Can I Borrow That? Antecedents and Outcomes from Sharing of Digital Services: An Extended Abstract

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Abstract

If a firm's offering is able to be read, heard or seen, there is a good chance that content is available for consumption digitally. Written and audio books, movies, songs, and the like are able to be purchased and consumed instantly on a multitude of devices through an equally large multitude of services. While offering digital content to customers opens up multiple opportunities and conveniences for firms and customers alike, there are certain inherent problems and inconveniences associated with digital goods. When consumers purchase a book, game, song, or audio book electronically, it is rare that they receive a physical product. This means that some of the advantages of physical products, the possibility of resale, the ability to loan a book to a friend or family member, etc., are not available. Amazon, through the release of new "sharing" programs, has found a way to mitigate some of these effects, as well as possibly influence their relationships with existing and new users.

Amazon's Audible service allows users to share an audio book from their personal library with any recipient. In other words, an Audible user can gift a book to another Audible user as long as the giver has already purchased the book. There is no limit to the number of books that can be shared, as long as it is the recipients first time receiving a shared book, the book is free to them. Amazon also instituted a similar program that allows Kindle users to loan Kindle books from their library to friends. This program differs from the Audible program in that the Kindle books are loaned for a set time period, and will disappear after that time period, whereas the Audible book belongs to the recipient after it is accepted.

In creating these programs, the firms have added a social, consumer-to-consumer (C2C) element into their business model. With this sharing program, what had been a simple exchange between the firm and the member is now a series of exchange relationships: 1) between the firm and the sender 2) between the sender and recipient and 3) the recipient and the firm. The implementation of the sharing program may impact all three relationships present in this series of exchanges. This new sharing model, and the introduction of the C2C relationship, raises the question of what effect does this sharing model have on the relationship between the brand, the lender, and the receiver? Are traditional post-consumption constructs, such as brand attitude and word-of-mouth altered by this sharing model? This proposed study aims to explore these questions.

The premise of both sharing programs is that the sender is recommending the book to the receiver. In fact, the "Share this book" prompt, although available through multiple locations on the app and site, is automatically shown when a user finishes listening to an audiobook. Because

both the “Share this book” program and the Kindle “Loan a book” program require that the lender choose which files to share, the lender is making a conscience decision to share a recommendation with their friend, with an acknowledgement that the sender either enjoyed the book themselves, thought that the receiver would enjoy the book, or both.

Due to the “stamp of approval” placed on the gift by the lender, one could assume that this recommendation carries a cost. Any positive or negative view of the gift could conceivably impact the relationship between the lender and the receiver. As the “Share a book” program is the vessel between the two parties, it is also conceivable that that positive or negative feelings could translate to the Audible brand itself. If the book is enjoyed by the receiver, the lender could appreciate Audible’s ability to provide this connection with the other party. Of course, for a disliked book, the opposite could be true as well.

To determine the effects of such sharing programs on these relationships, scenarios will be developed and data will be collected via an online consumer panel. After the scenario has been presented, the respondent will be asked a series of questions concerning outcomes on constructs such as brand attitude, expertise, self-brand identity, purchase intention, involvement, price consciousness and relationship strength. The data collected from the survey will then be analyzed with MANOVA and reported. Overall, it is our hope that this research will add to the sharing economy knowledge and examine possible impact of the C2C digital sharing model.

References

Available upon request

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: The proposed research aims to explore an emerging sharing economy paradigm through an experimental, scenario-based research design.

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