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The impact of individualism/collectivism of the host country on the internationalization process and post-entry speed

A comparative analysis between the USA and Angola

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ABSTRACT :

International business literature has showcased the importance of internationalization as a way to ensure business development and success. Therefore, this has been a constant topic within theoretical reviews over the years. Furthermore, networks have been proven in literature to be a relevant component of this process, through different tie strengths and densities. Moreover, culture has been continuously identified as a crucial aspect of internationalization. One of the identified dimensions of culture is the country's individualism or collectivism. Internationalization can be viewed through many lenses; however, a significant one regards its rapidity. Although its rapidness may be measured through the speed at which a firm internationalized since its foundation, it may also concern the quickness of a company's growth and development after entering a foreign market. Nonetheless, there is a gap in understanding the dynamic relationship between the individualism or collectivism of the host country and the post-entry speed at which internationalization occurs. Thus, the present study aims to address the research question: "How does the individualism/collectivism of the host country impact the business network internationalization process and the post-entry speed?". The research question is answered through an understanding of whether the individualism/collectivism of the host country influences the internationalization network tie strength and density, as well as comprehending how the network characteristics affect the internationalization's post-entry rapidity. The methodology applied to reach the conclusions for this question was an interpretivism and deductive approach, with a qualitative data collection method, which mainly leveraged semi-structured interviews, complemented by secondary data. To adequately test the theoretical framework, the study conducted a two-case study qualitative and subjective analysis, attending to the subjective nature of the study's central concepts, namely, network characteristics and culture. As case studies, the research analyzed the internationalization processes of two businesses, one in an individualist country and the other in a collectivistic society. The main findings of the work concluded that the individualism or collectivism of the host country influences the strength of network ties; however, it does not affect the network density. Furthermore, the study concluded that the network tie strength, which is influenced by the individualism/collectivism of the host country, has a direct impact on the post-entry internationalization speed. In concordance, if the network has strong ties, there is fast international resource commitment and a moderate international commercial intensity. Contrastingly, if the network has weak ties, there is a higher potential for rapid international sales intensity and a slow international resource investment. In conclusion, the study was successful in answering the intended research question through a revised framework that integrated all of the work's findings.

KEYWORDS: Individualism, collectivism, network, tie strength, network density, internationalization speed, post-entry internationalization.

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1 Introduction

This section aims to give context to the topic of the thesis, as well as justify the relevance of the study. Additionally, it presents the research problem and the questions that the work intends to explore. Finally, the overall structure of the paper is resumed.

1.1 Background

As numerous studies have demonstrated, internationalization is a crucial factor in a company's success. Due to its importance, the internationalization process has been studied for decades, and the way it is perceived has suffered significant alterations and evolutions throughout the years. In earlier years, one of the most accepted definitions of this concept was " the process of increasing involvement in international operations" (Welch & Luostarinen, 1988, p. 36) or the view provided by Johanson and Vahlne (1977) which described internationalization as an "incremental process" driven by the dynamic relation between the acquirement of experimental knowledge regarding new markets and the commitment of the company to those markets (Elango & Pattnaik, 2007, p. 543). In addition, Elango and Pattnaik (2007, p. 542) explained internationalization as the level of revenue income and processes of a business which take place externally, in relation to the country of origin of the firm.

Later on, research papers began to acknowledge the importance of networks within this process. For example, Johanson and Vahlne (2009, p. 1413) realised that their original Uppsala model needed to be further explored, taking into account the "clear evidence" of the major relevance of networks. Therefore, in their revisited work, internationalization is perceived as the result of a firm's efforts to cultivate and nurture better network positions in a market, as opposed to focusing on a firm's isolated position within a market (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1423). Furthermore, according to Johanson and Vahlne (2009, p. 1411), markets consist of a dynamic combination of networks, where businesses and actors interact with each other in an intricate and dynamic web of relationships. Moreover, the previous authors emphasize that, to succeed, companies must be

embedded in valuable networks. Chetty and Campbell-Hunt (2003, p. 5) emphasize this fact by stating that the cooperation provided by business networks gives small to medium-sized companies an opportunity to optimize their internationalization and strengthen their ability to accomplish goals they would not be able to achieve in isolation.

However, networks are also related to other research scopes within the international business research, such as the study of culture. In concordance with this, Beugelsdijk et al. (2017, p. 31) state that the "country is a critical unit of analysis in IB", an abbreviation for international business. By this, the authors mean that international business consists of comprehending how the dynamics created by a country's background and its context influence the behavior of its constituent members and the firms that are a part of it, as well as the issues and opportunities that arise from each country's characteristics. The specific dimension considered in this study, individualism and collectivism (in this case, of the internationalization's host country), has been perceived as a fundamental differentiator between distinct countries and realities, being a crucial determinant for societal exchanges (in other words, networks) and the way they are handled (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018, p. 1474). In the midst of the cultural dimensions established, data evidence that individualism is the one that most impacts a country's economic advancement (Hofstede, 1980, p. 151). This dimension of culture, individualism and collectivism, was selected since it addresses the relationship that members of a society have with the group (Hofstede, 1980, p. 148). In other words, the manner in which the individuals of a society perceive, consider, and interact with the network in which they are inserted. Therefore, since the base internationalization process considered in the thesis regards networks as its driving force, to obtain a relevant insidership position (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, pp. 1424 - 1425) within the market, it seemed pertinent to comprehend how the individual's relation with the group network affects the rapidness of the process.

Regarding the speed of internationalization, Hilmersson and Johanson (2016, p. 68) affirm that, due to the great focus on born globals and the analysis of the time be-tween

a firm's foundation and its first overseas entry, there is scarce literature that highlights the rapidity of development past this moment. However, internationalization process-focused research has acknowledged the distinction amongst a firm's earliness of internationalization and its rapidness in reaching its intended goals within a foreign market (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021, p. 1). Oviatt and McDougall (2005) are among the researchers who focused on the earliness of internationalization; however, some of the concepts leveraged by the authors are deeply connected to Johansson and Vahlne's revisited model (2009). More concretely, Oviatt and McDougall (2005, pp. 541-545) recognize network characteristics as an influencing force in the internationalization speed, due to their potential to provide relevant knowledge and a greater number of opportunities available to the firm. Therefore, although the authors perceive these speed forces as foreign first-entry related, they may also reflect the post-entry reality.

Summarising, to understand internationalization, we must understand how a process driven by networks functions and, if we know how it functions, we may also grasp with more clarity some of the aspects that impact this process's speed, for example, culture, realizing why in specific scenarios it happens in an accelerated manner. At the same time, in distinct circumstances, it occurs at a moderate or slow pace. More specifically, in this study, the Revisited Uppsala Model will serve as the basis for the process explanation. Simultaneously, the individualism/collectivism of the host country will be a variable that moderates the elements of this process, having an expected impact on the speed of the process cycles and the subsequent development of post-entry internationalization.

1.2 Research gap

Although the author found many articles and studies that pondered upon the internationalization process and, more specifically, the Uppsala Model (Original and Revisited), as well as the influence of countries' cultures on business settings, there seemed to be a gap regarding the correlation and interaction of these two scopes. More specifically, although culture is briefly mentioned in the various articles regarding the model, it is

perceived as a complementary observation of the process, through “psychic distance” (Vahlne & Johansson, 2017, p. 1089). Furthermore, Kogut and Singh (1988, p. 413) reflect on various studies that correlate the Uppsala Model and culture (psychic distance), with a focus on their effect on entry mode selection and strategies. However, the author found no research that directly explored the relationship between the Uppsala Model (2009) and Hofstede’s (1980; 2011) individualism/collectivism cultural dimension.

Regarding internationalization speed, although a substantial amount of research has studied firms' rapid entry into new markets, the volume of work focusing on the speed of internationalization post-entry is significantly scarcer (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021, p. 9). Furthermore, the thesis author addresses an untapped subject by examining the validity of one of Oviatt and McDougall’s (2005) influential forces, which are intended for first-entry rapidity conclusions, and applying them to a post-entry perspective.

Finally, developed countries, such as the USA, have been the subjects of several research studies (Andersson et al., 2014, p. 378). However, Angola and developing countries, in general, are uncommon discussion cases within the academic research field (Andersson et al., 2014, p. 378). Therefore, in addition to exposing the differences between very distinct realities in internalization destination countries, the paper also sheds light on a country profile that has not been extensively explored.

1.3 Research questions and objectives of the study

Considering the background of the topic under study and taking into consideration the research gaps identified in the previous section, the research question addressed by the present thesis is “How does the individualism/collectivism of the host country impact the business network internationalization process and the post-entry speed?”. More concretely, this study aims to determine how a specific and widely accepted scope of culture, individualism/collectivism, moderates the cornerstones of the Re-visited Upp-

sala Model and their interplay. Furthermore, the research aims to demonstrate practically how this dimension and way of perceiving the collective group influence the characteristics of the networks, which drive the internationalization explained by Vahlne and Johansson (2009). Consequently, this impacts the speed of internationalization, as described by Oviatt and McDougall's theory (2005). Therefore, this study joins three theories that are mutually connected to networks and show potential to produce relevant research outputs in the context of international business.

Considering the research question and the context of the three theories, which will be further explored later in the paper, the sub-questions that serve to answer the main research question are:

- Does individualism/collectivism of the host country influence the tie strength and density of a network?
- How do network characteristics affect the post-entry internationalization speed?

1.4 Delimitations

In terms of delimitations, the most prominent constraint of this paper is that it solely addresses a particular dimension of culture, namely individualistic versus collectivistic, which is a narrow aspect of what constitutes a culture.

Although networks are the driving force behind the internationalization process, according to Johansson and Vahlne (2009), many factors comprise a network. However, this research solely considers networks characterized by two types of indicators— density and tie strength — assuming that the other network characterization factors remain constant, to draw valid conclusions. This choice of characteristic was made in accordance with Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) view on the moderating forces of internationalization speed, and in consideration of the fact that these are claimed to be the most prominent network characteristics influencing the speed of internationalization, as per their work.

Additionally, a delimitation of the study is that both companies explored in the empirical cases are based in the same country, Portugal, which may limit the generalizability of the research results. However, this will also allow for more robust findings, as this fact remains constant in both explored cases, with only the host countries changing.
Finally, both case companies addressed by the study are involved in the food and beverage industry.

1.5 Study definitions

To facilitate the comprehension of the rest of the paper, this section provides a set of definitions for the basic concepts introduced throughout the paper. Considering the thesis topic, the definitions provided concern the concepts of individualism, collectivism, network, and post-entry internationalization speed. Firstly, according to Hofstede (1980), individualism versus collectivism is a fundamental societal issue that displays the level to which the individuals of that society are expected to prioritize themselves or be deeply embedded in the cultural group. Individualism is defined as the polar opposite of the spectrum, which emphasizes self-preservation and personal goal fulfillment, characterized by weak social ties (Hofstede, 1980, p. 171). Collectivism is described as the opposite pole of the spectrum, characterized by societies that are highly group-focused, where the collective benefit and acceptance are significant; therefore, they have strong social ties (Hofstede, 1980). Secondly, Coviello and Munro (1997, p. 365) define networks as an assortment of two or more interrelated exchange ties. Thirdly, post-entry rapidness is defined as the pace at which businesses achieve their goals after their arrival in a foreign market (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021, p. 1).

1.6 Structure of the study

In relation to the paper’s structure, it is comprised of seven sections, which are organized in a way that promotes the reader's discernment regarding the topic being explored.

Therefore, the initial section begins by presenting the context of the study, introducing the research question and concurrent objectives that guide the entire thesis, delimiting the assumed boundaries of the research, and finally, outlining the overall structure of the written work.

The following section delves into the theoretical background, which serves as the foundation for the study, organized into four parts: “Networks”, “Uppsala model for internationalization”, “Individualism versus Collectivism”, and “Post-entry Internationalization Speed”.

As the third section of the study, we have the methodology applied in the work. More concretely, an explanation of the methods that were considered most pertinent for the present research, namely, in terms of the chosen philosophy and analysis. Furthermore, it exposes the approaches selected to gather and access the data, as well as a reflection on the reliability and validity of the information collected.

The following section presents the most relevant data collected through the chosen methodology, which is then examined in the subsequent portion of the study. This discussion bridges the gap between the theoretical background of the study and the discoveries provided by the gathered data, answering the proposed research question, objectives, and hypotheses. In the final section, the study concludes with a summary of the thesis, followed by a list of practical implications of the work, as well as its limitations and a few propositions on future research that may be conducted to build upon the conclusions drawn from the study.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Networks

2.1.1 Network definition

As previously mentioned, according to Coviello and Munro (1997, p. 365), networks are defined as an assortment of two or more interrelated exchange ties. Coviello and Munro further explore this idea, explaining their view of markets as systems of social and business affairs among different stakeholders, including consumers, providers, other companies, relatives, and friends. Moreover, Coviello and Munro (1997, p. 365) explain that the type of connection amongst the subjects involved will impact the strategic choices and the resources transacted between the parties.

In their revised work, Johanson and Vahlne (2009, p. 1414) state that studies have shown that businesses are commonly integrated into a group of diverse, close, and long-term relationships with key providers and consumers. Subsequently, the organisations that have established relationships with said firms are also embedded in various connections with their key partners and stakeholders (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1414). The authors conclude that due to this “web-like” structure, organizations function in a network of business connections (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1414).

Hohenthal et al. (2014, p. 11) conclude that the most prominent similarities and intersections among the majority of studies regarding networks are that they consist of a knowledge-acquiring enabler and an experience-expanding source. Furthermore, previous authors explain that these connections can occur between businesses and their consumers, their providers and other stakeholders, as well as among business individuals. Hohenthal et al. (2014, p. 11) also highlight that the knowledge associated with networks is developed through experience, requiring in-person interactions to take place.

2.1.2 Importance of networks

Although networks are highly relevant within the business context, they were not always perceived as such. It was through the feedback provided by a study conducted by Håkansson and Östberg (1975), as stated by Johansson and Vahlne (2011, p. 485), that the notion emerged that network establishment and expansion were also critical when internationalizing. This hypothesis led to a significant amount of research by the IMP (Industrial Marketing and Purchasing) Project, which concluded that the great majority of the 800 cases studied evidenced that businesses were involved in networks significant to their growth and productivity (Johansson & Vahlne, 2011, p. 485). This work demonstrated that, through networks, firms exchanged goods, operational procedures, and methodologies (Johansson & Vahlne, 2011, p. 485).

Coviello (2006, p. 714) explains that social capital has a positive influence on the development of a firm's know-how regarding markets abroad and, subsequently, on its internationalization and expansion. Furthermore, links and interactions play a crucial role in attaining different resources and building their notoriety (Coviello, 2006, p.714). Most of all, networks present themselves as a rich source of opportunities for firms to take their businesses and potential for internationalization to the next level, leveraging circumstances they would not be able to realize on their own (Coviello, 2006, p. 714). Coviello (2006, p. 723) further concluded, through the output of her research, that networks are intangible assets that are fundamental for business expansion and development, since they grant access to leverage and significant means, such as monetary funds, product transportation and dissemination channels, recommendations, relevant lists of contacts, and a pathway to specific business environments.

In conclusion, we take away the view of Coviello and Munro (1995, p. 58) regarding networks and their influence on the internationalization and expansion course:
"Our understanding of the internationalization processes of entrepreneurial firms is enriched when we expand the analysis beyond the individual firm's actions and address the impact of a firm's role and position within a network of relationships.".

As the importance of networks for the internationalization process was proven, it impacted established theories within the academic space. The Uppsala Model was an example of a framework that was significantly altered by the new perception of networks and their role in internationalization, as we'll further explore below.

2.2 Uppsala Model

2.2.1 Introduction to the Uppsala Model

As previously mentioned, the internationalization process has been thoroughly studied and pondered upon for decades. Although there are many theories and approaches to how this process takes place, one of the most widely accepted is the Uppsala Model. An essential factor of this theory is that not only is it widely accepted, but it has also been revised and further developed over the years, taking into consideration how the world and the business landscape have evolved. This is the theory that we will consider within the scope of this thesis.

The Uppsala Model consists of a framework, created by Johanson and Vahlne (1977), which explains that businesses expand across borders through a slow-paced and cumulative process, due to limited information regarding foreign prospects, fear of high-risk circumstances, and potential unpredictability, amongst other factors (Madsen & Servais, 1997, p. 561). The previous authors further elaborate that, as is perceived in the Uppsala perspective, significant qualitative research has confirmed that "firms often internationalize like 'rings in the water', trying to gain market knowledge gradually, and hence reduce uncertainty and risk over time for each country market" (Madsen & Servais, 1997, pp. 561-562).

As affirmed by the original authors of the Uppsala theory, this view diverges from conventional economic frameworks, which encompass standard, rational, cost-based exchange and profit-driven perspectives when explaining the internationalization process. Typically, these views adopt “ideal” scenarios as generalizations for macro-level situations, whereas Johanson and Vahlne sought to describe the realities of single firms (Vahlne and Johanson, 2020, p. 5). Furthermore, classical economic concepts’ perception of the “market is not an empirical reality but a set of assumptions explaining conditions for production”, focusing on the comprehension of price and production stages and fluctuations (Johanson & Vahlne, 2011, p. 484). The most prominent differentiation point of this framework is its emphasis on the process - more concretely, the development and acquisition of knowledge, learning through experience, commitment, and trust, which will influence the firm’s decisions and “investment behaviour”, consequently, determining its broadening into markets across-boarders (Vahlne & Johanson, 2017, p.1088; Forsgren, 2002, p. 258).

The Uppsala model has been revised and further developed on several occasions throughout the years. These revisions enabled its improvement, broadening of insights and perspectives, and increase in accuracy over time in response to business realities (Vahlne & Johanson, 2017, p. 1088; Forsgren, 2016, p. 1136). For example, this enhancement enabled the integration of concepts such as networks and entrepreneurship, which were not initially considered (Vahlne & Johanson, 2017, p. 1088; Forsgren, 2016, p. 1136).

For context, in the next section of the thesis, the subject of study regarding the Uppsala Model is a “multinational business enterprise (MBE),” as opposed to a “multinational enterprise (MNE)” (Vahlne and Johanson, 2017, p. 1088). This statement outlines the authors' view of the relevant characteristics of a current firm (Vahlne and Johanson, 2017, p. 1088). Moreover, the authors explain that, by this, they mean that their perspective is a modern, more process-oriented, network-integrated, “pro-active and entrepreneurial”, flexible and decentralized view of the firm (Vahlne and Johanson, 2017, p. 1088).

2.2.2 Uppsala Model (1977)

In its original version, the Uppsala framework came to be as a consequence of a series of observations by the authors, which led them to believe that Swedish businesses tended to expand their international scopes through several small accomplishments, as opposed to single significant investments abroad (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p.24; Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975, p.305). The focus of the study was to understand how firms were able to surpass their limited knowledge regarding international markets, which were the origin of a certain level of unpredictability and liability (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, pp. 23-24).

In 1977, the Uppsala model consisted of two types of variables: state and change (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p. 26). The state variables showcased the status of the internationalization process, combining two types of aspects: “market knowledge” and “market commitment” (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p. 26). On the opposite spectrum of the model, we have the change variables, which encompass two indicators: “commitment decisions” and “current activities” (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p. 26).

The market knowledge refers to a firm's understanding of how a market operates (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p. 26). Although there are two types of knowledge – objective and experimental -, according to this model, the most crucial way in which a firm gains knowledge about a market is through “experimental knowledge”, more specifically, by leveraging first-hand experience, which allows them to understand the market, the available internal and external resources, the consumers, the pain-points, and potential opportunities (Eriksson et al., 1997, p.340). By taking advantage of direct operations know-how, the firm can reduce some of the liability of expanding to another country (Eriksson et al., 1997, p.340). Moreover, this knowledge is country-specific, which makes it difficult to transmit among firms, and non-codable, as it is embedded in possible practices, procedures, systems, or even individuals (Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003, p. 740). Furthermore, knowledge aggregation is “path dependent”, which implies that it is determined by the measure and variety of exposure to the new market (Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003,

p. 740). In contrast, objective knowledge refers to more general information that can be easily obtained and replicated across different firms, such as market research (Eriksson et al., 1997, p. 340).

On the other hand, market commitment encompasses two indicators: the volume of resources invested multiplied by the level of commitment (Eriksson et al., 1997, p. 340). The volume of resources invested may refer to factors such as marketing and human power, among others (Eriksson et al., 1997, p. 340). The level of commitment is determined by the inflexibility in transferring resources between markets – more specifically, this entails that it would be difficult to arrange an alternative purpose for the resources invested (Eriksson et al., 1997, p. 340). A greater commitment indicates a larger embeddedness in the market, with higher irreversibility and withdrawal costs (Figueira-de-Lemos et al., 2011, p. 146).

In terms of the change variables, commitment decisions address the choices to invest resources in a market with the intention of bettering a firm's position. These choices take place when issues or beneficial scenarios arise, and they are heavily influenced by outcomes that were perceived by the firm as effective in past occurrences, as well as the status of intelligence and investment on the market (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p.1412; Eriksson et al., 1997, p.341). Current activities comprise the firm's operations and actions, which are identified as the primary source of experiential knowledge, subsequently driving internationalization development (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1412).

As affirmed by the authors, Uppsala is a dynamic model (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p.1412). The way in which it works is: the firm's operations drive its knowledge regarding a market, which then leads the company to experience less risk and more certainty about said market, which motivates them to make decisions with greater degrees of commitment to that market, which promotes the level of investment on the market and pushes for more activities to take place on that market, which finally allows for even more intelligence acquisition, and so on (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p.1412). The diagram below

visually summarizes this process. It is also relevant to note that the model does not stipulate a specific shape of commitment, meaning that it does not imply that it necessarily rises (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1412). On the contrary, it may reduce or come to an end, depending on the market's performance and attractive forecast (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1412). This notion contradicts the allegations that claim the model to be "deterministic" (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p.1412).

The Basic Mechanism of Internationalization – State and Change Aspects (Adapted from Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p. 26).

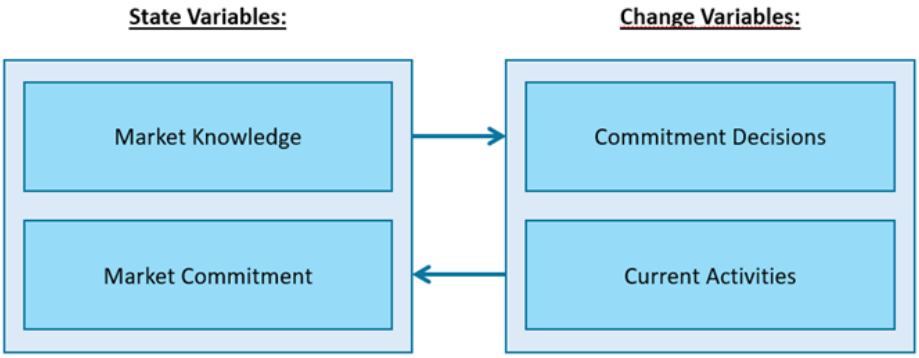

Figure 1. The Basic Mechanism of Internationalization – State and Change Aspects (Adapted from Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p. 26).

The original model identified two main empirical patterns as results of its application. However, it is essential to recognize that these observations were not part of the model; the authors regarded them as observations of its dynamics (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009, p. 1420; Johanson and Vahlne, 2006, p. 165). The first is the concept of "psychic distance," which entails that businesses tend to commence their expansion journey in nearby markets and gradually distance themselves both geographically and psychologically. Johanson and Vahlne described "psychic distance" as the aggregation of impeding aspects to the stream of information, and its comprehension, between the firm and the market to which it aims to expand (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p.24). According to the authors, these aspects include indicators such as "language, education, business practices, culture, and industrial development" (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, p.24). This distance not only impacts

the market chosen for the internationalization process, but also the entry mode utilized to enter that market. As time passes and firms acquire more information derived from direct experience, the influence that this distance has on the selection process decreases (Eriksson et al., 1997, p. 341). In terms of the "establishment chain", it consists of the observation that firms tend to adopt an approach of progressively higher investment and involvement when entering a new market: starting with rare shipment endeavours, moving to shipments through "representatives", eventually, developing into founding subsidiaries abroad, which then evolves into having their own production facilities (Andersen, 1993, p.210). In conclusion, the establishment chain implies a cumulative investment of resources in a foreign market, as well as the leveraging of higher-risk penetration approaches, as the firm increases its information regarding the market, due to a decrease in liability perception (Bruneel et al., 2010, p. 166).

2.2.3 The Uppsala Model considering the Network Perspective

Due to the new business research insights the IMP Project provided regarding networks and their importance, as discussed in the first section of the Theoretical Background, the Uppsala model was adapted to consider this new notion, which revolutionized the international business research field.

Based on the network perspective, the model changed its individual firm view inserted within a market, leveraging the new perspective of a business integrated within a network web, which includes several types of links and connections, and of various natures. For example, those links may be with "customers, distributors, suppliers, competitors and government", amongst several other examples of relevant stakeholders (Chetty & Holm, 2000, p.80). Secondly, as stated by the founding authors of the model in a later publication, the new model rethought the original model's focus on the "focal firm", exploring solely the effects and variables of the model in relation to it (Johansson & Vahlne,

2006, p. 166). Furthermore, the new model discerns that the internationalization process happens due to an exchange and interaction between, at a minimum, two collaborators (Johansson & Vahlne, 2006, p.166).

For a better understanding of the Network perspective view that determined the revised model, it explains internationalization as a process by which a business creates, builds, and nurtures relationships with other players embedded in networks abroad (Hood & Vahlne, 2013, p. 296). This endeavour begins by taking the form of an international expansion, where a firm builds its network position within a foreign network of links (Hood & Vahlne, 2013, p. 296). This normally evolves into further improvement and augmentation of the position within the network, while progressively increasing its investment in resources within the network it has established (Hood & Vahlne, 2013, p. 296). Finally, the firm reaches an integration state through the expansion of its net links by leveraging multiple positions within the foreign reality (Hood & Vahlne, 2013, p. 296).

As the revised Uppsala model adheres to previous beliefs, the internationalization process is now reliant on networks, with consequential adjustments to its variables and concepts. On the 2009 model, the main issue which aimed to be mitigated on the original version – shortage of market information and understanding, which was address as the “liability of foreignness” – is replaced by the “liability of outsidership”, referring to the issue of lacking the establishment of a relevant network position within the intended network (Forsgren, 2016, p.1136). Therefore, the new goal of the internationalization process is to modify a firm’s outsider status within a relevant network or networks, and replace it with an insider role and position, which are crucial for optimizing mutual learning, boosting confidence, and detecting potential opportunities (Forsgren, 2016, p. 1136).

As a result of the shift above, the updated variables of the model are as follows:
The state variable “market commitment” is replaced by "network position”, which manifests the status of the role the firm plays within the relevant network (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). On the other hand, the state variable “market knowledge” is

refocused, highlighting a specific part of the knowledge notion, opportunities, coming to the new updated variable “opportunity recognition” (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). Therefore, opportunities are addressed, on the 2009 model, as the principal knowledge concept, being the primary fuel of the new internationalization process (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). Furthermore, relationships are the most important generators of opportunities (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). Moreover, is it important to note that, although opportunities are the central knowledge aspect addressed by the model, the authors point out that there are different aspects of knowledge which are also relevant, namely, “needs, capabilities, strategies, and networks of directly or indirectly related firms in their institutional contexts.” (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424).

The original model’s change variable, “current activities,” was adjusted to reflect the more specific and concrete nature of the activities being explored, shifting to the new change variable, “learning, creating and trust-building.” (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). That is, while the current activities considered on the 1977 model were more related to the day-to-day tasks and operations, on the revisited version, the focus is on mutual learning, which, as explained by the authors, is a more comprehensive concept than the experimental learning originally considered (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). However, they emphasize that experimental learning remains the most crucial form of learning (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). In addition to this first renewed change variable, the 2009 model also introduced the “relationship-commitment decisions”, in place of the previous “commitment decisions” (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). This change makes the variable more congruent with the scope of the revisited model, showcasing a network view of investment choices (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). Essentially, relationships are now determined by their degree of intel, confidence, and investment, which can be spread in different measures between the counterparts (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424). However, they should primarily serve as a source of mutually beneficial outputs and leverage for network positions (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424).

The cyclical dynamic showcased in the new model is one where a firm capitalizes on its present “network position” at a certain point in time to collaborate with its counterpart(s) in aggregating mutual learning, creating value, and building trust (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, pp. 1424-1425). Through this process, they may identify new opportunities within the relationship, which influence their investment choices in the relationship (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, pp. 1424-1425). That is, if they intend to further commit to a certain relationship or if it is best to retract their investment in that relationship, considering the opportunities that they present (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, pp. 1424 - 1425). Moreover, the form of commitment may manifest in several ways, for example, the time spent, resources allocated, and funds assigned, among others (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, pp. 1424-1425). The decision to further commit generally takes place when the beneficial outputs of that choice surpass the possible loss of commitment, encompassing a certain degree of risk involved (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, pp. 1424-1425). This choice will then provide them with a new network position, in which they must undergo the cycle all over again (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, pp. 1424-1425). If they choose to progressively increase their commitment to a certain “relevant” network, they will become increasingly embedded within that network, thereby mitigating their liability of outsidership and, thus, building on their insidership (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, pp. 1424-1425).

Below is presented a visual representation of what the 2009 Uppsala model entails:

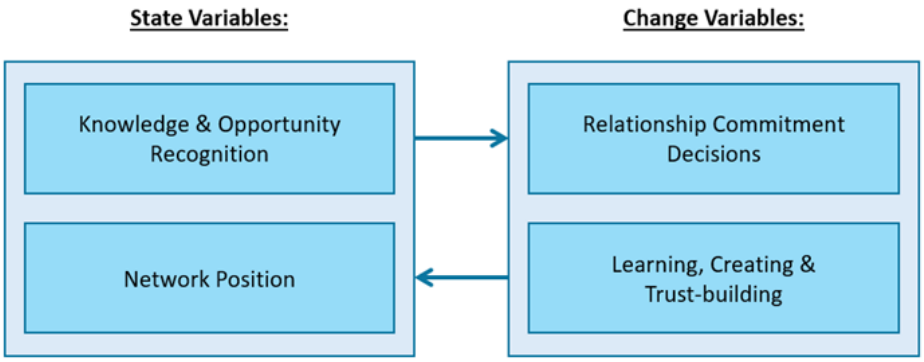

Figure 2. The business network internationalization process model (the 2009 version) (Adapted from Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1424).

Additionally, it becomes evident to the authors that the internationalization process no longer observes a stage-by-stage progress; on the contrary, several of the "stages" mentioned on the original establishment chain may coincide, in distinct order, or some of them may not even take place (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009, p. 1422). Furthermore, the manifestation of how they enter a relevant network within a foreign reality and the way in which they establish that position will depend on the opportunities that arise within the relationships that they have in their network, as opposed to the stage they find themselves on (Coviello & Munro, 1997, p. 378).

As previously mentioned, Johansson and Vahlne's (2009) revisited model is the foundation process of internationalization considered in this thesis, which places networks at the centre of this business development. Below, we will explore Hofstede's cultural framework, which also examines the differences in network dynamics and perceptions between various countries. One of the dimensions of this framework will serve as a moderator of the revisited Uppsala internationalization process.

2.3 Hofstede's Individualism versus Collectivism

2.3.1 Introducing Hofstede's Cross-Culture Dimensions

Several decades ago, Hofstede (1980) introduced his work on the distinctions between different cultures. Since its creation, this work and its subsequent updates have been an inspiration for a significant number of research studies worldwide (Taras et al., 2010, p. 405). In his work, Hofstede (1980, p. 13) explained culture as a shared cognitive programming – shared understandings – that reveal themselves in differences between individuals, which are integrated in distinct human aggregations. More concretely, these may be revealed in different values, but also in other aspects such as idols or customs (Hofstede, 1980, pp. 19-20). Furthermore, Hofstede explains culture as the shared aspects of an aggregation that impact its reaction to the environment (Hofstede, 1980, p. 21). His culture-driven hypothesis was formulated based on over one hundred thousand questionnaires, completed by collaborators from several IBM subsidiaries with residency in over 70 countries (Hofstede, 2001, p. 14). Therefore, this extensive amount of data gave him a strong foundation for a framework that still prevails nowadays (Taras et al., 2010, p. 406). In his work, he not only identified culture dimensions, but he also reached a system in which these dimensions could be quantitatively calculated (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017, p. 31). Culture dimensions are described as basic societal issues that all must endure; however, each society responds in a particular manner (Hofstede, 2001, pp. 92).

More concretely, Hofstede's (1980) framework introduces four dimensions:

- Power distance, which measures the level of acceptance and even presupposition showcased by the integrating individuals of a particular group towards hierarchical imbalance (Hofstede, 1980, pp. 88-93).
- Uncertainty avoidance, which indicates the group individuals' easiness and predisposition in handling ambiguous circumstances (Hofstede, 1980, p. 110).
- Masculinity/Femininity, which evaluates the level at which a group gives higher importance to concerning for other individuals, external assistance, commonality, and collaboration, which indicates femininity, as opposed to a larger focus on

accomplishments, positive results, prosperity, and competition, evidencing masculinity (Hofstede, 1980, pp. 176-177).

- Individualism/Collectivism, which explores the way a singular individual of an aggregation maneuvers the collectivity (Hofstede, 1980, p. 148).

Later, two additional dimensions were added, namely:

- Long-term/Short-term orientation, which indicates an urgent and present-driven mindset orientation of a group or a more endurance and persistence outlook towards "rewarding" and benefit collection (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018, p. 1473).
- Indulgence/Restraint, which reflects the degree of comfort with succumbing to one's desires and immediate fulfilment, in contrast to a more rule-focused and monitored view on collective management (Beugelsdijk et al., 2017, p. 37).

However, the present study will exclusively focus on the individualism versus collectivism dimension introduced by Hofstede, for the reasons stated in the thesis introduction, which will be further explored below. This is the most widely studied of Hofstede's culture indicators and is also perceived as the most reliable when prospecting group behaviors (Beugelsdijk & Welzen, 2018, p. 1474).

2.3.2 Individualism versus Collectivism Dimension

As previously mentioned, this indicator was first presented in Hofstede's original work on culture (1980). However, its definition has since been updated in his most recent work. More concretely, in his 2011 revisited view, he described individualism/collectivism as a communal dimension, which observes the extent to which the integrators of a society are embedded in the group (Hofstede, 2011, p. 11). The form in which Hofstede perceives it, individualism/collectivism is not a two-set option reality; contrarily, it is represented as a progressive scale in which nations are evaluated and placed into (Minkov et al., 2017, p. 387). This has been a source of criticism directed at the framework, as culture evolves over time and with societal development. However, in Beugelsdijk et al.'s (2015, p. 224) reflection on the validity of the original scores provided by Hofstede, the

authors concluded that, although countries have evolved into considerably more individualistic cultures, this was a phenomenon shared by the majority of countries. Therefore, although the nations' absolute culture scores changed, their relative positions have somewhat prevailed, evidencing that the "cultural distance" amongst the different nations has remained constant (Beugelsdijk et al, 2015, p. 224). Therefore, we may note that, although Hofstede's original scores may not be updated to reflect current reality quantitatively, they are still a relevant map for differentiating societies culturally.

Additionally, it is worth noting that, to be feasibly measured, this dimension does not encompass all the distinct cultures and societal realities within a single country (Minkov et al., 2017, p. 387). Contrastingly, it aims to shed light solely on the cultural correlations that are common to the majority of individuals within a country (Minkov et al., 2017, p. 387). Therefore, providing a macro perspective allows for conclusions to be drawn through generalization.

2.3.3 Individualism

An individualistic standpoint exists in cultures where the connections among integrating members are detached and loose, with the assumption that each individual lives by a self-interest and self-care perspective, extending that attitude towards their immediate relatives (Hofstede, 2011, p. 11; Hofstede, 1980, p. 149). More concretely, in these cultures, people are expected to function through a more self-governing and independent mindset, focused on their own accomplishments, with the dominance of the "I" perspective (Hofstede, 1980, p. 171; Hofstede, 2011, p. 11). Accordingly, individuals tend to be more dependent on unbiased entities and universal rules (universalism), which mitigates the constriction imposed by the extended family and the "kinship system" within collective societies (Hofstede, 1980, p. 165). In terms of action, these realities tend to be more rational, as opposed to ethical, being driven by personal benefits and volunteer involvement, rather than a social sense of obligation (Gladwin & Hofstede, 1981, p. 682). Moreover, they tend to be more liberal and permissive of variations from the aggregation

standards and individual initiative (Hofstede, 1980, p. 166). In conclusion, these characteristics indicate that individualistic countries, as previously referred to, have detached and deliberate social ties (Hofstede, 2011, p. 11). Economically, these types of societies tend to nurture a more capitalist economic reality, promoting self-growth encouragement and exponentiation, and rivalry (Hofstede, 1980, p. 169; Beugelsdijk et al., 2015, p. 230).

2.3.4 Collectivism

On the other hand, collectivist societies are described as environments where individuals are conjoined into robust, consolidated, and united groups, which commonly go beyond their immediate families and into an "extended family" consideration (Hofstede, 2011, p. 11; Hofstede, 1980, p. 149). Therefore, we move away from an "I" perspective into a "We" mindset, where the relationships within the group present a significantly high relevance, with great respect for the standards and obligations set by the aggregation, having a strong sense of responsibility towards them (Hofstede, 1980, p. 171; Hofstede, 2011, p.11). This attitude tends to promote and emphasise a spirit of deference and conformity to the community prospects, described by Hofstede (1980, p. 151) as "not losing face", in other words, which consists of a situation where an individual did not meet societal expectations. Within these extended communities, there is an expectation of mutual protection, in retribution for undeniable devotedness and loyalty, with strong resistance to external individuals and groups (Hofstede, 1980, p. 151; Minkov et al., 2017, p. 387). All the characteristics mentioned above demonstrate why collectivist countries have robust and tight social ties, namely, they have powerful links to the group and are heavily socially bound (Hofstede, 1980, p. 151; Brewer & Venaik, 2011, p. 438). Economically, contrary to the individualism view, societies tend not to cultivate a capitalist market reality, and people do not strive as much to pursue personal business success, believing that the economy should aim to maximize collective benefits (Beugelsdijk et al., 2015, p. 230).

2.3.5 The USA as an individualist society

According to Gladwin and Hofstede (1981, p. 682), the USA and Australia are the two countries that exhibit the highest evidence of individualism, with scores of 91 and 90, respectively. This score stems from their "calculative" perspective on reality, which prioritizes their individuality, as well as their independent and voluntary actions, as opposed to imposed loyalty expectations (Gladwin & Hofstede, 1981, p. 682). More concretely, people's relationships tend to be mutually beneficial, instead of morality or responsibility driven (Gladwin & Hofstede, 1981, p. 682).

Additionally, Brewer and Venaik (2011, p. 441) also argue that the higher display of individualism by more prosperous societies can be explained through Maslow's hierarchy of needs. That is, since richer countries can more easily fulfil their lower and middle-degree necessities, they are also able to focus on the superlative necessity of self-actualization, more specifically, to strive for their personal aspirations (Brewer & Venaik, 2011, p. 411). While poorer countries, such as Angola, have more difficulty fulfilling Maslow's base and middle-range needs, which reduces their ability to focus on self-actualization needs and individual interests, thereby detaching them from their communities (Brewer & Venaik, 2011, p. 411). Hence, poorer societies cause people to focus on the survival aspects of their existence, while richer countries, where survival needs are taken as guaranteed conditions, allow for an emphasis on higher-level and emancipatory needs (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018, p. 1470).

A practical example of the USA's individualism is one of its most famous staples, the "American Dream," which is a narrative commonly shared among members of society and even endorsed through various methods (Nelson & Shavitt, 2002, pp. 441-447). It is a philosophy that teaches individuals what to strive for in North America, the idea that anyone can stand out amongst the rest and achieve their ultimate idea of success, if they invest enough effort into it (Nelson & Shavitt, 2002, pp. 441-447). This ideal nurtures an environment of competition, where each member is on a cycle of self-enhancement,

driven by the “dream”, which is an equally attainable possibility for everyone (Nelson & Shavitt, 2002, pp. 441-447).

In his study, Imada (2012, p. 576) explored the topics highlighted in the stories contained in North American school workbooks, concluding that they accentuated matters related to self-discovery, pursuing one’s goals, and finding oneself. Therefore, we may infer that individualism is a mindset instilled in this culture from a young age and into adulthood. Moreover, many other media outlets emphasize this construct, such as entertainment content, including movies and series.

2.3.6 Angola (West Africa) as a collectivist society

According to the information available on Hofstede’s website (Geert Hofstede, n.d.), with all country scores evaluated by the framework available for download, we were able to determine that Angola, specifically, does not have an isolated score. However, West Africa, of which Angola is a part, is scored on its individualism/collectivism, totaling a 20 evaluation.

The collectivism prevalent in Angola is rooted in its African doctrine, which is centered on an aggregated view and an adjacent lifestyle (Oladipupo, 2022, pp. 2-6). This becomes even more apparent in rituals that are shared with western-individualistic cultures, such as marriage, where western cultures put emphasis on partner choice and the importance of the household family, while in African culture we can attest to many cases of marriage being a collectively driven choice, where the perception of family goes beyond the immediate, including extended families and villages (Oladipupo, 2022, pp. 2-6). According to Mbiti (n.d.), as stated by Oladipupo (2022, p. 6), in African customs, a single person does not have the capacity to exist autonomously; each person’s existence is made possible by those around them, those who came before them, and those who will come after; they stand as a piece of a complete group. This belief is evidenced by traditional expressions within African culture, which explain that the process of nurturing and developing a newborn child and all its life since then is a task and responsibility of its

village (Oladipupo, 2022, pp. 2-6). The author further elaborates on this by stating that, under an African perspective of society, “Without community there is no individual and without individual there is no community.”, making the interdependence and strength of social ties unquestionable (Oladipupo, 2022, pp. 2-6).

In their research, Asamoah and Yeboah-Assiamah (2019, p. 310) explain the Ubuntu mentality experienced in Africa, which resumes the meaningful pillars that guide the individuals’ attitudes, namely, being grounded as humans, mindfulness, reverence, supportiveness, communal sharing, and kindness, all of which strive to promote a positive group energy. Although Ubuntu is one of the names given to this form of viewing life within a community, it is present in several regions within the African continent, under various nomenclatures (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019, p. 308).

Concerning Angola, Silva and Caetano (2015, p. 166) found in their research that aggregational collectivism was amongst the two most prominent cultural behaviors, meaning it is a reality in Angola’s daily life. The researchers also mention that these close-knit ties were essential foundations that assisted individuals in overcoming turbulent times, such as warfare conflicts, uncertainty, fast-paced development, and large simultaneous movements of people outside of the country (Silva & Caetano, 2015, p. 170). Furthermore, the authors (Silva & Caetano, 2015, p. 166) identified the significant relevance of institutional collectivism. More specifically, Angola held the ninth-highest position among sixty-two countries considered in Silva and Caetano’s study (2015, p. 177), indicating a pronounced encouragement passed on by institutions for members of society to strive for communal aspirations, rather than individual accomplishments.

2.3.7 Individualism versus Collectivism - Comparative Summary

To summarize, the main differences between an individualistic and collectivistic culture are:

Table 1. Summary of the characteristics of individualistic and collectivistic societies

	Individualistic Society	Collectivist Society
Group dependency	Autonomy from the group and a focus on "I" (Hofstede, 1980, p. 171)	Dependency and strong embeddedness in the group and a focus on "We" (Hofstede, 1980, p. 171; Hofstede, 2011, p. 11)
Family scope	Immediate family (Hofstede, 1980, p. 172)	Consideration for the extended family (Hofstede, 1980, p. 172)
Social ties	Loose and detached relatives (Hofstede, 2011, p. 11; Hofstede, 1980, p. 149)	Strong and tight social ties (Hofstede, 1980, p. 151; Brewer & Venaik, 2011, p. 438)
Loyalty	Rational, as opposed to ethical, being driven by personal benefits and volunteer action, instead of a social sense of obligation (Gladwin & Hofstede, 1981, p. 682)	Expectation of mutual protection, in retribution for undeniable devotedness and loyalty, with strong resistance to external individuals and groups (Hofstede, 1980, p. 151; Minkov et al., 2017, p. 387)
Societal Standards	More liberal and permissive of variations from the aggregation standards (Hofstede, 1980, p. 166)	Deference and conformity to the community prospects Hofstede (Hofstede, 1980, p. 151)
Relation to institutions	More dependent on unbiased entities and universal rules (Hofstede, 1980, p. 165)	Respect for the norms and obligations set by the aggregation, having a strong sense of responsibility towards them (Hofstede, 1980, p. 151)
Economic landscape	More capitalist economic reality, promoting self-growth, exponentiation, and rivalry	Non-capitalistic society with the belief that the economy should

	(Hofstede, 1980, p. 169; Beugelsdijk et al., 2015, p. 230)	aim to maximize collective benefits (Beugelsdijk et al., 2015, p. 230)

Furthermore, since the individualism/collectivism dimension reveals the characteristics by which an actor perceives the collective group, we can infer that it also provides a map of how the dynamics of an aggregated network of a given country operate. Therefore, we may assume that it provides us with attributes that will influence the process of transitioning from an outsider position to an insider position within a relevant society, thereby internationalizing. This is why this thesis takes into consideration the individualism/collectivism of the host country, since it demonstrates how the network dynamics within a country work, through the interdependence of the individual and the group, through the shared sense of loyalty and, therefore, aversion to outsiders, and through the type of links that exist within a society.

In the next section of the paper, we will address Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) view on the speed of internationalization and its influencing forces, with a focus on the network dimension of the study.

2.4 Post-entry internationalization Speed

Literature addresses various forms of internationalization speed. Chetty et al. (2014, p. 634) describe internationalization speed as the average ratio between the number of years since a company was founded and the status of its internationalization. Therefore, this view showcases speed as an interaction between the conquered distance and the temporal framework, indicating that time and distance are the main determinants (Chetty et al., 2014, p. 634). This form of internationalization speed focuses on the period

preceding internationalization and its earliness (Oliveira & Johanson, 2021, p. 1). However, the literature also mentions another perspective on internationalization speed, which highlights the "post-entry internationalization speed" (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021, p. 1). As previously mentioned in the thesis, post-entry rapidness is defined as the pace at which businesses achieve their goals after arriving to a foreign market (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021, p. 1). Furthermore, explained by Oliveira and Johanson (2021, p. 1), internationalization speed, with a post-entry perspective, may be defined as the degree and pace of alterations that happen during the internationalization process across a period of time. These alterations may refer to the business's degree of investment in the market abroad, potential shifts in sales, and the cumulative number of markets it is addressing (Oliveira & Johanson, 2021, p. 1). This form of international speed enables the assessment of relevant components of internationalization, including results, outputs, accomplishments, and performance (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021, p. 1).

In terms of the measurement of the rapidness of a post-entry internationalization, the factors that may be considered are the share represented by the sales abroad in relation to the totality of the sales of the company (Sullivan, 1994, p. 331) and the rate of resources allocated abroad in comparison to the total resources (Sullivan, 1994, p. 331). These claims by Sullivan (1994) were later strengthened by other studies, which reemphasized his claims and based their studies on his measures, for example, Oliveira and Johanson (2021, p. 4) and Casillas and Acedo (2013, p. 20) named it "changes in international commercial intensity" and an increase of resource investment abroad. Furthermore, regarding sales development, the average international growth rate ranges at 2% per year; however, businesses with slow internationalization typically show an annual increase of under 1%, while rapid internationalization firms may display a foreign sales increase of up to 25% (Hilmersson & Johanson, 2016, p. 88). Additionally, concerning resource allocation, firms that are quickly investing their assets in markets abroad present an average yearly increase of 7%, while firms with more moderate internationalization post-entry present an added commitment that is closer to 0% (Hilmersson & Johanson, 2016, p. 88).

When pondering the first-entry internationalization speed, Oviatt and McDougall (2005, p. 538) realized that, although much research had showcased an apparent attentiveness regarding new ventures and their expansion processes, there was a research gap on the factors that impact their rapid expansions. Therefore, the authors proposed a theory aimed at understanding the influential forces that conditioned the rapidness, or lack thereof, of a firm's internationalization process (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, p. 538). This internationalization speed model identified four categories of forces that affected the entrepreneurial opportunity, which, according to the authors, was the initiator of the whole process (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-543). More concretely, these forces could be enabling, motivating, mediating, or moderating. Technology and its advancement were perceived as the enabling factor, which made quick expansion attainable (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-543). Competition was described as the motivating force, which drove firms to be more agile in their expansion processes, so their chances would not be appropriated by other players competing, or aiming to compete, within the same market they prospected (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-543). Entrepreneurial actor perceptions were identified as a mediating force, since the attributes and views of the entrepreneur constrained the way the opportunity presented was perceived and enacted (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-543). Finally, there were two forms of moderating forces: knowledge, which, depending on its typology and intensity, can promote faster progress in internationalization, and networks, which, inspired by the Revisited Uppsala Model, are explained as forces that also impact the process's speed (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-543).

Although Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) focus is on the earliness of internationalization, as presented below, the study highlights the importance of network characteristics in promoting the earliness of internationalization (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). More concretely, the study highlights the relevance of network characteristics in gathering exclusive information and being exposed to an optimized number of opportunities, which promotes quickness (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). However, according

to the revised Uppsala Model (2009), opportunity recognition and learning, as well as trust and value creation, are aspects that influence the overall internationalization process, leading to insidership, even after the initial entry. Considering their correlations, we can infer that the concepts studied by Oviatt and McDougall (2005) remain relevant even after the company has entered a foreign country. Below, we will further explore Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) findings regarding network characteristics as a key influencing factor of international speed.

As previously mentioned, Oviatt and McDougall (2005) focus on the speed of first-entry internationalization; however, for the purpose of the current study, we will focus on the moderating influence of networks on the speed of international expansion, always considering them from a post-entry internationalization lens. The authors attest that following an opportunity identification, a recognition of the technology that will make the expansion possible, and the realization of the opponents that will encourage the process, a firm will aim to leverage the relationships established within its network to understand how fast it can expand and where (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). Furthermore, the model presents three factors regarding networks that influence rapidness, namely, size, density, and tie strength (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). The network size's influence on internationalization speed is explained as follows: the potential for rapid internationalization is as high as the number of direct or indirect links a firm has within a prospective market abroad (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545).

Tie strength addresses two spectrums: weak and strong ties (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). Weak ties are characterized as cordial relationships with other stakeholders, which are more business-driven, as opposed to sentimental (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). Due to their characteristics, a firm can have a larger number of weak ties, considering they require low commitment and maintenance efforts (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). These forms of ties are relevant since they present themselves as significant sources of knowledge, leveraging learning opportunities (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). The authors give special emphasis to a specific profile of

weak ties, which are brokers – actors that connect two other players, which would otherwise not be connected (indirect ties) –, that are a powerful medium to gain access to suppliers or other relevant stakeholders, within a foreign market, that would be interested in conducting business opportunities with (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). On the other hand, strong ties are described as long-term and sentimental relationships that are significantly reliant on confidence, trust, dependability, and a willingness to compromise for their endurance (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). Consequently, these forms of links require a vast commitment and maintenance effort to be preserved, making it impossible for a firm to sustain a large number of these types of links due to limited resources (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545).

Finally, the network density presents two opposites of a spectrum, dense or sparse networks (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). Dispersed networks are environments where, commonly, the links a firm is attached to within an atmosphere are not connected, mitigating redundancy (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). However, dense networks are environments where the links a firm has are, generally, also connected amongst themselves, creating redundancy (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). Consequently, the authors explain that redundant ties are less effective in producing new and exclusive knowledge (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). Nevertheless, dense networks provide a larger number of opportunities for various actors to engage, which helps promote a firm's reputation more quickly and enables stronger trust-building among actors (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). Accordingly, the authors state that the most effective way to expand into foreign markets is through sparse networks; however, they acknowledge that dense networks are also moderately efficient when expanding a firm across borders, although they tend to take more time (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 541-545). In conclusion, sparse networks offer significant information, knowledge, and learning benefits for a firm, while dense networks are more relevant in settings where trust and mutuality are highly valued (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005, pp. 545-546).

In summary, the present work considers Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) beliefs and applies them to post-entry internationalization speed. By doing this, the thesis aims to investigate whether the relationship between tie strength and network density, as well as the rapidness of internationalization, also holds true within a post-entry international development context.

2.4.1 Internationalization Speed Model, considering the Individualism/Collectivism dimension

Considering the characteristics attributed to an individualistic society, where individuals are not strongly influenced by the group and notions such as long-term loyalty are not relevant, we may affirm that, probably, in individualistic internationalization host countries, relationships tend to have weak ties – cordial and business-driven, less focused on deep trust and loyalty. Moreover, due to their independence, rationality, and personal benefit-driven mentality of individualistic countries, we may infer that in these types of societies, there is a larger potential for the existence of sparse network structures, with less redundancy.

On the other hand, due to their attributes, we may infer that collectivistic societies will tend to present a greater number of strong ties. Considering their reliance on factors such as loyalty, conformity to the group's norms and benefits, valuing respect and mutual protection, and showcasing a strong resistance to external individuals and groups, it is expected that only strong ties will enable firms to transition from an outsider position to an insider network position. Moreover, we can deduce that these societal settings will foster dense networks, as the group dynamic is so tight and interconnected, with values such as the extended family and deep community integration.

Finally, considering that individualistic societies are expected to foster weak ties, which, according to Oviatt and McDougall (2005), present less redundancy and an increased number of occasions for learning and opportunity creation, the thesis author expects the post-entry internationalization speed to be higher. In other words, the author

expects individualistic societies to produce more efficient internationalization post-entry. Contrastingly, collectivistic countries are expected to generate strong ties, which, according to Oviatt and McDougall (2005), create a more moderate internationalization speed. The thesis author expects these types of countries to contribute to a more moderate speed of post-entry internationalization as well.

3 Framework

Considering all the relevant aspects and factors of the theories previously shared, the present framework was created as a summary. The framework shows that the internationalization process is network-driven, as demonstrated by the revisited Uppsala Model, through building an insidership and relevant position within the network of the new market. However, the relevant network, which is being constructed towards internationalization, has characteristics such as size, density, and tie strength. In other words, and as visually evidenced below by a dotted arrow, the individualism/collectivism of the host countries has an indirect impact on the network characteristics and the dynamic of the internationalization process. Consequently, the relationship between the previous factors has a direct impact (visually represented through a straight line) on the speed at which internationalization occurs. Below, a visual representation of the framework described is presented.

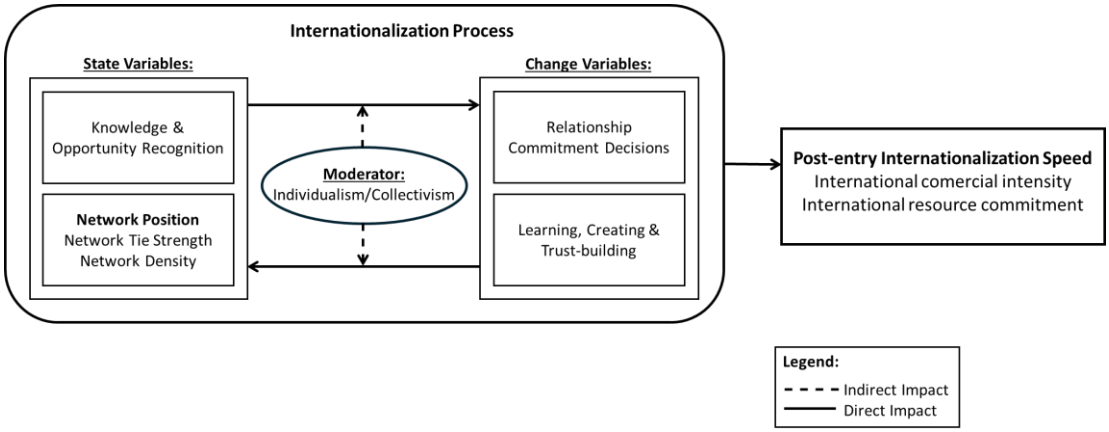

Figure 3. Theoretical Framework

4 Methodology

The present chapter aims to explain in detail the choices in terms of the study's methodology, namely, concerning the philosophical approach, research analysis, the selection of the interviewees, the methods employed in collecting research data and its sampling, as well as the method of assessment of the data and its validity and reliability.

4.1 Philosophical and Research Approach

4.1.1 Philosophical approach

Drawing on Saunders et al. (2007, p. 102), we can leverage three distinct perspectives of the philosophical approach in a study: its epistemology, ontology, and axiology. Epistemology focuses on the knowledge deemed suitable in a particular subject or area of study, which can be positioned within three principles: positivism, realism, and interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 102). Ontology addresses the "nature of reality" (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 108) and may be approached with three different views: objectivism, subjectivism, and pragmatism. Axiology concerns itself with the values and their role within the research (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 110).

Regarding Epistemology, the study adopts interpretivism, which underlines the importance of comprehending individuals and their different subjective understandings and experiences, which are influenced by their social and cultural realities (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 106-107). Saunders et al. (2007, pp. 106-107) highlight the significance of addressing the social agent integrated within a determined social context for research within the field of business and management. Accordingly, concerning ontology, the study adopts a subjective perspective, which posits that social occurrences are a consequence of the views, interpretations, and choices of social agents (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 108). These philosophical choices were undertaken in consideration of the subject of the current thesis, which addresses concepts related to culture and networks, as these

are not linear subjects; instead, they are more subjective and interpretation-driven notions. Furthermore, the selection is also supported by the unpredictability of the study's subjects, such as networks, culture, and internationalization, considering they may all vary within distinct environments and according to different individuals' perspectives and interpretations.

4.1.2 Research approach

Regarding the research approach, as noted by Saunders et al. (2007, p. 117), a study may adopt one of two different directions: either deductive or inductive. In the deduction approach, a hypothesis is formulated according to the theoretical research; afterwards, this hypothesis is tested through certain variables, investigated, and confirmed or refuted as a result of its discoveries (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 117). Contrastingly, in the induction approach, the research starts by collecting the data and later, attending to the data collected, a theory or framework is built (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 118). However, the authors also address an alternative which implements both deduction and induction, depending on the subject being explored by the work (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 119-121).

Considering the topic of the current thesis, the study employs a deductive approach, as it begins by conducting theoretical research to formulate a framework that guides the rest of the paper, including its data collection and analysis choices. This method was considered more suitable for the current study, as it would more adequately address the research question through a priori theoretical research, allowing for a deeper understanding of the topics and their potential correlations, which could later be tested. It is also important to note that the present thesis used an online tool to proofread the study's writing.

4.2 Data collection and sampling

In terms of data collection methods, the present work employed a comparative strategy involving two case studies, conducted through semi-structured interviews, complemented by written content categorized as secondary data.

Since the current thesis aims to understand the impact of collectivism and individualism of the host countries on the network characteristics and on the post-entry speed of internationalization, it becomes crucial to gather perspectives from more than one case, which, at least, illustrate the reality of internationalization in a collectivistic country and an individualistic country. Furthermore, since the present thesis employs empirical analysis, it enhances the appropriability of a multi-case study approach (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 140). This approach demonstrates that data will be collected from more than one case study, as a case study is a procedure where empirical analysis is undertaken to examine a particular event in a real-life context, by extracting knowledge from different examples (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 139). The multi-case study approach was selected because it provides a detailed perspective on the process of internationalization and its various variables, which may result in more accurate findings and discoveries when comparing distinct examples, as in this case, different cultural realities. Therefore, the fact that the research addresses two case studies from different companies, which have internationalized into different individualistic/collectivistic realities, allows the thesis's framework to be more adequately tested.

Moreover, considering the exploratory nature of the research question, which aims to understand the impact of the collectivism/individualism of the host country on network characteristics and post-entry internationalization speed, the chosen data collection method was semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 312). These present themselves as non-standardized methods and they are considered semi-structured since they imply there is a prepared set of questions and subjects to address, however, it is adequate for possible modifications to be made amongst different interviews, for instance, specific questions might be remove or added according to the context and direct

of the interview (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 148). Regarding the types of questions raised during the interviews, they were open-ended to provide the interviewees with the freedom to respond as they considered suitable (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 368). The interview form was the most pertinent method of collecting data, as the thesis presents itself as qualitative research, for which this form of interview is the most suitable manner of data collection.

As a complementary form of data collection, the work employed secondary data, which may consist of commonly written files, such as news articles, company documentation, magazines, and other examples (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 248). Typically, this data complements the primary data collection (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 248). Within the current thesis, the primary secondary data sources consisted of news articles about the companies, as well as interviews and reports found on their respective websites.

To be part of the research, firms had to comply with several relevant criteria established by the thesis author. First, firms must have had at least one experience with internationalization. Second, one of the firms must have internationalized to an individualistic society, and the other must have internationalized to a collectivistic country. Third, both firms must have demonstrated some form of development and expansion within the host country post-entry. These criteria were useful in narrowing the number of companies that would be able to illustrate the relationship between individualism and collectivism and the networking and speed of post-entry internationalization.

The research includes two small to medium-sized enterprises that have internationalized, one to an individualistic country and another to a collectivistic country and have both showcased success in their internationalization by displaying progress in their international development. The first firm is a startup that has internationalized to the USA and shows significant retail expansion in the few years it has been there. The second is a more traditional company which has an extensive legacy and has internationalized to Angola almost 30 years ago. The long duration of their internationalization shows the

sustainability of the process, and the company's articles describe it as a successful endeavour.

To undertake the chosen methods, the thesis author began by contacting two firms that had internationalized, one to an individualistic country and the other to a collectivistic country. Since the thesis author had already established relations within one of the companies, Delta, the first contact was made through a phone call to understand the viability of collaborating on the research and the availability to interview more than one individual from the firm. Moreover, considering the thesis author has previously worked with Delta's venture capital department, Delta Ventures, which has a strong partnership with a company that has internationalized in the USA, the phone call also served as an initial approach to understand the viability of contacting Swee to contribute to the research. Considering that the conclusion of the phone call was that it would make sense for both companies to contribute to the thesis's research question, the contacts of the pertinent interviewees for the data collection were exchanged. Afterwards, with the knowledge of Delta's initial contact, all interviewees from both Swee and Delta were contacted via email with an explanation and summary of the thesis's theoretical framework, as well as an invitation to schedule a meeting. In total, as displayed in Table 2, the study conducted two semi-structured interviews with Directors of different business areas from Delta and one interview with one of Swee's co-founders. The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour. The roles of the interviewees are deemed as relevant since they showcase the expertise and extensive knowledge of the individuals regarding the companies and their internationalization processes.

Table 2. Interviewees and their respective companies, roles, and name abbreviations.

Interviewee	Company	Role	Abbreviation
Natanael Baptista	Delta Cafés	Organised Trade Director	N.B.
José Beato	Delta Cafés	General Manager International Markets	J.B.
Tiago Rebelo	Swee	Co-Founder	T.R.

In terms of the outputs of the data collection, they are summarized in the table below.

Table 3. Dates, duration, and transcript pages of the interviews.

Interviewee	Interview Date	Interview Duration (min.)	Transcript Pages
Natanael Baptista	16/10/2025	45:57	9 pages
José Beato	22/10/2025	43:04	12 pages
Tiago Rebelo	16/10/2025	52:48	9 pages

As previously mentioned, the sources of secondary data were mainly the companies' official websites and blogs, as well as news articles written through interviews with relevant company members. These sources were relevant in attaining additional information regarding the companies and their internationalization standpoints.

4.3 Data analysis

As previously mentioned, the data analysis method was qualitative, which is heavily dependent on the author's handling of the collected data. As explained by Saunders et al. (2007, p. 474), the data analysis procedure starts with the transcription of the interviews. In this case, the thesis author utilized Microsoft Teams' AI-powered transcription tool, with the interviewees' authorization, as a basis for the transcription. However, since the AI transcription results are not entirely accurate, all the interview transcriptions were revised and corrected by the author to ensure that the information was accurate and coherent with the reality of the interview. When assessing qualitative data sourced from semi-structured interviews, it is essential to understand that the information will generally be non-standardized and based on words. Therefore, the next step in the data analysis procedure is to categorize (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 479-480). This step of the process aims to establish and organize the collected information into various categories pertinent to the research, based on the theoretical background and the variables of the

theoretical framework (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 479). Within the present thesis and attending to the current analysis methods, the author utilized a tool which allowed for the categorization of the data collected in the various interviews, according to relevant topics like network characteristics like tie strength and density, internationalization sales, internationalization resources, amongst others, which were established according to what was previously studied on the theoretical section and considering the objectives of the study. Throughout this practical endeavor, the author also implemented Saunders et al.'s (2007, p. 482) process of identifying relationships and correlations among the data. Finally, the last step of the data analysis process is a dynamic stage of pattern matching to reach conclusions concerning the theoretical framework (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 489). These patterns, which are discovered amongst the data collected and categorized, are what build the potential confirmation or refutation of the framework (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 489). The authors' outputs of the last two stages mentioned, namely, the relationship identification and pattern matching to find conclusions, are presented in the following sections of the work.

4.4 Reliability and Validity

Validity and reliability intend to reduce as much as possible the potential doubt regarding the study, in order to increase its trustworthiness and applicability (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149). Furthermore, these dimensions aim to guarantee that the methods and procedures of the study are ethical (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149).

Reliability refers to the likelihood that the selected methods and analysis approaches will provide cohesive discoveries and conclusions, allowing for the potential repeatability of the information (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149). Nonetheless, research reliability is associated with four main challenges. The first challenge is participant error, which is related to the volatility of human nature and the fact that, within distinct events and moments, the same individual may provide different data for collection (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149). The second challenge is participant bias, which refers to the fact that interviewees may provide responses conditioned by others' expectations, omitting or modifying their

honest views (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149). The third challenge is the potential observer error, which is influenced by the choice of words and interview formulation, and may condition the answers provided (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149). This can be mitigated by an adequately structured and prepared interview script (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 149). The fourth challenge is potential observer bias, considering that the conclusions obtained by the observer are subjective and may vary, which can result in biased interpretations (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 149-145). To mitigate these challenges, the topics addressed in the interview were provided to the interviewees beforehand, the interviewees chose if they would prefer to keep their opinion anonymous or not, as well as if they wanted to keep the company names anonymous or not, both the interviewer and interview-ee agreed to a suitable timing for the inquiry to reduce time pressures, the sessions were held through a platform, Microsoft Teams, which was familiar to all the individuals involved, and the interviews were conducted on the interviewees' native language, amongst others. Regarding participant bias, this challenge was overcome by the fact that all the interviewees held relevant roles within their companies, which gave them the liberty to express their honest opinions without being constrained. Furthermore, all the interviewees were experts in their respective areas, which provided them the authority to address the subjects. In terms of potential observer error and bias, considering that the entire study was conducted and interpreted by the sole author, although this fact increases the coherence of the work, it may also reduce its reliability, as it does not address any additional perspectives. However, it is relevant to note that, since the data is based on the interviewees' views and interpretations regarding the discussed themes, and the analysis relies on the researcher's interpretations and perceptions, it is not possible to eliminate the potential bias and errors from both parties entirely.

Validity refers to the assessment of whether there is a causal interaction among the variables considered within the study, and if their subsequent findings reflect what they aim to (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 150). The challenges associated with this re-search aspect are history and events, testing, instrumentation or related benefits, the chance of participants withdrawing from the study, maturation of events and conditions, and potential

ambiguity regarding the orientation of the causal relationship, which might negatively impact the findings and the conclusions extracted from the work (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 150-151). An aspect that endorses the trustworthiness of the study is the degree to which it may be generalized into diverse contexts (external validity) (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 151). The manner in which the study mitigated its conclusions' biasedness and promoted their generalization potential was the fact that the information was extracted from various sources and through the employment of a multi-case approach, making the data collected based on two different companies, contexts, necessities, and goals, amongst other variables (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 140). Since the interviewees and case companies were all from the same country, Portugal, this may limit the generalization of the research. Moreover, since the interviewees and case companies both work within the same industry —food and beverages —this may also limit the generalizability of the study. However, since the research methods employed are coherent and aligned with the evaluation and analysis of the proposed research question of the thesis, we may consider that there is validity in the conclusions drawn.

5 Preliminary Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings derived from the collected data. Furthermore, the current section presents a discussion relating each finding to the literature review. More concretely, the two internationalization cases will be presented in six sections: background, internationalization process, influence of individualism/collectivism on network characteristics, and, finally, the impact of network characteristics on post-entry internationalization speed. Each section was written based on the information gathered from interviews conducted with individuals representing each organization. However, the information has also been complemented by data collected from the companies' websites, as well as a few news articles.

5.1 Case Study 1: Swee

5.1.1 Background

Swee is a Portuguese vegan ice-cream brand, founded in 2020 by Tiago Rebelo (T.R.) and Diogo Valente. The company sets itself apart due to its promise of a 90% sugar reduction on its recipes and products, aiming to expand access to a healthy lifestyle to everyday consumers. Although the company was founded in 2020, its products were first introduced to consumers in 2021. After less than a year into their business launch, they were already present in over 500 sales points in Portugal. Within their first year, the startup won the Portuguese acceleration program "From Start-to-Table", which helped jump-start their business and connected them to Delta's venture capital department, Delta Ventures, birthing the partnership that stands to this day. (Marmé, 2022; Delta, n.d.; Delta Ventures, n.d.)

5.1.2 Internationalization process to the USA

As described by the co-founder, T.R., during its first two years, the company was mainly focused on perfecting its product, as well as establishing its presence on relevant supermarket chains in Portugal. By 2023, having accomplished these two goals, the next step was to look outward, while continuing to build their brand in Portugal (T.R., 2025).

The interviewee stated that, due to their product's characteristics, the choice could go either way: to explore Europe or look overseas to the USA (T.R., 2025). However, factors such as language barriers, legal complexities, and the need to adapt their strategies for each European country were overshadowed by the higher potential buyer pool - due to the country's large size and significant population - and the opportunity of having access to these customers through a homogeneous supply chain and strategy, provided by the EUA (T.R., 2025). More concretely, this single-country internationalization offered a significantly larger consumer market, considering the viability of undertaking such efforts given their limited human resources (T.R., 2025). Furthermore, it is also a suitable fit in terms of market demand for low sugar and vegan solutions (T.R., 2025).

The internationalization to the USA began through an opportunity driven by their close relationship with Portugal Foods, a Portuguese institution that helps Portuguese food and beverage (F&B) brands internationalize (T.R., 2025). Due to their relationship, the institution offered Swee the opportunity to attend one of Portugal Food's partners' thematic weeks in Texas, which was dedicated to Portuguese food and beverage products and cuisine (T.R., 2025). Although this was meant to be a two-week-long connection with the American retailer, with no strings attached, Swee's founders perceived it as their big chance to enter this market (T.R., 2025). Therefore, once they met the person responsible for the chain, they negotiated a deal (T.R., 2025). If they sold all the orders bought by the American retailer within the two weeks they were there, the retailer would introduce Swee's products into their store portfolios (T.R., 2025). Having achieved this goal, this marked the official launch of Swee ice cream within North American stores (T.R., 2025).

After the first entry into the US market, the startup continued to intentionally utilize networks to internationalize in the US market and build a favorable position (T.R., 2025). According to the interviewee, they leveraged networks intentionally in three primary forms:

- By being present in three business fairs per year, in different regions of the USA (T.R., 2025). They utilized business fares as a network shortcut to invaluable contacts, which are typically difficult to access (T.R., 2025). This was their way of interacting with all the key retail stakeholders they required (T.R., 2025). Furthermore, it was a strategy that also allowed them to ensure these crucial connections first tasted their product in adequate condition (T.R., 2025). Moreover, business fares also connected them to local service providers, which were essential to their operations within this market (T.R., 2025).
- By being integrated on startup incubators, which allowed them to meet a significant network of fellow founders – sharing experiences, contacts, and other know-how -, and to connect with the incubators' partners, which were relevant players in the USA market (T.R., 2025).
- By establishing relations with brokers, in this case two brokers (one on each coast, East and West), which not only helped them in this process due to their know-how and deep understanding of the market, but also served as a vital bridge between the startup and relevant stakeholders (T.R., 2025).

Through this description of the start of the internationalization process, it becomes evident the role of the network position and respective links that Swee had established in Portugal. More concretely, through this network, they recognized a valuable opportunity that significantly impacted future network decisions and, consequently, their network position. This link in Portugal became their entry ticket into a relevant network position within the North American market, which was later fortified by their following network decisions.

5.2 Case Study 2: Delta

5.2.1 Background

Delta Cafés, also known as the Nabeiro Group, is a coffee company founded in Portugal by Mr. Rui Nabeiro in 1961 (Grupo Nabeiro, n.d.). Currently, aside from being the roasted coffee leaders in the Portuguese market for over two decades (Delta Cafés, n.d.), they also have direct operations in seven countries and indirect operations in an additional seven countries (N.B., 2025). The company was founded through the acquisition by Sr. Rui Nabeiro of a shipload of Angolan coffee, immediately after the country declared independence (J.B., 2025). Due to the timing of the acquisition and Angola's recent declaration of independence from Portugal, no other Portuguese brand had stock of coffee to commercialize, as all the coffee in Portugal at the time was sourced from Angola (J.B., 2025). Considering that no other company offered coffee, this came as a significant advantage for Delta Cafés, which promoted the establishment and growth of their company (J.B., 2025). Due to this fact, the company's founder has consistently expressed his great gratitude to Angola for its contributions to the company (J.B., 2025).

5.2.2 Internationalization process to Angola

In 1998, after the pacification of Angola, the Angolan Government, namely, the president at the time, invited several Portuguese industrials to invest in Angola, particularly in their production (N.B., 2025). Among the invited businesspeople was Mr. Rui Nabeiro, who was asked to reform an old factory in Angola, named Liangol (N.B., 2025). Delta’s founder accepted the challenge and internationalized to Angola, with the contribution of a local partner connected to the Government (N.B., 2025). The local partner initially held a strong position within the company, and over the years, Delta has acquired its own capital parcels (N.B., 2025). One or two years ago, Delta acquired the company in its entirety, making Angonabeiro 100% Delta-owned as of 2025 (N.B.). Throughout their 30 years in the country, they have maintained a local coffee mindset, which supports the local coffee-producing families (J.B., 2025).

5.3 Discussion on the importance of the network for internationalization

Through the first entry and post-entry descriptions of both case companies, we may infer that networks were the main driver that provided them with the initial opportunity, as well as assisted them in expanding their market penetration post-entry. In Swee's case, this first entry was driven by their network, at the time, with Portugal Foods, which allowed them to enter the USA market. In Delta's case, the network that allowed them to internationalize to Angola was their connection to Angola's Government at the time. Furthermore, the interviewee from Swee explained the different types of network strategies they used to build a relevant position within the USA market, namely through fairs, brokers, and incubators. On the other hand, the interviewees from Delta explained that Delta's expansion within the Angolan market after their entry was facilitated by a long-term local partner, also connected to the Government, and their network of local farmers. Accordingly, it becomes apparent that the base model utilized to explain the internationalization process, the revised Uppsala model (Johansson & Vahlne, 2009), which is driven by networks and aims to go from an outsidership position into an insidership position within a relevant network of the market, is suitable for the company cases of the study.

In terms of the internationalization process variables, highlighted by Johansson and Vahlne (2009), such as trust-building, learning, and opportunity recognition, it became apparent that on the USA case since there was not a sense of trust within the relationships that Swee had established (quote below), they relied on a large number of network building strategies that offered them lots of business connections that provided them significant learning and leveraged a higher number of opportunities they were able to recognize. This is evidenced in the previous explanation of the network strategies and network establishment within the USA market. Meaning that the need to build a relevant network position (state variable) was influenced by their methods of gaining knowledge, learning, and the understanding of the local way of approaching business (change variable), to leverage an optimized number of contacts that put them in contact with the maximum number of opportunities (state variable). This was a driver for their network

strategies, decisions, and commitments (change variable), which then determined their learning platform and consequent network position (state variable). This strategy for internationalization is aligned with Johansson and Vahlne's (2009) model.

> *In American culture, the benefit outweighs trust; it is a very transactional culture. (T.R.)*
>
> *At the moment, we clearly have weak relations. (T.R.)*

In terms of the internationalization variables in the Angola case, elements such as trust were evident in the initial invitation by the country's president to come to Angola and reform the factory to restore local production. This trust was also apparent in the long-term and decades-long relationship they had with the local partner, which also allowed the firm to foment their learning regarding the local market and prominent distribution channels (change variable). In this case, and through the interviewee's explanation of the internationalization process, it became noticeable that there was a relationship commitment decision (change variable) to focus on a significantly smaller number of networks that were deeper and stronger to build local knowledge (change variable) and to leverage opportunities (state variables). This internationalization also showcases concepts aligned with Johansson and Vahlne's (2009) framework for the internationalization process, however, manifested through a very distinct strategy to build a relevant network position.

5.4 Does individualism/collectivism of the host country influence the tie strength and density of a network?

5.4.1 Network Tie Strength

5.4.1.1 Network Tie Strength: Swee

The interviewee from Swee stated directly that their existing ties within the American market are weak, describing the country's culture as transactional several times. However, Swee's interviewee says that they intend to build strong bonds. T.R. (2025)

explains that to build strong ties, one needs to be near and physically present, and invest time and show interest, which they have not yet been able to undertake in the USA market fully. However, one of Delta's interviewees, J.B. (2025), describes the relations in the USA as having a great degree of formalism. Additionally, the Swee interviewee mentions that one of the network type relationships they have in the USA market is with two brokers to gain relevant knowledge and build a bridge with relevant contacts; these are a form of weak ties. These claims become evident in quotes such as the ones presented below:

> *At the moment, we clearly have weak relations. (T.R.)*
>
> *It is a transactional culture. (T.R.)*
>
> *It is only possible to establish strong ties if you are close. Even if you are very professional, (…) you must spend time with the person to build trust, you must show interest. (T.R.)*
>
> *There is a high level of formalism in these countries (USA). (J.B.)*
>
> *We work with two brokers, one for the East Coast and another for the West Coast. They are individuals with 20 to 30 years of experience, having worked with numerous brands and clients, and they serve as a bridge for us. Over time, they have also been able to integrate us not only with the people of the industry but also with the way the industry thinks. (T.R.)*

5.4.1.2 Network Tie Strength: Delta

Contrarily, both of Delta's interviewees expressed the strength of the ties that they have established in the Angolan market. The interviewees displayed the strength of the relations through numerous examples. However, when analyzing the quotes below, we may infer two main ways in which Delta has strong ties within the market. Firstly, the firm has, since the start of internationalization, strong ties with the local community. The interviewees discuss various reasons why this is true, namely, due to their initial brand, Ginga, which is deeply connected to their culture, as Ginga was a beloved Angolan queen who helped fight colonization. Furthermore, the interviewees even go as far as to say that Angonabeiro and Delta are so integrated with the community that they are perceived as

a national brand. Their strong ties were also built on the brand's role as a caretaker of the local community. An example of how they built this reputation for taking care of the community is through their investment in local producers, which they pay in advance yearly to ensure they have the necessary means to nurture and harvest their coffee fields. Furthermore, they are perceived as a brand that is in Angola to stay, which, for the Angolan people, is a very relevant element in trust-building. Therefore, they explained that the goodwill they had established with the people, the connection, and strong bonds were not only significant in building the business but also sustaining it in years when the outcomes were not positive. Furthermore, the strong ties with the Angolan market are evident in the company's founder being personally invited by the country's president to invest in their production. Additionally, Delta's founder, Mr. Nabeiro, viewed internationalization to Angola as a form of retribution for all that the country had given him. Furthermore, this displayed the strong emotional connection he already had with the host country, even before the internationalization. The decades-long nature of the partnership with the local partners also shows a strong tie relationship. These statements are showcased in the quotes below.

> *The relationships were always very important. (J.B.)*
>
> *There are doors that open when there is availability and proximity, and in this context, proximity is very easy. (J.B.)*
>
> *Although Angola is a former Portuguese colony, the relationship is easy. I be-lieve that when it is evident that companies are serious, they treat the local people well, are contextualized about their reality, are there to stay, and are not opportunistic, that is a great advantage. This is a very collective mindset. (J.B.)*
>
> *We ensure the flow of local coffee production and farming, and we provide job opportunities for locals. (N.B.)*
>
> *We do not own farms; we solely work with local farmers so they can continue to reinvest in the green coffee production. (N.B.)*
>
> *Angonabeiro (Delta) is already positioned as the "Angolan brand of the Angolan peoples' brands". (N.B.)*

The Ginga brand (Delta's Angolan Coffee brand) is 100% built on Angolan coffee, and it is extremely valued locally because even the name "Ginga" is connected to their tradition. Ginga was an Angolan queen who existed in real life and helped fight the Portuguese colonizers. The fact that Ginga was a 100% Angolan brand brought significant institutional value to Delta's internationalization. (N.B.)

This "goodwill" helps us maintain good relationships and makes us believe it is worth staying in Angola. (J.B.)

After some pacification of the country, after the war, the President of the Angolan Government invited various Portuguese industrials to invest in the country and its production. (…) Amongst the invited business people was Mr. Rui Nabeiro (Founder of Delta), who was challenged to restore an old factory. (…) Mr. Rui Nabeiro accepted the challenge. (…) At the time, we had to go to Angola with a local business partner, and the recovery of the factory happened, and its name Liangol was changed to Angonabeiro. (N.B.)

He (Mr. Rui Nabeiro, the founder of Delta) always said that he had a gratitude debt towards Angola. (J.B.)

Angola moves through connection networks, and (…) at the time when we went there, we had to have a local partner, which was connected to the Government. He started by holding a strong position within the group, but over the years, we acquired parcels of his owned capital. About one or two years ago, we fully acquired his share, now owning 100% of Angonabeiro, which is no longer related to the State. (N.B.)

5.4.1.3 Does individualism/collectivism of the host country influence the network tie strength?

5.4.1.3.1 Case Study: Swee

Concerning the potential relationship between the individualism of the host country and the established tie strength between Swee and the North American agents, the interviewees associate the transactional nature of the culture experienced in the USA with the transactional and benefit-driven relations that one can establish within the

market. One of the interviewees emphasizes the rationality and benefit-focused mindset prevalent in the USA, which leads to a disposability of relationships when they are no longer beneficial. Moreover, one of the interviewees notes that this way of perceiving business and relations does not allow firms to become too comfortable in their relationships. Just because a client appears to like them, they must constantly prove their worth in the interaction. Therefore, in a reality such as this, one of the interviewees explains that the gains are more valued than sentimental attachments like trust. These statements are proved by the quotes presented below:

> *In American culture, the benefit outweighs trust; it is a very transactional culture. (T.R.)*
>
> *A trait of the American culture that makes things move forward more easily is its strong capitalist culture. What I mean is that it is a country where the goal is to produce, make money, and get rich, where everyone must live the American dream. (…) This mentality is deeply ingrained in them, and they are oriented towards it. Therefore, at the end of the day, if the bottom line makes sense, it will not be the fact that you are an outsider that will prevent them from doing business with you. (T.R.)*
>
> *In a transactional culture, you cannot get comfortable or stop working hard just because you have already gained a client and he likes you. (T.R.)*
>
> *Weak ties are not the correct way to be. (…) Strong ties allow you to have an open communication channel where you can adapt and evolve towards the needs of your partners. (…) If you have a weak tie with a client and, suddenly, he completely changes his needs, target, and strategy, and you are not aware, of course, the transactional nature of the relationship is going to outweigh your benefit to the relationship. (T.R.)*
>
> *For Americans, this does not happen." (staying for the bonds) "The American thinks like this: "if it goes wrong, we close it and open another with a different name", (…) bankrupting a company does not weigh on their consciousness. Truly, the USA's primacy of individualism manifests there, in the nonchalant attitude of*

“I can fire these guys with no problem and find new ones”; this reflects their work relations. (J.B.)

5.4.1.3.2 Case Study: Delta

In terms of evidence amongst the collected data which proves that there is a correlation between the collectivism of the Angolan market and the strong relationships established by Delta in the country, one of the interviewees continuously mentions the significant importance of building a sentiment of goodwill to successfully interna-tionalize to this country, proving that the internationalizing firm is aligned with the local reality, well-being and that it has a long-term intention. One of the interviewees further elaborates on this idea, stating that the good relationships they have there were the justification for their continued presence to this day, not only impacting the fact that they were able to internationalize but also the sustainability of this internationalization. One of the interviewees states that Angola has a very collectivistic society, which is a reality that strongly values the longevity and maintenance of bonds. Due to the strong ties, Delta did not give up on the Angolan market. These statements are showcased in the quotes below:

In countries like this, building a feeling of goodwill is always important. And because we were the only company buying green coffee from Angola for a long time and were responsible for maintaining the Angolan coffee row, we always had this goodwill. (J.B.)

This “goodwill” helps us maintain good relationships and makes us believe it is worth staying in Angola. (J.B.)

Both of our countries being collectivistic impacted the internationalization, concretization, and its sustenance, because, if not, we would have given up already. After 7 years of less positive results, after a great year followed by a bad one, we would have left. Therefore, the fact that we are both countries with this log-ic toward relationships and connection made us want to stay. (J.B)

Although Angola is a former Portuguese colony, the relationship is easy. I be-lieve that when it is evident that companies are serious, they treat the local people well,

are contextualized about their reality, are there to stay, and are not opportunistic, that is a great advantage. This is a very collective mindset. (J.B.)

In Angola, everything has a common denominator, which is the Government. Everything connects to the state, (…) and there the Government is always an important decision maker. I would say that Delta has institutional relationships between State members and the Nabeiro Group administration; these links have been maintained, and they have helped build the brand. (N.B.)

5.4.1.3.3 Discussion on the influence of individualism/collectivism of the host country on the network tie strength

It is evident when assessing both cases that the collectivism and individualism of the host countries influenced the strength of the ties established by the companies. The Swee interviewee describes the USA as a "transactional culture", which aligned with Hofstede's (1980) view of individualism. While Swee's co-founder associates these weak ties with geographical distance, the statement by J.B. (2025), who also has international experience in the US market, indicates that he associates countries like the US with "formalism". The previous statement aligns with Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) description of weak ties as being cordial and non-emotionally driven. Fur-thermore, T.R. (2025) emphasizes Swee's leverage of brokers as "bridges" to become more "integrated" in the USA reality, not only gaining connections to relevant indi-viduals within the network but also receiving valuable insights on "the way the in-dustry thinks". Brokers are a specific example used by Oviatt and McDougall (2005) to illustrate weak ties and their relevance in accelerating the internationalization process.

Contrastingly, when referring to the Angolan reality, J.B. (2025) emphasizes the importance of building trust and loyalty, which Hofstede (1982) associates with collectivistic societies, to be welcomed and accepted. Furthermore, the repeated rein-forcement of the importance of "In countries like this, building a feeling of goodwill" (J.B., 2025), which underlines the critical roles of "feelings" that other people have towards the individual, and the firm dictate the internationalization process, which is in

concordance of Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) explanation of strong ties, which represent a more emotional form of relationships, where reputation is essential. Furthermore, J.B. (2025) describes the Angolan internationalization saying that "after 7 years of less positive results, (…). The fact that we are both countries with this log-ic toward relationships and connection, it made us want to stay", which is correlated with Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) view that strong ties may signify that there is a stronger willingness to compromise to maintain the tie.

5.4.2 Network Density

5.4.2.1 Network Density: Swee

T.R. (2025) describes the USA as a "continent" to emphasize its large size in geographical and population terms. He further elaborates, saying that "it is a more competitive market, with a lot more brands and players, which means it is more demanding". Concerning density, the interviewee perceives it as being a dispersed market. To support his view, T.R. (2025) justified it through two reasons. Firstly, its loose nature derives from the significantly large dimension of the market. Secondly, T.R. (2025) explained that the way the market is segmented also promotes its looseness. More specifically, the market is segmented both locally and by channel. In terms of channels, the US market is structured in a way that the agents of each of the seven existing channels do not interact with one another. For example, the suppliers, service providers, and clients exploring the conventional channel do not interact with the suppliers, service providers, and clients of the convenience channel. As a result, suppliers and service providers in a channel are specialized solely in that channel, and they do not serve other distribution channels. Accordingly, within each channel and location, T.R. (2025) describes the channel network as being dense, with a deep correlation and interception of ties, since "everyone knows each other". However, he tells the overall USA retail reality as dense, because each channel feels like a completely different world. T.R. (2025) perceives this structure as an opportunity since it allows businesses the chance to fail, since in smaller and denser markets like Portugal, if you do not meet expectations in a chance with a retailer, for

example, it is difficult to build your positioning within the market, since there are scarce alternatives available. Secondly, the market is also segmented locally, meaning that each channel is specialized by state. This requires a firm to have, for example, a supplier per State per channel. In contrast, in Portugal, a company may have a distributor that serves several channels nationwide. This segmentation makes the network more dispersed and requires specific strategies for each niche of the market. Delta's interviewee, who has experience in the USA market, further makes a juxtaposition between the two host countries, explaining that in the USA, one is alone. These statements are showcased in the quotes below:

> *The USA is clearly a sparser market. (T.R.)*
>
> *We have two ways to segment the USA market: locally and by channel. (…) In Portugal, we do not have enough critical mass to make this distinction as consumers, that you cannot have one big Celeiro (Portuguese healthy food super-market chain) and other Celeiros. Contrarily, you can only have one Celeiro. While in the USA, it is the opposite. Just so we have an idea of the scale, Whole Foods alone generates more revenue than all the supermarkets in Portugal combined. (J.B.)*
>
> *In the seven channels that exist in the USA market – convenience channel (…), conventional channel (…), healthy channel (…), "cash & carry" channel (…), e-Commerce channel (…), and so on. Why are they important? Because if you are operating in a channel, you do not know the people of another channel. The suppliers that undertake the same type of activities in each of these channels do not intervene in channels that are not theirs. (…) They specialize in a certain channel, and their services are specialized to that channel. This means that, within the same channel, everyone knows each other, but in the overall umbrella of the USA retail, they are completely different worlds. (T.R.)*
>
> *You cannot approach the USA in the same way as Portugal, with a one-size-fits-all approach. In Portugal, you have a factory and a distributor, and you can get your product everywhere. (…) In the USA, (…) for example, within the state of New York, you must have a distributor for the conventional channel, another for the healthy*

channel, etc. The same applies to brokers; you must have a specific one for a certain channel, coast, and region. (T.R.)

While in Angola, it is easy to get to know and call someone who can help you know the market; in the USA, you are completely alone, even if you ask for help. (J.B.)

5.4.2.2 Network Density: Delta

J.B. described the Angola market as having a dense network. He explained that, although it is a large country with a vast population, the "inner circle", which is relevant within a business network perspective, is very small and dense. Therefore, all individuals relevant to the business network, regardless of nationality, know each other, facilitating the construction of one's network and access to relevant contacts. Furthermore, the interviewee states that it is easy to find and get to know people within this context. These statements are based on the quotes below:

Angola has 40 million people, but the inner circle that matters is the inner circle you find in airports, in restaurants, in conferences. This makes a country 4 times larger than Portugal feel "pea-sized". Everyone who "matters" knows each other, whether Angolan, French, Italian, or Portuguese. You are easily able to talk to someone who knows someone who knows another person who can help. (J.B.)

In Angola, it is easy to get to know and call someone who can help you know the market (…). (J.B.)

However, one of the Delta interviewees provides an additional example that displays a dispersed reality within a collectivistic society, which is Brazil, due to its very large dimension. The interview describes the market as a "continent" to illustrate its large size and substantial population. Moreover, he provides an example that demonstrates that, within the Brazilian market, due to the large number and variety of offers, it takes longer to leverage partnerships and build strong relationships, even with a Portuguese brand that is already established in the Brazilian market. These allegations are endorsed by the quotes below:

Sometimes it has a lot more to do with the dimension factor; in Brazil, even if we really want to, and although it is a very collaborative (collectivistic) country, I do not know anyone. I cannot know anyone, due to the fact that the finance and politics "high-level" are in such a stratosphere, that Brazil is no longer a country, it is a continent. (J.B.)

For example, Brazil is full of Padaria Portuguesa stores (a Well-Known Portu-guese bakery chain), and, theoretically, one would assume, "Why would a Portuguese brand not want Portuguese coffee?" (…) only after 5 years of building a strategy, did doors start to open and with good price, good product, and with Portuguese brands that they recognise.". The reality is that a big scale does this, a large scale makes you smaller and it results that when you go and first approach people, they tell you things like "but I already have another brand that is cheaper" or "I have another brand that makes me a lot of profit". (…) This means that in a reality like this, even if you have bonds, and when there is networking, it turns things a little differently than what you would think and expect. (J.B.)

5.4.2.3 Discussion on the influence of individualism/collectivism of the host country on the network density

Regarding density, we may conclude that individualism or collectivism of the host country does not influence the density of the network. Furthermore, we may infer that the dimension of the business and economic landscape, as well as its adjacent fields, such as politics, appear to influence the density of the networks. To sustain these claims, we may consider that both the USA and Brazilian markets are described as a "continent" (T.R., 2025; J.B., 2025), due to being a "more competitive market, with a lot more brands and players, which means it is more demanding" (T.R., 2025). Furthermore, T.R. (2025) characterizes the North American market as a "clearly a sparser market," due to its large dimension and significant economic dimension as well, explaining "Whole Foods alone makes more than all of the supermarkets in Portugal together ". Consequently, the retail reality has a very "segmented" structure, both locally and by channel, where in a specific region and channel, "everyone knows each other", but outside of that channel, even

within the same region, “they are completely different worlds” (T.R., 2025). Therefore, although the reality described in the USA showcases the characteristics of a sparse network, according to Oviatt and McDougall (2005), this attribute is associated with the large “continent” like volume of the country and the significantly large economic dimension. Additionally, the Brazilian example also corroborates these claims since the sparse and “stratospheric” reality of the “finance and politics high-level”, making them distant (J.B., 2025). Furthermore, the density is associated with the large dimension of the country in terms of the amount of competition and different offers available within the country, where the “large scale makes you smaller”(J.B., 2025) in an infinity of options. Lastly, on the Angolan case, we attest the same relationship between densi-ty and dimension, where the Oviatt and McDougall’s (2005) description of dense networks, where there is a large quantity of overlapping between links is associated to the very small “pea-size” “inner circle” of the business network, where one is “easily able to talk to someone that knows someone who knows another person that can help” (J.B., 2025).

5.5 Do network characteristics of the host country impact post-entry internationalization speed?

5.5.1 Post-entry internationalization speed: Swee

Regarding the post-entry internationalization speed, the startup founder described their retail presence journey in the USA as follows: by the end of the first year, they sold their ice cream in 10 supermarkets, by the second year, 30 supermarkets, and by the end of 2025, they had a total of 80 supermarkets where they sold their ice cream. Moreover, in terms of materializing this retail presence into gross sales, they terminated the first year with approximately 10,000€ in sales. 2024 ended with more or less 75,000€ in sales, and they will close this year (2025) with around 150,000€ in products sold. Through these numbers, we can conclude that they experienced a retail penetration growth of approximately 200% between the end of 2023 and 2024, and around 166.7% between the end of 2024 and 2025, averaging 183.3% growth per year. Concerning sales growth,

they increased by 650% between the end of 2023 and 2024, and further grew by 100% in sales between the end of 2024 and 2025, averaging a 375% sales growth per year.

Furthermore, in Ribeiro's article (2024), she quotes one of Swee's founders, Tiago Rebelo, describing that at the beginning of 2024, the USA market represented about 20% of Swee's total sales, and that they expected that, still in 2024, they would be able to increase this number to over 50% of their overall sales. Therefore, the overall landscape of Swee's post-entry internationalization to the USA, shows that the firm had a rapid post-entry internationalization in terms of "international commercial intensity" (Oliveira and Johanson, 2021, p. 4), according to the measurement stand-ards established by Hilmersson and Johanson (2016), which explain that a rapid post-entry sales internationalization happens when the firm's share of international sales, comparing to overall sales, represents up to 25%. In this case, this number is surpassed, and consequently, we may conclude that it was rapid. The statements above were based on the quotes below and on additional secondary data sources, such as articles.

> *2023 was when we first entered the USA market, and in that year, in terms of supermarkets, we started off with 10 supermarkets. In 2024, we ended the year with a presence in 30 supermarkets. This year (2025), we are present in 80 supermarkets. In terms of sales, in the first year, we made around 10,000€. Last year, we made between 70,000 and 80,000€, and this year, we project that we will make approximately 150,000€. I do not believe it will reach 200,000€, but it will be around that number. (T.R.)*

Operationally, on the beginning of the first year, after confirming they would be sold on the first retailer, they established a partnership with an USA importer, which, not only made sure the products was delivered onto the respective stores, but also as-sisted them on their FDA approval process, and served unofficially as what would be a USA "logistics and operations director", managing all of the supply chain process after the products reached the USA border. Furthermore, this importer manages all clients in the USA. On the other hand, since the beginning of the process, they contracted a Portuguese

Business Developer, who had lived in the USA and worked in retail in the country. This individual, although based in Portugal, goes to the USA monthly. At the beginning of 2026, as evidence of their greater investment in the market and with the mission of jump-starting the brand's marketing strategy, one of Swee's founders, Diogo Valente, will permanently relocate to the USA.

Considering that, according to Ribeiro (2024), the startup employed four people in March 2024, and recruited three more collaborators within that year, all based in Portugal, we may assess that the human resource investment on the internationalization grew at a rate close to 0%, since only in 2026 we'll they have a base personnel in the USA market, aside from the monthly visits of the Business Developer. Therefore, their resource commitment post-entry internalization is considered slow, according to Hilmersson and Johanson (2016). Furthermore, in terms of operations throughout all its existence, Swee has worked with 3 Portuguese factories, based in the north of Portugal (Ribeiro, 2024); therefore, their investment in this aspect is also close to 0%, since the operational scope in the USA market is fully assured by their importer. Swee solely has to guarantee the products reach the New York City coast. The affirmations above are displayed in the quotes presented below and were also sourced through secondary data, including articles.

> *As long as we are not physically present in the USA, or only partially present, we will only be able to build weak ties. (T.R.)*
>
> *Our importer there is more the logistics director in the USA, than Swee's logistics director, based in Portugal. Our operational director ensures that the product labelling is correct to guarantee that it arrives adequately at the freight forwarder, who then crosses the Atlantic towards New York. (T.R.)*
>
> *Eventually, to assure client support, (…) we hired a Portuguese person, (…) that had lived in the USA and worked in retail there, to make sure he "spoke the language as them" in terms of retail and business. (…) This person is almost like a business developer. (T.R.)*

From a marketing standpoint, our goal is to send Diogo (co-founder) to the USA and relocate there permanently, which is expected to occur in 2026. (T.R.)

5.5.2 Post-entry internationalization speed: Delta

In terms of sales, J.B. explained that Delta sold approximately 7 million euros in 2012, and currently, sales are approximately 30 million euros. For a company that has existed in Angola for 27 years, this represents an average of € 500,000 in sales per year until 2012. Between 2012 and 2025, these numbers showcase an overall sales growth of 328.6%, averaging approximately an annual growth of 25.2% within this period. Complementarily, the "Delta no Mundo" report by D de Delta (n.d.) describes the company as having a global revenue of € 460 million in 2022. Therefore, we may infer that the Angolan market sales hold a share of around 6,5% of Delta's total sales. Thus, considering Hilmersson and Johanson's (2016) measurement standards, this is a slower international sales process. One of the interviewees, J.B. (2025), supports this view by explaining that, although it was not a rapid process, their incremental sales progression has led them to a leadership position with various brands within their portfolio. Both Delta interviewees emphasized that, although coffee consumption continued to grow, the country's economic circumstances had a negative impact on their progressive sales growth, for example, through major annulments of profit due to currency devaluation and years with significant currency shortages.

In 2012, the company sold around 7 million euros, and currently, sales are worth approximately 30 million euros. (J.B.)

We continually progressed, but we experienced two periods of exponential growth: in 2014/2015 when we entered retail, and in 2019/2020 when we expanded our categories. (J.B.)

I would not call it a fast process, but Angonabeiro has several leading brands within the F&B industry in Angola, such as Delta (coffee), Ginga (coffee), and Serrata (olive oil). (J.B.)

Our business in Angola has had good and challenging years, and it has nothing to do with coffee, as the consumption continues growing. It has everything to do with

two factors: cambial conversion, which in some years annuls the profitability of the business due to the devaluation of kwanzas in relation to the euro. (…) Other challenging years happen due to currency shortage. (N.B.)

Angola is a country of significant economic instability, and with cyclical crises, it is very dependent on petrol. Therefore, being in Angola was always a challenge, a challenge of maintaining stability and a challenge to achieve a positive trend, and being able to grow. (J.B.)

It was a little like our history, always a snowball effect, which has been growing, with some good and hard years, sometimes due to currency shortages, hyperinflation, or petrol price fluctuations. (J.B.)

The country changed a lot, democratized itself, and the whole process happened at the pace of the development of the country, which was slow. (…) It was always a process with a large need to culturally adapt, namely, to manage the people, manage and train the teams. (J.B.)

We have continually invested in this market to diversify our offer. For example, we noticed that due to the kwanza devaluation, the big capsule market penetration was dropping exponentially, because they became too expensive. Therefore, we took one of the capsule production lines we had in Portugal and brought it to Angola, selling this product at an affordable price. (N.B.)

Both interviewees addressed the large investment of resources within the first years of internationalization post-entry. Some of the examples presented included investments in material assets, such as the factory and machinery, investments in human capital through the expatriation of Portuguese professionals, and the employment and training of local teams, as well as significant financial investments in green coffee plantations and harvesting, through the endorsement of local farms. Furthermore, the interviewees mentioned that the company did not solely invest resources in this market in the first few years; they continued to build on their operational activities, services, and structure throughout the years, such as distributing the products and scaling their operations to an extent that their Angolan internationalization internationalized itself to other markets.

Although we do not have a concrete rate of international resource investment to compare with the standards identified by Hilmersson and Johanson (2016), it becomes evident that the rapid nature of the internationalization component within the Angolan case is notable.

> *From the moment we made the decision to go, send the machines, installing them, training the people, building teams. (J.B.)*
>
> *When we went to Angola, we made a big investment, namely in recovering the factory and warehouses to store the coffee. (N.B.)*
>
> *The internationalization happened through the Portuguese know-how and the expatriation. Now, the people are not the same, but the General Director and the first-level management are still Portuguese. (N.B.)*
>
> *We have about 100 people within Angonabeiro," (Delta's Angolan Group, which owns the factory and various brands), "(…) among those 100 people, 15 are Portuguese expatriates; therefore, about 85 people are Angolans. (N.B)*
>
> *In terms of human resources, the company grew until a certain point, and then stabilized. (…) We have around 105 workers in Angola. (J.B)*
>
> *Angola is a source of green coffee. (…) Although we do not have coffee farms in Angola, we work with local producers. The way the green coffee works is that your first harvest of what you plant today does not cover the investment costs. The first harvest I can commercialize occurs after three years. Therefore, you need to have a medium to long-term mindset. (N.B.)*
>
> *We did not solely do an initial investment; we have been continually investing within this market. (N.B.)*
>
> *Operationally, we built it as time passed. It was a very Portuguese model with a technical and a commercial team, street sellers. At one point, we started, and the offices were interesting to explore, so we did that, but we realized the biggest channel was retail, so, eventually, we started selling Ginga with Delta Q capsule machines for retail. (J.B.)*
>
> *In the beginning, the products were not distributed by Delta; only halfway through, after 15 years, did the products start being distributed by us. (J.B.)*

We always grew until, more or less, 15 years ago. At that point, we stabilized the production and distribution. (…) where we grew most was commercially, and in commercial support areas. (J.B.)

Nowadays, in Angola, we have a commercialization structure, we have both formal and informal channels, which means we are present in supermarkets and Horeca, but we are also in the small markets that happen in the villages, through informal distribution methods. (N.B.)

Angonabeiro exports Ginga coffee to Senegal, Cape Verde, and China, which demand a bigger structure. (N.B)

5.5.3 Do network characteristics impact the internationalization speed?

5.5.3.1 Case Study: Swee

In terms of evidence amongst the collected data, which proves that there is a potential impact of network characteristics on the post-entry internationalization speed, Swee's interviewee describes the shared mindset as valuing agility. Furthermore, the interviewee claims that the progress on these types of societies is easier due to their focus on the "American Dream" and their goals of wealth and success. T.R. (2025) explains that if the interaction is beneficial for the North American agent, the fact that a firm is an outsider will not be an impediment to the relationship, allowing it to become an insider quickly if the benefits justify it. However, the firm must not become complacent in its position just because it has gained a client, because it can easily be lost if the client is no longer valuable. The disposable nature of relationships was referenced on several occasions by the interviewees, which highlights the weakness of the ties. However, due to the ease of being accepted and moving from an outsider to an insider position, as long as it is beneficial, it affects the potential for internationalization speed. These statements are showcased in the quotes below.

A culture such as this, above all, values agility" (T.R.)

A trait of the American culture that makes things move forward more easily is its strong capitalist culture. What I mean is that it is a country where the goal is to

produce, make money, and get rich, where everyone must live the American dream. (…) This mentality is very ingrained in them, and they are oriented towards it. Therefore, at the end of the day, if the bottom line makes sense, it will not be the fact that you are an outsider that will prevent them from doing business with you. (T.R.)

In a transactional culture, you cannot get comfortable or stop working hard just because you have already gained a client and he likes you. (T.R.)

"The American thinks like this: 'if it goes wrong, we close it and open another with a different name', (…) bankrupting a company does not weigh on their conscience. Truly, the USA's primacy of individualism manifests there, in the nonchalant attitude of "I can fire these guys with no problem and find new ones"; this reflects their work relations. (J.B.)

5.5.3.2 Case Study: Delta

In terms of evidence amongst the collected data which that proves there is a potential impact of network characteristics on the post-entry internationalization speed within the Delta case, one of the interviewees highlighted that strong ties and long-term commitment, as well as emotional attachment to a certain extent, not only helped the internationalization process but were also relevant in terms of perseverance and sustainability. The closeness of these relationships and the importance that both countries attach to the group and to the individuals, as well as their collective well-being, were reasons to stay and endure, paving the way to more prosperous times, even when the results did not immediately translate into tangible benefits. These statements are found in the quotes below:

Both of our countries being collectivistic impacted the internationalization concretization and its sustenance, because, if not, we would have given up already. After seven years of less positive results, following a great year and a bad one, we would have left. Therefore, the fact that we are both countries with this logic toward relationships and connection made us want to stay. (J.B)

The vicissitudes of the market are numerous, and having a network and being collaborative is evidently important. (J.B.)

5.5.4 Discussion on the impact of network characteristics of the host country on post-entry internationalization speed

The data showed that the USA's individualistic culture prioritizes aspects such as benefits of the relationship, as previously mentioned, "a culture such as this, above all, values agility" (T.R., 2025). Complementary, another critical feature of the North American culture is its "strong capitalism" (T.R., 2025), where the objective is "to produce, make money, and get rich, where everyone must live the American dream. (…) This mentality is very ingrained in them, and they are oriented towards it. Therefore, at the end of the day, if the bottom line makes sense, it will not be the fact that you are an outsider that will prevent them from doing business with you" (T.R., 2025). In other words, their individualistic culture directed towards personal benefits (Hofstede, 1980) come as an advantage for outsiders because, if the transaction is beneficial, you do not have to build a strong tie, with a sense of long-term belonging or loyalty and trust (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005) to be let in, which according to Minkov et al. (2017) are necessary on a collectivistic society. T.R. (2025) explained that within the USA mindset, firms must "raise their competitiveness level" and always prove their value within the relationship, which displays the weakness of the ties (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005), but also explains why results may exponentially grow, since the relationship and longevity of the partnership are solely moulded by benefit and objective results. Furthermore, attending to the reflections made on the findings of the study, it is possible to conclude that the individualism of the host country has not only an impact on the tie strength of the networks that take place in the internationalization process, but also on the interaction between the internationalization process as a whole and the speed of post-entry internationalization. More concretely, in the individualism case, they took relationship commitment decisions that leveraged a maximum amount of mutual learning, through incubators, brokers, and fairs, to optimize their access to opportunities within their network positions. This choice to build a large number of weak ties was crucial in

determining their post-entry international sales intensity speed. Therefore, the individualism of the USA showcased a direct impact on the relationship between the internationalization process and its post-entry speed of internationalization.

In concordance with the previous conclusions, through the collected data, it is possible to infer that, in an internationalization to an individualistic country like the USA, which is already proven to influence their network tie strength and build weak ties, there is a faster growth of international sales intensity, according to Hilmersson and Johanson's performance measurements (2016). In Swee's case, the share of international sales in relation to the total ones is between 20% and 50% within the two years post-entry. However, the data also show that in a transition to an individualistic society, which influences the network tie strength and builds weak ties, there is a slow international resource commitment, as indicated by the performance indicators established by Hilmersson and Johanson (2016). In the USA internationalization case, the share of international resources invested was close to 0%. This slow internationalization may be a result of the disposability character that the interviewees associated with the relationships built within the USA, therefore, reducing the sense of trust to make a large investment in the market (relationship commitment decisions), where "benefit weighs more than trust" (T.R., 2025).

Within the Angolan context, the data showed that sales "continually progressed," with their post-entry international sales share being around 6% after 27 years on the market. This continuous and incremental growth aligns with Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) explanation of the effect of strong ties on internationalization speed, stating that they are moderately efficient in expanding the firm, although they are not the most effective method. Contrastingly, the data shows that, in an internationalization to a collectivistic country, where the ties are strong and more emotionally driven, being described as "goodwill" (J.B., 2025), "medium to long-term mindset" (N.B., 2025), amongst other already mentioned characteristics, there is a fast post-entry internationalization of resource commitment, according to the indicators enumerated by Hilmersson and

Johanson (2016). In Delta's case, although their sales growth only grew exponentially after 16 years of being in Angola, they made a "big investment" (N.B., 2025), resource wise, within their first years of internationalization post-entry, investing on a "factory and warehouses" (N.B., 2025), "expatriation" (N.B., 2025) and human resources. Further, they "did not solely do an initial investment" (N.B.); they "have been continually investing within this market" (N.B., 2025). These resource investments, although the data does not determine a specific percentage, evidently surpass the average 7% established by Hilmersson and Johanson (2016) to assess a rapid post-entry internationalization of resource commitment. Furthermore, we can infer that the collectivism of the host country had an impact on the internationalization process as a whole, as well as its direct impact on the post-entry internationalization speed. More concretely, the collectivism of the host country was a moderator of how the relationships fomented within this type of society, to create mutual learning and trust-building, establishing a network position, and recognising opportunities that influence the relationship commitment decisions, directly impacted the speed at which the post internationalization took place, in terms of sales intensity and resource commitment.

5.6 Revisited Framework

Considering the findings and discussions drawn from the collected data and explored in the previous sections, we can examine the revised version of the initial theoretical background framework in the image below (Figure 4).

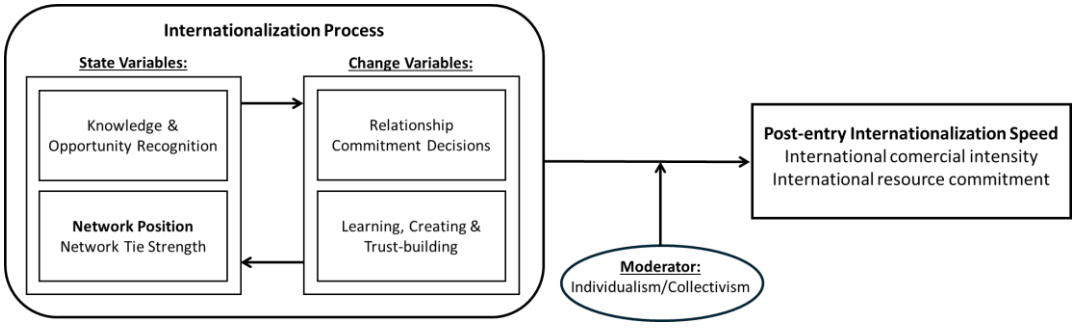

Figure 4. Revisited Theoretical Framework

Within this revised version of the framework, the base network-driven internationalization process was maintained, as both internationalization cases demonstrated the importance of networks in the internationalization endeavour. Furthermore, in the revised framework, it is possible to observe the influence of the individualistic or collectivistic nature of the host country on the network characteristics, specifically manifested in the network tie strength. Another alteration within the framework was the removal of the network density as an aspect that was influenced by the individualistic or collectivistic culture of the host country. However, a relevant alteration was the shift of individualism/collectivism as a moderator of the relationship between the variables of the internationalization process into a moderator of the overall relationship between the internationalization process and the post-entry speed. Therefore, the framework shows that individualism/collectivism impacts the internationalization process as a whole and, consequently, the types of networks it has and the post-entry speed of internationalization of sales and resources. Finally, the framework visually represents the direct impact that the network tie strength, embedded in the internationalization process, has on the speed of post-entry internationalization. Finally, we may infer that this revised version of the framework proposes an adequate model for answering the study's research question: “How does the individualism/collectivism of the host country impact the business network internationalization process and the post-entry speed?”.

6 Conclusions

This section of the study intends to summarize the present thesis. Moreover, it summarizes the theoretical and managerial implications of the work, highlighting its key findings and outputs, as well as its limitations. Finally, the section concludes with a proposal for further research subjects related to the study.

6.1 Summary of the study

The current study aims to assess the influence that the individualism or collectivism of the host countries has on the network characteristics within the internationalization process, and consequently, the impact this has on the post-entry internationalization speed. More concretely, the study aims to analyse the individualism or collectivism of the host country in relation to the tie strength and network density within the internationalization process. Furthermore, the paper also aims to assess the practical implications of network characteristics on post-entry internationalization speed in terms of international commercial intensity and international resource commitment.

Regarding the literature review of the study, it focuses on the internationalization process, explained through networks, according to the Uppsala Model (2009). Additionally, it examines the individualism/collectivism dimension of culture, primarily through Hofstede's (1982; 2011) models, as well as the post-entry internationalization speed. In terms of the internationalization speed, the study focuses on Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) regarding network characteristics as an influencing force of internationalization speed, through a post-entry lens. Furthermore, the literature review provides the fundamentals and elaborates on the individualism and collectivism of the host countries in the case studies analysed in the paper. Within the literature review, these theories and models were merged into a theoretical framework that aimed to answer the question: "How does the individualism/collectivism of the host country impact the business network internationalization process and the post-entry speed?".

In terms of the methodology chosen to assess the framework and adjacent research question, the study leveraged empirical findings through the collection of qualitative data, using a case study approach, specifically a comparative analysis between two case studies. Furthermore, the primary data source of the study was semi-structured interviews. However, the findings of the semi-structured interviews were complemented with pertinent secondary data.

Regarding the outputs of the study, we may infer that the main findings were that Oviatt and McDougal's (2005) theory regarding first-entry speed of internationalization, also as implications within the post-entry internationalization speed; that the individualism or collectivism of the host country has an impact on the tie strength of the network established in the internationalization process; that the individualism or collectivism of the host country does not have an impact on the density of the network established in the internationalization process.

Regarding the impact of the individualism of the host country on the tie strength of the network established in the internationalization process, the study concludes that the individualism of the host country fosters weak ties within the networks of the internationalization process. Contrastingly, the study found that the collectivism of the host country fosters strong ties within the networks of the internationalization process. Therefore, it reveals the moderating force of the individualism or collectivism of the host country within this process.

Regarding the impact of the individualism of the host country on the density of the network established in the internationalization process, the research concluded that there was no cause-and-effect relationship between these variables. However, the study concluded that the density of the network within the internationalization process is determined by the dimension of the host country, specifically in terms of the size and number of players within the business network, as well as the proportion of the economic landscape. More concretely, regardless of the individualistic or collectivistic cultural aspect,

a host country that presents a large dimension in terms of population size and, consequently, a large number of players within the business and economic network, or a significantly larger monetary reality, will tend to be more segmented and sparser. However, a reality where the overall business network has a reduced number of players or a smaller monetary landscape will tend to generate denser networks.

In terms of the finding that Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) theory regarding the first-entry speed of internationalization also has implications within the post-entry internationalization speed context, the study concluded that the authors' theory regarding network tie strength as an influencing force of international speed is also present within the post-entry internationalization speed context. The original theory (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005) posited that weak ties, due to their mitigation of redundancy and reduced investment required, enabled a firm to maintain a larger number of ties, thereby building more exclusive knowledge and accessing a broader range of opportunities. Therefore, these were considered by the authors (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005) to be the most efficient types of ties for internationalization. This statement is also true in the case study of weak ties and the USA's internationalization, particularly in terms of the speed of international commercial intensity. More specifically, internationalization processes with weak network ties grew more rapidly in terms of the rate of international sales compared to the firm's total sales. On the other hand, as predicted by the original Oviatt and McDougall theory (2005), strong network ties, although they are adequate and relevant within contexts where trust and mutuality are crucial, are not the quickest way to internationalize. This belief by Oviatt and McDougall regarding the first-entry internationalization was also apparent in the case study with strong ties, internationalization to Angola, where the international commercial intensity was described as continually growing; however, this was an incremental growth, as opposed to exponential, as predicted by Oviatt and McDougall (2005).

However, what the international speed theory did not predict (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005) was that, when analysing the international resource commitment, the outcomes of the

impact of the network tie strength are the opposite. More concretely, when the networks of internationalization are weak, as shown in the USA case, there is a slower international resource commitment. According to the data, this may be associated with the disposability of relationships and the higher value of benefits compared to the trust built. Contrastingly, in the case study with strong network ties, internationalization to Angola, the data evidenced that there was a significantly faster internationalization of resource commitment. This may be due to the trust and strong bonds that are established within the relationships in this context.

Finally, the study presented a revised framework that integrated the different findings. The new framework displayed the impact that the individualism or collectivism of the host country has on the tie strength of the relationships established within the internationalization process. Moreover, the revised framework highlighted the direct impact that the strength of network ties within the internationalization process has on the post-entry internationalization speed, manifesting in two forms: the speed of internationalization of resource commitment and the speed of internationalization of sales/commercial intensity, depending on the individualism/collectivism of the host country.

6.2 Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Concerning the theoretical and managerial implications of the paper, it presents itself as a validation of the majority of the insights drawn from the theoretical background. Furthermore, in terms of the research gap that the study aims to fill, we may consider the work as an adequate response, explaining the impact that the individualism or collectivism of the host country has on the business networks of the internationalization process and on the speed of post-entry internationalization. Additionally, the work adequately fills the research gap concerning the lack of exploitation of case studies within developing countries and realities, broadening the international business scope to these types of realities.

The study also reinforces the importance of networks when internationalizing to a country, specifically highlighting their impact on the speed of post-entry internationalization. Therefore, the study shows that the type of ties that they build in their internationalization process should be intentional and that they have concrete effects on their post-entry internationalization speed, either fastening their international sales intensity or quickening their international resource commitment. However, the host country that they choose to internationalize to influences the type of network tie strength they can create.

Furthermore, this study serves as a source from which firms may gather information on the best approach in terms of tie strength when internationalizing to individualistic and collectivistic countries. Specifically, through this study, firms may realize that they should invest in strong network ties within the internationalization process when going to collectivistic host countries. However, the study also shows that businesses should build several weak network ties within the internationalization process when going to individualistic societies to successfully internationalize.

Finally, the study presents itself as a roadmap for firms looking to internationalize in individualistic or collectivistic countries, with weak/strong ties, outlining the expected speed of internationalization in terms of sales intensity and the rapidity of resource commitment that may be required. Moreover, if a firm is looking to internationalize in an individualistic country with weak network ties, it should expect a higher potential for international sales intensity; however, it should also expect a slower international resource commitment. Furthermore, if a business is looking to internationalize in a collectivist society with strong ties, it should expect moderate growth in its international commercial intensity; however, it should be prepared for a faster internationalization of resource commitment.

Therefore, the work stands as a network-focused and rapidness-oriented overview for firms that are internationalizing to utilize.. Additionally, it is important to note that the

managerial implications of the work are not solely confined to the USA and Angolan realities; conversely, these insights drawn from the study are applicable to other internationalization processes in countries that are also individualistic or collectivistic. However, although the outputs drawn from the study and the cases are valuable, it is essential to apply them to other realities with a critical perspective, assessing the results in collaboration with other cultural factors that were not addressed in the study but may impact the expected outcomes.

6.3 Limitations and further research suggestions

Despite the valuable insights provided by the study, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, primarily related to the method of data collection and analysis, as well as the conclusions drawn.

Firstly, since both cases presented in the study are related to the food and beverages industry, the findings may be conditioned by the experiences that occurred within this industry. Furthermore, the number of case study firms and interviewee sample is also limited. As a result, although both firms have experience abroad and their respective interviewees also present foreign experience, the data collected is restricted to their know-how and personal perspectives. Additionally, in one of the case studies, we had a sample of two interviewees, and in the other case study firm, we had one interviewee; therefore, in Swee's case, we did not have the opportunity to compare answers between respondents. Regarding these limitations, a suggestion for further research would be to analyse firms that belong to industries outside the scope of food and beverages, to understand how the experiences and findings might vary.

Additionally, both case study firms share the same home country, Portugal. Therefore, the results and the approaches taken by the firms may be conditioned by their original conditions, circumstances, and culture. Consequently, the outcomes of the framework may vary in firms that do not have Portugal as their home country. A further research suggestion would be to conduct a complementary analysis of firms with different home

countries and host countries, beyond those explored in the present work, to understand the implications for the revised framework.

Thirdly, the findings of the current study were drawn based on one case study firm per individualistic/collectivistic country. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the collected information are limited to the experiences the firms had during those internationalizations. Moreover, not all conclusions may be directly applicable to all firms internationalizing to the USA and Angola, or to all firms internationalizing to individualistic and collectivistic countries. Accordingly, a suggestion for further research would be an exploratory study of companies that have internationalized to countries with various levels/scores of collectivism and individualism, to comprehend how the reality experienced at the extremes of this cultural dimension differs from that in more neutral countries, for example.

Fourthly, the current study solely focuses on the individualism/collectivism cultural dimension; however, there is a significant amount of other cultural aspects that may influence the outcomes and speed of internationalization and the experiences of the firms. Consequently, a suggestion for further research would be to complement the current framework with a multidimensional cultural perspective, to have a more holistic overview of the influence of culture on the network characteristics, and the consequential effects on the post-entry speed of internationalization.

Fifthly, the two studied firms are categorized in very different business forms, with one being a startup and the other a more traditional company. Therefore, although the present study did not focus on this variable, it may be interesting to explore further its effect on the strength of the network ties and on the speed of post-entry internationalization.

Finally, a last suggestion for further investigation is regarding the impact of the cultural distance between the home and host countries on the network characteristics of the internationalization process and consequent speed of post-entry internationalization.

Furthermore, to understand how the cultural characteristics of the home and host countries impact the present framework. Further research could be conducted by, for example, analysing different internationalization processes that involved countries with varying individualistic and collectivistic home countries, which internationalized into various individualistic and collectivistic societies, to draw conclusions about the impact of the distance.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guide – Delta

Date:

Company:

Interviewee Name:

Job Role:

Interview Purpose:

The main goal of the current interview is to explore the internationalization process, to understand, in your view, what the role of networks is within this process, and to examine to what extent individualism/collectivism of the host country influences the speed of the internationalization process.

QUESTIONS REGARDING INTERNATIONALIZATION

1. Do you give me consent to record this interview?
2. Do you consent for your name and the company's name to be shared on the thesis?
3. How many internationalization processes have you been a part of?
    a. Can you, briefly, give some examples of the destination countries of those internationalizations?
4. Can you explain, shortly, the internationalization process of your firm in Angola?
5. How would you describe the speed of this internationalization process?
    a. How many years after the firm's foundation did you internationalize to Angola?
    b. How was the sales development in Angola, throughout the years, after first entering the country?
    c. What operation modes were you using when entering this country, and what are you using now?

d. With how many employees did you start your internationalization to Angola and how many employees do you have now?

QUESTIONS REGARDING NETWORKS

1. What do you believe was the role of networks within this internationalization process?
    a. How would you describe the type of networks established within the internationalization process in Angola? Dense or sparse, and why? With weak or strong ties, and why?
    b. Do you think their individualistic/collectivistic cultural nature had an influence on these characteristics (density and strength of ties) and why?
    c. Were there any other advantages or challenges that their cultural characteristics and types of networks brought to the internationalization process?
2. How did the cultural similarities and distance between Portugal and Angola impact the internationalization process and networks?
3. What was the influence of networking on the speed of internationalization?

Thank you!

Appendix 2. Interview guide – Swee

Date:

Company:

Interviewee Name:

Job Role:

Interview Purpose:

The main goal of the current interview is to explore the internationalization process, to understand, in your view, what is the role of networks within this process, and to recon to what extent individualism/collectivism of the host country influences the speed of the internationalization process.

QUESTIONS REGARDING INTERNATIONALIZATION

1. Do you give me consent to record this interview?
2. Do you consent for your name and the company's name to be shared on the thesis?
3. How many internationalization processes have you been a part of?
    a. Can you, briefly, give some examples of the destination countries of those internationalizations?
4. Can you explain, shortly, the internationalization process of your firm in the USA?
5. How would you describe the speed of this internationalization process?
    a. How many years after the firm's foundation did you internationalize to the USA?
    b. How were the sales development in the USA, throughout the years, after first entering the country?
    c. What operation modes were you using when entering this country, and what are you using now?
    d. With how many employees did you start your internationalization in the USA, and how many employees do you have now?

QUESTIONS REGARDING NETWORKS

1. What do you believe was the role of networks within this internationalization process?
    a. How would you describe the type of networks established within the internationalization process in the USA? Dense or sparse, and why? With weak or strong ties, and why?
    b. Do you think their individualistic/collectivistic cultural nature had an influence on these characteristics (density and strength of ties)?
    c. Were there any other advantages or challenges that their cultural characteristics and types of networks brought to the internationalization process?
2. How did the cultural distance between Portugal and the USA impact the internationalization process and networks?
3. What was the influence of networking on the speed of internationalization?

Thank you!