Chapter 9
What Pulls Consumers in and What Pushes Consumers Out

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ABSTRACT

The recent proliferation of collaborative models of consumption has called attention of organizations, governments, and the academy to understand the impact of these new forms of consumption on the economic scenario. However, specific efforts to understand the changes in consumer behavior are so far scarce. This chapter compiles the available knowledge on how consumers are coping with these new forms of consumption exploring the motivators and obstacles affecting their behavior. Additionally, some relevant information on the current status of the adoption of different forms of collaborative consumption, the collaborative consumer profile, as well as some perspectives for the future are also explored.

INTRODUCTION

Would you share your assets with a stranger? If your answer is yes, then you are a collaborative consumer. This recently spread out behavior reflects a new form of getting access to goods different from the well-established model of ownership. Although a formal definition is still under discussion, one can briefly describe the collaborative consumer as an individual willing to share his/her assets to some unknown person and/or is willing to get access to goods and services that belong to someone strange to his/her inner circle (Bucher, Fieseler, & Lutz, 2016).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9928-9.ch009
Even though there is no doubt this sharing mode of exchange is gaining more and more attention, the act of sharing is not a novelty as historically individuals have always shared their resources (Belk, 2010). For sure, you have shared, at least once in your lifetime, something with a friend or family member, an entirely standard form of help and support to your inner circle. So, what makes it different now? Currently, strangers are connecting in a chain of users and providers of goods and services activities well outside the frontiers of inner circles, neighborhoods or even countries (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016) mediated by a technology agent, usually a platform (Sutherland & Jarrahi, 2018). This collaborative model of consumption is calling the attention of all, the industry, the academy, and governments as it reflects a change in behavior where individuals are moving from focusing on ownership towards focusing on experience and access to goods and services (Bucher et al., 2016).

Consumers have dramatically changed their behavior in recent years. Economic crisis, concerns with the environment together with the evolution of information and communication technologies with the advent of the internet and social networks created the perfect environment for people to connect to each other and, therefore, built solid grounds for the proliferation of sharing modes of consumption (Edbring, Lehner & Mont, 2016). Although this is a relatively new phenomenon, the impressive fast pace of growth and its global dissemination led collaborative modes of consumption to be considered an alternative economic model which impact on the individuals’ life and companies businesses is still unclear (Böcker & Melen, 2017).

Several authors claim collaborative consumption is a radical game changer in the way individuals relate to each other and how the economy moves (Barnes & Mattsson, 2016; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2010; Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Leismann et al., 2013). In the March 2011 issue of Time Magazine, sharing was said to be one of the ten ideas that will change the world (Walsh, 2011) as it has the potential to reduce the pressure of consumption in the environment, redefine human interactions, generate new business models and forms of livelihoods and thus, altering the entire marketplace. Therefore, understanding the drivers behind the adoption of collaborative forms of behavior is fundamental and beneficial for all sectors. The industry will be better armed to adjust their plans and course of actions, and the governments will have solid grounds to implement laws and regulations as a way to guarantee adequate protection to all parties involved. Finally, the entire community will benefit from understanding the pros and cons of engaging in a sharing activity as it might change the way individuals live and relate to each other.

Although empirical evidence in the field is still limited, in this chapter, the authors aim to share with the reader a comprehensive review of current knowledge regarding the drivers of the adoption of collaborative consumption as well as the key barriers preventing it. The authors reviewed the available literature on Web of Science, and official publications from 2010 through 2019. The chapter seeks to compile current knowledge regarding consumers’ behavior towards CC. Therefore the effects it might have on the economy are not discussed. It starts with a brief background for contextualization, followed by a section with key facts and figures from the consumer standpoint. Next, a review on the key drivers that lead consumers to behave collaboratively, the key barriers preventing them from joining in and the expected growth and penetration of collaborative models of consumption is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion on implications and future avenues for research in the field.