

How individualism–collectivism influences consumer responses to the sharing economy: Consociality and promotional type

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Abstract:

With the explosion of online exchange of products, the sharing economy is experiencing ever-increasing growth. Despite the increasing popularity of lateral exchange market platforms as part of the sharing economy, research has not yet adequately investigated cultural effects on how consumers’ intentions to purchase products on these platforms. Using two studies, this paper examines whether consumers high in individualism versus consumers high in collectivism respond differently to platforms with low versus high consociality and how individualistic and collectivistic consumers respond differently to two types of promotions that relate to self-maximization. Findings in Study 1 indicated that consumers high in individualism (collectivism) have higher patronage intentions toward a platform low (high) in consociality. Findings in Study 2 suggested that in the presence of a promotion, collectivistic consumers respond comparably to promotional types across platforms, whereas individualistic consumers respond more positively to collective (individual) promotions when consociality is low (high). Further, felt commitment to others as a result of the consociality/promotional type relationship explains these effects. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

Keywords: consociality | cross-cultural | individualism–collectivism | promotion | sharing economy

Article:

1 INTRODUCTION

As the online facilitation of the exchange of goods and /or services expands, the sharing economy is experiencing ever-increasing growth (Belk, 2014; Benkler, 2004; Lamberton & Rose, 2012; Pera, Viglia, & Furlan, 2016; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017), and investors have poured more than \$23 billion in venture capital since 2010 into startups operating with a share-based model (Wallenstein & Shelat, 2017). Many of these sharing-economy platforms, alternatively termed *lateral exchange markets* (Perren & Kozinets 2018) or collaborative consumption (Belk, 2014), touch multiple components of consumers' lives, from food and lodging to transportation and investments. Though consumers benefit from efficiency with products from nonownership exchange, the sharing economy also provides value to marketers by understanding consumption patterns and the mechanisms behind them. Meanwhile, mobile applications have become especially important to modern implementations of the sharing economy as consumers seek accessibility in participating in and soliciting goods and services from platform providers (G. Zhu, So, & Hudson, 2017).

Previous researchers have studied some motivations behind participating in the sharing economy and categorizing different types of sharing (Belk, 2014; Benkler, 2004; Hellwig, Morhart, Girardin, & Hauser, 2015; Lamberton & Rose, 2012; Pera et al., 2016; Perren & Kozinets 2018). The sharing economy is not only occurring in Western and developed countries but also booming around the world in different cultural contexts (Parente, Geleilate, & Rong, 2018). For example, the market turnover of China's sharing economy reached \$763.5 billion in 2016 and yields a 47.2% growth from 2015, with an expected 30% annual growth rate in the next 5 years (L. Zhu, 2018).

Regardless of the spurred worldwide adoptions of the sharing economy, little research has sought to understand how cultural values affect consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward the sharing-economy platforms. Thus, scholars have advocated more attention to cultural differences in sharing-economy operations and participation (Davidson, Habibi, & Laroche, 2018). As marketing activity continues to globalize and the sharing economy thrives in many countries, investigating cultural differences can offer important implications for both theory and practice, especially for collaborative consumption entities seeking to do business in multiple locations in a global context (Brouthers, Geisser, & Rothlauf, 2016). The current study examines an important predictor of consumers' patronage intentions toward the sharing-economy platform as their cultural values on individualism versus collectivism because, as one defining characteristic of the sharing economy is to connect individuals via exchanges of products, consumers' mental models of interpersonal relationships (individualistic vs. collectivistic) are of particular relevance in affecting their intentions and behaviors on the sharing-economy platform. Thus, although the sharing economy is a global phenomenon, sharing-economy platforms can vary widely in the design and implementation of interpersonal elements. Those characteristics might appeal differently to different cultural values, such as individualism and collectivism.

At the interpersonal level, the sharing-economy platform possesses an important characteristic: "consociality", defined as "the physical and/or virtual copresence of social actors in a network, which provides an opportunity for social interaction between them" (Perren & Kozinets, 2018, p.

23). On a sharing-economy platform, consociality represents the number and nature of social interactions between buyers and sellers, varying from low (limited social interactions) to high (extensive social interactions with enriched media). The impact of consociality on consumers' attitudes and behaviors is institutional in nature (Perren & Kozinets, 2018; Schutz, 1962), governed by social norms such as cultural values (Scott, 1995). However, research on how individuals' cultural values interplay with the consociality level of these sharing-economy platforms is scant. Because individualism and collectivism differ in terms of self- versus collective perspectives and behaviors (i.e., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman, 1993), we contend that individualistic versus collectivistic consumers may respond differently to platforms with low versus high consociality.

Aside from the interpersonal social interaction level of the sharing-economy platform, promotional types may also impact consumers' attitudes and intentions (Blattberg & Neslin, 1990; Pappas, 2016). As our paper focuses on a social interactional context of the sharing economy, we place our attention on the social aspects of promotion type—namely individual versus collective promotional types. *Individual promotions* consist of a discounted-price incentive only benefitting the consumer only, whereas *collective promotions* are similar to referral discounts that benefit both consumers and their friends, families, relatives, or other consumers (Ryu & Feick, 2007). We argue that this categorization of promotional types will further affect the influences of consociality and cultural values on consumers' patronage intentions on a sharing-economy platform.

Thus, this investigation seeks to address the research gap between the sharing economy and cultural predictors of consumer responses to the sharing economy by investigating how consociality as a critical dimension of the sharing economy, individualism–collectivism as an important cultural factor, and promotional types related to the individual versus collective work together to influence consumer patronage intentions toward the sharing economy.

The current paper contributes to existing research on the sharing economy, cultural factors, and promotional activity. First, our work adds to recent theory on lateral exchange markets of how social platforms operate in a networked economy (Perren & Kozinets, 2018), suggesting that consociality is a key dimension in categorizing sharing-economy platforms. We add value to this work by incorporating a cultural factor of individualism–collectivism across two empirical studies, one with a student sample and the other with a cross-cultural sample. Study 1 determines that in the absence of a promotion, individualistic (collectivistic) consumers respond more positively to low (high) consociality platforms.

Second, we fill a research gap by completing existing marketing studies on promotional type to propose two types of precise promotions: individual versus collective promotions. An individual promotion focuses on benefits for the consumer alone, such as a buy one, get one 50% off deal. On the contrary, a collective promotion spreads benefits beyond the consumer to other consumers, such as a friends-and-family (F&F) deal offering two individuals 25% off. Although both types of promotions have equivalent ultimate numerical values, they may have different psychological effects on consumers.

Finally, prior exploration of cross-cultural studies in the sharing economy has been primarily focused on a seemingly contradictory topic to sharing, which is materialism (Davidson et al., 2018). Our research extends this stream to address how felt commitment to others can be used to connect promotional types to individualism–collectivism and consociality in the sharing economy. Study 2 finds that in the presence of a promotion, collectivistic consumers respond comparably to promotional types across platforms, whereas individualistic consumers respond more positively to collective (individual) promotions when consociality is low (high). Further, felt commitment to others as a result of the consociality-promotional type relationship explains these effects. The results offer implications for scholars investigating the role of cultural factors (i.e., individualism–collectivism) in the theoretical relationships and insights of the sharing economy as well as for managers seeking to tailor platform strategies to different cultures.

In the following sections, we begin by reviewing the literature on the sharing economy, individualism–collectivism, and promotional types, together with a series of proposed hypotheses. Next, we report two studies to test the hypotheses, including a student sample and a cross-cultural sample. We conclude by discussing the theoretical and managerial implications, followed by limitations and future research directions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Sharing economy

Sharing as a form of collaborative consumption has emerged as an alternative approach to selling. Some examples of the sharing economy include Airbnb (Zervas et al., 2017), Zipcar (Belk, 2014), CouchSurfing (Pera et al., 2016), Uber, and Rideshare (Davidson et al., 2018). In the hotel industry, researchers (viz., Zervas et al., 2017) estimate the impact of Airbnb empirically, finding that a 1% increase in Airbnb listings in Texas results in a 0.05% decrease in quarterly hotel revenues. Thus, the sharing economy is impactful.

Initially noticed as a modality of economic production (Benkler, 2004), the sharing economy quickly gained attention from marketing researchers. Belk (2007, 2014) addresses impediments to sharing, incentives that may encourage more sharing, and comparisons between sharing and collaborative consumption. Lamberton and Rose (2012) utilize three studies to develop a framework for understanding and managing commercial sharing systems. Their model shows that perceived product scarcity risk mediates consumers' likelihood to choose a sharing program because consumers are interdependent in a sharing system.

Besides understanding the concept of sharing, many marketing researchers have examined the behavior of sharing consumers. Using a two-step mixed method, Hellwig et al. (2015) suggest four potential clusters of sharing consumers, including sharing idealists, sharing opponents, sharing pragmatists, and sharing normatives. Later, Pera et al. (2016) find that compelling self-storytelling facilitates personal reputation in online relational communities and argue that the sharing economy is allowing individuals to perform as businesses.

Only limited cross-cultural studies examine topics related to sharing economy. For example, Davidson et al. (2018) find that materialism in both the United States and India leads to greater

participation in the sharing economy under certain circumstances. However, the literature concerning cultural differences in consumer responses to the sharing economy remains scant. Importantly, this gap provides little guidance to scholars and managers wishing to study and operate in a global sharing economy. Thus, we turn our attention to a key cultural dimension, individualism–collectivism, and investigate its relationship with an important dimension of the sharing economy, consociality.

2.2 Consociality

The sharing economy can be categorized differently depending on the salient dimensions in a given context. For example, goods-based markets can be categorized based on low versus high exclusivity and low versus high rivalry, forming a two-way matrix of four categories (Lamberton & Rose, 2012). However, the sharing economy also includes services, which continue to grow in importance. Perren and Kozinets (2018) proposed a different two-way matrix incorporating products along the goods–services continuum, basing the categories of markets on two important dimensions: *Consociality*, which is the extent to which buyers and sellers are able to interact and *platform intermediation*, which refers to the extent of involvement by the platform itself in communication and exchange processes. This study adopts the second typology with a high level of platform intermediation, consistent with the theoretical framework from Lamberton and Rose (2012), to emphasize on the interdependence between buyers and sellers with sharing-economy platforms. This also points to an ideal factor of consociality to examine its moderating effect with the ideological factor of individualism–collectivism.

2.3 Individualism–collectivism and consociality

Scholars have studied the influence of individualism–collectivism in the marketing context, revealing important insights about how cross-cultural ideology can affect consumer responses to marketing efforts and stimuli (i.e., Frank, Enkawa, & Schvaneveldt, 2015; Hsieh, Chiu, Tang, & Lin, 2018; Mo, Liu, & Liu, 2018; Wang, 2014; Wien & Olsen, 2014; Xiao & Kim, 2009). As an ideological factor, individualism–collectivism is relevant in the consociality dimension of the sharing economy because it clarifies the variability in consumers' approaches toward personal interaction (i.e., Marcus & Le, 2013; Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005; Oyserman, 1993; Watkins & Liu, 1996). Namely, individualistic consumers tend to rely less on interpersonal interaction and view themselves as special and different from others, with an independent self-construal view characterizing more self-interests rather than group interests. Further, consumers from individualistic cultures are more likely to believe that the individual is considered to be the source of moral power and totally competent to assess the effects of personal actions. Therefore, individualistic consumers are more likely to be comfortable with sharing-economy platforms offering low consociality, resulting in higher patronage intentions toward those platforms.

On the contrary, consumers in collectivistic cultures are more likely to define themselves based on group memberships, with a dependent view on more group interests rather than self-interests. Thus, choices are not made exclusively, with a greater emphasis on the group's well-being than the individual's well-being. Additionally, collectivistic consumers rely more on interpersonal interaction. Thus, given their more socially defined identities and values, collectivistic

consumers are more likely to align with sharing-economy platforms offering high consociality, resulting in higher patronage intentions toward those platforms.

H1. Consumers high in individualism (collectivism) will have higher patronage intentions toward a platform low (high) in consociality.

2.4 The moderation of promotional type

Unlike tensile promotions that vary within given ranges, a precise promotion clearly specifies the discount level for the product (Liu & Chang, 2017). To the best of our knowledge, no existing studies have examined subtypes of precise promotions. Given the current study's focus on individualism–collectivism, we propose two different types of precise promotions: individual versus collective promotions. An *individual promotion* usually involves one person only, which avoids spreading the benefits of a promotion to other people. Most promotional types fall into this category (percent-off, dollar-off, BOGO, etc.). In contrast, a *collective promotion* encourages spreading of the promotion to others, such as a friend-and-family coupon promotion that involves a benefit for the individual as well as for their friends, family members, relatives, and other people.

For collectivistic individuals, their social roles and responsibilities exist inherently in their minds, making these consumers less likely to be affected by external factors (Triandis, 2018; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Therefore, we expect that collectivistic consumers may not be affected by the orientations of promotional types.

H2. Consumers high in collectivism will form similar patronage intentions toward platforms for individual and collective promotions, regardless of consociality.

On the contrary, people in individualist cultures exhibit greater variance in reactions to interpersonal interactions, as compared to those in collective cultures, who hold consensus expectations of their roles and responsibilities in social interactions (Triandis, 2018; Triandis et al., 1988). Individualistic consumers also demonstrate more variance in reactions to specific nuances of pricing due to their relatively low-context nature (i.e., H. Chen, Bolton, Ng, Lee, & Wang, 2018; Mattila & Patterson, 2004; Song, Noone & Mattila, 2018). Specially, attitudes towards certain incentives of people in individualistic cultures should be contingent on how much their needs for social interactions are fulfilled or primed. As sharing-economy platforms offer various levels of social interactions, such as sharing one's own room with a stranger (e.g., Airbnb) or offering a ride to an unknown customer (e.g., Uber), these social interactions inspire communal feelings of friendliness and social satisfaction (Dyck, 2002). In the current study, consociality levels represent the consumers' social interaction level with others on a sharing platform. When this interaction level is high (i.e., high consociality), individuals have already fulfilled their needs to belong to a group or connect with other individuals. In these cases, individual promotions provide innovative and additional incentives for these consumers to buy products. Therefore, we argue that for consumers high in individualism on a high-consociality platform, individual promotions lead to higher level of patronage intentions than collective ones. On the contrary, as the interactions of consumers in individualist cultures on a low-consociality platform are restricted, collective promotions can fulfill their need to belong and prime them

with fresh cues on commitment to others such as F&F. In turn, they are more likely to develop a higher level of patronage intentions than those who receive collective promotions.

H3. For consumers high in individualism on a platform with high (low) consociality, an individual promotion leads to higher (lower) patronage intentions than a collective promotion.

2.5 The moderated moderated mediation of felt commitment toward others

Felt commitment to others is defined as “the willingness or intention of initiating and maintaining a stable and durable relationship, and of making the maximum effort in this direction” (Sanchez-Perez & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2004). We have adopted this concept from customers’ felt commitment to the service provider, which has been documented in previous marketing research (Kelley & Davis, 1994; Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999; Sanchez-Perez & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2004). As we are studying the sharing economy, customers’ felt commitment in this context is not targeting at any particular organization providing a product—rather, felt commitment in this case is toward other individuals, such as friends, family or other buyers, on the sharing-economy platform. To be clear, in our context, these “others” are also users of the same platform with which the consumer is engaging.

Felt commitment can serve as an underlying mechanism on how promotional types can affect the patronage intentions of individuals with different cultural values (e.g., individualism–collectivism) because felt commitment to others indicates a willingness for developing a stable relationship. Specifically, previous research has suggested that felt commitment to a service provider can serve a strong precedent for purchasing intentions and behaviors (Beatty & Kahle, 1988; Fullerton, 2003). In the current study, as individuals develop a strong felt commitment to others in relation to the given platform, they are naturally inclined to patronize the platform. Therefore, we suggest that felt commitment to others has a positive association with patronage intentions.

Further, we posit that individualism and collectivism will interact with promotion types to influence felt commitment. That is, felt commitment should result from the consumer's culturally derived orientation toward and attachment to others as well as by the self- versus relationship-maximizing nature of individual versus collective promotion types. Consumers in collective cultures are already attuned to a high level of social relationships (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002), so the orientations of promotions (individual vs. collective) or the level of consociality should not significantly affect their high level of felt commitment to others. Meanwhile, for people in individualistic cultures, promotional types should only affect felt commitment when social interaction with counterpart individuals on the platform is restricted. This is because when individuals are in the context of high consociality, they are encouraged to have different forms of interpersonal interactions and communications with the providers. In this case, promotional types should add little additional impact on their felt-commitment levels.

Communications are a strong motivator to develop commitment and cultivate trust in an interpersonal context or marketing initiatives (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). When individualistic consumers enter a high-consociality platform,

interpersonal interactions lead to a high level of felt commitment to others. On the contrary, when communications are discouraged, the promotion type should significantly affect their commitment to others. Specifically, collective promotions can prime participants with social interactional and relational cues, in turn increasing the level of felt commitment. However, individual promotions do not present interactional or relational cues, leading to a reduced effect on felt commitment toward others.

Taken together, we argue that the link between consociality and patronage intentions is mediated by felt commitment to others, and this mediational path is also moderated by cultural dimension (individualism vs. collectivism) and promotion type (individual vs. collective).

H4a. For consumers high in collectivism, felt commitment does not differ between promotional type and consociality.

H4b. For consumers high in individualism, felt commitment is higher for collective compared to individual promotions when consociality is low, but exhibit no difference between promotional types when consociality is high.

3 STUDY 1

Study 1 examines the effect of sharing-economy consociality on patronage intentions toward an app in response to individualism versus collectivism, as hypothesized in H1. A 2 (consociality: low vs. high) \times continuous (culture: individualism–collectivism) between-subjects experimental design is employed. In this study, the cultural factor of individualism versus collectivism is measured as a difference of means from two existing scales on individualism and collectivism.

3.1 Procedure

In exchange for course credit, 146 undergraduate students from a large U.S. university (female = 74; mean age = 23) participated in this experiment. First, participants responded to a 7-point, 7-item Likert-type scale (Mo et al., 2018) split into three items for individualism (“I want to be unique and different from others in many aspects,” “I am competitive with others,” and “I prefer working independently from others;” $\alpha = .518^1$) and four items for collectivism (“I respect the majority's wish,” “I support my group, whether they are right or wrong,” “I respect decisions made by my group,” and “I maintain harmony in my group;” $\alpha = .819$). To calculate each participant's individualism–collectivism score, the items for individualism and collectivism were separately averaged, and the individualism score was subtracted from the collectivism score. As such, negative scores represented a stronger leaning toward individualism, whereas positive scores represented a stronger leaning toward collectivism.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to read one of two cover stories for a new app designed to allow for prepared food and/or groceries to be delivered directly to consumers (see Appendix A). Each participant then rated patronage intentions toward the app with five 7-point Likert-type items (*never/definitely, definitely do not/definitely intend, low/high interest, definitely*

¹ Although the α for the individualism component of the scale was below the recommended threshold of .6, we felt that it was necessary to retain the three items to form a sufficient set of measures.

not/definitely, probably not/probably; $\alpha = .956$) adapted from Spears and Singh (2004). Participants also responded to three 7-point Likert-type items as a manipulation check for consociality (“The platform I read about seemed like there would be a lot of personal interaction between buyers and sellers,” “It sounds like the buyers and sellers in this platform would be able to identify one another,” and “Users of this platform would likely be able to interact easily and clearly;” $\alpha = .862$). Participants also responded to basic demographics items before ending the procedure.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Manipulation check

The low-consociality condition ($M = 4.12$) was perceived as lower in consociality than the high-consociality condition, $M = 5.25$; $F(1, 144) = 25.439$; $p < .001$. That is, participants in the low-consociality condition perceived lower interaction with deliverers than those in the high-consociality condition. Meanwhile, the high-consociality rating for the high-consociality condition indicated that participants perceived maximized interactions with deliverers and greater information on deliverers. Therefore, the scenarios for consociality successfully manipulated high and low consociality.

3.2.2 Main effects and interaction

The main effect of consociality on patronage intentions was not significant, $M_{\text{Low consociality}} = 3.95$ versus $M_{\text{High consociality}} = 3.86$; $F(1, 145) = 0.121$; *ns*, nor was the relationship between individualism–collectivism score and patronage intentions, $\beta = .034$; $t(1, 144) = 0.331$; *ns*.

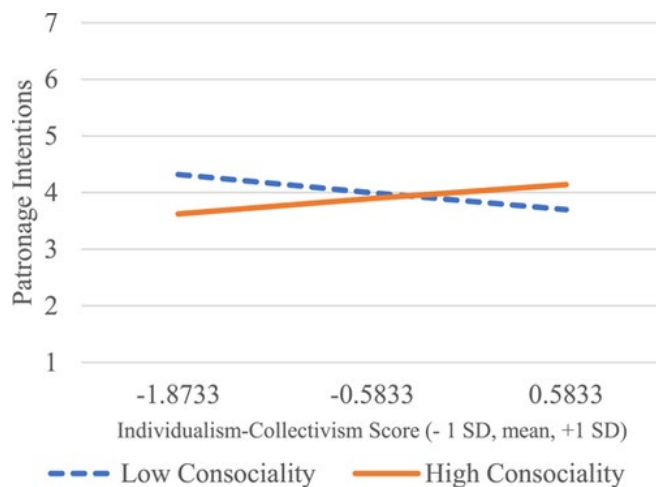


Figure 1. Consociality × individualism–collectivism interaction on patronage intentions (Study 1)

To assess the interaction of consociality and individualism–collectivism, PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2017) was run. The results indicated a significant interaction (effect = 0.46; confidence interval [CI] = 0.05 to 0.88). The Johnson–Neyman regions of significance occurred below individualism–collectivism scores of -2.13 and marginally above scores of 1.15 , indicating that individualistic consumers respond more positively to the low-consociality platform, whereas

collectivistic consumers form higher patronage intentions toward the high-consociality platform. As shown in Figure 1, H1 was supported.

3.3 Discussion

Study 1 found a significant two-way interaction in support of H1, supporting that individualistic consumers formed higher patronage intentions toward a low-consociality platform, whereas collectivistic consumers responded more positively to a high-consociality platform (Figure 2).

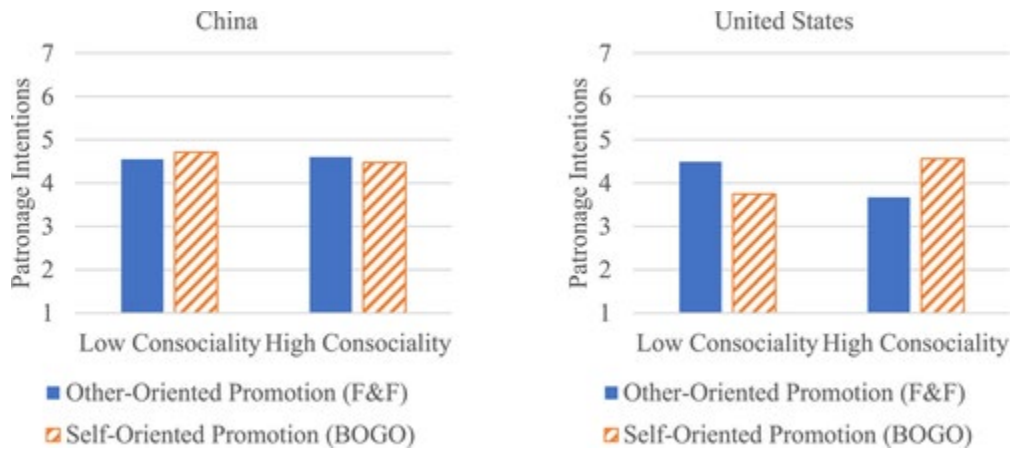


Figure 2. Consociality × culture × promotion type interaction on patronage intentions (Study 2)

4 STUDY 2

Study 2 extends the findings of Study 1 by testing the predictions of H2 through H4. Namely, this study employs a 2 (consociality: low vs. high) × 2 (culture: individualism vs. collectivism) × 2 (promotional type: individual vs. collective) between-subjects experiment. This time, individualism was represented by an American sample of participants, whereas collectivism was represented by a Chinese sample.

4.1 Procedure

Four hundred (400) individuals (female = 246; mean age = 29) completed an online survey using Amazon's Mechanical Turk panel for the American sample ($N = 201$; male = 110; mean age = 37) and a random sample of a large public university in China² ($N = 199$; female = 155; mean age = 21). Both samples participated in a 2 (consociality: low vs. high) × 2 (culture: China vs. United States) × 2 (promotional type: individual vs. collective) between-subjects procedure. China and the United States were chosen for this study because these two countries are commonly used in research as exemplars of collectivist and individualist cultures, respectively (i.e., Y. R. Chen, Brockner, & Chen, 2002; Earley, 1989; Hong, Ip, Chiu, Morris, & Menon, 2001).

To prepare to launch the study for both countries, the procedure was first drafted for the United States sample, and one of the authors whose native language is Chinese translated the procedure

² Because Amazon Mechanical Turk is not available in China, a student sample had to be utilized for this study.

into Chinese for the Chinese sample, followed by an iterative and independent validation of back translation with two additional Chinese speakers (differences were discussed and revised after agreement). Both procedures were housed and taken using Qualtrics.

In both countries, participants first saw one of two scenarios, similar to those of Study 1. However, in this study, the cover story was for a consumer-to-consumer lodging service (Appendix B). Next, participants were informed that the platform was offering either an individual promotion (a buy one, get one promotion with 50% off a second night's stay; see Appendix C), or a collective promotion (i.e., a friends & family promotion with 25% off for the participant and a friend or family member; see Appendix C). Participants once again rated patronage intentions ($\alpha = .970$) and consociality ($\alpha = .907$) with the same items from Study 1. Additionally, participants rated one 7-point Likert-type item for felt commitment toward others ("I would feel more committed to others with this promotion") and one 7-point Likert-type item to ensure that participants perceived differences in how the displayed promotion benefitted the individual ("The coupon only benefits the customer individually"). Participants finally responded to demographics items before finishing the procedure.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 Manipulation check

Participants in the high-consociality condition ($M = 5.47$) perceived the platform as higher in consociality than participants in the low-consociality condition, $M = 4.01$; $F(1, 398) = 89.294$; $p < .001$. Additionally, participants viewed the collective promotion ($M = 3.21$) as less beneficial to the individual than the individual promotion, $M = 4.22$; $F(1, 398) = 27.136$; $p < .001$.

4.2.2 Main effects and interactions

Main effects

Main effects. The main effects of consociality, $M_{Low} = 4.34$ versus $M_{High} = 4.29$; $F(1, 392) = 0.132$; *ns*, and promotional type, $M_{F&F} = 4.30$ versus $M_{BOGO} = 4.34$; $F(1, 392) = 0.104$; *ns*, were not significant. Meanwhile, the main effect of culture was significant, such that patronage intentions were higher for China ($M = 4.58$) versus the United States, $M = 4.05$; $F(1, 392) = 10.459$; $p = .001$.

Interactions

The two-way interactions of consociality \times culture, $F(1, 392) = 0.115$; *ns*, and promotional type \times culture, $F(1, 392) = 0.042$; *ns*, were not significant, whereas the consociality \times promotional type interaction was significant, $F(1, 392) = 5.466$; $p = .020$. Namely, for the low-consociality condition, the collective promotion ($M = 4.52$) and individual promotion ($M = 4.20$) conditions did not significantly differ, $F(1, 196) = 2.461$; *ns*, whereas for the high-consociality condition, the collective promotion condition ($M = 4.12$) yielded marginally significantly lower patronage intentions than the individual promotion condition, $M = 4.51$; $F(1, 200) = 3.477$; $p = .064$.

Further, the consociality \times promotional type \times culture interaction was significant, $F(1, 392) = 11.361$; $p = .001$. For the Chinese sample, the consociality \times promotional type interaction was not significant, $F(1, 195) = 1.003$; *ns*. However, for the U.S. sample, the interaction was significant, $F(1, 197) = 11.098$; $p = .001$, such that for the low-consociality condition, the collective promotion ($M = 4.49$) led to higher patronage intentions than the individual promotion, $M = 3.75$; $F(1, 98) = 4.852$; $p = .03$, whereas for the high-consociality condition, the individual promotion ($M = 4.56$) led to higher patronage intentions than the collective promotion, $M = 3.67$; $F(1, 99) = 6.268$; $p = .014$. Therefore, H2 and H3 were supported.

Moderated moderated mediation

To test the mediation of felt commitment between the consociality \times country \times promotional type interaction and patronage intentions, PROCESS Model 11 (Hayes, 2017) was employed with 5,000 bootstrapped samples and a 90% CI. The results revealed significant moderated moderated mediation (index = 0.49; CI = 0.01 to 1.03; Figure 3). Namely, the consociality \times culture \times promotional type interaction on commitment was significant at a 90% CI (effect = 1.10; CI = 0.03 to 2.17), and felt commitment had a highly significant, positive relationship with patronage intentions (effect = 0.45; CI = 0.39 to 0.51). Further, the indirect effect for the Chinese group was not significant (effect = -0.06 ; CI = -0.33 to 0.21), whereas the effect for the U.S. group was significant (effect = 0.43; CI = 0.05 to 0.88), indicating that the effect of felt commitment was significant for U.S. but not for Chinese participants.

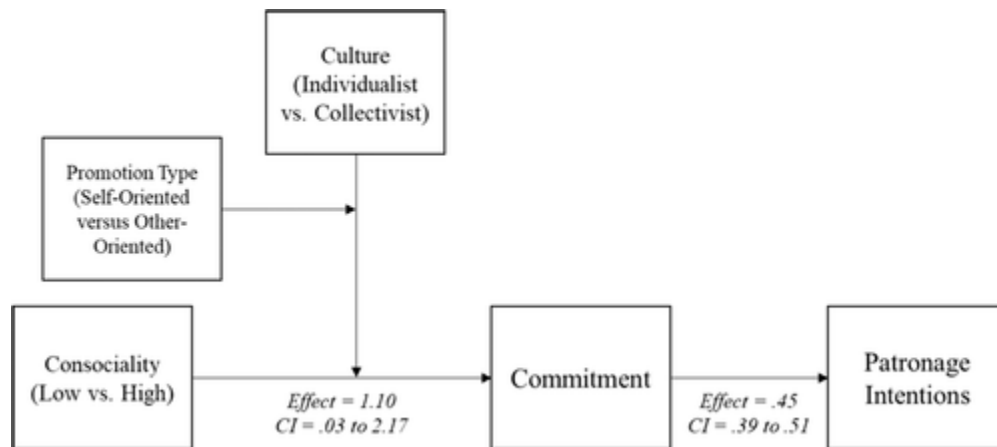


Figure 3. Moderated mediation between consociality \times culture \times promotion type interaction and patronage intentions (Study 2)

Closer inspection of the three-way interaction on commitment showed that for the Chinese sample, the two-way interaction of consociality \times promotional type was not significant, $F(1, 195) = 0.133$; *ns*. However, for the U.S. sample, the interaction was marginally significant, $F(1, 197) = 3.235$; $p = .074$. Figure 4 shows that, for low consociality, commitment was significantly higher for the collective promotion ($M = 4.02$) than for the individual promotion, $M = 2.71$; $F(1, 98) = 12.286$; $p = .001$, whereas for high consociality, the difference was not significant, $M_{\text{Collective}} = 4.26$ versus $M_{\text{Individual}} = 3.91$; $F(1, 99) = 0.843$; *ns*. Taken together, the results support H4a and H4b.

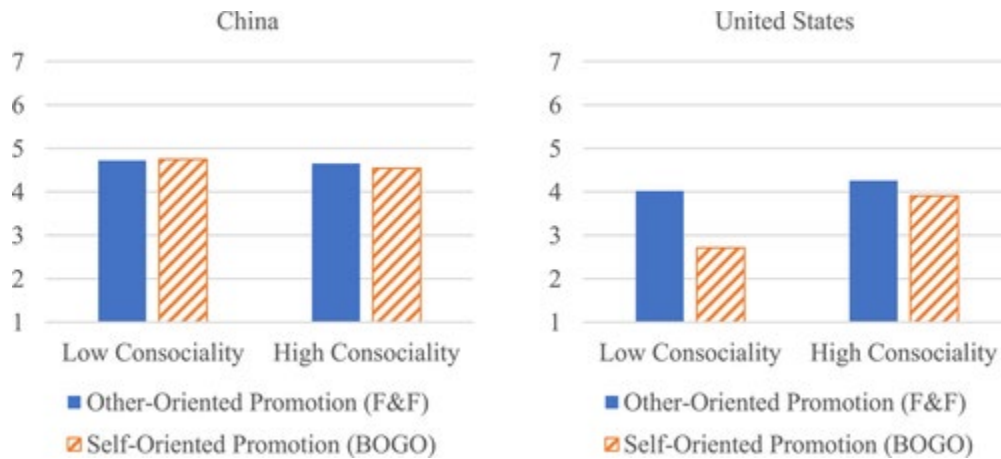


Figure 4. Consociality × culture × promotion type interaction on commitment (Study 2)

4.3 Discussion

Study 2 confirms that responses to individual versus collective promotions for a lateral exchange market do not significantly differ for China (collectivistic) but significantly differ for the United States (individualistic) based on consociality levels. Namely, for a low-consociality platform, individualistic consumers respond more positively to a collective promotion, whereas for a high-consociality platform, an individual promotion leads to higher patronage intentions. Further, Study 2 reveals that felt commitment to others mediated the relationship, as predicted by H4a and H4b.

5 GENERAL DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study offers several theoretical contributions. First, our study provides novel conceptual underpinnings for previous research on the sharing economy and directly applies Perren and Kozinets' (2018) typology of the sharing economy based on consociality (i.e., at high platform intermediation, those authors classify sharing-economy firms with low consociality as hubs, such as Lending Club, Quirky, and thredUP, whereas platforms with high consociality are matchmakers, including Airbnb, DogVacay, Snapgoods, TaskRabbit, and Uber; these examples are provided on p. 25 of their work). To extend these findings, we provide an innovative cultural perspective to understand consumers' inclinations to participate in the fast-growing sharing economy. Our results from Study 1 highlight that individualist consumers are more motivated by low consociality of the sharing platform in developing patronage intentions, suggesting the use of hubs for consumers high in individualism, whereas collectivistic consumers are more motivated by matchmakers, which have high consociality. In addition, the results of previous research regarding social operating systems stated that "networked individualism is the reality of many everyday lives" (Rainie & Wellman, 2012, p. 18) and "the Triple Revolution—the Social Network, Internet, and Mobile Revolutions—affect networked individualism" (p. 20). This finding explains how individualism–collectivism influences consumer responses to the sharing economy categorized by consociality by empirically confirming these prior arguments around

individualism and collectivism. Namely, this study shows that individualistic consumers generally place less value on relational aspects of the transaction, thus making hubs more attractive to them. Meanwhile, collectivistic consumers see greater value in involving others in transactions, which renders matchmakers better for those consumers.

Second, consistent with previous studies on international business, this study fits into a holistic framework from a business ecosystems perspective. Specifically, Parente et al. (2018) argue that global sharing-economy firms' success depends on social interactions, motivating a call for future research to study consumers' reactions to the sharing economy in different countries to understand how "individualism...and other cultural characteristics interact with sharing-based business" (p. 61). Our paper answers this call, which is of particular value to promoting sharing-economy platforms to an international population. Namely, countries across the world differ in individualism versus collectivism and our findings show that consumers high in individualism (collectivism) have higher patronage intentions toward a platform low (high) in consociality. Stated another way, this study contributes new knowledge by demonstrating the relationship among individualism–collectivism, consociality of sharing-economy platforms, promotion types, and consumers' patronage intentions.

Third, from a marketing theory point of view, this study suggests two subtypes of precise promotions—individual versus collective promotions—and examines their effects on consumer responses. Previous researchers point out two types of promotions: tensile (e.g., up to 50% off) versus precise promotions (e.g., 50% off; Liu & Chang, 2017). Our work takes an extra step to classify precise promotions by adding a new dimension of whether a promotion impacts other people. In other words, we propose that an individual promotion only impacts a specific consumer (e.g., BOGO of 50% off the second of two stays for the individual), and a collective promotion affects other people beyond the sole consumer (e.g., F&F with 25% for each of the two stays for the individual and another person), although both promotions intend to offer the same overall monetary precise discount. In the presence of a manipulation with these two subtypes of precise promotions, the results of Study 2 support the moderating role of individual versus collective promotions, indicating that the individual versus collective nature of promotional deals can affect consumer responses alongside individualism–collectivism and consociality. Namely, collectivistic consumers respond comparably to both promotions across consociality levels, whereas individualistic consumers respond more positively to collective (individual) promotions for low- (high-) consociality platforms. As such, individualistic consumers are more sensitive than collectivistic consumers to different combinations of consociality and promotional types due to their low-context nature.

Finally, our research broadens the concept of felt commitment from previous studies on felt commitment to a service provider (Beatty & Kahle, 1988; Fullerton, 2003) or a retailer (Sanchez-Perez & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2004) to felt commitment to others in the sharing economy as an important mediating role, especially for individualistic cultures. This study further uses this extended concept of felt commitment to others to connect promotional types to individualism–collectivism and consociality in the sharing economy. While collectivistic cultures experience comparable felt-commitment levels regardless of the relationship between consociality and promotional type—highlighting the cultural emphasis on groups and relationships in those cultures—individualistic cultures are more influenced by consociality/promotional type

combinations. That is, high-consociality platforms raise commitment levels of individualism, such that felt commitment to others is similar between individual and collective promotions, whereas in low-consociality, collective promotions lead to higher commitment than individual promotions. This finding indicates that promotional deals can induce individualistic consumers to feel more (or less) committed to others depending on the level of platform consociality as well as whether promotions include others.

5.2 Managerial implications

From a managerial perspective, managers can utilize our findings in a few ways. An important factor in international marketing is whether ideological factors influence consumers to participate differently in the sharing economy. Our studies address this issue from the standpoint of consociality of sharing-economy platforms by providing cross-cultural empirical evidence about individualism–collectivism. For managers seeking to expand the geographical scope of the sharing economy, it is important to consider the individualism–collectivism of the given area and tailor consociality to fit the needs of the market. For countries and cultures high in individualism (i.e., the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and South Africa), low consociality would likely meet with more success, whereas countries and cultures high in collectivism (i.e., China, Japan, Indonesia, Brazil, and India) should tailor strategies toward high consociality (for a more complete list of countries, see Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). These insights have implications for managers as they have the ability to tailor platform consociality and better understand consumers of the given country.

We also contribute to recent research on the importance of selecting promotional types to influence consumers with different cultural backgrounds in the sharing economy. Marketing managers should consider differences in how promotional types affect consumers in a global market. Whereas collectivistic cultures may respond similarly to individual versus collective promotional deals in the sharing economy, individualistic cultures appear to respond differently based on consociality levels. Namely, individual promotions may be more effective in increasing these individualistic consumer responses toward high-consociality platforms, whereas collective promotions should lead to stronger positive responses toward platforms low in consociality. For example, sharing-economy firms in the U.S. market with generally high individualism should be careful to select a promotional type depending on the platform consociality. This study suggests that BOGO promotions fit with sharing-economy firms with high-consociality platforms, whereas F&F promotions work well with those with low consociality. Offering a promotion without considering the consociality level of the given sharing-economy platform may lead to ineffective marketing strategies.

Additionally, we show that there is more than one way for marketing managers to build social relationships in the sharing economy; marketers can adjust the platform level of consociality and choose an appropriate promotional type. Marketing strategies should then focus on integrating consociality and promotional types consistently in the sharing economy to communicate with consumers with different cultural characteristics. The meaning of the social relationship in the sharing economy is broader than B2C relationships in traditional firms, as evidenced by the felt commitment to others in this study. For example, marketers may enable sharing-economy platforms with low consociality in an individualistic culture to increase patronage intentions.

Alternatively, sharing-economy firms in an individualistic culture can adopt platforms with high consociality using an individual promotion of BOGO to encourage consumer participation in the sharing economy.

5.3 Limitations and future research directions

This study takes an important step investigating cultural effects on how consumers' intentions to purchase products on sharing-economy platforms, but it is not without limitations. One potential limitation is from our samples. For example, although the goal of the information in the manipulations was to emphasize a low versus high degree of separation between customer and provider, the privacy and information asymmetry elements of the manipulations could have affected responses. Study 1 was conducted online with undergraduate students, as was the Chinese sample in Study 2; this could limit the generalizability of the findings to other consumers. Also, we did not account for whether participants in the Chinese and U.S. samples in Study 2 have always lived in their respective countries or for consumers' familiarity with or use of mobile apps for similar services as those featured in the studies, so future research could examine these as influential factors. Additionally, the differences in sampling frames (MTurk vs. students) between countries in Study 2 could have affected the results.

Another limitation is the nature of the promotions used in Study 2. Although the two types of promotions were designed to lead to the same overall monetary discount of 25% across two stays (i.e., 50% off the second of two stays for the individual or 25% for each of two stays for the individual and another person), the difference in the number of stays required for the individual between promotional types could have been a confound.

Further, given the relationship between individualism–collectivism and construal level (Trope & Liberman, 2010), research into potential effects of temporal distance would be useful. Namely, temporal distance (the perception of an event as occurring either near or far from the present) can affect consumer responses to products in various ways, including a focus on concrete versus abstract aspects of the product (K. Kim, Zhang, & Li, 2008), feasibility versus desirability (Y. J. Kim, Park, & Wyer, 2009), types of uncertainties in new product adoption (Castaño, Suján, Kacker, & Suján, 2008), and—importantly for this investigation—differences in responses to pricing (Bornemann & Homburg, 2011). Thus, how might temporal influences affect the results, such as the choice to take a collective discount immediately or an individual discount after a certain time has passed?

Finally, scholars should examine how broad predictors other than culture might affect consumer responses to the sharing economy. For example, the Big Five Personality Traits (i.e., Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann, 2003) could help to explain how consumers respond to different levels of consociality of, individual versus collective promotions within, and general attitudes and usage intentions toward sharing economy. For example, future research can address if extraverts, who draw energy from social interaction, will be more inclined to use platforms high in consociality than introverts who tend to lose energy through social interaction.

APPENDIX A: STUDY 1 SCENARIOS

Low consociality

A consulting firm would like your feedback. A proposed startup app, Disque, aims to provide a platform for food delivery needs. Disque allows people to order prepared food and groceries to be delivered by other consumers.

Disque aims to provide customers with food or groceries while minimizing speaking to or directly interacting with deliverers, which helps to maintain anonymity between parties. Deliverers are identified in the app with anonymous identifiers, and communication occurs through the platform rather than with the deliverers themselves. Further, food or grocery pickup is purely transactional, and deliverers are encouraged not to engage customers in additional conversation. After the transaction, you are asked to rate the transaction on timeliness, correctness of the order, and similar aspects.

The goal is to create a high degree of separation between customers and deliverers, which is intended to enhance the experience.

High consociality

A consulting firm would like your feedback. A proposed startup app, Disque, aims to provide a platform for food delivery needs. Disque allows people to order prepared food and groceries to be delivered by other consumers.

Disque aims to provide customers with food or groceries while maximizing speaking to or directly interacting with deliverers, which helps to build relationships between parties. Deliverers are identified in the app with their names and basic personal information, and communication occurs directly with deliverers themselves. Further, food pickup is meant to be a friendly exchange, and deliverers are encouraged to engage customers in additional conversation. After the transaction, you are asked to rate the transaction on friendliness of the deliverer, engagement with the deliverer, and similar aspects.

The goal is to create a high degree of interaction between customers and deliverers, which is intended to enhance the experience.

APPENDIX B: STUDY 2 CONSOCIALITY SCENARIOS

Low consociality

A consulting firm would like your feedback. A proposed startup app, Disque, aims to provide a platform for lodging needs. Disque allows people to rent rooms, apartments, or homes from other consumers on a nightly, weekly, or monthly basis.

Disque aims to provide renters with open rooms, apartments, or homes without needing to speak to or directly interact with property owners, which helps to maintain anonymity between parties. The goal is to create a high degree of separation between buyers and sellers, which is intended to enhance the experience.

High consociality

A consulting firm would like your feedback. A proposed startup app, Disque, aims to provide a platform for lodging needs. Disque allows people to rent rooms, apartments, or homes from other consumers on a nightly, weekly, or monthly basis.

Disque aims to provide renters with open rooms, apartments, or homes while encouraging renters to speak to or directly interact with property owners, which helps to maintain relationships between parties. The goal is to create a high degree of interpersonal interaction between buyers and sellers, which is intended to enhance the experience.

APPENDIX C: STUDY 2 PROMOTIONAL TYPE SCENARIOS

Collective promotion (F&F)

The platform is considering offering a coupon for customers. The coupon will give the customer 25% off and also allow the customer to share a second 25% coupon with a friend, family member, or other individual to use on their own.

Individual promotion (BOGO)

The platform is considering offering a coupon for customers. The coupon will give the customer 50% off on a second night's stay after staying one night at a property.

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