

Are Young People Keen to Adopt More Sustainable Behaviour by Using Shared Services?

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Abstract

The continual development of modern technologies and rising interest in their usage directly influence interest in services, which are strongly dependent on their usage, shared services. Shared services have become very popular among consumers across the world. However, the overall potential of this sector is still not sufficiently utilized in some regions. Therefore, we decided to find answers about the perception of the concept of sharing economy and its services among young consumers in Slovakia. In this context, we designed a questionnaire to determine whether and how consumers understand the concept of the sharing economy, what kind of services they use and their experience with them. We also focused on reasons why they use the services, as we assumed that young consumers, except for saving money, prefer to behave more sustainably. By analyzing respondents' answers, we found that even though only 30 % of respondents know sharing economy concept, more than 70 % of respondents have already tried shared services. The most used services are related to shared transport: shared e-scooters, bicycles and cars, and shared accommodation. We also found that only 1 % of respondents have a negative experience with these services. Results also show that young people use this kind of service mainly to save time and money, while only 27 % of respondents do because of environmental protection. Based on our results, we can also confirm that the growth of the shared services market will continue.

Keywords

Sharing economy, shared services, sustainable behavior, young people, Slovakia

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Introduction

The Sharing Economy (SE) covers all activities involving exchanging assets and services between individuals in exchange for a pre-agreed compensation. These are often underutilized assets and services; through the sharing economy, some people can benefit from them while the owner profit from them. Until now, collaborative consumption has been limited to several areas. Nevertheless, thanks to powerful information and communication technologies (ICTs), connecting people worldwide with common interests is now possible. The digitalization of society and the economic crisis have encouraged the development of new business models and forms of consumption. According to SE's statistics, the total value of the global SE is predicted to increase to 600 billion U.S. dollars by 2027, from 113 billion U.S. dollars in 2021, with compound annual growth of approximately 31% (Statista, 2023).

Even though the projected growth is massive, it is still necessary to pay attention to the factors affecting the use of shared services, especially in the areas in which the concept of sharing economy is not so popular. Živojinović and Zornić (2022) described three drivers: trust, interaction and experience, that synergistically affect potential consumers' interest in SE services. Akan and Tepeler (2022) emphasize that crucial factors for using SE platforms are the trust of economic actors in their interactions and the potential positive externalities for sustainability development. The application of the SE model by entrepreneurs

and companies contributes to the sustainable development of society (Mi and Coffman, 2019). The concept of the sharing economy contributes to the protection of the environment and to more sustainable behaviour but does the knowledge of this concept and its effects belong to the reasons for using these services? To answer this question, this study explores the influence of sharing economy concept knowledge on using shared services and also factors affecting their use.

This article is divided into several sections; first, it contains a literature review, then, based on it, it follows the methodology of our research, exploring and analyzing the current consumer's intention to use shared services in Slovakia and the article ends with the discussion and conclusion section.

Literature review

The Sharing Economy can go by a variety of names and often overlaps with other terms such as collaborative economy, collaborative consumption, access economy, platform economy, community economy or peer-to-peer economy. These concepts can be described as a mutual sharing of access to underused goods and services that prioritizes use and accessibility over ownership. Stephany (2015) argues that SE is organized by the value of taking underutilized assets and making them available to the online community, leading to a reduced need for ownership. Belk (2014) treats consumers as collaborators by emphasizing that the sharing economy is people who coordinate the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation. Cheng (2016) describes SE as a socio-economic system that facilitates a mediated set of exchanges of goods and services between individuals and organizations that aim to increase the efficiency and optimization of partial resources in society. Sutherland and Jarrahi (2018) presented the sharing economy as an online platform that helps people share access to assets, resources, time and skills. SE refers to forms of exchange facilitated through online platforms that include a diversity of for-profit and not-for-profit activities that generally focus on open access to underutilized resources through what is called "sharing." SE is an economic model defined as a peer-to-peer (P2P) activity based on obtaining, providing or sharing access to goods and services, often facilitated by a community-based online platform. SE business models are hosted through digital platforms that enable more accurate measurement of spare capacity and the ability to dynamically connect that capacity in real-time to those who need it. In SE, transactions that favour access over ownership are mainly used. Access to a good or service can take different forms, e.g. renting, lending, subscribing, exchanging, gifting, or reselling. All approaches mentioned above are typically able to realise lower costs compared to the form of ownership or costs in enterprises (Durisova, Kucharcikova, 2014). Nowadays, brand value is often associated with the social connections it fosters. Managing these connections is the basis for successful marketing and use of the services offered. In the case of SE, the user experience is crucial for the emergence of a client's emotional connection to the service. By offering the user ease of use and confidence in decision-making, SE business models are moving these companies from a purely transaction-based relationship to an experiential platform. The benefits of SEs arise from technological advances that allow users to generate revenue from untapped assets in many sectors, such as hospitality, transportation and leisure.

Since the beginning of SE, the tourism and hospitality industry has become one of the pioneering industries for its growth because SE allows tourists and residents to share their homes, cars, meals and expert local knowledge. A study by Tussyadiah and Pesonen (2016), based on travellers from the US and Finland, shows that peer-to-peer accommodation significantly changes travel patterns by reducing accommodation costs and providing meaningful social encounters with locals. In terms of supply, SE has expanded the overall range of tourism options, as starting a tourism business with relatively low start-up costs is easy. Online platforms further enable SE start-ups by giving their consumers access to a wide range of products and services, many of which are of a high standard but more affordable than their traditional counterparts. The sharing economy model has profound social and economic benefits and will improve the lives of countless individuals. According to a survey by Statista (2017), in North America, respondents aged 18-34 years old reported that they mainly use buy and swap services (50%), followed by shared transportation, shared accommodation and assistance services (30-32%). The least used were, for example, bike or car sharing (12%). The 34+ group used most of the same services as the 18-34 group, but these users were about 2/3 less. Data from Eurostat (2020) tells us about the use of SE by people aged 16-74 in the European Union and reports that accommodation and transport services were used the most. Overall, accommodation services were used more in the EU by almost half. They were primarily used in Luxembourg, Ireland and Malta. In Slovakia, they were used half as much as in Luxembourg, but in Slovakia, a similar number of people also use shared transport options. The data shows that shared accommodation services, notably Airbnb, are the most used. The value of Airbnb reached \$113 million in 2021, which was \$38 million more than in 2020. According to statistics from Statista (2021), nearly 45 million adults in the US used SE services, rising to nearly 87 million by 2021. Study of Warwas et al.

(2022) demonstrates that among the most popular platforms are accommodation booking services (26.7%), which are mainly used by Poles aged 25-34 (44%) and 18- 24 years old(39%). Less frequently used services include the free exchange of goods, services, knowledge and skills (17%). The least used services are crowdfunding services (2.3%). Only a tiny percentage (0.4%) of respondents declared using all or almost all SE platforms.

Within SE, we can consume goods that were not previously used or that did not have 100% utilization, thus optimizing resources. This fact also results in a larger supply for the final consumer. The consumer finds a more comprehensive range of products than traditional shops offer. You can make a broader comparison in quality and price. In a more detailed view, the consumer has the advantage of direct communication, the attractiveness of price, a more excellent range of products and services, environmental benefits and available feedback from previous consumers. By offering second-hand goods and services, consumers have access to below-market prices, allowing them to save. In times of economic crisis, this advantage has been crucial to the spread of collaborative consumption. SE prides itself on creating an ecosystem based on determination, solidarity and idea generation. These ideas go hand in hand with entrepreneurs with new businesses that create jobs, wealth and innovation in our business structure. It also allows for the growth of new areas of employment, opportunities to find parallel work, and a remuneration model. The SE model will have profound social and economic benefits and potentially improve the lives of countless individuals. The benefits arise from technological advances that allow users to generate income from untapped assets in many sectors, such as hospitality, transport and leisure. Consumers who use SE business models often feel more satisfied in transactions involving deeper social interactions than in traditional exchange models. For example, Airbnb or CouchSurfing allow travellers to connect with locals and get travel tips in a more personal way.

The main disadvantages of SE's services are the lack of legislative regulation and unfair competition. We usually face an unregulated sector that leads to complaints and protests from the affected sectors due to the assumption that there may be unfair competition because services cannot be offered on equal terms. Another disadvantage is that the end consumer has no guarantee of the quality of the product, and at the same time that the people with whom the product is shared are trustworthy and do not cause problems. These are risks that are transferred in exchange for a lower price. Ridesharing services such as Uber or Lyft depend on users being okay with the fact that they have to trust strangers to ride-share. According to Nielsen's (2015) Global Trust in Advertising study, 83% of respondents completely or somewhat trust the recommendations of friends and family more than any other type of advertising. It is also true that when brands evoke social sentiment and use it in marketing, conversion is often much higher. This trend is also a driving force for SE players. The rapid growth of mobile apps reflects greater user trust and the use of social sentiment to reinforce trust. For SE to continue to expand, providers will need to find ways to authenticate consumers. Trust, convenience, and a sense of community are all factors that are driving SE adoption forward. As consumers trust more in bonded relationships, a social sense, the community of SE users will build and expand more quickly.

Methodology and Data

This paper aims to determine young consumers' awareness of SE services, their perceived advantages and disadvantages, and their habits of SE services usage. Based on the literature and the current status of shared services in Slovakia, we would like to verify the following hypotheses: (H1) Most of the young people in Slovakia have already tried at least one of the shared services, (H2) Young people in Slovakia are interested in using SE services mainly due to saving money, and the environment protection, (H3) Usage of shared services in Slovakia by young people tends to increase in the next years, and (H4) Usage of shared services depends on knowledge of sharing economy.

Our analysis presented in this article is based on data collected through a survey targeting the young age group in the Slovak Republic. Through the questionnaire, we wanted to find respondents' opinions on the sharing economy and their perception or experience with services of the sharing economy. In creating it, we followed a thorough study of the Sharing Economy for better orientation and understanding of the concept. Based on this, we created a mind map of questions that would be suitable to be processed, analyzed and evaluated to complement, confirm and draw further conclusions regarding SE. Based on the mind map, a so-called indicative analysis (simplified) was used to understand each piece of information better.

Individual respondents' responses were recorded using Google Forms, a free web-based software package provided by Google, including online survey management software, which was used to record individual responses from all respondents. In addition to creating the survey, this tool also allowed the survey to be

shared with respondents online. As we focused on young people’s behavior related to shared services, the best way to reach them was to use social media.

The questionnaire mainly contained closed-ended questions with one or more options, but the respondents were allowed to define their answers to several questions. Some questions depended on previous answers, while others build on each other. Open-ended questions were used to elicit each respondent's unique subjective perspective. All data collected, processed and analyzed were used to provide recommendations or ideas for possible improvements to sharing economy activities and support their use by the young generation. The survey was launched from November 2022 to February 2023. 361 respondents filled in the questionnaire. However, as we focus in this research on young people (up to 35 years), we processed answers from 317 respondents. The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table no. 1. Descriptive statistics of the survey’s sample (N = 317)

Variable	Frequencies
Gender	50.5% women, 49.3% men, 0.3% other
Age group	89.0% 16-25, 11.0% 26-35
Occupation	86.1 % Student, 11.7% Employed; 1.3% Maternity and Parental leave, 0.9 % Unemployed
Region of living	32.5% Žilina Region, 18.6% Trenčín Region, 13.9% Bratislava Region; 8.8% Bratislava Region; 8.2% Prešov Region; 7.6% Trnava Region; 6.9% Banská Bystrica Region, 3.5% Nitra Region

Results

The statistics presented in the theoretical section are partly touched upon and confirmed by the data obtained from our survey. The majority of respondents reported that they had at least sometimes used the services of the sharing economy. This analysis shows that 72.6 % of respondents have already used some of the SE services in Slovakia (H1 confirmed). Results also show (Figure no. 1), that the most used SE services are related to shared transport (bicycles, scooters, cars) and shared accommodation. Less used SE services include shared funding and room-sharing.

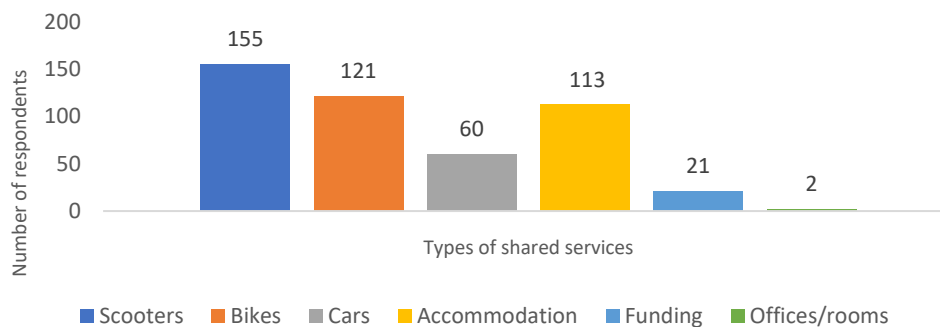


Figure no. 1. Use of shared services

From respondents who have used some of the shared services, 5.2 % use these services every day, 14.8% a few times a week, 24.3 % a few times per month and the majority only a few times per year. From the satisfaction point of view, it can be seen (Figure no. 2), that respondents evaluate their experience with shared services mostly positively. Only 16 % of respondents stated they have a neutral or slightly negative experience. We also run a chi-square test of independence to examine the relation between the frequency of usage shared services and satisfaction with them. The test confirmed there is not a significant relationship between these two variables ($X^2(9, N = 372) = 11.7004, p = .1362$).

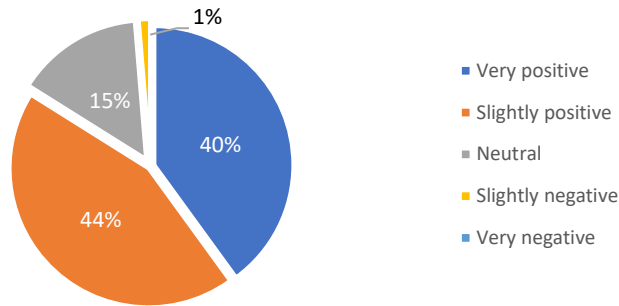


Figure no. 2. Perception of respondent's usage of SE services

The most frequent reasons why respondents use SE services are mainly to save time (74.3%) and to save money (53.0%) (Figure no. 3). Almost 27.4% of respondents selected environmental protection as a reason for using the services and 39.1% selected curiosity (functionality, usage) as a reason for using the services. It can be seen that even though the protection of the environment already plays a role in the selection of these services, their individual benefits in the form of cost and time savings still prevail. Therefore, we reject our H2. This result also corresponds with a finding of a study from Iran, where researchers confirmed the effect of perceived usefulness on subjective norms, satisfaction and behavioral intention in the case of ridesharing (Akbari et al., 2021) or with a study from South Korea which assumes that consumer attitudes to Airbnb have a positive effect on the intention to use SE services respectively (Sung et al., 2018).

We also analyzed the influence of gender on factors influencing the usage of shared services. The share of reasons to use shared services was similar for women and men except for curiosity. Only 28 % of women selected this reason compared to 51 % of men. This finding is also confirmed by the results of the Chi-square test, which shows there was no significant association between gender and reasons to use shared services ($X^2(5, N = 561) = 9.386, p = .0946$).

To identify the trend of usage of shared services, respondents were also asked to define, whether they plan in the future to start using shared services or use them more. 39% of respondents expect to use services more often or to start using them in the future. In comparison, 36% expect to use services at the same level. Based on these results, we can confirm our H3, as we expect, that usage of these services will increase in the following years.

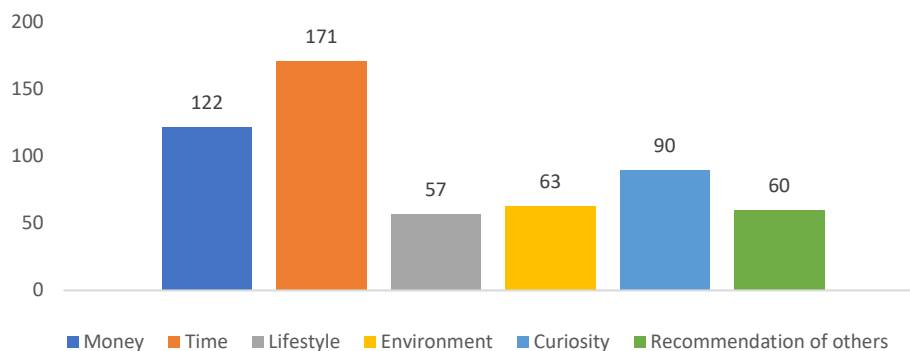


Figure no. 3. Motivating factors of SE service's usage

However, there are still factors decreasing interest in shared services. One of them are the problems of mistrust (Figure no. 4). 56% of respondents said that they felt some negatives discouraged them from using SE services, mainly factors such as distrust in others (37.4%), lack of information (25.7%) or tenant ignorance (23.5%). Other reasons that were mentioned in the questionnaire as possible deterrents are the lack of transport infrastructure (bicycles, scooters), the rising cost of the services, or the damage and deterioration of goods that are unusable at the moment. A study from Japan shows that especially females tend to not use space-, goods-, money-, or mobility-sharing services and the important factor inhibiting the use of such services was "resistance and anxiety about sharing with strangers (Nakamura, Abe and Mizunoya, 2021).

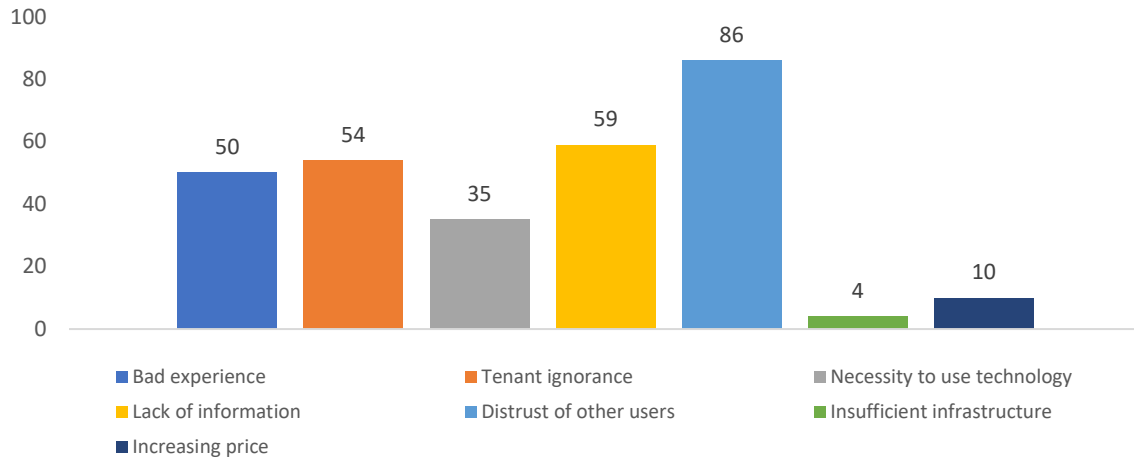


Figure no. 4. Discouraging factors of SE service usage

Our last hypothesis was focused on identification of relationship between knowledge of sharing economy and interest in using sharing services. Therefore, we asked respondents, whether they have already encountered term “sharing economy” and if they know the meaning of this concept.

Most users (42%) reported that they had previously encountered the term and were familiar with its meaning, which was a somewhat surprising finding (Figure no. 5). The responses were pretty even with not knowing the meaning (30%) or not knowing or not having encountered the term before (28%).

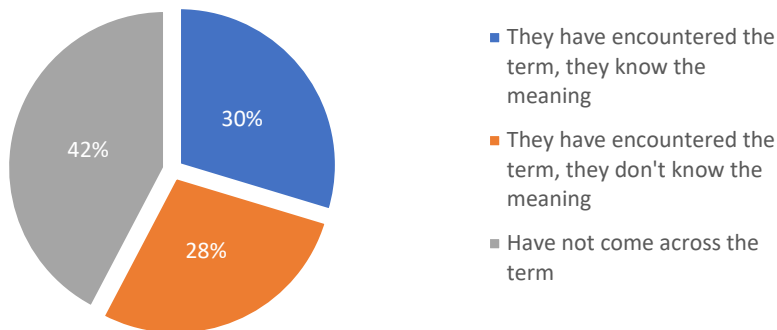


Figure no. 5. Knowledge level of term „sharing economy“

To reveal whether there is a relationship between knowledge of sharing economy concept and usage of sharing economy services, we perform Chi-square test of independence. Although results from researchers Hrusovska et al. (2021) show in Slovakia a high customers awareness and knowledge regarding sustainability, in the case of our modified point of view related to SE, our test did not confirm dependency; therefore, we reject our H4, which means that whether people know or do not know sharing economy does not influence their interest in using shared services.

Discussion

Since the Covid pandemic outbreak occurred, many services have suffered (Juříková, Ližbetinová and Káčerková, 2022), and the market conditions have also changed for sharing services. This impact on SE is one of our research limitations in terms of modified reasons and intentions for using or not using, for example, shared transport or accommodation. Based on our results, we suggest focusing on SE’s business models on multi-party cooperation of shared services’ providers. This cooperative approach could improve SE’s transparency and establish all customers’ trust regardless of age. Indeed, to achieve better usage of unused capacity toward more sustainable consumption, the sharing economy model requires cooperative economic actors both on the side of demand and supply. Different business models with other SE platforms could offer an appropriate combination of products/ services, like close complementary products/services regarding the content of the shared products/ services, geographical area or time when shared services are provided. This increased choice on one side could allow consumers to choose from a broader range of products and services, with more possibilities according to pricing, payment methods or

location. On the other hand, it could also offer new options to generate income for people even though these wages can often be low and unstable or cause tax avoidance and tax evasion, which are less researched topics of SE. Also, studies between personality traits, sociocultural variables of a particular geographical area and intention to develop SE business, similar and modified like Yurrebaso's research team carried out (Yurrebaso, Picado and Paiva, 2021) are highly demanded.

Security is another crucial factor of SE. In SE, the newest is not the perspective of sharing, but the difference is an empowered usage of technology how to do business. Data privacy security focuses on sharing platforms that collect and work with data about their users to facilitate transactions. They also have access to extensive data sets, and if it is not responsibly managed, this could create potential risks for SE. To avoid hybrid threats (Steingartner, Galinec and Kozina, 2021), we have to focus on innovation to find more accurate ways to recognize these negative externalities of SE, to develop better software solutions and mobile applications which allow economic actors' safety, and more quickly and transparent way how to make and respond to a request for products and services. Another perspective of security is personal safety in transportation, such as bike-sharing or e-scooter sharing. Especially in big cities like Paris, residents have been forced to ban rental electric scooters (not private yet) as e-scooters accidents are associated with several serious injuries, even death. And when we are thinking about another aspect of security and SE, Stickle (2023) states that one of the likely outcomes of this change is reducing crime and transitioning from publicly provided justice systems to prevention and alternative dispute resolution. In our continuing longitudinal research activities, we want to enrich our understanding of above mention sharing economy aspects.

Conclusions

The sharing economy is growing and changing how consumers think about ownership, assets or services. So it is no longer just a new, unfamiliar concept, even for the older population. More and more people are coming across the concept of the sharing economy, knowing what it means, grasping its concepts, and using them extensively. Our research also shows that in Slovakia, quite a lot of young people have already tried the services of the sharing economy, but they use them mainly occasionally. Young people in Slovakia prefer to use mainly transport services such as e-scooter sharing or bike-sharing and also shared accommodation. This finding can be related mainly to access to shared services in the analyzed area and limited offers of other shared services. Young people also tend to continue using shared services in the future, and part of them expects that they will increase the intensity of their use, which gives the sharing economy potential for future expansion in Slovakia. We also found that young people are mainly used to saving time and money by using shared services, but environmental protection as a decision factor is also not forgotten. The negatives mainly come from the lack of tenant familiarity and low trust.

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