that collectivist members tend to have higher purchase intentions through an online brand community than individualistic members.

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