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Shared Moments of Sociality: Embedded Sharing Within Peer-To-Peer Hospitality Platforms

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We investigate how the notion of sociality is shaped through the prevailing context. Using a multi-sited collection of qualitative data, we compare shared moments in peer-to-peer hospitality platforms in a market versus a non-market environment and conclude that sociability comes closest to prototypical sharing when it is perceived as autotelic.

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Sharing As a Social Phenomenon

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Paper #1: Shared Moments of Sociality: Embedded Sharing within Peer-to-peer Hospitality Platforms

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Paper #2: Sharing Difficult Choices

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Paper #3: A Social Network Analysis of Adolescent Social Standing, Sharing and Acquisition Materialism, and Life Satisfaction

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Paper #4: With Whom Do People Share? The Effects of Upward and Downward Social Comparisons on Willingness to Share Possessions

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SESSION OVERVIEW

Sharing is a fundamental consumption behavior that only recently has started to gain academic attention (Belk 2010). As consumers, we share our possessions, knowledge, experiences, time, and other resources with selected others. Sharing is defined as anti-materialistic, prosocial, communal behavior, which bridges interpersonal boundaries by linking us to other people, with no expectations of reciprocity (Belk 2010 ; Benkler 2004). However, very little is known about how the perception of others affects our willingness to share our possessions and resources with them.

This special session aims to further our knowledge of sharing as a social phenomenon. The authors explore diverse forms of sharing, including experiences, decisions, social relationships and possessions, in a variety of social contexts, and use multiple research methods and data from multiple countries, including Russia, France, Canada and the US.

Hellwig, Belk and Morhart open the session with an exploration of the sociality of shared moments in monetary (AirBnB) vs. non-monetary (CouchSurfing) peer-to-peer hospitality platforms. Using qualitative data, they study how shared experiences are created, shaped and evaluated through the prevailing material or non-material context. They conclude that when sociality is perceived as authentic it comes closest to the ideal of prototypical sharing.

Barakshina and Malter examine a different kind of sharing – shared decision-making, in the context of patient-doctor decisions during pregnancy and childbirth. Their survey data from Russia and the US and interviews with patients and their doctors show that patients often feel they are sharing decisions with doctors, as well as family, friends, and peers online, but the same treatment decisions are typically perceived by medical practitioners as not “shared” at all. Medical outcomes are felt most acutely by the patient (and her baby) and only to a lesser extent by others who shared in the decision.

Gentina, Shrum and Lowrey aim to bridge apparently contradictory concepts - sharing and materialism. Transcending the traditional view of materialism as acquisition of objects, they examine a

different type of materialism - as shared experiences. Using network analysis of adolescents’ social relationships with peers, they find a positive relationship between centrality of social standing and sharing materialism (but not with acquisition materialism) and between sharing materialism and happiness.

Finally, Ruvio, Mandel and Gentina focus on the fundamental question, “With whom do we share?” Two experiments suggest that consumers strategically choose with whom to share possessions, and tend to share more with individuals perceived as superior to them in terms of social comparison. This behavior seems motivated by anticipation of future gain, challenging the view of sharing as a non-reciprocal act.

Each of these papers highlights a different view of sharing as a social phenomenon. Together they expand our understanding of sharing as a consumption behavior and help push the boundaries of this emerging concept. This session offers potentially fruitful avenues for future research, and will appeal to ACR attendees interested in sharing, consumption and pro-social behavior, possessions and self-identity, and shared decision-making, among others.

Shared Moments of Sociality: Embedded Sharing within Peer-to-peer Hospitality Platforms

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Many welcome the “new sharing economy” for its transformative impact, lower prices, and increased convenience. But there is also growing criticism of its rampant neoliberalism, its marginal illegality, and its business practices that support tax fraud and undermine workers’ rights and social security (Cagle 2014; Morozov 2013). In fact the business practices of many prominent “sharing businesses” have little to do with the romantic ideal of sharing as “joint (psychological) ownership, pro-social intentions and the absence of expectations of reciprocity” (Belk 2010).

Given the dominance of economic treatments of business it is not surprising that much existing research focuses precisely on the redistribution of idle capacity and thus on purely economic efficiency within a system labeled sharing (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Lamberton and Rose 2012). Many of the findings of such studies thus revolve around how participants perpetuate a traditional capitalist mindset by presumably maximizing their utilities under the guise of a socially romantic label - a practice that has sometimes been called “sharwashing.” However, if a socially romantic aspect within material sharing systems is to be found, it is not advisable to focus solely on economically efficient behaviors, but on the opposite: on economically “inefficient” behaviors, namely participants’ spending time and congeniality with each other even though the redistribution of physical resources would not require it.

Among the plethora of peer-to-peer service offerings, two popular cases in the new sharing economy appear particularly well-suited for investigating the sociality of shared moments: the hospitality platforms CouchSurfing and AirBnB. The latter is based on monetary exchange while the former is based on non-monetary exchange. We use a multi-method and multi-sited collection of qualitative data over a three year period in order to understand how the notion of sociality is produced and shaped through these market or non-market based sharing ideologies. We draw on fourteen qualitative in-depth interviews with AirBnB and CouchSurfing hosts (some do both) in

Europe and the Americas. Besides participant observation we analyze online content such as member profiles and forum discussions.

Granovetter's (1985) discovery that social embeddedness is pervasive in business transactions is especially germane in the "hospitality industry" because it relies not only on providing concrete accommodations, food, and drinks, but also the social interaction between hosts and guests. But although the two hospitality platforms studied were both founded upon the idea of offering strangers the use of unused home facilities, they differ substantially in how they deliver the material and non-material components of hospitality. As summarized in table 1, the sociability aspect of hospitality is the core offering of CouchSurfing while in AirBnB the core offering is the accommodation.

In CouchSurfing, comforts beyond a simple place to sleep are perceived as an "added value" that is not decisive in choosing a host. In AirBnB, it is sociability among guests and hosts that is the not expected source of added value (Ikkala and Lampinen 2015). In AirBnB, the economic exchange of money for accommodation is explicitly stated in the contractual agreement between host and guest and both have legal rights for mutual compliance. In CouchSurfing by contrast, there is an implicit agreement for social engagement in which claims for mutual sociality are embedded. This is illustrated by the disappointment, anger and frustration that were expressed by the CouchSurfer informants in cases where such implicit agreements for time and attention broke down. The opposite is true of attractive accommodations; AirBnB'ers have a legal right to them, while for CouchSurfers having their own rooms and comfortable beds is a nice extra.

However, when social interactions between AirBnB hosts and their guests DID occur, they added unexpected autotelic benefits external to the economic exchange. This points to the insight that, ironically, when it comes to sociality, AirBnB sometimes comes closest to the idea of "true sharing" without underlying expectations or obligations (Belk 2010, 2013). In contrast, in the case of non-monetized CouchSurfing, sociality is an "expected benefit". The interactions are obligations and entitlements that suggest "demand sharing" (Belk 2010; Price 1975; Woodburn 1998) of attention and time. Materially, CouchSurfing is clearly closest to true sharing; but non-materially, such demand sharing is institutionalized and expected, even though it is often freely given and autotelic.

Thus, we find that what changes the perception of sociability in both platforms is whether they are part of the core offer, or whether such social moments occur as "added value" beyond the agreement. The sometime occurrences of social interactions in AirBnB are unsolicited and when they do take place they are not driven by reciprocal expectations. They are the extra embeddedness that Granovetter (1985) finds in other business transactions. In CouchSurfing by contrast, such social embeddedness is the sine qua non of the expectations of both hosts and guests.

We conclude that sociability comes closest to the ideal of prototypical sharing whenever it is perceived as autotelic. This is mostly (but not exclusively) the case when moments of social togetherness are not overtly expected or induced by the system. Sociability seems to be perceived as more autotelic when time is perceived as something that is not in limited supply. While research on consumption practices in the so-called sharing economy mostly examines how existing material resources are redistributed among individuals, we look at how shared experiences are also created and shaped through the prevailing material or non-material context.

Sharing Difficult Choices

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The medical domain represents a unique and important class of consumption decisions that are not only high-stakes, high-risk and high uncertainty, but also rely on advice and guidance from expert service providers. Medical practitioners often decide for patients, even when medical evidence does not clearly support a specific option. We study the effect of sharing "preference-based" patient-doctor decisions during pregnancy and childbirth when more than one treatment option is medically justified (Wennberg 2004) (e.g., choice of epidural anesthesia during labor). In contrast, medical decisions are "evidence-based" or "effective care" when benefits clearly outweigh potential harms (O'Connor et al. 2007) (e.g., emergency C-section when there is a sudden change in the baby's heart rate).

In the U.S., the concept of shared decision-making (SDM) between a doctor and patient was first proposed several decades ago. SDM may occur when neither party carries the focal decision power or is predisposed towards one course of action; hence the decision is made collectively, combining the doctor's medical expertise and patient's view of desired outcomes. By adding consumer input to the decision-making process, SDM may improve patient outcomes (Gravel, Legare and Graham 2006). While SDM has received vocal support from many U.S. practitioners, implementation is still far from widespread. Multiple factors, from a paternalistic tradition in healthcare (Coulter 1997) to practical limitations, such as brief duration of doctor visits, have prevented wider adoption of SDM. In developing countries, including Russia, SDM is still in its initial stage.

In marketing and consumer research, healthcare has been studied as high-stakes decisions (Kahn and Luce 2003) from the perspective of emotional load, affect and stress associated with these decisions (Isen 2001), positive and negative consequences resulting from freedom of choice (Markus and Schwartz, 2010; Botti, Orfali and Iengar 2009), uncertainty-seeking by avoiding risk and responsibility (Leonhardt, Keller, Pechmann 2011), and the effect of social power exercised by physicians on patient satisfaction and compliance (Friedman and Churchill 1987). Personality and social psychology research links investigation of "decisions for others" and self-others decision-making to level of construal theory (Polman and Emich 2011). While making decisions for others, people tend to be less loss-averse compared to making decisions for themselves (Polman 2012). In the medical literature, Frosch et al. (2012) found that many patients feel compelled to play socially predetermined roles and defer to physician decisions during clinical consultations even for preference-based decisions. Bernstein et al. (2012) show that women's decisions in favor of elective repeat C-section are largely due to lack of objective information and essentially follow the medical provider's preference.

Our research aims to bridge the gap between clinical evidence from healthcare studies and studies of consumer perspectives on decision-making processes for difficult decisions. Specifically, we examine how and when shared decision mode between patient and doctor affects emotional outcomes of decisions, such as post-decision regret.

We surveyed 394 females from the U.S, ages 18-50, regarding their youngest child. Respondents were recruited through a paid online panel, and identified medical procedures they decided to undergo (or not) during pregnancy. For decisions described as "preference-based," respondents rated and evaluated the emotional difficulty of each decision. Participants reported the decision mode (patient-made, doctor-made, or shared) and degree of agreement with the treatment decision. Post-decision regret was measured on

a scale commonly used in the medical decision-making literature (Breahaut et al. 2003).

We find that patient involvement in decision-making (patient-made or shared decisions) minimized post-decision regret. Decisions made only by medical doctors had the highest level of regret. The U.S. results were replicated with a second sample of 177 women in Russia. Findings were consistent for Russia and the U.S., despite contrasting medical traditions (authoritative vs. patient-centered). A similar pattern was found for treatment decisions of low versus moderate emotional difficulty.

A key issue may be the degree of decision-making match or mis-match between patient and physician. The patient's perception of decision control often contradicts the physician's perception (Adams and Drake 2006). To test this assumption, we are conducting a long-term study – also in the maternal care domain – in the U.S., to measure patient-doctor correspondence in dyadic assessment of decision control.

Our current paper highlights the complex and multi-faceted nature of factors contributing to decision-making approaches that optimize emotional outcomes of highly-consequential consumer health-care decisions. The consumer behavior perspective helps enrich the medical approach by looking at patients in their diversity. For decisions when medical outcomes are positive, some consumers feel happy and experience no regret thinking about the decision process, while others become completely alienated from the medical establishment. Our research suggests that patient empowerment through shared medical decisions is a robust factor driving emotional outcomes of medical decisions. Shared decision-making, distinct from joint decisions, deserves a status of a standalone concept, making an important difference and improving medical service consumption experiences globally.

A Social Network Analysis of Adolescent Social Standing, Sharing and Acquisition Materialism, and Life Satisfaction

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Materialism plays a central role in many aspects of everyday life. Research has overwhelmingly focused on the negative consequences of materialism that may result from emphases on products over experiences (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003) or trade-offs between social relationships and material pursuits. This focus may ignore important positive functions that materialism may serve for some people. Recent conceptualizations of materialism have expanded the targets of materialistic acquisition to include not only products and services, but also shared product experiences based on social relationships (Shrum et al. 2013, 2014). Our research explores the implications of this new perspective.

Because the process of developing materialistic values is particularly critical during periods of identity transitions, we focus on adolescence, which is one of the most crucial transitions in one's life, because it is the time when adolescents emerge from the family setting in order to construct their personal identities. To do so, they increasingly rely on their peers, who help them to construct their social identity. More specifically, to reinforce their social identities, adolescents may seek strategic positions in a social peer network: some adolescents are isolated whereas others are socially integrated within their peer group.

This research aims to expand the view of materialism and develop an integrative model that identifies two social determinants of materialism (loneliness and social position within the peer group) and its consequences (life satisfaction). We focus on two subtypes of

materialism that play different roles in adolescents' and life satisfaction: materialism as acquisition of objects and materialism as shared experiences.

Method

Because school is where adolescents interact every day with their peers, we used school class as the unit of analysis to identify peer networks. A questionnaire was distributed to 984 adolescents across 33 school classes. This sample was then randomly divided into two sub-samples. The first sample served to validate the measurement scales. The second sample was used to test the model.

To measure adolescent's social network integration, we created a peer-reported measure of teenagers' social position by asking teenagers to nominate their five closest friends in their school classes. In such networks, the most central teenagers are those most frequently considered by others as being the more active. This "in-degree" centrality measure was chosen because it is less subject to social desirability bias, and thus provides the most accurate instrument to identify the most active teens in the network using sociometric data (Lee et al. 2010). Some adolescents are situated on the extreme periphery and have few contacts; others have many contacts and thus exhibit a greater degree of centrality.

Life satisfaction and materialism as acquisition of objects were measured using Diener et al.'s (1985) and Goldberg et al.'s (2003) scales, respectively. Loneliness was measured with Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona's (1980) scale. To measure sharing practices with others, we proceeded in two stages. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 adolescents, who were asked to answer the following question: "What are the objects that you share more often with others at school." This qualitative study enabled us to list 15 shared objects during adolescence. Next, a quantitative study of 150 adolescents was conducted. Among these 15 shared objects, only three were selected (movies, games, and files) because they were those most often shared. Sharing, defined as the extent to which adolescents engage in sharing practices with friends, was measured with a 3-item scale. Confirmatory factor analyses (using AMOS) on the first sample indicated good fit statistics and good composite reliability coefficients.

Results and Discussion

Structural equation modeling was used to test the structural model. The results of this analysis revealed the following. First, consistent with expectations, in-degree centrality was positively related to materialism as shared experiences but unrelated to materialism as acquisition of objects. In contrast, loneliness was positively related to materialism as the acquisition of objects but unrelated to materialism as shared experiences. Importantly, materialism as shared experiences was positively related to life satisfaction whereas materialism as the acquisition of objects was unrelated to life satisfaction.

There are concerns that today's teenagers are more materialistic than ever, because of the material resources they have to achieve a specific, positive social identity through their consumption. In contrast, our results revisit the fundamental question of the extent to which adolescents should be considered materialistic consumers in the conventional sense of the term. This research offers a new conceptualization of adolescents' materialism that refers not only to the acquisition of objects but also to shared experiences, which contributes to adolescent life satisfaction. We provide evidence that adolescents suffering from loneliness seek to acquire objects to compensate for their isolated status, whereas socially integrated adolescents seek to share experiences with their peer group. Their purpose is not merely to "have," but rather to "be" or even to "become."

With Whom Do People Share? The Effects of Upward and Downward Social Comparisons on Willingness to Share Possessions

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Imagine that you are a college student preparing for an important exam, and a classmate asks to borrow your notes. Would you be more likely to share with one of the top students in the class, or one of the bottom students? The answer may seem unclear, because you would have both more to gain (e.g., future favors) and more to lose (e.g., class standing) by sharing with a top student.

Individuals must often decide whether and with whom to share their most important material possessions. In this research, we experimentally investigate the role of social comparison in sharing: Are people more likely to share with someone who rates higher or lower than them on a dimension of interest, such as academic performance?

People often compare themselves to others on dimensions such as intelligence, appearance, or status (Festinger 1954). An upward comparison is a comparison to an individual who is superior on that dimension, and a downward comparison is a comparison to an individual who is inferior on that dimension. Upward comparisons can sometimes trigger similarity testing, in which the individual and target are seen as similar to each other, leading to assimilation (Mussweiler 2003). If this assimilation occurs, sharing with the upward comparison target may feel almost like sharing with oneself. Indeed, individuals are more likely to share possessions such as computer files with others with whom they are psychologically or geographically close (Wiese et al. 2011). Moreover, people may prefer to share with upward comparison targets for strategic reasons. Sharing is a communal act that connects us to other people (Belk 2010), and the sharer may wish to ingratiate him/herself with an upward comparison target in order to feel socially closer, or to benefit in the future.

Based on the reasoning above, we predicted that individuals would be more likely to share a significant possession with an upward comparison target than a downward comparison target. We also predicted that several factors might moderate these results. First, we expected to find stronger effects in situations where the shared product was non-relevant to the comparison dimension (such as sharing an apartment with an academic superior) than in situations where the shared product was relevant to the comparison dimension (such as sharing notes with an academic superior, in which case the sharer might lose academic standing). Second, we predicted that when individuals were in a competitive mindset (Toma et al. 2009), they would be less willing to share with anyone, but in particular they would be less willing to share with an upward comparison target, because sharing would potentially allow the target to get even further ahead on the comparison dimension.

The goal of study 1 was to examine the effects of social comparison and product relevance on likelihood to share. Study 1 utilized a 3 (comparison target: upward vs. downward vs. neutral) X (shared product: relevant – class notes, computer vs. non-relevant – sandwich, apartment) between-subject design with 607 participants. For the social comparison manipulation, participants read a scenario about Michael/Michelle, who was a very successful (upward comparison), very unsuccessful (downward comparison) or average (neutral) business student in the same class as the participant (Mussweiler et al. 2004). We matched the gender of the target to the gender of the participant to control for the effects of mating motives. Participants indicated their willingness to share their possession with Michael/Michelle. We pooled the two relevant products and two non-relevant products for analysis purposes. There was a main effect

of social comparison, indicating that participants were more willing to share with an upward versus downward comparison ($M = 5.32$ vs. 4.09 , $F(2, 601) = 31.56$, $p < .001$), with neutral in the middle ($M = 4.59$). There was also a main effect of product relevance, indicating that participants were more likely to share non-relevant versus relevant products ($M = 4.94$ vs. 4.39 , $F(1, 601) = 18.63$, $p < .001$), but these two variables did not interact. Consistent with our theorizing, participants believed they had more to gain from sharing with an upward target ($M = 4.53_{\text{upward}}$ vs. 3.94_{same} vs. 3.6_{downward} , $F(1, 601) = 34.61$, $p < .001$), and this perceived gain mediated the relationship between social comparison ($r = .30$) and sharing ($r = .44$).

The purpose of study 2 was to examine the moderating role of competitive mindset. Undergraduate students ($N = 128$) participated in a 2 (comparison target: upward vs. downward) X 3 (mindset: competitive vs. cooperative vs. control) experiment. Participants read the same social comparison scenario as in study 1. Then they wrote a short paragraph about a situation where they competed/cooperated with another individual or group of individuals (Toma et al. 2009), or went grocery shopping (control condition). Finally, they indicated their willingness to share their class notes. Results demonstrated a significant main effect of social comparison ($M = 4.12$ downward vs. 5.53 upward, $F(1, 122) = 24.89$, $p < .001$), replicating the findings in Study 1, and a significant comparison X mindset interaction ($F(2, 247) = 3.15$, $p < .04$). Participants were more likely to share with an upward target when they were in a cooperative mindset ($t = 2.50$; $p < .02$) than either a competitive or control mindset ($t = 2.50$; $p < .02$), whereas they were more likely to share with a downward target when they were in a competitive mindset than either a cooperative ($t = -3.09$; $p < .003$) or neutral mindset ($t = -3.77$; $p < .001$).

The goal of study 3 (currently underway) is to further probe the reasons why individuals prefer to share with upward comparison targets. In other words, what exactly do people stand to gain by sharing with their superiors? We designed study 3 very similarly to study 2, but with several follow-up questions about what the participant expects to gain from sharing, including knowledge, favors, respect, trust, and reputational gains. In doing so, we hope to establish a more precise explanation for our findings.

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