

Public Opinion towards Sharing Economy Business Model

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Abstract: The importance of the sharing economy has been growing in recent years and it is now becoming an important segment of the global economy. Positive developments in this field are dependent on understanding the attitudes of the stakeholders in this business model. The aim of the article is to identify public attitudes towards selected general aspects of the sharing economy model using the Czech Republic as an example. Primary data were obtained via a questionnaire survey (N = 614) and processed using descriptive statistics tools. The study shows a relatively low level of familiarity among respondents with the concept of the sharing economy and the business model itself. However, the respondents do believe that the sharing economy model will replace traditional business models in the future. In the opinion of the respondents, neither a lack of ability and willingness to use information technology nor a lack of information hinder development of the sharing phenomenon. Respondents also do not believe that sharing is the preserve of young people.

Keywords: business model; sharing economy; collaborative consumption; public

JEL Classification: D16; Q01

1. Introduction

Sharing, by means of which individuals or groups use, occupy, or enjoy something with others, is a long-established social practice (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015). However, it is now expanding widely (Narasimhan et al., 2018) and defining an innovative model of the sharing economy using various kinds of new technologies (Acquier et al., 2017). This unprecedented growth can be attributed to significant technological advances (Cheng, 2016), changing user views on ownership of certain products or use of different services (Botsman & Rogers, 2010), promotion of a collaborative and sustainable society (Heinrichs, 2013; Tetrevova et al., 2019), demand for socially responsible behavior by economic entities (Jelinkova et al., 2021; Tetrevova et al., 2022), and the need for social connectivity among users (Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017).

The professional literature offers a wide range of definitions of the sharing economy model, this above all being due to the dynamic development of this phenomenon as well as the multitude of constantly evolving business models (Hawlitschek et al., 2018). One example of this is the definition given by Lessig (2008), who first defined the term "sharing economy". According to him, this concerns "collaborative consumption made by the activities of sharing,

exchanging, and rental of resources without owning the goods” (Lessig, 2008). An alternative view is offered by Botsman (2013), who states that it is “an economic model based on sharing underutilized assets from spaces to skills to stuff for monetary or non-monetary benefits”.

Although the sharing economy model has now become mainstream, it is still not entirely clear exactly what this concept represents. After all, as Acquier et al. (2017), Schor and Fitzmaurice (2015) or Tetreanova et al. (2021) state, it encompasses a diverse range of practices and sectors, as well as different types of organizational forms ranging from for-profit to various non-profit initiatives. Examples include carsharing and ridesharing (Heinrichs, 2013), shared transportation of goods or food (Geissinger et al., 2019), sharing flats, offices or parking spaces (Casado-Diaz et al., 2020; Cohen & Munoz, 2016), sharing a wide range of devices and equipment (Bocker, 2017; Tetreanova & Kolmasova, 2021), sharing finances (Leone & Schiavone, 2018) or sharing various types of services (Yaraghi & Ravi, 2017). Whatever the definition, the fact is that the sharing economy model is associated with a number of positive effects (Teubner, 2014). The main ones being a reduction in demand for new goods (Moriuchi, 2019) and slowing down of environmental destruction (Ravenelle, 2017).

A number of topics are discussed in the context of the sharing economy model. One topic which has so far stood outside the mainstream of research is analysis of the attitudes of participants in the sharing process or other entities concerned towards this phenomenon (Tetreanova et al., 2021). One of the few studies on this is the study by Andreotti et al. (2017a) focusing on selected European countries. This study shows that 90% of Europeans are familiar with the sharing economy model. Respondents from Portugal have the highest level of awareness of this phenomenon (97%), while respondents from Italy have the lowest (82%) (Andreotti et al., 2017a). The only post-communist country included in this research was Poland, where 91% of respondents are familiar with the sharing economy model (Andreotti et al., 2017a). From the point of view of the Czech Republic, one of the few studies is that conducted by IPSOS. This study shows that 38% of the Czech population is familiar with the concept of the sharing economy (IPSOS, 2019). However, respondents’ knowledge of individual services is significantly higher, this being as much as 78% in the case of financial sharing via the Zonky platform (IPSOS, 2019). A higher level of knowledge of sharing economy services was found among the younger generation (IPSOS, 2019). Analogous conclusions in terms of the age of respondents were also reached by the Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2016) or Andreotti et al. (2017a).

It can be concluded that the current economic situation is leading society to think positively about sharing, and therefore it is reasonable to assume that this model will become more and more important over time thanks to its undeniable benefits. It is precisely these alternative attitudes of individual entities in society towards the sharing economy model which represent an interesting area of research which has not as yet been studied sufficiently.

2. Methodology

The aim of the article is to identify public attitudes towards selected general aspects of the sharing economy model using the Czech Republic as an example. The article presented here aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent is the public in the Czech Republic familiar with the concept of the sharing economy?
2. Does the public in the Czech Republic believe that the sharing economy model will completely replace traditional business models in the future?
3. Does the public in the Czech Republic believe that it is sufficiently informed about the sharing economy and the possibilities of its use?
4. Does the public in the Czech Republic believe that one of the reasons for the limited use of sharing in this country is that people are unable or unwilling to use modern technology?
5. Does the public in the Czech Republic believe that the sharing model is designed primarily for the younger generation?
6. To what extent are attitudes towards the above-mentioned questions influenced by the age of the respondents?

The point of departure for the article was a literature review, which formed the basis for the creation of new findings (Webster & Watson, 2002). This was followed by quantitative research in the form of a questionnaire survey. This is considered to be an efficient method of collecting primary data (Patten, 2014). The pilot survey was conducted in August 2019. The survey was conducted electronically via the LimeSurvey application from September to October 2019. The questionnaire contained four parts, namely a part mapping the respondents' awareness of the sharing economy, previous experience and level of use of sharing economy platforms, public attitudes towards the sharing economy and identification of the respondents. Two closed questions from the section "Respondents' awareness of the sharing economy" and four closed questions from the section "Public attitudes towards the sharing economy" became part of the presented study. Data specifying the respondents are also presented. Respondents were identified using both closed (gender and education) and open (age) questions. Respondents were selected on the basis of quota sampling, with quotas applied to age and gender. The interviewees were students of the University of Pardubice. They contacted the determined number of respondents on the basis of a breakdown of quotas. The sample consisted of 630 respondents. From this sample, 614 fully completed questionnaires were gained. The response rate was 98%. The structure of the respondents can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Structure of respondents by age

Age	N	%
15–29	224	36%
30–80	390	64%
Total	614	100%

Table 2. Structure of respondents by sex

Sex/Age	Age 15–29		Age 30–80		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	114	51%	192	49%	306	50%
Female	110	49%	198	51%	308	50%
Total	224	100%	390	100%	614	100%

Primary data were processed using MS Excel (version 2208), specifically with the aid of descriptive statistics tools. Differences in the attitudes of the younger and older generations were tested using Pearson’s chi-square test at the 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results

The study first investigated the extent to which respondents were familiar with the term “sharing economy”. Table 3 shows that only 23% of respondents know exactly what the term sharing economy means.

Table 3. Knowledge of the term “sharing economy”

Are you familiar with the term “sharing economy”?		
Answer	N	%
Yes, I know exactly what it means	141	23%
Yes, but I don’t know exactly what it means	204	33%
Yes, but I have absolutely no idea what it means	102	17%
No	167	27%
Total	614	100%

Respondents were also asked whether they are aware of the existence of the sharing economy model, even though they may not be directly familiar with the concept. For this purpose, the sharing economy was defined as “the temporary provision of currently unused own resources (money, labor, cars, space or things etc.) for use by other entities via digital (online) platforms”. Table 4 shows the structure of the responses. In this case, 40% of respondents declared that they were familiar with the existence of the sharing economy model.

Table 4. Familiarity with the existence of the sharing economy model

Have you come across the sharing economy model as defined here?		
Answer	N	%
I definitely have	245	40%
I probably have	210	34%
I probably haven’t	114	19%
I definitely haven’t	45	7%
Total	614	100%

The study also ascertained respondents’ attitudes towards selected aspects of the sharing economy phenomenon. Table 5 shows the respondents’ attitude towards the question whether the sharing economy will completely replace traditional business models in the future. The majority of respondents (71%) basically agree with this statement.

Table 5. Attitude towards the statement “The sharing economy will completely replace traditional business models in the future”

Answer	N	%
I definitely agree	131	21%
I probably agree	304	50%
I probably don’t agree	141	23%
I definitely don’t agree	38	6%
Total	614	100%

Table 6 shows the difference in attitudes between the younger generation (aged 15 to 29) and the older generation (aged 30 to 80). Using the Chi-square test, at the 5% level of significance, there was a statistically significant difference in attitudes towards this statement between respondents who belong to the younger and older generations (Chi-square 16.149, Sig. <0.0005). Respondents belonging to the older generation generally agreed more with this statement.

Table 6. Attitude towards the statement “The sharing economy will completely replace traditional business models in the future” – Differences in the attitudes of younger and older generations

Answer	Relative frequency	
	Age 15-29	Age 30-80
I definitely agree	15%	25%
I probably agree	49%	50%
I probably don't agree	31%	18%
I definitely don't agree	5%	7%

Table 7 shows the respondents' attitude towards the question whether the public is sufficiently informed about the sharing economy and the possibilities of its use. More than ¾ of respondents (78%) believe that the public is sufficiently informed.

Table 7. Attitude toward the statement “The public is sufficiently informed about the sharing economy and the possibilities of its use”

Answer	N	%
I definitely agree	145	24%
I probably agree	331	54%
I probably don't agree	116	19%
I definitely don't agree	22	4%
Total	614	100%

Table 8 shows the difference in attitudes between the younger generation (aged 15 to 29) and the older generation (aged 30 to 80). Based on the Chi-square test performed, there was no statistically significant difference at the 5% level of significance between the attitudes of the younger and older generations towards this statement (Chi-square 3.762, Sig. 0.052).

Table 8. Attitude toward the statement “The public is sufficiently informed about the sharing economy and the possibilities of its use” – Differences in the attitudes of younger and older generations

Answer	Relative frequency	
	Age 15-29	Age 30-80
I definitely agree	24%	24%
I probably agree	51%	56%
I probably don't agree	20%	18%
I definitely don't agree	5%	3%

Table 9 shows respondents' attitudes towards the claim that the sharing economy based on internet platforms is inaccessible to many people because they are unable or unwilling to use modern technology. Most respondents disagreed with this statement. Using a Chi-square test, no statistically significant difference was identified between the attitudes of the younger and older generations towards this statement (Chi-square 3.163, Sig. 0.075) (Table 10).

Table 9. Attitude toward the statement “The sharing economy based on internet platforms is inaccessible to many people because they are unable or unwilling to use modern technology”

Answer	N	%
I definitely agree	32	5%
I probably agree	136	22%
I probably don't agree	266	43%
I definitely don't agree	180	29%
Total	614	100%

Table 10. Attitude toward the statement “The sharing economy based on internet platforms is inaccessible to many people because they are unable or unwilling to use modern technology” – Differences in the attitudes of younger and older generations

Answer	Relative frequency	
	Age 15–29	Age 30–80
I definitely agree	7%	4%
I probably agree	24%	21%
I probably don't agree	40%	45%
I definitely don't agree	29%	29%

Table 11 shows that respondents do not believe that the sharing economy is primarily for young people. However, using a Chi-square test, at the 5% significance level, there was a statistically significant difference in attitudes towards this statement between respondents who are part of the younger and older generations (Chi-square 11.405, Sig. 0.0007) (Table 12).

Table 11. Attitude toward the statement “The sharing economy is primarily for young people”

Answer	N	%
I definitely agree	37	6%
I probably agree	116	19%
I probably don't agree	255	42%
I definitely don't agree	206	34%
Total	614	100%

Table 12. Attitude toward the statement “The sharing economy is primarily for young people” – Differences in the attitudes of younger and older generations

Answer	Relative frequency	
	Age 15–29	Age 30–80
I definitely agree	4%	7%
I probably agree	23%	16%
I probably don't agree	46%	39%
I definitely don't agree	27%	37%

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The study shows that 56% of respondents are familiar with the term “sharing economy”, but only 23% of respondents know exactly what this term means. 74% of respondents declared their familiarity with the sharing economy model when the concept was explained to them. The level of familiarity on the part of Czech respondents is therefore significantly lower as compared to the level of familiarity achieved in Western European countries, but also compared to a post-communist country such as Poland (Andreotti et al., 2017a). The

study also shows that the majority of respondents (71%) believe that the sharing economy will completely replace traditional business models in the future. This was supported to a greater extent by representatives of the older generation. Respondents (78%) also believe that the public in the Czech Republic is sufficiently informed about the sharing economy and the possibilities of its use. No statistically significant difference in attitudes towards this aspect was identified between the younger and older generations of respondents. The majority of respondents (72%) disagreed that the sharing economy based on internet platforms is inaccessible to many people because they are unable or unwilling to use modern technology. However, studies to date have shown conflicting views regarding the impact of digital skills on the development of the sharing economy model (Andreotti et al., 2017b). In this case too, no statistically significant difference between the attitudes of the younger and older generations was identified. The study also shows that respondents (76%) do not believe that the sharing economy is primarily for young people. Paradoxically, the older generation were more likely to support this. However, most studies (e.g. European Commission, 2016; Andreotti et al., 2017a; IPSOS, 2019) do show a much more positive attitude towards the sharing economy model from the point of view of the younger generation.

This study expands knowledge of the sharing phenomenon, in particular knowledge about the attitudes of stakeholders, specifically the public in the Czech Republic, towards the sharing economy model. This is a unique study on this topic. There is a very limited number of studies available for possible comparisons, confrontations, and deeper discussions. This knowledge can be used as theoretical points of departure for further follow-up studies in this field which deal with this rapidly developing phenomenon. The findings presented by this study are also useful for managers of sharing economy platforms, and especially for policy makers in this field.

One limiting factor of this study is its focus on one of the small post-communist countries – the Czech Republic. We can also consider the fact that the article does not take into account the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic or the economic effects of the military conflict in Ukraine as a limiting factor. Follow-up studies should therefore focus on comparison from the point of view of the individual countries in Europe or even the world regarding these effects. Another limiting factor is the non-representativeness of the survey, which does not allow for generalization of the findings.

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