

The Sharing Intention: How Culture and Materialism influence consumer's interests on consuming shared goods. A benchmark between Italy and Spain.

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Abstract Sharing economy is a socio-economic model, built around the sharing of human and physical resources, which give consumers the possibility of accessing to product and assets without having the individual ownership. The present research has the purpose of analysing consumers' intentions to join in with sharing economy system, and, in particular, of focusing on how this participation is influenced by Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Materialism. Data for this study were collected by distributing a questionnaire among engineering students from two technical universities, respectively in Italy and Spain, in order to observe the different behaviour about sharing intention. The obtained results point out that cultural dimensions like Collectivism and Femininity foster sharing intention and that, therefore, consumers' attitude to join in with sharing economy, whereas Individualism and Masculinity inhibit sharing intention. It is possible to say the same thing about Materialism that, as demonstrated by the results of the research, has a negative impact on sharing intention, considered as one of the principal inhibitors of sharing.

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1 Introduction

The sharing economy is a phenomenon that has had a rapid growth over the last five years, especially after the global economic recession of 2008. Network and communication technologies such as Internet have started to challenge traditional thinking about how resources can and should be offered and consumed (Cohen & Kietzmann, 2014). The sharing economy marks an important shift in the behaviour of individuals (Bonciu & Bâlgăr, 2016), and points to a new stage in the evolution of the consumer role (Perren & Grauerholz, 2015), which assumes peculiar characteristics both in the consumption and in the creation of products and services.

However, there is lack of consensus around sharing economy definition (Borcuch, 2016). Terms like collaborative economy, collaborative consumptions, and sharing economy have been used interchangeably (Botsman, 2013). On one hand, "collaborative economy" is usually referred to as a series of systems which have the function to release the value of assets and resources that not used to best of their ability level. On the other hand, Botsman (2013) defines "collaborative consumption" as an economic model based on sharing, swapping, trading, or renting products and services enabling access over ownership, while "sharing economy" is defined as economic models based on sharing underutilized assets from spaces to skills to stuff for monetary or non-monetary benefits, that it can take place only in a peer-to-peer (P2P) market and not in the business-to-consumer (B2C).

Regardless of the term used, the sharing economy has brought changes in the consumers' value system. Indeed, the typical values of the capitalist mentality such as the Individualism, the personal well-being, the cult of the ego, is leaving space to completely different values. The community, the relationships, less tolerance for waste, a strong and growing desire for sociality and belonging, service orientation, environmental responsibilities, will of sharing and participation, are now trends that characterize the collaborative consumer profile. Sharing intention is a culturally learned behaviour as well as possession and ownership (Furby, 1976). The current research has been conducted in order to verify if culture dimensions and materialistic attitudes can influence positively or negatively the consumers' intention to participate in the world of sharing economy.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next section, the state of the art is summarized and the research question and hypotheses of the study are established. Later, there is a section in which the methodology used to obtain the results is described. In the following section, the obtained results are described and discussed, while the last section gathers the conclusions of this work.

2 Research framework

2.1 *Influence of culture over sharing intentions*

Hofstede (1980) defines a set of six cultural dimensions that allow distinguishing different national cultures across countries. Out of the six factors, two of them have been selected as possible mediators in consumer's interest towards the sharing economy.

The first dimension considered is the Individualism / Collectivism, in which the definition of self, expressed in terms of "I" and "We" is involved (Triandis, 1995). Members of individualistic cultures see themselves as independent of others. Individualism can be seen as the emotional independence from "groups, organizations, or other" (Hofstede, 1980). On the contrary, members of collectivist cultures see themselves as interdependent members of an "in-group/community", a collection of people perceived as sharing the same fate (Triandis, 1993), so they tend to act cooperatively in their group's interest (Hofstede, 1980; Kagitcibasi, Berry, 1989; Triandis, 1993) and give priority to the goals of the groups (Hofstede, 2001).

A collectivist consumer is prone to collaborating and compromising in group activities and sharing in group outcomes (Hui, Triandis, & Yee, 1991). "Sharing Resources", whether tangible or intangible, is seen as a characteristic of collectivism (Hui, Triandis, 1986; Sinha & Verma, 1987). In this sense, the act of sharing is one of distribution, and it is an active practice to have something in common with someone (John, 2013), so the "real" sharing experience is consuming together, sharing or exchanging assets and resources like products, time, space, skills, food, money from and/or with peers (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). In this sense, sharing can be considered a form of consumption that promotes cooperation between people, awakens a sense of community and reinforces the sense of commitment, in which the social aspect becomes more relevant and important (Vaquero, Calle; 2013).

The second dimension under study is Masculinity / Femininity, where masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success; women are supposed to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life. Contrariwise femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede, 2001). Cultures with high masculinity emphasize work goals, assertiveness, heroism and materialism, while feminine cultures stress personal goals, such as employment security, human relationships, concern for others, and nurturing relationships (Hofstede, 1980). While masculinity can be represented by a competitive society that view the world in terms of winners and losers, femininity refers to the environment of cooperation where people feel secure to share their

knowledge and resource with others, where alliances are typically viewed as "win-win" situations.

If sharing is about openness and mutuality, there is a sense in which it can be perceived as reflecting a set of values that can be seen as feminine (John N.A, 2013). Alison Jaggar (1992) in fact defines “interdependence, community, connection, sharing” as feminine attributes, a set of characteristic that may be associated to sharing economy.

Italy and Spain are the two countries under consideration in this study, and they show distinct values for the abovementioned measures. Italians rank higher in individualism (76%) than Spaniards (51%). At the same time, Italians are more masculine (70%) than Spaniards (42%). For Italians, competing and winning are important things in their life; they show their success with new car, travels, big houses, etc. On the contrary Spaniards are less competitive. They are educated in search of harmony, relationships and cooperation with others, also with weak or needy people.

Hence, in accordance with the literature and Hofstede’s studies, it is possible to state that Italians are individualistic and masculine, while Spaniards are collectivist and feminine, thus reacting differently over sharing economy. For this reason it is hypothesized:

H1a: “Italians are individualistic and masculine. They have a low Sharing Intention”

H1b: “Spaniards are collectivistic and feminine. They have a high Sharing Intention”

2.2 Influence of materialism over sharing intentions

Materialism has been identified as playing a key role in the consumers’ sharing decision (Akbar, Mai, Hoffman; 2016). It is defined as a personality trait reflecting the importance a person places on material possessions (Belk, 1985); it refers to how important material good are to a person’s life (Goldsmith R.E, Clark R.A., 2012). Materialism, in essence, is an orientation among individuals who find their greatest personal satisfaction from owning valuable objects, and who have relatively little interest in humanistic value such as altruism or community feeling.

However, in accordance with Belk (1984), materialism is a multi-dimensional concept, which consists of three sub-dimensions: Possessiveness, Non-generosity and Envy. In this research we rely on the previous study of Akbar et al (2016), in which only the first two sub-dimensions are accounted for when dealing with sharing intentions. Possessiveness represents the inclination and tendency to retain control or ownership of one’s possessions (Belk 1983), it is the excessive desire to acquire materialistic things, people, and memories. On the other hand, non-

generosity stands for an unwillingness to give possessions to or share possessions with others (Belk 1984); it is to value things more than people (Belk & Ger; 1994), and appeared to represent the interpersonal components of materialism (O'Guinn & Faber; 1989).

As abovementioned, Italians are considered more individualistic than Spaniards and for this reason, more prone to materialism. Therefore the following hypotheses are made:

H2a: "Italians are materialistic, so they have a high Possessiveness and a low Sharing Intention"

H2b: "Spaniards are not materialistic, so they have a lower Possessiveness than Italians, and have a high Sharing intention"

H3a: "Italians are materialistic, so they have a high Non-Generosity and a low Sharing Intention"

H3b: "Spaniards are not materialistic, so they have a lower Possessiveness than Italians, and have a high Sharing intention"

3 Methodology

A quantitative approach has been selected for this research, with the use of a questionnaire submitted to a sample of engineering master degree students from two different universities, namely "Università di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale" (Italy), and "Universidad Politécnica de Madrid" (Spain). The respondents of the survey are enrolled in master degrees of Mechanical, Civil and Industrial Engineering, being their number of 144 for Italy and of 119 for Spain. Similar results for gender distribution have been found for both samples: Italy (men: 71.5%, women: 28.5%) and Spain (men: 71.4%, women: 28.6%).

The items that form the survey are divided in three modules. The first one is devoted to demographic identification of respondent (age, gender, nationality and employment status of student's parents). The set of cultural dimensions (individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and risk aversion) are gathered in the second module. Last, the survey developed by Akbar et al (2016) for analysing the link between materialism and sharing intentions has been used as the third module. All items are measured in a five point Likert scale.

4 Results and discussion

The first variable measured in this study is General Sharing Intention (GSI), for which an average of 2.64 has been found for Italy ($\sigma=0,944$) and 3.20 for Spain ($\sigma=0.884$). The second variable is materialism, which is composed of two sub-dimensions: Possessiveness, with an average value of 4.34 ($\sigma=0.852$) for Italy and 3.71 ($\sigma=0,940$) for Spain; and Non-Generosity, which averages 2.50 ($\sigma=0.953$) for Italy and 2.15 ($\sigma=0.709$) for Spain. The Cronbach alpha for these variables is 0.78, 0.90 and 0.90 for GSI, Possessiveness and Non-Generosity, respectively, proving a high internal consistency in the questionnaire.

Prior to the statistical analyses, the non-parametric Kolmogorov-Smirnov test has been used to verify the normality of all items considered in the analysis, presenting all of them a normal distribution with a significance level of $p < 0.001$.

Hypotheses have been checked with the Student's t-test for difference between average values between both samples. Table 1 summarizes the results obtained. As it can be seen, H1 is confirmed in its two propositions: Italians, which belong to an individualistic and masculine culture, have a lower GSI than Spaniards (collectivist and feminine), being this difference statistically significant.

This result implies that an individualistic and masculine behaviour, as that of Italian consumer, does not foster participating in the sharing economy. In Italy there are some prevailing individualistic feelings among consumers, which clash with those typical of the sharing economy and therefore slow the spread of the same phenomenon. Contrarily, Spaniards do not feel comfortable with competitiveness, preferring to cooperate and give attentions to needs and preference of others rather than competing to distinguish oneself. In fact, Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, and Betancourt (1984) described the Spanish as entertaining, warm, pleasant, and friendly people who show respect for others and try to establish harmony in their interpersonal relationships, can be seen also in the work-place as teamwork. They adopt a pattern of social relationships that has been described as communal sharing and that instils a sense of belonging to a social group, that is frequently giving presents, behaving altruistically, being generous, and perceiving relationships as being eternal (Fiske, 1992).

With respect to H2a, H2b, H3a and H3b, they are all positively verified. That is, Italians rank higher in both sub-dimensions of materialism. This is linked with the previous result obtained for GSI, as previously proved by Akbar et al (2016). Not in vain, Rifkin (2014) argues that "Materialists are less empathetic not only against other people but also toward other creatures and the natural environment. In their view, the nature is just a tool, a resource to be exploited, instead of a community to preserve. For them the environment, as well as relationships with others, should be considered only in terms of utility and market value and never for its own sake".

Table 1 Student's t-test for the variables measured in this research

		N	Mean (1-5)	df	T
General Sharing Intention	Italy	144	2.64	261	-4.95***
	Spain	119	3.20		
Possessiveness	Italy	144	4.34	261	5.62***
	Spain	119	3.72		
Non-Generosity	Italy	144	2.50	261	3.35***
	Spain	119	2.15		

***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; and *p < 0.05.

5 Conclusions

The determinants of consumer behaviour when dealing with sharing economy have been dealt within this research. Particular emphasis has been made on the influence of culture and materialism.

Regarding cultural dimensions, results obtained point out that of individualism / collectivism and masculinity / femininity influence individual behaviour and propensity to sharing economy. Specifically, individualism and masculinity are negatively correlated with sharing intention.

With respect to materialism, its influence on sharing intention has been confirmed in this study. Individuals with high materialistic disposition do not show a high sharing intention, in consequence of their personal satisfaction in owning valuable objects rather than sharing them.

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