
A suggested framework for online sharing practices

First Author

Petter Bae Brandtzæg
SINTEF
Forskningsvn. 1, 0871 Oslo
Norway
pbb@sintef.no

Second Author

Marika Lüders
SINTEF
Forskningsvn. 1, 0871 Oslo
Norway
malud@sintef

Abstract

When designing for sharing online we need to gain a better understanding of what kinds of sharing practices that exist online, and what these sharing practices mean in respect to differences in motivation and demands up on the giver versus the receiver. This paper explores the possibilities to develop a preliminary framework to; 1) understand the different sharing practices online and; 2) to provide a distinction between the *receiver* and the *giver* in regard to both motivations and demands in the sharing economy. The latter points to the need to understand different sharing practices online within an integrated framework considering the person or group who holds the content or artefact to be shared (the giver), as well as the receiver of the sharing practice. Future directions and research challenges are discussed.

Author Keywords

Sharing; receivers; givers; online practices

Introduction and background

The sharing economy, encompassing sharing, bartering, trading, renting and swapping goods and services through networked technologies and peer communities [1], is portrayed in media as a disruptive and sustainable mega-trend. The citizens' participation on the Internet in general, and in social networking

sites in particular, is related to "a culture of sharing" [3]. But, what is really online *sharing*, and how can different sharing practices be characterized?

According to Wittell [10]. "sharing" is used for different social practices with different functions and different kinds of motivations. Yet, the concept of sharing, in the context of online practices, is regarded as an under-theorized one [6]. Consequently, there is a need for an improved understanding of online sharing practices. We need to understand how different services are typically included as examples of the sharing economy and everyday practices of sharing, particularly in terms of sharing as seen and experienced from the different perspectives of the actors involved.

When designing for sharing online, we need to gain a better understanding of; 1) what kinds of sharing practices that exist online and; 2) what factors that motivate and put demands up on the various actors. Hence, we suggest that the different actors, givers and the receivers, have diverse experiences of the various sharing practices. In general, there has been either a focus on the person or group who holds the content or artefact to be shared (the giver), or the other side of these processes, the receiver of the content and artefact. A combined perspective, which considers both givers and receivers within the same framework, is needed.

Our framework suggested in Table 1, divides online sharing into three distinct practices: 1) social sharing, 2) pro-social sharing and 3) business sharing.

Sharing practices User groups	<u>Social sharing</u> Example: Sharing personal experiences, (text, photos, video)	<u>Pro-social sharing</u> Example: Give something away; money, used things, advices, knowledge	<u>Business sharing</u> Example: Rent out/renting car, flat; C2C product and service systems (previously owned items, small services)
<u>Giver:</u> <i>Effort, interest, and social ties</i>	Low effort. Friends and strangers	High effort, no economic benefit. Mainly stranger	High effort, economic benefit. Strangers
<u>Receiver:</u> <i>Effort, interest, and social ties</i>	Low effort Varied interest. Friends and strangers	Medium effort High interest. Mainly strangers	Medium effort Varied interest. Strangers
<u>Audience,</u> <i>Effort, interest, and social ties</i>	Potential interest. Friends and strangers	Potential interest. Strangers	Potential interest. Strangers

Table 1. Preliminary online sharing framework

The framework suggests some key user groups and divides between the central actors within a sharing process; the *giver* and the *receiver*, as well as the "invisible" audience. This categorization of the different actors might be useful when designing for sharing based on civic and peer engagement in local

communities to enable both collaboration and interdependence. The table shows how different user groups will vary in interest and effort related to different sharing practices.

Giver versus receiver

The suggested framework understands the sharing process as a social transaction that takes place between the giver and the receiver, and that the sharing practice often is viewed by a larger crowd, a lurking audience who rarely participates actively [2]. The giver will face different demands than the receiver (see Table 1), and they will have different kinds of motivations for using the online service. The giver wants to either earn money or give something away, while the receiver wants to benefit from the giver in some way or another. But the receiver may also want to give something back in return, to show gratitude. This latter point may be solved by the following solutions in design:

- *Facebook* (social sharing): by using the like button.
- *Kickstarter* (pro-social sharing); by giving back with access to good music or pre-view of a movie.
- *Airbnb* (business sharing); by submitting a good review.

Still there may be more and better solutions that we have not thought of, that can help and improve the design of solutions that support the receiver. In addition, in some sharing services (e.g. crowdfunding, Kickstarter) the receiver needs to actually pro-actively ask for a gift or support. "Will you help me?". These services will need to support the receiver to ask for help. "The art of asking", as Kickstarter-user Palmer [9] has formulated it. Palmer also formulates some other underlying questions that are interesting to dig more into:

- *How do we ask each other for help?*
- *When can we ask?*
- *Who's allowed to ask?*

These questions are still not really addressed, either by the design or the literature. Moreover, we have suggested in Table 1 that there are strangers among the actors (that the receiver and giver not are known to each other), which typically is the case for pro-social sharing and business sharing. However, these strangers and sharing practices can still be part a local sharing community, as a size of a local community will be dependent up on the scope of the particular sharing service.

Related research and perspectives

While studies on for example gift-giving, a kind of a pro-social sharing practice, largely have ignored the receiver, the giver perspective has been researched extensively in sociology, anthropology, and social psychology (see [11]). Sociologists have been interested in gift-giving, from the perspective of "norms" of giving, social responsibility, and reciprocity (e.g. [4]). Anthropologists have focused on gift-giving as a "total social fact," in other words, as a medium for social as well as economic exchange (e.g. [8]).

Psychologists focus on gift giving as an opportunity to express the giver's perception of both herself and the receiver (e.g. [5]). These perspectives might not always be relevant in an online business sharing transaction, where the giver wants to earn money in a safe and trustful environment, and the receiver wants to gain a good deal, also in trustful and safe environment [7]. Yet, the differences between the giver and receiver need a broader understanding. This might be understood from learnings, not only from different theoretical stands from gift-giving, but also from theory

on traditional seller behavior and consumer behavior studies. Our assumption is that to optimize the users' experience, from the different actors' perspectives, there is a need to link the design of such services to typical motivations that drive both receiving and giving in different sharing practices.

Conclusion and future research

The framework suggested in this paper, is only based on some preliminary thoughts and ideas, but might still be a good starting point for an open discussion of what a local online sharing community should consist of to be successfully designed. The various characteristics of different sharing practices and its actors are topics we believe can contribute and enrich this discussion.

Future research should firstly identify the motivations, demands and experiences from all the actors involved in online sharing practices, the receivers and the givers. Secondly, research is needed to understand how different characteristics of social ties (friends or strangers) between actors in these marketplaces impact the experiences and behaviours of involved actors on both sides. Thirdly, research is needed to advance our knowledge of what motivates sharing-practice lurking audiences to become active in both sharing and receiving. These studies should recruit participants from different types of sharing services, to gain deeper understandings of sharing practices and the different needs related to different actors.

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