NO STRINGS ATTACHED! DETERMINANTS OF FEMALE PARTICIPATION INTENTIONS TOWARDS COLLABORATIVE CLOTHING AS 'PROSUMERS'

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1. INTRODUCTION

Consumption is a continuous loop, we consume, we get rewarding satisfaction, the satisfaction vanishes as the previous consumption loses its rewarding peculiarities, then finally a new consumption takes place (Palese, 2013). Consumption as a continuous loop is a characteristic of liquid modernity of the contemporary era which talks about the overall societal shift away from stability towards ephemerality and fluidity. This view is echoed by the present conceptualization of liquid consumption wherein consumer has a short term orientation, detached and access based relationships (Christodoulides et al., 2021; McNeill & Venter, 2019) as opposed to an enduring ownership based relationship in which possession becomes a part of his extended self (Bardhi & Eckhardt, n.d). These evolved conceptualizations have given way to the concept of the sharing economy where people share resources among themselves for fulfilling their needs in return for some monetary gain. The applications of the sharing economy have flourished in myriad sectors such as the transportation sector, travel and tourism sector (Shingari & Kaur,

2024), the food industry and also the apparel sector. The present paper focuses on the application of sharing economy in the clothing sector, also known as collaborative clothing.

Collaborative clothing is an arrangement wherein any person having an extra clothing item shares it with other people, via the medium of a digital platform, in return for some monetary gain. Myriad platforms are now mushrooming like Rent the Runway, Bag borrow or steal and Poshmark that are democratizing fashion and making them available for the masses (Colic-Peisker & Flitney, 2018). Moreover, collaborative clothing is being considered a cleaner form of consumption which does not contributes to the waste pile ups as the apparel has to be returned back in order to be used by another consumer. It has also been argued to reduce the ecological footprint owing to enhanced shelf life of the garment (Zamani et al., 2017) and reduced resource deployment in totality (Lang & Joyner Armstrong, 2018).

The available literature on collaborative consumption of clothes has focused on identifying the drivers and barriers of collaborative clothing (C. Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018; Park & Joyner Armstrong, 2019). Some studies have focused on the role of one's personality traits in shaping their intentions towards collaborative clothing adoption, while other studies have examined the role played by self- concept and self- identity in impacting one's collaborative and sustainable fashion choices (McNeill & Venter, 2019). More recently, studies have been conducted in the realm of collaborative clothing through the lens of the theory of planned behavior (Baek & Oh, 2021).

However, the existing studies on collaborative clothing have overlooked Maslow's need hierarchy theory in studying the behavior intentions of the participants towards collaborative clothing albeit the high relevance of need satisfaction in propelling one's behavior (Cui et al., 2021). The present study thus employs Maslow's need hierarchy-based approach in studying the intentions of female consumers towards collaborative consumption of clothes both as a user and a provider. The study adopts a mixed method approach and

proposes a set of five determinants of intentions to participate in collaborative clothing common to both the users and providers. Moreover, the available research on collaborating clothing lacks a single study encompassing the determinants of participation in collaborative clothing both as a user and a provider. This gap has also been addressed in the present study which presents a holistic approach by encompassing both the supply and the demand side in the collaborative clothing realm. Hence the present study seeks answers to the following research questions: Drawing upon the Maslow's need hierarchy theory, what are the determinants of female participation in collaborative consumption of clothes both as a provider and user?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory

Individuals at different stages of the need pyramid have differing set of motivations persuading them to indulge in different consumption behaviors. Alternatively, even the same consumption behavior may be the resultant of varying sets of motivations depending on the consumer's personality (Matte et al., 2021). Maslow's need hierarchy has five levels of needs namely – Physiological needs, Safety Needs, Social Needs, Self Esteem and Self Actualization Needs. The theory has been applied in myriad sectors in the past literature such as in studying various stages in the adjustment of the immigrants into new countries (Adler, n.d.) or in the health care sector for propelling a comprehensive care plan for the patients (Jackson et al., 2014) and in hospice and palliative care sector to design patient care interventions corresponding to their needs (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006). More recently, the theory evidences its application in studying the electric vehicle adoption intentions (Cui et al., 2021) and to examine the use of web 2.0 tools corresponding to each of the needs mentioned in the pyramid (Kafkas University, Turkey & Yildiz, 2021). However, there is a dearth in the application of the need hierarchy in explaining the behavior of the participants in collaborative clothing sector, albeit its high relevance in

influencing one's consumption behavior. Addressing this gap, the present study presents a mix of both functional and psychological drivers affecting the intentions of female participants to indulge in collaborative clothing both as provider and a user. While the first three motivators are the three dimensions of the 'Triple Bottom Line', the next two are the satisfiers of higher order needs as depicted in the (figure) below:

Figure: The Conceptual Model
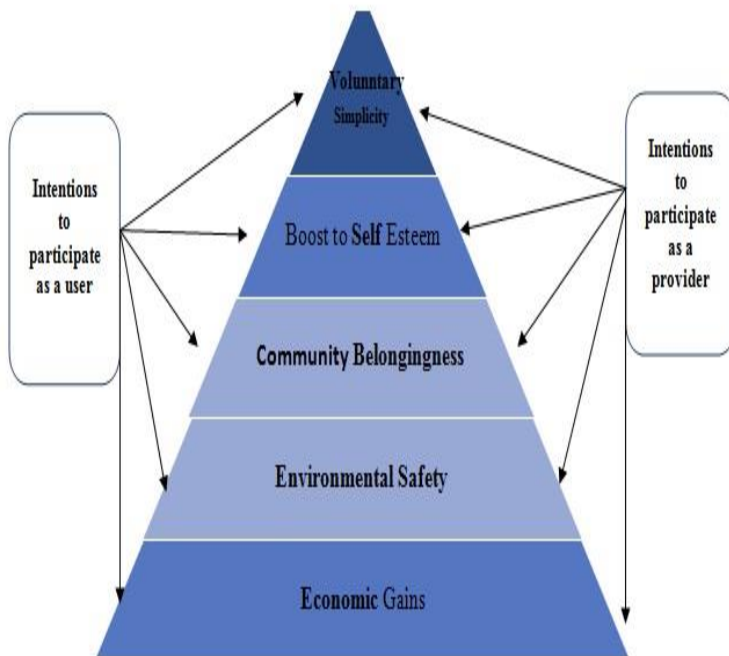
2.1.1 Physiological needs: Economic Gains
An individual who is at the lowest level of the need hierarchy and is struggling to make his ends meet will likely undertake those consumption behaviors that would result in monetary savings. Their consumption practices would reflect rational, utility maximizing and price conscious practices (Cui et al., 2021). In

the similar fashion, collaborative consumption of clothes is reported to result in financial gains or monetary savings (Guzzetti et al., 2021). As a user, collaborative consumption of clothes would result in monetary savings by eliminating the expenses involved in purchasing a new clothing item. As for a provider, collaborative clothing would result in generation of extra income, thus facilitating the fulfillment of basic physiological needs of the providers. Hence, for those striving to fulfill their basic physiological needs, collaborative clothing would mean a consumption alternative resulting in monetary savings, thus utilizing the saved money for better purposes (Guzzetti et al., 2021).

> *H1a: Economic gains positively influence the intention to participate in collaborative clothing as a user*
> *H1b: Economic gains positively influence the intention to participate in collaborative clothing as a provider*

2.1.2 Safety Needs: Environmental Safety

After gratifying the basic physiological needs, individuals would strive for the next level of seeking safety in the need pyramid. The individual at this stage seeks not only his current safety and security, but a continued safety for the future as well (Maslow, n.d.). In the context of this study, safety refers to the psychological safety perceived through/ by living in a safe/ relatively safer environment (Cui et al., 2021). Moreover, literature also supports the view that people make pro environmental choices by taking cognizance of the long term consequences of their actions (Rahimah et al., 2020). Collaborative consumption of clothes is proposed as a prudent consumption alternative since clothing industry in its traditional form, right from its production to disposal, is highly detrimental for the environment (McNeill & Venter, 2019). Collaborative cloth consumption has been exhibited in the literature as a pro environmental alternative to the traditional cloth consumption resulting in reduced waste pile ups, leading to an overall safer and secure environment (Kim & Jin, 2020).

H2a: Environmental safety positively influences the intention to participate in collaborative clothing as a user
H2b: Environmental safety positively influences the intention to participate in collaborative clothing as a provider

2.1.3 Social Needs: Community Belongingness

Having gratified the basic physiological and safety needs, individuals then transcend to the next level in the need pyramid, the social belongingness needs (Maslow, n.d.). Individuals at this stage seek affection and affiliation from the community. Consumption behaviors and choices of individuals at this stage would showcase a need to become a part of the community. Collaborative clothing as a manifestation of sharing economy, is known to foster a sense of community belongingness among its participants by providing opportunities to share ideas, knowledge and personal experiences (Jain & Mishra, 2020). Also, by participating in collaborative clothing, individuals get to meet other like- minded people and share not just their clothes but may also get to share their ideas or interests (Tunçel & Özkan Tektaş, 2020; Zhang et al., 2019).

H3a: Community belongingness positively influences the intention to participate in collaborative clothing as a user
H3b: Community belongingness positively influences the intention to participate in collaborative clothing as a provider

2.1.4 Self Esteem Needs: Boost to Self Esteem

Once the social needs of the individual are satisfied, they then advance to the next level in the need hierarchy: the self-esteem need. Individuals with self-esteem needs like to receive recognition from their affiliated or desired reference group and seek to be evaluated highly by the society (Sheth et al., 1991). Hence, consumption behaviors commanding greater social value from an individual's reference group are valued highly by the consumers. Moreover, the increased social media presence poses a constant challenge to keep a vigil on our online presence and how we portray ourselves digitally, failure to which lowers our

self- esteem. Collaborative consumption offers people an opportunity to assume any desired identity suiting their self-concept and express it through their clothing, thus satisfying their self- esteem need (Belk, 2013;Kleine et al., 1993).

As for the providers, participating in collaborative clothing serves as an opportunity to enhance their self- esteem as it is a pro-environmental behavior which would bring positive affirmation from their desired groups (Cui et al., 2021). Also, Hwang & Griffiths (2017) shows that people attach higher moral, social and symbolic values to the persons indulging in sustainable behaviors. Hence, for those who want their self- esteem needs to be fulfilled through depiction of a certain self, collaborative clothing seems a viable option.

> *H4a: Boost to the self- esteem through collaborative clothing positively influences individual's participation as a user*
>
> *H4b: Boost to the self- esteem through collaborative clothing positively influences individual's participation as a provider*

2.1.5 Self Actualization Needs: Voluntary Simplicity

Taljaard & Sonnenberg (2019) have conceptualized voluntary simplicity as "removing all the clutter from one's life and choosing to limit the expenditures on consumer goods". They also claim that sustainable consumption provides a sense of personal growth and experiential pleasure. Moreover, voluntary simplicity is a lifestyle choice made by those whose basic needs are satisfied and are sure of them being met in future as well implying that it is not a choice made by individuals at lower levels in the need hierarchy (Demirel, 2022). The philosophy behind adopting voluntary simplistic consumption behavior is to limit the expenses to those consumption practices which would contribute to personal growth, self fulfilment and self enhancement and which corresponds with their hobbies, interests and pursuits (Pangarkar et al., 2021), which happens to correlate with the goal orientations of self-actualizers. Literature reveals that voluntary simplifiers believe in disposition of material possessions and

accumulation of experiences (Demirel, 2022), which is also the philosophy behind peer to peer cloth sharing.

> *H5a: Voluntary simplicity positively influences behavior intention to participate in collaborative clothing as a user*
> *H5b: Voluntary simplicity positively influences behavior intention to participate in collaborative clothing as a provider*

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Pilot Test and Measures

Before collecting the data, the drafted questionnaire was pre tested with five academicians working in the field of marketing to check the language of the items and ensure its face validity. Thereafter, a pilot test was conducted with 35 female respondents to check the language and flow of the items of the user questionnaire and another 35 female respondents were approached to check the relevance of the items in the provider questionnaire. It was only after satisfying the participants of the pilot testing that the questionnaire was finalized to collect the data.

The items used to measure the latent constructs were adapted from existing literature and were modified to suit the context of the study. Items used to measure economic gains were adapted from (Ertz et al., 2017); environmental safety was measured with items adapted from (Li et al., 2021; Ertz et al., 2017). In the similar fashion, community belongingness was measured with items adapted from (Kim & Jin, 2020)items used to measure self-esteem were adapted from (Jain & Mishra, 2020) and items adapted from (Shama & Wisenblit, 1984)were used to measure voluntary simplicity. Finally, intention to participate as a user were measured using three items adapted from (Jain & Mishra, 2020) and items for intentions to participate as a provider were measured from (Jain & Mishra, 2020). All the items were measured on a five- point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = neutral; 4 = disagree; 5 = strongly disagree.

3.2 Data Collection

Data was collected from female respondents from the state of Punjab using convenience and simple random sampling technique. Female respondents were chosen for the purpose of the study due to their higher participation in fashion consumption (Lang & Joyner Armstrong, 2018). For the purpose of collecting the data, the state of Punjab was divided into three regions namely- Majha, Doab and Malwa and one state from each region was chosen for collecting the data. From the Majha block, the district of Amritsar was chosen, from the Doab block, the district of Jalandhar was chosen and from the Malwa block, the district of Ludhiana was chosen.

Self-administered surveys were used to collect data from respondents living in the state of Punjab during the months of September and October, 2024. A total of 400 questionnaires were disseminated to the respondents, 200 respondents were approached to collect the data regarding user intentions and 200 respondents were approached to collect the provider intention data. After accounting for missing values and response bias, a total of 170 users and 168 providers were retained for further analysis.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Majority of the users of collaborative clothing belonged to the age group of 25-35 years (39%) and a major chunk of the users (31%) belonged to the income group of 25000-35000 per month. Most of the respondents of user questionnaire had the qualification of graduation (37%) and (28%) had completed their post-graduation.

Majority of the providers belonged to the age group of 25- 35 (37%) and had the income ranging between 35000-45000 (32%) per month. Most of them had completed their graduation (35%) and (29%) had completed their post-graduation.

4.2 Data Analysis

Variables were measured using items adapted from existing scales. Some items were deleted due to insignificant factor loadings and some were self -generated to suit the context of the

study. After these changes, Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed which exhibited following results: KMO value for the user's data was 0.713 and that of the provider's sample was 0.691 indicating that the sample was adequate enough for further analysis. Bartlet test of sphericity value for both the samples were also less than 0.05. The factor loadings of the items in both the questionnaires were > 0.7 retaining them for further analysis.

Confirmatory factor analysis was then run for assessing model fitness using AMOS 24. The measurement model's assessment indicated that the model is reasonably consistent with all the indices under the recommended range (Fadlelmula, n.d.). Table 1 indicates the values of the following - chi-square/degree of freedom (CMIN), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Root Mean Square Residual (RMSR) for the user data. The same indices for the provider data are depicted in (Table 3). All the indices were in their acceptable range, which ensured the model to be reasonably fit (Hoyle, 1995).

Table 1. Model Fitness Indices for the users

Fit Index	Recommended Values	Model Values
CMIN/ DF	<5.00	3.122
CFI	>0.9	0.909
TLI	>0.9	0.900
IFI	>0.9	0.910
RMSEA	<0.1	0.048
RMSR	<0.05	0.030

Further, the Composite Reliability of each construct for the user data as depicted in (Table 2) and for provider data in (Table 4) were tested and which turned out to be above the recommended value of 0.7(Marcoulides, 1998), ensuring the reliability of the scale

Table 2. Reliability and Validity analysis of the measurement scale for the users

VARIABLE	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Economic gains	.843	.674	.563	.375
Environmental safety	.864	.614	.546	.265
Community belongingness	.978	.743	.324	.245
Self esteem	.825	.526	.441	.321
Voluntary simplicity	.969	.758	.335	.232
Intentions to continue as a user	.872	.629	.295	.435
Notes: Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Maximum Shared Variance (MSV), Average Shared Variance (ASV)				

Table 3. Model Fitness Indices for the providers

Fit Index	Recommended Values	Model Values
CMIN/ DF	< 5.0	3.11
CFI	> 0.9	0.912
TLI	>0.9	0.901
IFI	>0.9	0.942
RMSEA	<0.1	0.032
RMSR	<0.05	0.033

Table 4. Reliability and Validity analysis of the measurement scale for the providers

VARIABLE	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Economic gains	.833	.773	.563	.275
Environmental safety	.854	.622	.546	.365

Community belongingness	.765	.645	.324	.245
Self esteem	.711	.522	.241	.321
Voluntary simplicity	.755	.752	.335	.332
Intentions to continue as a provider	.752	.623	.295	.235
Notes: Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Maximum Shared Variance (MSV), Average Shared Variance (ASV)				

The average variance extracted was more than 0.5 and the composite reliability (C.R) of each latent construct was also more than its average variance extracted (AVE), as depicted in (Table 2) for user data and (Table 4) for the provider data. Both conditions ensured convergent validity of the scale (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Further, to ensure the discriminant validity two conditions were fulfilled – Average Variance Extracted must be greater than the Maximum Shared Variance and secondly, Average Variance Extracted should be greater than Average Shared Variance (Kahle & Malhotra, 1994). Both the conditions were fulfilled, as depicted in (Table 2) for user data and (Table 4) for provider data.

Next, since the same questionnaire was used to collect responses for both the dependent and independent variables, the data needed to be tested for Common method variance (Craighead et al., 2011). Two separate Harman's single factor tests were employed, one for the user data and the other for the providers data. The results for the user data indicated that a single factor accounted for 25% of the total variance and that of the provider's data was 27%. Both results were well below the recommended limit of 50%, indicating the data to be free from common method variance.

Hypotheses testing for the user as well as for the provider data was then conducted to check the significance of the proposed relationships. Table 5 presents the results of the standardized path coefficients along with the critical ratios, standard errors and p-values for the user data and (Table 6) for the provider data.

Table 5. Test of Proposed Hypotheses for user data

Proposed Relationship	Estimates	S.E.	C.R	P-values	Status of Hypotheses at 99% confidence level
Economic gain to participation intention	0.79	0.075	9.06	0.001	Supported
Environmental safety to participation intention	0.70	0.061	8.81	0.000	Supported
Community Belongingness to participation intention	0.62	0.057	7.03	0.221	Not Supported
Self-esteem to participation intention	0.47	0.432	5.02	0.235	Not Supported
Voluntary Simplicity to participation intention	0.58	0.521	6.76	0.000	Supported
Notes: Standard Error (S.E), Critical Ratios (C.R)					

The results for the path analysis of the user data indicated that the standardized path coefficients of three out of the five proposed relationships namely – (economic gins to participation intentions, environmental safety to participation intentions and voluntary

simplicity to participation intentions) were positive and significant. However, two proposed relationships namely (community belongingness to participation intentions and self - esteem to participation intention) turned out to be positive but statistically insignificant.

Table 6. Test of Proposed Hypotheses for the provider data

Proposed Relationship	Estimates	S.E.	C.R	P-values	Status of Hypotheses at 99% confidence level
Economic gain to participation intention	0.79	0.069	9.06	0.001	Supported
Environmental safety to participation intention	0.70	0.061	8.81	0.000	Supported
Community Belongingness to participation intention	0.62	0.054	7.03	0.001	Supported
Self esteem to participation intention	0.47	0.432	5.02	0.235	Not Supported
Voluntary Simplicity to participation intention	0.52	0.402	6.76	0.075	Not Supported
Notes: Standard Error (S.E), Critical Ratios (C.R)					

The results of the hypotheses testing for the providers revealed that the standardized path coefficients for two out of the five proposed relationships namely (economic gains to participation

intentions and environmental safety to participation intentions) turned out to be significant and positive, while remaining three relationships namely (community belongingness and participation intentions, self-esteem and participation intentions and voluntary simplicity and participation intentions) were positive but insignificant.

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

With soaring environmental degradation posed due to the unscrupulous use of resources, there is an urgent need to explore for sustainable, more mindful alternatives. The clothing industry is amongst the front runners in contributing to the carbon emission pool owing to the emergence of fast fashion. Hence the study explored the applications of sharing economy in the clothing industry to reduce the waste pool generated by expanding the service life of the cloth. The study incorporated a panoramic view of the collaborative clothing industry by exploring both the acquisition as well as the disposition intentions of the participants. The study explored five factors namely economic gains, environmental safety, community belongingness, self-esteem and voluntary simplicity, corresponding to five levels in Maslow's need hierarchy, which would influence the behavior intention of the female respondents both as a provider as well as user.

Out of the five proposed determinants, economic gains turned out to be the most significant predictor of participation intention as a user of collaborative clothing. This finding was in line with the previous studies conducted in the arena of collaborative consumption (Li et al., 2021), wherein, economic benefits arising out of collaborative cloth consumption are shown to drive participation in this industry. Another finding of the study suggested environmental safety to be significant motivator to indulge in collaborative cloth consumption as a user. This finding is also in line with the conjecture created in the previous literature wherein the participants are shown to consider collaborative cloth consumption a sustainable alternative as it relies mainly on already existing, otherwise lying dormant clothes (Böcker &

Meelen, 2017). Another factor that impacted the intentions of participants to indulge in collaborative clothing as a user was voluntary simplicity. This finding also finds support in the previous literature wherein women especially are shown to be driven towards collaborative clothing in order to lead a simplistic life (Taljaard & Sonnenberg, 2019). However, literature also presents a contrasting view wherein people are shown to engage in sharing options in order to showcase a trendy character and to access latest and trendy options.

As for the provider, economic gains turned out to be the most significant variable impacting intentions to participate in collaborative clothing as a provider. This finding also finds support in the past literature conducted in the arena of collaborative consumption (Zhang et al., 2019)., wherein, participants are shown to consider collaborative consumption alternatives as a lucrative occupational choice due to the underlying economic benefits. Another finding of the study was the environmental safety that the providers seem to associate with collaborative consumption of clothes. This finding suggests that providers of collaborative clothing seem to consider collaborative clothing as a pro environmental behavior and are likely to indulge in it to enhance their sense of self.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The present study proposed that collaborative clothing is a valuable proposition for individuals at both the lower level needs as well as for those at the higher levels. The current literature on collaborative fashion consumption models highlights lack of proper communication of the service proposition of collaborative clothing as a barrier for the growth of these business (C. Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018). The present study contrives collaborative clothing as a worthwhile proposal for individuals at every level of the need hierarchy, thus suggesting marketers to segment the market based on the need pyramid and present collaborative clothing to every segment highlighting the need it would fulfil for the individuals seeking to fulfil that particular need. Also, as need recognition is considered to be the first step in the product buying

process, a similar approach can be applied in offering a service as well. So, collaborative clothing, by targeting the needs of the individuals from basic to the higher levels could trigger them into indulgence. Thus, the platforms are advised to create stimuli centralizing separately on each motivator by accentuating on the level of the need pyramid that it caters to.

Further, since economic gains turned out to the most significant motivator for both the users and providers, the marketers are suggested to communicate to the masses the economic aspect of collaborative clothing. Further, since economic needs are most prominent in the people at the lowest level of the need pyramid, marketers are suggested to target that segment and position their offering with a focus on the economic aspect. Additionally, since the second most significant determinant was environmental safety, again for both users and providers, a marketing and communication strategy could be created highlighting the sustainability aspect of collaborative clothing as an added advantage along with economic gains. Moreover, a separate communication strategy could be created showcasing collaborative clothing as a sustainable alternative allowing the consumers to indulge in 'guilt free' consumption and create a niche.

Lastly, a separate communication strategy could be created for the 'who have it all' segment of the society, highlighting the voluntarily simplistic aspect of collaborative clothing. Simplistic lifestyle choices are seen to be mushrooming among the elites wherein they are preferring to lead a clutter free life. Thus, collaborative clothing to them could be a gateway to attaining self- actualization by giving it back to the society.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The foremost limitation of the present study is that the data was collected from the respondents restricted to the state of Punjab, which could limit its generalizability. Future studies could be undertaken in other cities to further analyze the scope of this budding industry in culturally distinct environments. Additionally, future studies could incorporate other variables such

as the personality traits of the respondents, their trust dispositions, ease with technology and other culture related variables to gain a more holistic view of the participants of this industry. Secondly, since the data was collected from female respondents only, future studies could be conducted on male respondents to get more insights. Finally, such a need-based approach could also be used in other sectors of collaborative consumption such as transportation or tourism in order to render more targeted implications.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION
Dr. Rishi Raj Sharma: Study concept and design
Diksha Shingari: Drafting of the manuscript
Shriya Shingari: Analysis and Interpretation

Disclosure Statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by authors.
No funding was sought for this manuscript.

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