

SHARING ECONOMY AS A NEW DIMENSION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY CASE OF POLAND

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Abstract. Sharing economy concerns a wide range of different behaviours in the field of redistribution of goods and resources, including renting products instead of buying them or resources sharing, such as carsharing or bedsharing inter alia. Such activities enable better access and allocation of resources, which can be assessed positive in terms of ecology (rationalization of resources use, elimination of post-consumption waste) or societal issues (counteracting social exclusion of people). A study on adult Poles shows that two thirds of respondents have handed over unused items to people in need or sold them on C2C market in the last year, while 59% limited buying new products directly from producers, buying "second-hand" items or borrowed them from friends, family or specialist companies (50%) if possible. Also, a high percentage of respondents willingly share their surplus of food products (69%) and non-food products (79%) with others. Such results indicate on high degree of commitment to the development of circular economy, as well as collaborative consumption helping to drive the sharing economy, which is an important step towards hindering wastage of both food and other resources thereby promoting their optimal use.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, sharing economy, consumer social responsibility.

JEL code: D10, D16, E20

Introduction

The global economy is facing many challenges that have been alarmed for many years by such recognized organizations or international institutions as the United Nations and the European Commission among others. Despite considerable debate on sustainable development and the importance being stressed in numerous development policies, we observe further deepening of social inequalities or increasing risks due to degradation the natural environment, which require an immediate and decisive response, and above all, solidarity in action. In view of these challenges, the concept of consumer social responsibility (CnSR) is gaining more and more importance. CnSR refers to various types of attitudes and behaviors of consumers in the economic, social, ethical and environmental context. It can be seen, among others, through the lens of consumer activism, and its' most influential form which is nowadays eco-consumerism, environmentalism, ethical consumption or the concept of citizens-consumers. The field of consumption was covered in the fourth chapter of *Action Programme – Agenda 21*: "Changing consumption patterns". The document underlines the great impact of the unsustainable consumption and production patterns, especially in the most developed societies, on the further deterioration of the environment. Moreover, it was emphasized that special attention should be paid to the demand for natural resources generated by unsustainable consumption patterns as well as that changing consumption patterns will require a multi-pronged strategy, focusing on shaping the demand, as well as meeting the basic needs of the poorer sections of society while reducing waste and the use of non-renewable resources in the production process.

Sharing economy (SE) is a social phenomenon which is claimed to be a modern trend in the 21st century, and its extremely rapid expansion could be assigned to the development of new technologies, especially the ICT and social networks such as digital platforms (Rutkowska-Gurak & Adamska, 2019, 346; Palm, Södergren & Boecken, 2019, 2). Despite considerable attention to the topic of SE in the scientific debate, the clear definition of the concept is still lacking (Lyaskovskaya & Khudyakova, 2021, 5) and there is great disparity in the conceptualizations of the phenomenon in the academic literature (Table 1).

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Table 1

Diverse definitions of the sharing economy from literature

Source	Definition
Aloni, E. (2016)	" (...) an economic activity in which web platforms facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges of diverse types of goods and services"
Barnes, S. & Mattsson, J. (2016)	" (...) involves access-based consumption of products or services that can be online or offline"
Cheng, M. (2016)	" (...) describes the phenomenon as peer to peer sharing of access to under-utilised goods and services, which prioritizes utilization and accessibility over ownership, either for free or for a fee"
Habibi, M.R., Davidson, A., & Laroche, M. (2017)	" (...) non-ownership forms of consumption activities such as swapping, bartering, trading, renting, sharing and exchanging"
Hamari (2016)	" (...) the peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services"
Heinrichs, H. (2013)	" (...) individuals exchanging, redistributing, renting, sharing and donating information, goods and talent"
Shaheen, S., Chan, N.D., Gaynor, T. (2016)	" (...) a popularized term for consumption focused on access to goods and services through borrowing and renting rather than owning them"

Source: Kurtis, S.C., Lehner, M. (2019)

To summarize the above mentioned definitions, it could be stated that sharing economy constitutes an umbrella term for a wide range of activities of individuals, social groups and enterprises, as well as local and state authorities, mainly in socioeconomic spheres, which purpose is optimization of allocation and redistribution of resources among societies (Rutkowska-Gurak & Adamska, 2019, 346). It includes sharing, swapping, trading or renting products and services, enabling a *"temporary access to underutilized physical assets (idle capacity), possibly for money"* (Rutkowska-Gurak & Adamska, 2019, 349) (Table 2).

Table 2

Sharing economy applications in modern communities

	Things	Services	Activities
Individual	Swapping, bartering, gifting	Ridesharing, couch-sharing	Skill sharing
Collective	Car clubs, tool banks, fab-labs	Childcare, time banks, crowdfunding	Sports, clubs, open-source software
Public	Libraries, freecycling	Health services, public transport	Politics, public space

Source: McLaren, D., Agyeman, J. (2015)

There is a substantial discourse in the academic field whether sharing economy contributes to the implementation of sustainable development goals (SDG) or in contrary. A many authors indicate on potential benefits of development of the sharing economy both in environmental, economic as well as societal sphere, which include, for instance:

- dematerialization of consumption;
- enhancement of the economic importance of interpersonal aspects and direct transactions between households (Lyaskovskaya & Khudyakova, 2021, 5);
- reconstruction of the individual or family budget (Rutkowska-Gurak & Adamska, 2019, 358);
- benefits for municipal development and democratisation (Palm, Södergren & Bocken, 2019, 2).
- However, as indicated by Palm et al. (2019), "*the potential for sustainability of the sharing economy is still debated and needs further investigation*".

Research results and discussion

The study was conducted using the CAWI technique and an online panel in the period of 17-20th of November 2021 on sample of N=516 respondents that were qualified to the study by using qualifying questions based on the definition of deconsumption. The research tool was a standardized questionnaire consisting of 53 substantive questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale and 10 sociodemographic questions defining respondents' characteristics. SPSS Statistics version 25.0 was used for statistical analysis. A significance level of $p \leq 0.05$ has been applied to assess the significance of the effects.

The study covered the following sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents: gender, age, place of residence, household size, having children, subjective assessment of the financial situation and its change in recent months. 272 women (53%), 243 men (47%) and 1 non-binary person (0.02%) took part in the study, which largely corresponds to the entire Polish population (women - 52%; men - 48%). With regard to the variable age, the largest percentage are the age groups 25-34 and 35-44 (26% and 27%, respectively). It is almost twice as much as in the general population, which may constitute a limitation to presented results. The least represented groups belonged to the age group of 18-24 and 65-80 years (10% and 2%, respectively). A detailed distribution of responses is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

**Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents in the study –
 distribution of respondents**

Variable	Number of indications	%
Gender:		
Woman	272	53%
Man	243	47%
Other	1	0%
Age group:		
18-24 years old	54	10%
25-34 years old	135	26%
35-44 years old	137	27%
45-54 years old	99	19%
55-64 years old	83	16%
65-80 years old	8	2%
Size of town (population):		
10 thous. - 49 thous. of inhabitants	94	18%
100 thous. - 199 thous. of inhabitants	74	14%
200 thous. - 499 thous. of inhabitants	70	14%
50 thous. -99 thous. of inhabitants	72	14%
more than 500 thous. of inhabitants	94	18%
Countryside and towns less than 9 thous. of inhabitants	112	22%
Having children:		
None	157	30%
2 children	162	31%
3 children	43	8%
4 children or more	10	2%
1 child	144	28%
Household size:		
1 person	36	7%
2 persons	111	22%
3 persons	149	29%
4 persons	136	26%
5 persons or more	84	16%

Source: authors' own study, November 2021

In the last twelve months, 26% of respondents participated in sharing economy activities – car-sharing, bike-sharing, couch-surfing etc. (133 indications). These were more often the people who reduced the quantity of consumed products as well (deconsumers, voluntary simplifiers). A statistically significant difference was observed for the "age" variable – the respondents from the age group 18-34 more often than people from the age group 35-54 and 54-80 declared this way of satisfying their needs (Table 4).

Table 4

Empirical distribution of responses in the view of socioeconomic characteristics – age, among 133 people indicating the use of services and products as part of sharing economy

Socioeconomic variable	Variable variant	Number of indications	Percentage
Age	18-24 years old	21	0.16
	25-34 years old	45	0.34
	35-45 years old	29	0.22
	45-54 years old	20	0.15
	55-64 years old	15	0.11

Source: authors' own study, November 2021

Participants of the study willingly shared unused goods for people in need or sold them on the C2C market – 66% of respondents declared such activity in the last 12 months (344 indications). Also, in this case these were more often the people who reduced the quantity of consumed products as well (deconsumers, voluntary simplifiers), women more often than men, people with higher degree more often than person with vocational education as well as respondents who have children more often than those without children (Table 5).

Table 5

Empirical distribution of responses in the view of socioeconomic characteristics: gender, degree level and having children among 344 people indicating sharing or sale of unused goods

Socioeconomic variable	Variable variant	Number of indications	Percentage
Gender	Woman	198	0.58
	Man	144	0.42
	Other	1	<0.01
Degree level	Elementary / lower secondary	7	0.02
	Vocational	22	0.06
	Medium / secondary without high school diploma	149	0.43
	Higher	164	0.48
Having children	1 child	98	0.28
	2 children	108	0.31
	3 children	36	0.10
	4 children or more	8	0.02
	None	93	0.27

Source: authors' own study, November 2021

One in five respondents (19%) rented a product instead of buying it in the last twelve months (96 indications). Statistically, more often with this statement agreed those respondents living in 5-person or larger households than 2-person households, assessing his or her household's financial situation positively than those who assessed it as average, as well as respondents whose economic situation had improved in recent years than those who whose economic situation had deteriorated or had not changed (Table 6).

Table 6

Empirical distribution of responses in the view of socioeconomic characteristics: household size and having children among 96 people indicating renting products

Socioeconomic variable	Variable variant	Number of indications	Percentage
Household size	1 person	4	0.04
	2 persons	14	0.15
	3 persons	29	0.30
	4 persons	24	0.25
	5 persons or more	25	0.26
Having children	1 child	22	0.23
	2 children	37	0.39
	3 children	9	0.09
	4 children or more	2	0.02
	None	26	0.27

Source: authors' own study, November 2021

Discussion

The findings of the study partially corroborates previous results showing that the use of services and products as part of sharing economy (carsharing, bike-sharing, renting, couch-surfing) as well as renting products instead of buying them is generally more popular among males; however, females tend to be more engaged in handing over unused goods for people in need or reselling them on C2C market. Also, observations are convergent in accordance to variable age group as all activities in the field of the sharing economy covered in the study are more popular among young generations (32% vs. 13%) as well as among more-educated people excluding use of services and products as part of sharing economy; the statistics differ also for various activities in the field of sharing economy (Table 7) (Rutkowska-Gurak & Adamska, 2019, 347; Stuchly & Suta, 2019).

Table 7

Participation in different sharing economy activities with indication of socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

Activity	Age group		Gender		Level of education	
	Woman	Man	18-44 y.o.	45-80 y.o.	Primary or vocational	Intermediate or higher degree
Use of services and products as part of sharing economy: carsharing, bike-sharing, renting, couch-surfing	24%	27%	32%	13%	29.5%	26.5%
Handing over unused goods for people in need or reselling them on C2C market	73%	59%	69%	63%	62.5%	68.5%
Renting products instead of buying them	16%	21%	21%	10%	15%	19.5%
Mean:	38%	35%	41%	29%	36%	38%

Source: authors' calculations based on own study, November 2021

The results of the study are also convergent with current papers covering the topic in other CEE countries that show that C2C sales are contributing at most to the sharing economy (Lyaskovskaya & Khudyakova, 2021, 10; Stuchly & Suta, 2019).

Conclusions, proposals, recommendations

- 1) The results of the study revealed that the engagement of Polish consumers in sharing economy activities, such as car- or bike-sharing, couch-surfing, lending products instead of buying them and redistribution of unused goods is quite high. Having in mind the current tendencies on the market, we can assume that such activities will become even more common in societies and sharing economy will play a crucial role in counteracting current development challenges, such as social inequalities, lack of resources or ecological challenges.
- 2) However, it must be underlined, that there is a need for further consumer education in the field of consumer social responsibility, supporting their awareness and building up consumer competences in this area as well promoting sharing economy among them.
- 3) Sharing economy and collaborative consumption is a field in which companies may successfully participate as well – a questionnaire by CBOS showed that Polish consumers are willing to buy second-hand products in stationary shops and commissions, but there are much more possibilities for enterprises arising from the development of the trend, such as development of online peer-to-peer platforms between consumers, for instance – successful examples of such strategies are platforms as Allegro, OLX or Vinted.

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