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A Grounded Analysis of Collaborative Consumption among Apparel Consumers: Identification of Motivations for Engagement

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Collaborative Consumption (CC) is an emerging business approach that encapsulates different models for sharing products and services in a market. “Collaborative consumption takes place in organized systems or networks, in which participants conduct sharing activities in the form of renting, lending, trading, bartering, and swapping of goods, services, transportation solutions, space, or money” (Mohlmann, 2015, pp.194). Sharing is beneficial to consumers from practical and financial perspectives, and positively impacts environments and communities (Belk, 2014). Bostman and Rogers (2011) classify CC into three categories: Product Service Systems (PSS), Redistribution Markets (RM), and Collaborative Lifestyles (CL). PSS includes products and services for rent or exchange through platforms managed by an intermediary, RM includes bartering, giving, exchange or second-hand sales between individuals, while CL includes sharing immaterial resources between individuals (e.g., space, skills, time).

Academic researchers have begun to investigate CC from a consumer perspective, though most of the work is applied in contexts outside of the apparel industry. Tussyadiah (2015) provides a model of the positive and negative motivations for consumer use of CC in the travel industry, which provides the basis for this investigation. In a 2015 empirical study, Tussyadiah identified lack of trust, lack of technology efficacy & lack of economic benefits as deterrents, and sustainability, community and economic benefits as drivers of CC engagement. The purpose of the study is to establish an understanding of CC in the apparel context, from a consumer motivations perspective. Specifically the research identifies motivations for using CC among users of three established platforms: Rent the Runway (RR), Bag, Borrow and Steal (BBS) and Poshmark (PM).

Data are comprised of comments sourced from *SiteJabber.com*, an unbiased platform for consumer reviews. The data span time periods based on each platform’s history and consumer comment behavior: RR (2010-2016, N=82), BBS (2009-2016, N=14) and PM (2014-2016, N=227). NVivo software was used for the analysis following a deductive approach to identify consumer motivations for using CC among the apparel related platforms, guided by motivations identified in previous research. Thirty initial terms were generated to guide the analysis whereby each term and its related stems were mined in the text data. The full corpus was analyzed (N=323) which generated word frequencies and trees at the CC platform level. Word frequencies were used to identify consumer motivation presence, while word trees were used to interpret the meaning of identified motivation terms within the verbatim consumer context.

Content analysis indicated presence of eight of 30 search terms among the CC data (i.e., afford, cost, deal, worth, honest, trust, complex, difficult). Based on word tree interpretation, these terms were integrated into three motivation categories: affordability, trust and complexity. Both affordability (N=87 citations) and trust (N=58 citations) emerged frequently and consistently across the platforms. Unique dimensions of affordability were expressed in the data: BBS data suggest sheer affordability as a positive motivation, RR data suggest cost savings and worth the money as positive or negative motivations and PM data suggest finding a deal as a positive motivation. Trust, both a positive and negative motivator, emerged consistently across the platforms, with PM comments suggesting the importance of honesty for engagement among consumers in this platform. Weaker evidence of complexity emerged (N=9 citations) and comments were isolated to two platforms (i.e., RR and PM) predominantly driven by difficulty cited among users of the RR platform.

Findings of this exploratory study suggest that motivations for using CC in the apparel context are somewhat consistent with those identified by Tussyadiah (2015). Our results, though limited in generalizability due to research design, suggest that both affordability and trust impact consumers within the CC market environment. Several platform specific findings emerged as well such as issues related to honesty among users of the PM platform, which is highly interactive and accommodates many buyers and sellers. Additionally, difficulty with technology or process did not emerge among all formats, but was pronounced among the RR users which actually indicated difficulty with delivery logistics rather than technology.

Limitations related to the analysis and use of secondary data includes: negative bias in consumer comments, potential bias among users of *SiteJabber.com*, and difficulty establishing authenticity of online comments. Though motivations for using CC are identified, their influence needs to be established to understand the practical impact on consumption decisions in this arena. Research that addresses these limitations is necessary to advance the exploratory findings of this study and provide deeper insight into the potential competitive impact of CC on the apparel industry.

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