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Alternative Tourism and Shared Accommodation Motivation: a cross-national study

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ABSTRACT

CouchSurfing is a non-profit internet site through which people offer or get free lodging in the host's home. The aim of the current article is to compare the various motivations of sharing behaviours occurring amongst Brazilian and Portuguese when guests, as far as the use of Couchsurfing as an alternative tourism activity is concerned. The current study offers a qualitative, exploratory and comparative approach addressing Brazilian and Portuguese guests. The results rely on 18 in-depth interviews with ten Brazilian and eight Portuguese guests. The content analysis was carried out based on theme categorization defined before data collection. As far as the similarities between the guests from both countries is concerned, the expectations of sharing cultural experiences and establishing social bonds, as well as the need to trust the host indicated the motivation to travel using the platform - this included both parties, the Portuguese and the Brazilians alike. Conversely, only the Brazilians indicated the motivation of use as means of reducing travel costs and meeting utilitarian needs such as sleeping. The study contributes to the sharing economy literature as it identifies that the Degree of Identification amongst the Peers, Perceived Risks, and Value Co-creation Perception are also elements that motivate sharing tourism.

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The internet has caused substantial changes to tourism distribution in the last two decades. Travellers access a vast array of information through the internet, enabling them to pursue the best deals available (Xanthakis et al., 2024). Besides the easy access to information, consumers “build new relationships by using social media” (Kunz & Seshadri, 2015, p. 1). Online communities “offer a wide variety of possibilities” of establishing, keeping and developing relationships with individuals and businesses alike (Kunz & Seshadri, 2015, p. 1). To tourists, online travel communities represent a growing trend (Bialski & Batorski, 2007). According to Kunz and Seshadri (2015), online contacts between travellers frequently lead to off-line relationships, such as a visit to each other in the town where they reside.

The tourism services used to be provided, traditionally, only as a business activity, however, nowadays they have been extended and are also available to individuals wishing to temporarily share what they have or what they do. Therefore, alternative tourism practices have been continuously encouraged by social networks’ new technologies, which is the case of sites of shared lodging such as CouchSurfing, which uses online social network technologies to connect travellers and hosts willing to offer free accommodation, or even tourist experiences (Molz, 2013). Thus, online communities help users to “build off-line relationships with strangers” (Kunz & Seshadri, 2015, p. 1).

What the literature addresses regarding alternative tourism reveals some important elements relating to moral economy exchanges and other moral encounters, which may contribute to a better understanding of sharing economy in the activity. According to Molz (2013), alternative tourism aims at supporting a moral economy based on sustainable commerce, fair labour practices and social and environmental awareness, representing an alternative practice to mass commercial tourism. Scholars have introduced mottos to describe these forms of development in tourism; “responsible tourism” and “slow tourism” are just a few to mention. What these practices have in common is the harsh criticism of mass tourism and the main logic of market economy.

Alternative tourism concerns a tourist’s growing desire to have more authentic, personal and intimate experiences, translated by the people and places they visit (Molz, 2013). This desire to have a deep connection with the local people and places reflects a growing dissatisfaction amongst middle-class tourists, tired of having “plasticized” experiences and in-series reproduction of culture (Vera, Gosling & Silva, 2021).

New sharing trends in tourism differ from traditional travel options, for they allow a high level of personalisation of the tourist experience (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). Increasing the quality of guest-host relationships, which can develop empathy and reflections on these encounters is recommended to transform mass tourism into a more sustainable activity (Pechlaner, Olbrich & Isetti, 2024). Hence, the peer-to-peer tour models are founded on reciprocity and mutual collaboration principles (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). For instance, people referring to

CouchSurfing have the opportunity to learn more about the local culture as they have the chance to experience the daily routine of a local resident directly, which would be difficult to achieve through a more traditional tourism model.

CouchSurfing was founded in 2004 and since its inception it has undergone several transformations. Mikołajewska-Zajac and Márton (2022) analysed the history of CouchSurfing and stated that the platform went through a series of four deaths and resurrections. They explained that “the platform was first brought back to life by its members, in the spirit of open collaboration, then by its leaders, in an effort to legitimise the platform as a US-based charity, then by Silicon Valley investors, seeking to shape it into a profitable startup, and finally by private investors, only to find itself yet again in jeopardy as a result of Covid-19” (Mikołajewska-Zajac & Márton, 2022, p. 1).

According to the authors, by the beginning of 2020, CouchSurfing had 18 million members, with about 4 million active couchsurfers and 400,000 active hosts. But the situation changed dramatically with the Covid-19 pandemic, because the traffic on the platform dropped, sinking both paid memberships and advertising revenues (Mikołajewska-Zajac & Márton, 2022). Starting May 14, 2020, CouchSurfing began asking for contributions of \$2.39 per month, or \$14.29 per year, to help them survive these difficult times. In order to access the Couchsurfing website and mobile applications, contributions made by members became mandatory (Blog CouchSurfing, 2020). Currently, in 2024, CouchSurfing reports on its website that it is a global community of 12 million members in more than 200.000 cities, maintaining its activities (CouchSurfing, 2024).

Academic interest in community engagement regarding tourists' behaviours on social media networks is increasing (Nuiar et al, 2024). Meanwhile, research focusing on the motivations behind the utilisation of shared economy platforms primarily centres on AirBnb and Uber and is still in its infancy (Breidbach & Boridie, 2017). The exploration of alternative lodging platforms, such as CouchSurfing, remains limited, particularly in identifying cross-national variances. This research gap prompts our inquiry: What drives guests to utilise a sharing economy lodging platform? Are there similarities or disparities between Portuguese and Brazilian guests?

The current study aims at identifying what motivates tourists to use sharing economy platforms based on sharing behaviour. Hence, the objective of the current article is to compare the various motivators of sharing behaviours occurring amongst Brazilian and Portuguese when guests, as far as the use of Couchsurfing as an alternative tourism activity is concerned. In this sense, the current article seeks to render a significant contribution to the understanding of the alternative tourism consumption behaviour by devising a study extending the knowledge of sharing, in a comparative way concerning consumers in Portugal and Brazil.

The research findings suggest that the motivations driving sharing behaviour extend beyond the categories outlined in the literature and are influenced by cultural distinctions.

Specifically, Brazilian guests were motivated by Cost Savings and Perceived Utility, while Portuguese guests had Social Influence and Moment in Life as factors in their use of Couchsurfing. Additionally, our contribution to the sharing economy literature lies in identifying motivations that have been neglected in sharing tourism research: the Degree of Identification among Peers, Perceived Risks, and Value Co-creation Perception.

1. Sharing and Consumption Motivations

A variety of terms have been used to refer to the sharing economy, “all sharing a similar core operational concept: shared economy, collaborative consumption, collaborative economy, peer-to-peer economy, platform economy and gig economy” (Rojanakit, Oliveira & Dulleck, 2022, p. 4). In this sense, the sharing economy has been defined according to the perspective of each author and their focus of study (Rojanakit, Oliveira & Dulleck, 2022, Vera & Gosling, 2020).

For this study, we will follow Belk's (2014a) perspective on the sharing economy. Belk (2014a) defined two types of consumer behaviours towards the sharing economy, namely sharing and collaborative consumption. Collaborative consumption corresponds to the consumption relations in a sharing economy involving fees or other forms of payments (which is the case of AirBnb and Uber amongst others). On the other hand, the concept of sharing encompasses consumption relations found in websites and apps of sharing economies not involving payments.

Sharing is described by Price (1975) as an allocation of economic assets and services without expecting monetary return, this occurs within an intimate social group, and is modelled upon the general aspect to the group's structure. Adding to that, Belk (2007) suggests that sharing involves the act and the process of providing what is ours for others to use free of charge, and/or the act and process of receiving or borrowing something to our own use. In both definitions, the sharing activity attempts to provide resources in a way that all individuals, in a pair or in a small group, may benefit from the use of the property. Krush *et al* (2015), hence, describe sharing as a non-monetary transference of assets amongst the players.

As it is a recent phenomenon, there is no consolidated literature addressing consumer's motivation when utilising such sharing platforms. However, there have been theoretical discussions and initial exploratory studies concerning such aspects. In this sense, the current study has categorised aspects relating to the sharing behaviour as follows:

Cost savings. Cost savings was indicated by a few authors as being a motivating factor in people's option for sharing economy (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016; . Belk and Sobh (2007) pointed out that sharing allows people to consume a wider and more varied range of products than what they could regularly afford, as a result, cost savings may correspond to a motivation. The authors highlight the fact that there might be a risk of loss

and damage in the activity, depending on how the sharing develops, however, they suggest that if all the parties involved follow set rules, all of them will benefit. Cost savings would, however, “be a motivation that would help to overcome aspects like fear of loss or damage” (Vera, Gosling & Silva, 2021, p. 5).

Expectations of creating social bonds. Another possible motivation appointed in the literature would be the creation of social bonds, which corresponds to the expectations of connections with other people and the establishment of feelings of solidarity and links amongst people having different views of the world such as expectations of relational wealth, building of sense of community and affection amongst individuals (Belk, 2010; Belk & Sobh, 2007). According to Swarbrooke and Horner (2002), such a concept corresponds to a motivation factor of a personal nature and the desire to make new friends is a motivational personal factor in the tourist behaviour. Breidbach and Brodie (2017) states researchers should comprehend the antecedents and consequences of actor engagement and how platforms can promote the relationship between actors in the sharing economy. For Nusair et al. (2014), community engagement depends on brand relationship building.

To Heo (2016), the quality of the social interactions and the relationship with the host may represent important factors in the perceived value and satisfaction for the tourist using sharing economy platforms. Also Bialski and Batorski (2007) demonstrate in their study that the intensive exchange activity found in platforms such as CouchSurfing helps to transform online relationships into offline ones. Forno and Garibaldi (2015) highlight the fact that the relational aspect is the most attractive factor in this sort of platform, since it is an option based on an peer-to-peer arrangement amongst private proprietors, not involving monetary exchange.

Expectation of shared cultural experiences. Heo (2016) points out that the desire for connection with the local community can also be a factor contributing to the popularity of sharing economy in tourism. Tussyadiah and Pesonen (2015) argue that participation in such platforms allow people to establish and maintain social connections, by providing direct interactions with the hosts and allowing connection with local communities and a unique local experience.

Expectation of shared cultural experiences “may be a factor having positive correlation with the tendency for the use of sharing economy platforms” (Vera, Gosling & Silva, 2021, p. 5). The expectation of shared cultural experiences corresponds to the desire for connection with the local community and authentic and unique experiences. This would represent a cultural factor related to the tourist’s motivation (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2002), given the fact that the authors propose that experiencing other cultures and visiting places of interests are motivating factors of a cultural nature.

Trust. The sharing economy platforms rely on the idea of promoting a relationship between strangers. It is noticeable that the impressions of the host’s profile, as presented in the platforms and made available in the social media, play an important role in the establishment

of trust. Prayag and Moital (2014) argue that, as the volume of the content available on the web and in the social media has raised considerably, followed by a more creative and friendly display of information, the tourist's trust in the online sources has grown.

Kunz and Seshadri (2015) propose that trust and empathy amongst members of the platforms are also "central mediators" in the development of a relationship (p. 5). According to Kuhzady et al (2020), "Couchsurfing uses trust building mechanisms, such as self-disclosure information, verified memberships, and the number of friends" (p. 133). Aydin and Duyan (2019) found in their research on CouchSurfing in Eskişehir (Turkey) that trust for participants is a prominent concept due to the fact that the first encounter is carried out over the internet.

Finally, this study uses these four categorised aspects as starting points to promote an understanding of sharing economy behaviour.

2. Materials and Methods

The study relied on the qualitative approach, of an exploratory nature, aiming at comparing the motivations of sharing behaviours amongst Brazilian and Portuguese guests. The current investigation was conducted in Brazil and Portugal through in-depth interviews having a semi-structured script. An in-depth interview is devised to reveal a more profound understanding of a topic, about which the respondent is able to talk, it is usually about a subject the interviewee is well acquainted with (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013).

In regard to a semi structured script of interviews, the current research is in line with Belk, Fischer and Kozinets' (2013) recommendations on how to elaborate the questions - from a general to a more specific sequence. The semi structured script applied hereby had twenty-seven questions (See Appendix 1).

Eighteen people were interviewed, ten of them were consumers of CouchSurfing in Brazil and the eight remaining correspond to the number of CouchSurfing consumers in Portugal. With regard to the subject of the research, all interviewees were required to have used CouchSurfing as a guest at least once. Hence, in the current study the results were based on the guests' point of view.

The selection criteria for the initial interviewees were primarily based on accessibility, as outlined by Malhotra (2004). In Brazil, a researcher from this study delivered a lecture on "the sharing economy" during a tourism event held in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. At this event, attendees from various parts of Brazil, who had prior experience as guests on Couchsurfing, were present. Four individuals volunteered to be interviewed and participate in the research, subsequently nominating others to join the study. In Portugal, the first interviewees were sourced through the Couchsurfing app. Subsequently, they began recommending individuals

with the desired research profile—specifically, Couchsurfing guests who had utilised the platform to stay with hosts at least once.

Therefore, the method for data collection involved the snowball technique (Malhotra, 2004), the first person interviewed in each country indicated acquaintances suitable to participate in the study. The interviews were halted the moment “saturation point” was reached, i.e. when the addition of new information to the observations ceased - in the interviews being responded to (Thiry-Cherques, 2009).

In Brazil, seven interviews were carried out in person and three were carried out virtually via Google Meet. In Portugal, all interviews were conducted in person. Generally, the interviews lasted over 40 minutes. All interviewees signed an interview consent form, declaring themselves aware of the objective of the research. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In the data analysis, the content analysis technique was adopted, which, according to Bardin (1977), as a method, it represents a set of communication analysis techniques aiming at providing indicators through objective and systematic procedures to describe the content of the messages. The authors use content analysis categorization. Categorization has as its prime concern the provision, by condensation, of a simplified representation of the primary data. The final inferences are, however, processed by the reconstruction of the material. Therefore, the decomposition-reconstruction is supposed to have a certain function in the indication of correspondences between the messages and its subjacent reality (Bardin, 1977).

In the current investigation, the categories were defined according to the literature previously indicated (Cost savings, Expectation of shared cultural experiences, Expectations of creating social bonds and Trust).

In-depth semi structured interviews allowed extrapolation of the initial questionnaire, which may contribute to an enrichment of the study. In the interviewees' statements, aspects going beyond consumption motivation aroused. The categories “Degree of identification between peers”, “Perceived Risk”, “Perceived Utility”, “Value Co-creation Perception”, “Social Influence” and “Moment in life” emerged as study's results and represent a contribution on motivations of using sharing economy platforms. Subsequently, we compared the results of these new categories from interviews with the literature. We noticed connections with the ideas from other authors in the literature on consumer behaviour and tourism, which is presented in table 4, reinforcing the study's contributions.

The content analysis was done by the qualitative data analysis software Atlas TI in an attempt to select the parts of the utterances and categorise them according to the ten categories presented in the result (See Table 2). The software helped us to compare the results between the countries.

3.Results

The results are presented according to the characterization of the interviewees, followed by CouchSurfing use motivation under the perspective of users in Brazil as a comparison with their Portuguese counterparts, highlighting the similarities and differences found amongst the respondents in each country.

3.a Profiles of the interviewees in Brazil and in Portugal

Table 1. Socio-economic profile of the users of CouchSurfing interviewed in Brazil and Portugal

Socio-economic profile of the users of CouchSurfing interviewed in Brazil					
Respondents	Age	Gender	Marital status	Schooling	Monthly Family Income
B1	23	M	Single	Some College	Not informed
B2	23	F	Single	Some College	7 - 10 minimum wages
B3	29	M	Single	Some College	7 - 10 minimum wages
B4	24	M	Single	Some College	7 - 10 minimum wages
B5	23	M	Single	Some College	1 - 3 minimum wages
B6	33	M	Single	Master`s Degree	4 - 6 minimum wages
B7	35	F	Single	Specialisation	1 - 3 minimum wages
B8	32	M	Single	Some College	1 - 3 minimum wages
B9	33	F	Single	Specialisation	4 - 6 minimum wages
B10	32	F	Single	Specialisation	4 - 6 minimum wages
Socio-economic profile of the users of CouchSurfing interviewed in Portugal					
Respondents	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Schooling	Monthly Family Income
P1	27	F	Single	Master`s Degree	1 - 3 minimum wages
P2	37	M	Single	Post- Graduation	1 - 3 minimum wages
P3	27	M	Single	12th year	7 - 10 minimum wages
P4	30	M	Single	College Graduate	4 - 6 minimum wages
P5	43	F	Divorced	Post- Graduation	1 - 3 minimum wages
P6	32	M	Single	College Graduate	4 - 6 minimum wages
P7	41	M	Single	College Graduate	1 - 3 minimum wages
P8	40	M	Single	12th year	1- 3 minimum wages

Source: Study data (2020)

In general, the guests interviewed are single, between 20 and 40 years old, male, having a higher level of education in Portugal than in Brazil. Most of the Brazilians interviewed declared

to have had an experience with the site not only as a guest, but also as a host. In Portugal, some interviewees declared to have used CouchSurfing as a guest only once, but some of them had a large number of experiences as host, up to 50 times. Almost all of them have played the part of hosts in the site.

We must note that the minimum wages in the two countries reveal a significant disparity. At the time of data collection, Brazil's minimum wage stood at approximately 937 reais, equivalent to roughly 175 euros, whereas Portugal's minimum wage was 557 euros, approximately 2985 reais. This comparison underscores the substantial difference in currency values between the two nations, highlighting a crucial aspect that cannot be overlooked.

3.b Motivation of Using Sharing Platforms a comparison between Brazilian and Portuguese consumers

In order to shed light on the results of the research, ten main categories indicate sharing platforms use motivation, according to the description in Table 2.

Table 2. Motivators of Use of Sharing Platforms

Category	Concept	Sources
1) Cost savings	Economy of financial resources to travel.	Belk & Sobh (2007), Bardhi & Eckhardt (2012), Botsman & Rogers (2011), Sacks (2011), Forno & Garibaldi (2015), Tussyadiah & Pesonen (2016)
2) Expectation of shared cultural experiences	Desire to connect to the local community and have unique and authentic experiences.	Tussyadiah and Pesonen (2015), Heo (2016)
3) Expectation of creating social bonds	Expectation of connecting with other people and creating feelings of solidarity and bonds with people having different worldviews.	Belk (2010), Forno & Garibaldi (2015), Heo (2016)
4) Trust	A subjective feeling that a person behaves in a certain way in an attempt to meet the implicit or explicit agreement established by the service.	Kunz & Seshadri (2015), Ert, Fleischer & Magen (2016), Aydin & Duyan (2019)
5) Degree of identification between peers	Link between the individual and his peers, which contributes to the creation of identification with the group.	Result identified in the study. Subsequently, a relationship was found in the literature with the idea of Algesheimer, Dholakia & Hermann (2005).

6) Perceived Utility	Motivation in a more functional and utilitarian character, such as survival or even the meeting of a necessity.	Result identified in the study. Subsequently, a relationship was found in the literature with the idea of Venkatesh <i>et al.</i> (2003) and Belk (2014a)
7) Perceived Risk	Factors capable of inhibiting the participant's interest in the use of the lodge sharing platform.	Result identified in the study. Subsequently, a relationship was found in the literature with the idea of Liang, Choi & Joppe (2017), Oglethorpe and Monroe (1987)
8) Value co-creation perception	Process in which the players go through a growing process of knowledge acquisition, exchange of services and integration of resources.	Result identified in the study. Subsequently, a relationship was found in the literature with the idea of Lusch & Vargo (2014)
9) Social influence	Extent to which an individual understands the influence people who are important in his social circle exert over him towards the use of the system, in the behavioural intention of use.	Result identified in the study. Subsequently, a relationship was found in the literature with the idea of Venkatesh <i>et al.</i> (2003)
10) Moment in life	Indicates the stage the consumer is in during his life cycle, considering his socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics.	Identified in the current study

Source: The authors (2020)

After the analysis of the interviews with ten consumers of CouchSurfing in Brazil, eight main factors influencing use motivation were identified: 1) Cost Savings, 2) Expectation of Shared Cultural Experiences, 3) Expectations of Creating Social Bonds, 4) Trust, 5) Degree of Identification between Peers and 6) Perceived Utility. On the other hand, one of the results suggest that aspects connected to restrictive consumption factors regarding CouchSurfing, which were not addressed in the literature, emerged and were categorized as follows 7) Perceived Risk. The fear of suffering some type of violence or harassment, the fear of being inconvenient for the host and the feeling of lack of privacy are risks perceived by Brazilian guests (Vera, 2018). Another novel result of the study was category 8) Value Co-creation Perception, in which the consumers declared co-creation of value by means of experiences with the hosts (Table 3).

Table 3. Synthesis of the results of sharing use motivators by country

Category	Brazil	Portugal
1) Cost savings	x	
2) Expectation of shared cultural experiences	X	X
3) Expectation of creating social bonds	x	X
4) Trust	x	x
5) Degree of identification between peers	x	X
6) Perceived utility	x	
7) Perceived risk	X	x
8) Value co-creation perception	x	X
9) Social influence		x
10) Moment in life		x

Legend: x or X indicate that the category is identified in one or more interviews with either Brazilian or Portuguese respondents. X indicates that a higher intensity of the category by comparison with x.

Source: The authors (2020)

In addition, the analysis of the interviews with the eight consumers of CouchSurfing in Portugal gave rise to the following categories: 2) Expectation of Shared Cultural Experiences, 3) Expectation of Creating Social Bonds, 4) Trust, 5) Degree of Identification between Peers. Contrary to what was revealed in interviews carried out in Brazil, there were not many statements regarding restrictive factors concerning the consumption of CouchSurfing. Only two of the Portuguese respondents mentioned the discomfort of the thought of being inconvenient for the host and the possible lack of privacy, corresponding to the category, 7) Perceived Risk. Another result was category 8) Value Co-creation Perception, in which the consumers mentioned co-creation of value in connection with experiences with the hosts. Also as a difference observed through the interviews with the Brazilians, 9) Social Influence and 10) Moment in Life are assessed in the current study. Therefore, the results of this study point to six new categories of sharing economy behaviour not yet being discussed in the literature.

3.c Similarities found in Brazil and Portugal

Expectations of sharing cultural experiences were pointed out by the interviewees in both countries. The Brazilian respondents considered the search for a more realistic view of their destinations, which would occur with a shared experience with the host, however, the Portuguese interviewees valued the possibility of visiting a tourist attraction and interacting with the locals as one of the reasons for using the platform. The search for different experiences, rich and intercultural as well as the possibility to experience a bit of the locals' daily routine, were aspects mentioned by the interviewees as being important and represented the "philosophy" of CouchSurfing. To sum up, the participants demonstrated that they were willing to see the place they visited under the view of a native rather than a tourist.

The category Expectation of Establishing Social Bonds is associated with the proposal of the platform, which is to connect people and promote exchange of experiences. The Portuguese respondents demonstrated willingness and adherence with regard to this concept of the platform. The interest lies in the exchange of life history, different perspectives and information, which corroborate Albinsson and Perera (2012)'s idea, which recognizes the sense of community as being one of the main factors stimulating participation in the sharing activities. Five Brazilians highlighted this category, however there were a few objections, such as the difficulty in keeping the new friends when they are back home, the intensity of the friendship formed, and the lack of expectations of creating bonds before travelling, i.e. some Brazilians believe that the creation of social bonds occurs as a consequence of the travel, not as a motivator.

Trust was repeatedly mentioned by the Brazilian and Portuguese respondents. Trust is closely related to the readings of the reviews given by the users of the platform, the ones who had positive experiences with the hosts, providing safety. The interviewees stated that they had read the online comments before they decided to apply for a stay, so that they could feel safe regarding the place they were about to lodge in. Such findings corroborate the literature addressing the importance of trust in the sharing economy relations and in the internet as well (Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Belk, 2014a; Ert; Fleischer & Magen, 2016).

The analysis of the host's profile, in order to identify similar tastes and shared interests, in an attempt to predict the likelihood of a positive experience represents a search to verify if the guest identifies himself with the prospective host – this aspect fits into the categories Trust and Degree of Identification Between Peers.

An important finding in the research refers to the category Degree of Identification Between Peers. It is acknowledged that "a harmonious relationship with the brand can lead consumers to seek out and interact with like-minded consumers who share their enthusiasm" (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Hermann, 2005, p. 23). In this sense, the interviewees stated there had been a concern about the host-guest identification when reading the comments made by

the users, as well as the host's profile. If the image cast on the platform by a prospective host did not suggest affinity with the guest, he would avoid lodging in this person's home and vice-versa.

Moreover, empathy was somewhat important in the opinion of the Brazilian and Portuguese respondents alike, it was an important factor in the acceptance of the request for accommodation. The guests see this relationship as a two-way road, in which the hosts have an interest in accommodating guests and guests have the opportunity to stay in the place of their choices. This is confirmed by Pechlaner, Olbrich & Isetti (2024), which adds that responsible tourism practices should benefit travellers and locals, but also the environment.

The Portuguese interviewees stressed not only the importance of the identification between pairs in the platform (guest and host), but also the identification with the CouchSurfing proposal. They highlighted the spirit and the principle of camaraderie amongst strangers in the platform. To the Portuguese, anyone who is willing to share a space in their homes with a network of people who like travelling is part of a group of particular people that adheres to the spirit of the community. This identification inspires confidence in the use of the platform and reduces the fear of risks. For Nusair et al. (2024), some tourists may be motivated to interact with other community members due higher brand involvement, generating higher levels of community engagement, including consumption, contribution and creation.

One aspect emerging from the interviews in Brazil had to do with the category Perceived Risk, as it involves the restrictive factors of CouchSurfing consumption. Thus, some points were cited as being factors capable of inhibiting the participant's interest in the use of the accommodation sharing platform. It was noticed that the difficulty in having full privacy, the lodger's fear of feeling inconvenient in the host's home and the fear of suffering some kind of abuse or harassment (especially when the guest is a woman) were aspects addressed.

Another point enhanced was the possible absence of privacy, being associated with the dependence on the host's times and the fact that the guest might not be able to dress as comfortably as he wishes, inhibited by the presence of the host, or vice-versa, which could result in fear of creating a certain discomfort, especially because it is a free stay. A restrictive factor in the consumption of the platform was the fear of suffering some sort of violence or harassment, inflicted by the host. In this sense, more specifically in the cases of women, this can be regarded as something risky and deserve further attention regarding their decision making and preferences. Cheng et al. (2024, p. 86) confirms gender differences in tourism lead to "psychological, cognitive and behavioural, personality and emotional differences".

On the other hand, the Portuguese displayed a higher trust in the use of the site, only two respondents mentioned this aspect of Perceived Risk. Such issues stress findings in the current investigation not yet being mentioned in the literature.

Another aspect that emerged from the current research was the fact that the interviewees expressed their perception of co-creation of value based on their own experiences with

CouchSurfing. Co-creation of value is defined by Lusch and Vargo (2014) as being a process in which the players go through a growing process of knowledge acquisition, exchange of services and integration of resources.

In a sense, it is possible to ascertain that the interviewees described their recollections of the co-creation of value process established between the parties. According to the statements, co-creation of value encompassed cultural exchange, exchange of knowledge, personal learning, a reduction in cultural bias and an improvement on trust in other people. However, the category was more clearly noticed in Portugal than in Brazil.

To the Portuguese participants, the perception of co-creation of values corresponded to the relation established between them and the host, which in many cases culminated in friendship and memorable experiences. The interviewees declared they were surprised when they noticed that some hosts spared some of their time taking them sightseeing, introduced them to friends and even provided the house keys. All in all, in the interviewees' view, the co-creation of value experienced between host and guest added knowledge and sympathy for each other's causes.

Therefore, despite the similarities between the factors, there were also categories that exposed differences, either by the Brazilians or the Portuguese.

3.d Differences found in Brazil and Portugal

Some categories appeared only in one of the contexts investigated, e.g., Cost Savings and Perceived Utility in Brazil; and Social Influence and Moment in Life in Portugal. Thus, these represent categories that point out cultural differences between the two countries and therefore call for further investigation in future research.

While Cost Savings was cited in interviews with Brazilians as being one of the main aspects motivating the use of CouchSurfing, this reason was not presented in Portugal. In Brazil, five respondents stated that the main reason for using the service was to save money, the remaining mentioned the importance of saving, but made clear that this was not their main motivation. Some interviewees declared that the gratitude in the stay made the travel viable, because the payment for a hotel would incur high expenditure and they could not afford it.

Despite appearing in two statements made by Brazilians, Perceived Utility was also a category indicated as a consumption motivation. Such finding corroborates Belk (2014a)'s, when he suggests that sharing may encompass motivations of a more functional and utilitarian character such as survival or even provision for a necessity. However, most of the respondents in both countries attributed their interest in CouchSurfing to their search for shared cultural experiences. The participant's interest in the accommodation itself went beyond the utilitarian character.

In Portugal, the category Social Influence was a factor that had a positive influence on the interviewee's decision to use the platform. Six out of the seven Portuguese respondents said that their first contact with the platform and its proposal occurred through a friend or a reference group's indication.

It was noticed that a friend's recommendation carried important weight in the Portuguese interviewees' decisions, however this aspect was not mentioned by the Brazilian respondents. In a consumption context, the non-users have a better control of their choices and their consequences for their social images, in a way that social influence plays a significant role in the consumer's behaviour (Slade et al., 2015). In previous studies, such as Vera (2014) and Indrawati and Haryoto (2015), the relationship between Social Influence and Use Intention was confirmed.

Another category that was also perceived only in interviews carried out in Portugal was the Moment in Life. This category indicated that the motivation leading the participants to use CouchSurfing was closely related to the stage in the interviewee's life when it occurred. The phase in life and the conditions the person had then, were uppermost factors leading to the use of the platform.

It is important to acknowledge that the moment in the life-cycle stage has not been addressed in the literature with regard to the sharing economy in tourism. However, in the literature, there are authors who point out that the stage in life is one of the factors that influences the consumer's decision, in a general sense, as far as the consumer's behaviour is concerned (Hawkins; Monthersbaugh & Best, 2007; Mowen & Minor, 2008).

Although some interviewees associate the use of CouchSurfing with a younger generation, this idea is disputed, given the fact that three respondents are in their 40s, even so, they use CouchSurfing. However, it is well worth observing that at present, the use of the platform by an older generation occurs more frequently in the host's position, rather than in a guest's role.

4.Results and Discussion

The results reveal that the practice of alternative tourism goes far beyond the search for alternative accommodation, as is the case of CouchSurfing. We concluded that one of the motivations leading to the use of the platform was a desire for an escape from the common, from the traditional tourism, in an attempt to experience a more personal moment. This can indicate the search for a more authentic experience as a tourist, one which is genuine and closer to the reality of the local community. Tourists hope their social experiences when staying with locals may lead to more authentic travel experiences, according to Guttentag (2015). Breidbach and Brodie (2017) questioned if the use of sharing economy platforms can

improve human well-being. Our answer is that the CouchSurfing platform can add value and enhance guest experience, through host/guest experience co-creation, as indicated by Elliot, Adams & Tsetse (2023). But results also indicate guests can reduce their well-being whenever they are not respected. Hence, travel risks such as harassment, violence and absence of privacy, were presented in our study – especially by women.

The experiences with tourism sharing economy platforms allow a high level of personalisation of the tourism activity (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). By boosting the possibilities of lodging, the apps and platforms not only make available an alternative experience to what is offered by the hotel sector, they also offer the traveller the chance to stay in the parts of the town not considered tourist attractions (Souza & Lemos, 2016). This can lead to socio-economic implications, being an opportunity for future research (Breidbach & Brodie, 2017).

Molz (2013) addresses the tourist's growing desire to have more authentic, customised and intimate experiences with people and places they visit. The wish to meet locals and the value of creating new relationships and friendships indicates that the quality of social interaction and relationships with the host may represent an important aspect to do with perceived value and satisfaction of tourists who make use of sharing economy platforms (Heo, 2016). The wish to connect themselves more closely with the locals and places mirrors a growing dissatisfaction amongst the primarily middle class tourists who are tired of "plasticized" experiences and serial production of culture (Molz, 2013). We reiterate the relationship between actors as an important engagement practice within the sharing economy, such as stated by Breidbach and Brodie (2017).

Literature in consumer behaviour points out that the factors influencing a tourist's decision-making encompass the stage in the moment in life the tourist find himself, resources available, socio-demographic characteristics, cultural aspects and personal motivation. The current research demonstrates that the guests lodging through CouchSurfing dislike being labelled as tourists and are motivated by the opportunity of living the daily routine of a local resident, even if it is for only a few days.

The present study indicates that the sharing behaviour leads to savings not only in cost of accommodation, but also other aspects such as meals, transportation and tour guides. Belk and Sobh (2007) propose that sharing allows people to consume a wider and more varied range of products than what they could regularly afford, as a result, cost savings may represent a motivation. Therefore, sharing provides people with opportunities when travelling to tourist destinations, even when the cost of living is higher than in their place of origin, it also enables them to have longer holidays or include more routes in their travel itinerary. In a sense, there are indications that sharing has a direct effect on the consumer's decision making.

However, the financial economy does not represent a crucial motivation in the context of the interviewees in Portugal. One explanation for this is a greater motivation the Portuguese have for the possibility of establishing social bounds between the host and the guest. Another

possible explanation for this is a higher consumer purchasing power the Portuguese have, which is above the Brazilians'. One way or the other, the study indicates that the consumption relations in this sort of platform may extrapolate utilitarian interests such as the need to save money, as already pointed out by Belk (2014b).

The motivation for Sharing Cultural Experiences is closely related to the profile of the CouchSurfing public interviewed, they appeared to be curious, open to meet new people and experience new cultures, but also willing to offer accommodation, exchange experiences and help people. The experiences inspire friendships that can last beyond the stay, and also can create a feeling of generosity and human warmth amongst the members of the community (Belk, 2014b). Zare (2019) examined the cultural influence on memorable experiences and identified several culture-specific elements, including Togetherness, Independence and Control, Spontaneity and Flexibility, and Distinctiveness. It is noteworthy that Distinctiveness, defined as "a sense of pride and achievement for not following the common ways of traveling, therefore, enjoying and learning more" (Zare, 2019, p.8), was found among both Brazilian and Portuguese guests in our study, indicating it does not represent a culture-specific dimension in our research. This convergence may be attributed to the investigation of the chosen sharing economy platform, aligning with previous significant findings in the study.

The general impression of the host has to do with trust. The impression the guest has of the host determines trust and also influences his decision to lodge in a specific home stay. Some hosts explained that they sought information by referring to the reviewers comments on the platform, others took a step further and searched in the host's social media profile. Hence, guests must trust first the platform and then the guest to proceed with the travel. This result indicates brand involvement is important to generate customers' confidence and risk perception reduction (Nusair et al., 2024).

Trust is notably uppermost in online peer-to-peer transactions, once two strangers are not expected to get involved in a deal without trusting each other (Bonsón Ponte, Carvajal-Trujillo & Escobar-Rodríguez, 2015; Kim, Chung & Lee, 2011, Vera, Gosling & Silva, 2021). According to Kunz and Seshadri (2015), trust and empathy amongst members of a virtual community, which is the case of CouchSurfing, are central mediators in the development of relationships between pairs.

One of the contributions of the current study is the identification of categories, which extrapolates findings presented in the sharing economy literature. Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) argue that identification with the group is a key determinant in the participation in a virtual community, in a way that when the identification with the group is established, the person develops collective intentions by thinking of "us" and wants to keep a positive relationship with the group, therefore, he finds himself lured into joining the activities of the community (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Hermann, 2005).

As far as co-creation of value is concerned, after the sharing experience, the interviewees state that the experiences with the hosts added something to their lives. According to Vargo

and Lusch (2004), the creation of value happens when the players interact by sharing resources such as abilities and knowledge. The current study suggests that the motivations for the sharing behaviour go far beyond the categories identified in the literature, and are impacted by cultural differences. Therefore, the similarities between the groups studied may contribute to a better understanding of the sharing behaviours, on the other hand, the differences may enhance the cultural diversity of those who use the sharing platforms.

5. Conclusion

The objective of the current article was to compare the various motivators of sharing behaviours occurring amongst Brazilian and Portuguese when guests, as far as the use of Couchsurfing as an alternative tourism activity is concerned. When comparing the results of the Couchsurfing qualitative study conducted in Brazil and in Portugal, similarities and differences emerge. As far as the similarities between the guests from both countries are concerned, the expectation of sharing cultural experiences and establishing social bonds, as well as the need to trust in the host are factors that indicate the motivation for travelling using the platform, these aspects involve the Brazilians and the Portuguese alike and become motivators for both groups.

When the differences are taken into account, only the Brazilians mentioned means of saving money and provision for utilitarian needs such as sleep as motivation. Another difference to be noticed is that the influence of friends and acquaintances and the stage in life were mentioned as factors contributing to arousing an interest in utilising Couchsurfing only by interviewees in Portugal.

Moreover, it was noticed that aspects connected to Couchsurfing restrictive factors in the consumption of Couchsurfing were more recurring and better explained by respondents in Brazil, their statements evidenced the fear of suffering some sort of violence or harassment, the fear of being inconvenient for the host and also not having privacy in the host's home. It is important to point out that only two of the Portuguese interviewees signalled the fear of being inconvenient in the host's home and the fear of not having privacy, which indicates fewer statements related to restrictive factors, which occurred more frequently in Brazil.

Even though we followed the guidelines of qualitative research, a limitation we face is the inherent subjectivity in the interpretation of our data. This limitation is related to the interpretative epistemology and the method we have chosen. This is a general criticism from the positivist and neopositivist perspectives. The paper was based on interviews with participants recounting their experiences. However, participants may have had limited memory of these experiences or even changed their minds after the interview, which may not accurately reflect the emotions or feelings they had during the study. This is a real limitation of exploratory qualitative studies, restricting the generalization of the results. Hence, our findings only reflect the participants' context.

Bearing in mind that the theme of sharing economy in tourism is a trend, it is noticeable that there is plenty of room for studies approaching its various aspects. The suggestion for further research is that studies having a quantitative approach of the theme should be carried out. Also, studies aiming at understanding the host's perspective could complement our results. A proposed agenda on the topic of CouchSurfing could involve studies on factors restricting use for both guests and hosts. Scholars can highlight the authenticity of CouchSurfing experiences and the conflicts -including hospitality and hostility-between guests and hosts. Furthermore, studies on CouchSurfing's business model can also be carried out and contribute to its survival, such as identifying why some customers don't use the platform. Works addressing the impact of sharing economy on other sectors such as transport and mobility, cities and real estate, as well as other relevant issues (regulation and work relations) can also render contribution to the area.

With regard to the implications of the current study, profile and online comments provide lifestyle observations which demonstrate the online behaviours of the guests in the sharing economy. Similarly, the exposure of the personal profile may take into consideration features that provide personal identification between hosts and guests. Therefore, hosts and guests alike must consider the functional aspects of the platform such as proper filling of information in their profile, a review of the online comments and the choice of hosts must be given in a way that it boosts trust and reduces risks in the experience. As for the study implications, results demonstrate that brand involvement is important to generate customers' confidence and risk perception reduction. Hence, the sharing economy platforms must provide members engagement and communicate clearly how members can consume, contribute and create beyond the community.

It is understood that the role of the host is central in the tourism experience, once a host may offer more reliable indications than a hotel can, the institution may try to entice the tourist to purchase package tours that are more convenient to the business than to the client. Thus, the interviewees showed interest in the host's tips about how to move around town, unsafe spots and its conflicts amongst others. Therefore, the host contributes to a tourism experience which differs from traditional tourism and also creates alternative forms of travelling and learning about the destination.

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Appendix 1

Interview script

1- How did you find out about CouchSurfing?

2- Why did you decide to use it?

3- What motivated you to use the sharing economy platform (CouchSurfing)?

4- What were you looking for when choosing to use this platform?

5- What positive points did you see in using this platform?

6- When you tried to use CouchSurfing, was the objective to go alone or with someone to the host's house?

7- How many times have you used this type of platform?

8- How long did you spend at the host's house each time you used the platform?

9- How was the experience of going on a trip staying at a stranger's house and not in traditional accommodation (hotel, hostel, etc.)?

10- Why did you decide to stay in a stranger's house/apartment and not in traditional accommodation (hotel, hostel, etc.)?

11- Do you think Brazil has a culture that contributes to a sharing economy?

12- Do your closest friends and family use this type of platform?

13- Did you talk to anyone (relatives, friends, etc.) before using the platform? What did they say? Have you ever using it?

14- Before travelling, did you look for videos on YouTube or information on social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) about CouchSurfing to see how it works? How did this help you in choosing your trip?

15- To what extent do you think your stage in the life cycle contributed to your decision to use the sharing economy platform (CouchSurfing)?

16- Do you think your lifestyle matches the proposal of these platforms?

17- To what extent do the impressions you have of the image of the person who will host you contribute to your choice to stay or not at a particular person's house? Do you research who the host is before contacting them?

18- Before travelling, what did you think of the profile (image, photo, content) of the person who was going to welcome you to their home?

19- Before you travelled, what did you think would have happened? What did you think this experience would be like?

20- Before using the sharing economy platform and staying at the home of someone you didn't know, what were your expectations?

21- Before using the sharing economy platform and staying at the home of someone you didn't know, did you have any expectations of making new friends?

22- What is confidence for you?

23- What led you to trust an unknown person and stay at their house?

24- Did you have any trepidation or fear about staying at a stranger's house?

25- What were the positive points of your experience using the sharing economy platform?

26- What were the negative points (trade-offs)?

27- What did this experience add to your life?