



Does shared consumption affect consumers' values, attitudes, and norms? A panel study



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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Shared consumption
Sharing economy
Effects
Values
Panel study
Structural equation model

ABSTRACT

Shared consumption is proposed as a comparably sustainable consumption practice. However, little is known about effects of shared consumption on individuals. We build on the theory of planned behavior and the value-belief-norm theory using cross-lagged structural equation modeling based on a two-wave panel study with 168 consumers to examine the effects a shared consumption pattern has on consumers' values, attitudes, and norms. Our structural model explains a medium to large amount of variance in self-reported shared consumption. We find shared consumption has statistically significant positive cross-lagged effects on future altruistic values, attitudes, subjective norms, and personal norms. However, no statistically significant effects of shared consumption are found on consumers' future biospheric and egoistic values. Thus, the more consumers engaged in shared consumption, the more concerned they were for others, while it did not affect their concern for the environment or themselves. Theoretical and practical implications of our results are discussed.

1. Introduction

Shared consumption—that is, borrowing, renting, gifting, swapping, and buying used, common, or idle resources in consumer or peer networks—is proposed as a step beyond unsustainable linear consumption patterns toward more sustainable consumption practices (Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Heinrichs, 2013; Prothero et al., 2011). Consequently, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers aiming to achieve a transition toward sustainability are interested in the effects shared consumption actually has on the environment, the economy, and the society (Heinrichs, 2013; Martin, 2016). As nascent research on shared consumption has primarily examined its determinants (e.g., Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016; Möhlmann, 2015; Piscicelli, Cooper, & Fisher, 2015), research on its effects remains incomplete. Foremost, although researchers have provided valuable insights into shared consumption's effects on the environment (Leismann, Schmitt, Rohn, & Baedeker, 2013) and on the economy (Owyang, 2013), insights into effects on the society are missing. In particular, there is a lack of knowledge about the social-psychological effects shared consumption has on the individual level.

We examine the effect shared consumption has on consumers' values, attitudes, social norms, as research has found these social-psychological factors to be major prerequisites for the transition toward sustainable behavior (Stern, 2000; Thøgersen, 2006). The more consumers' values reflect a concern for the environment and others, the

more favorable their attitude toward sustainable behavior, and the stronger the expectation of others and the personal moral obligation to behave sustainably, the more consumers will change from unsustainable to more sustainable behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999).

For shared consumption, current values, attitudes, norms, and habitual behaviors are identified as major inhibitors (Barnes & Mattsson, 2016). Research has found sharing consumers to have stronger pro-environmental and altruistic values than non-sharing consumers (Piscicelli et al., 2015) and to be driven by favorable attitudes toward shared consumption and a normative groundswell (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). However, shared consumption's effects on these factors are not well understood. Moreover, while some frame shared consumption as a “pathway to sustainability” enabling a mind shift of consumers, others frame it as a “nightmarish form of neoliberal capitalism” (Martin, 2016, p. 149) potentially encouraging alienation rather than community and environmental concern (Rifkin, 2000). Thus, Martin (2016) has called for empirical research examining actual effects of shared consumption on consumers in order to enable its development as a more sustainable form of consumption. In response to these gaps in the research, our study aims to answer the research question: Which effects does shared consumption have on consumers' values, attitudes, and norms?

Our research question implies a causal influence of behavior on social-psychological factors. While this general causal relationship has

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been examined in the literature before, most consumer research assumes a reverse causal influence of social-psychological factors on behavior. Therefore, we locate our research in the broader context of the following four potential causal relationships between these social-psychological factors and behavior that have been examined in the literature: (1) values, attitudes, and norms cause behavior (e.g., Ajzen, 1985, 1991; McGuire, 1976; Stern et al., 1999); (2) behavior causes values, attitudes, and norms (e.g., Bem, 1967; Gundelach, 1992); (3) values, attitudes, norms, and behavior mutually cause each other (e.g., Kelman, 1974; Reibstein, Lovelock, & Dobson, 1980; Schwartz, 1994; Thøgersen & Ölander, 2006); and (4) values, attitudes, norms, and behavior are unrelated (e.g., Wicker, 1969). So far, theoretical agreement is lacking (Bentler & Speckart, 1981), previous results vary with the examined behavior (Kahle & Berman, 1979), and interaction between values, attitudes, norms, and behavior has not yet been examined in an integrated model as called for (Thøgersen, 2006). To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to examine this interaction in the context of shared consumption. We build on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) and the value-belief-norm theory (Stern et al., 1999) to ground our hypotheses on the causal influence of shared consumption on values, attitudes, and norms over time and use cross-lagged structural equation modeling based on a two-wave panel study with 168 consumers to test these hypotheses. Our study makes several contributions to the extant literature. First, we provide new empirical evidence for social-psychological research on the relationships between values, attitudes, norms, and behavior in general showing that they mutually cause each other in a continuing reciprocal process. Next, our study is (to the best of our knowledge) the first to use panel data to examine the social-psychological effects of shared consumption on society. In particular, we find shared consumption to have a statistically significant positive cross-lagged effects on future altruistic values, attitudes, subjective norms, and personal norms. However, no statistically significant effects of shared consumption are found on consumers' future biospheric and egoistic values. Thus, we provide new insights that the more consumers engage in shared consumption, the more concerned they are for others, while it does not affect their concern for the environment or themselves in any way. Finally, these insights will help practitioners to take adequate decisions in order to enable the development of shared consumption as a more sustainable form of consumption.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1. Shared consumption

Recently, many different terms have been used to describe forms of the shared consumption of used, common, or idle resources in consumer or peer networks. Among those terms are “sharing” or “sharing economy” (Belk, 2009, 2014), “collaborative consumption” (Botsman & Rogers, 2011), “access” or “access-based consumption” (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Chen, 2009), “commercial sharing systems” (Lamberton & Rose, 2012), “the mesh” (Gansky, 2010), and “product-service systems” (Mont, 2004). We differentiate shared consumption¹ from individual, linear consumption (Mont & Heiskanen, 2015). Individual, linear consumption is based on the notion of buying new things for private use and final disposal, whereas shared consumption is based on the effective management of repeated, shared use of used, common, or idle resources (i.e., products, assets, or services). We view shared consumption as a group of behaviors that reflect the same underlying

¹ While we use the term shared consumption in this study, we acknowledge the fact that there has not yet been a consensus as to what term best describes the consumer behaviors we examine. For example, collaborative consumption has been used in the literature as well, e.g., Barnes and Mattsson (2016), Belk (2014), Botsman and Rogers (2011), Hamari et al. (2016), Hartl, Hofmann, and Kirchner (2015), Leismann et al. (2013), Möhlmann (2015), Piscicelli et al. (2015), Scaraboto (2015).

disposition, which is similar to Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) idea of a behavioral category, a set of actions with similar target and context. We find the behavioral category shared consumption to include five prototypical behaviors discussed in the literature (e.g., Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2014; Botsman & Rogers, 2011): borrowing, renting, gifting or donating, swapping, and buying things used.

These five behaviors represent major configurations of the four primary exchange logics (Scaraboto, 2015) underlying shared consumption, that is (1) repeated, shared use, (2) acquisition mode (transfer of ownership versus access), (3) reciprocity (reciprocal versus non-reciprocal behaviors), and (4) compensation (monetary versus non-monetary). All five behaviors enable the repeated, shared use of resources. They all require some degree of collaboration between consumers, peers or between an individual and a sharing-based organization. Moreover, they all involve at least two people sharing the use of a resource over time resulting in repeated consumption cycles (i.e., acquisition, use, distribution). These similarities are the prerequisite for examining these five behaviors as a shared consumption pattern. Table 1 provides an overview of the five prototypical behaviors of shared consumption illustrating their characteristics of the mentioned four primary exchange logics.

Renting (e.g., car-sharing services like tamyca) and borrowing (e.g., shared use of living space platforms like couchsurfing) facilitate exchange without transfer of ownership as resources are only temporarily accessed. When gifting or donating used or excess resources (e.g., pre-owned clothes, foodsharing), swapping (e.g., exsila), or buying things used (e.g., eBay Kleinanzeigen), ownership is transferred while multiple consumers effectively share the use of products or assets over time. We consider some of these behaviors non-reciprocal (e.g., borrowing, gifting), while others are reciprocal involving some form of monetary (e.g., renting, buying used) or non-monetary compensation (e.g., swapping). These behaviors can be found in commercial market structures (business-to-consumer and consumer-to-consumer markets) or privately (between peers) and both online and offline. Although our understanding includes the provision of resources, we focus on the acquisition of things through shared consumption here. Thus, we define shared consumption as getting resources from others for repeated shared use among consumers or peers as opposed to acquiring new resources for private use and final disposal.

2.2. Social-psychological factors to understand shared consumption

Four major groups of social-psychological factors are suggested when examining sustainable (consumer) behaviors: Motivational (e.g., values, attitudes, norms), individual (e.g., behavior-specific knowledge and skills, social status), external/contextual (e.g., availability, laws and regulations, supportive policies, advertising), and habitual factors (e.g., past behavior) (Stern, 2000; Thøgersen, 2006). In line with Barnes and Mattsson (2016), we will focus on motivational and habitual factors as they were identified as strongest inhibitor of shared consumption. As the role of habit and the causal influence of shared consumption on values, attitudes, and norms over time cannot meaningfully be examined with cross-sectional data, we use panel data measured over a time period of nine months to explicitly account for change in variables, causal influence and habitual effects. Next, we will describe the behavioral factors building our theoretical framework (see Fig. 1) and their relevance for shared consumption. Then, we will examine their three potential causal relationships with shared consumption and derive hypotheses.

2.2.1. Values

Schwartz (1994, p. 21) defines values as: “... desirable transsituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity.” Values can both motivate as well as explain and justify behavior (Thøgersen & Ölander, 2002). According to Schwartz (1994), values can be divided into ten motiva-

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