

Short Communication

Sharing economy and libraries: a challenge or an opportunity?

Shamprasad M. Pujar^a, Satish S. Munnolli^b and
M. B. Mundgod^c

^aChief Librarian, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development
Research, Goregaon East, Mumbai-400065,
E-mail: pujar@igidr.ac.in

^bLibrarian, Advanced Center for Treatment, Research and
Education in Cancer, Sector 22, Kharghar, Navi Mumbai-410210,
E-mail: smunnolli@actrec.gov.in

^cLibrarian, Gammon Engineers and Contractors Pvt. Ltd,
Gammon house, Prabhadevi, Mumbai-400025,
E-mail: Madhwa.Mundgod@gammonengineers.com

Received: 16 November 2018; accepted: 20 March 2019

Sharing economy is not new, it exists in the corporate world. The norm of sharing resources in libraries is also not new. However, sharing resources and services for a price is relatively new. In the era of dwindling financial resources and shrinking spaces in the libraries, the paper deliberates the concept of sharing economy and the probable avenues librarians can think of to initiate and explore in the sharing economy.

Keywords: Sharing economy; Libraries; Library resources; Library services

Introduction

Sharing and swapping of material resources for reciprocal benefits is not new and it has been in existence since the primitive years of civilization. Even today, people regularly exchange goods and services for free or barter for something. However, the technology is adding a new element to the concept. Initially, it started off with sharing content mostly for free among peers or groups or the public in general. Now, it has taken a new dimension, in which people can share resources and services for a price. The model proposes to get a monetary value from the long standing social value. Shared cabs, accommodation, furniture, co-working spaces and others are widely offered for people to make best use of the services at a reasonable and affordable cost. Today, there are umpteen numbers of services available such as 'Airbnb', 'Uber', 'Swiggy', 'Grofers' and others which connect people who

would like to share with the one, who wish to avail. People can gain access to any of these services, mostly using mobile apps of these platforms. This kind of sharing of goods and services for monetary benefits is referred as 'sharing economy'.

Libraries are not new to sharing. Libraries have been involved in sharing of resources among the members for a membership fee and also, involved in resource sharing with other libraries.

Sharing economy is a new wave of peer-to-peer network. It is based on a trust among the peers, convenience and sense of community which are much relied in the triumph of businesses in the sharing economy. It recommends for access against ownership, thus reducing the wastage of resources. For example, instead of buying a car one can make use of app based cabs from 'Ola'. It has also blurred the lines between the professional and the personal. For example, offering a ride or lending something to someone used to be personal, but in the sharing economy it gets commercialized. It gives a freedom to individuals to decide on their hours of work, economic dependence and encourages entrepreneurship¹.

Sharing economy is aiding in extending the economic activities beyond a neighborhood thus raising investments, producing new breed of entrepreneurs and taking commerce away from the traditional business enterprises¹. According PricewaterhouseCoopers, there will an increase in the global revenues to about USD 335 billion by 2025² in the sharing economy. However, the sharing economy has also unnerved some challenges to the regulatory framework as the existing rules and regulations are not pertinent to these platforms. Thus rising protests from the people associated with the existing business models.

Libraries in a sharing economy

Libraries are the leaders in signifying the value and potential of sharing for free since their existence. However, their sharing is diverse than what has been visualized by commercial models. In a shop, one has

to pay for the goods before leaving, whereas in case of libraries, the member can borrow the books by just producing a membership card. Here too no one owns, but only gets access to the desired resources for a certain period, thus encouraging sharing. Libraries in the present internet age, not only share books and provide infrastructure, but also offer access to range of resources and services such as e-books, e-journals, multimedia content, digital libraries and Internet facilities.

Libraries in general promulgate genuine structure of sharing as long as their budget supports them by just looking at the social value instead of thinking on making profits from such value. That is how libraries tend to vary from other businesses, where profit is the real motive. Libraries may not be able to offer rides or accommodation, but thus represent the model, wherein how an economy based on principle of sharing actually looks³. However, in today's networked world, where technology rules the roost and the mere existence of libraries is probed and budgets are shrinking, we think it is a time for libraries to take a step forward to reap the doles of sharing economy by offering certain resources and services to interested ones through sharing platforms for a price. It may help libraries in raising revenues for maintenance or resource augmentation and at the same time help in maintaining their social role.

Resource sharing V/s Sharing economy

There is a thin line of difference between library resource sharing and sharing economy. In case of resource sharing, libraries share reading materials with other libraries as per mutually agreed terms. Whereas in sharing economy, it not only enables libraries to share reading materials, but also space, Internet, infrastructure, expertise etc., for a price to interested individuals or institutions using an online platform thus expanding the usage and services of library resources for a diverse community.

Possible areas, libraries may partake in the sharing economy

Following are some of the possible areas, wherein libraries may leverage in to the sharing economy.

Resources and services

Libraries are rich in their resources; and specialized in book collections in varied subject areas. These are generally used or issued to the members and also to

other libraries on inter-library-loan through resource sharing. In spite of that, several books remain underused or unused. Libraries may explore sharing of these to the public, who would be interested in referring these books for a fee. A policy framework in this direction will ensure effective consumption of resources and also enable libraries to enrich the usage and earn additional revenues. All libraries even may think of providing Internet services to the nonmembers for a fee.

Physical spaces

Libraries typically have large spaces to stock resources, have working area and provide reading spaces. Some of the libraries may even have a conference hall or a meeting room. Many a times these spaces are underutilized or unused. In the sharing economy, it makes sense for libraries to share such spaces for a price. For example DC public library in USA has established a 'Dream Lab' to share co-working spaces, technology tools and business expertise to individuals and businesses in exchange of an hour of technology related public programming.⁴

Expertise of librarians

Librarians have skills sets in identifying, organizing and retrieving information from numerous sources. They may share these skills for a fee to interested individuals or organizations outside the library.

Developing partnerships

Libraries may develop partnerships with organizations that would help in elevating the skills of members of the community to enable them to become micropreneurs. Libraries may engage in partnerships with the platforms such as code.org, udemy, skillshare to organize tailored training programmes to learners with partial resources for free or at nominal cost or to build a repository of tailored content. They may also even help small entrepreneurs in building websites using free web services such as Weebly or Wix⁵.

Issues for libraries to participate in sharing economy

Libraries being non-profit social entities are bound to face challenges in participating in the sharing economy. Libraries need to assess the legal implications of sharing of any of the resources and services. Libraries also need to agree on what kind of

resources and services can be offered and to whom. Participating in sharing economy may also need additional infrastructure and may need to seek permissions from the parent organization or government. Gaining the confidence of library staff in execution of such services by explaining the benefits of such sharing is required. Finally, select the best platform, which takes care of the interest of the library and also helps in getting better collaborations and revenues.

Conclusion

Sharing economy is new, promising and spreading rapidly. The space and budget are shrinking every year in libraries. Concurrently, the cost of sustaining and maintaining the facility is increasing. To augment the usage of resources and services, libraries can embrace sharing models by opening the avenues for others with a price tag. Libraries being pioneers of sharing may become a sharing economy to explore new avenues without disturbing their social brand value. It may benefit them in redefining their roles and align with the

new world order and earn some additional revenues to provide added resources and services to the existing clientele. However, precautions are imperative, before hopping into the bandwagon of sharing economy.

References

1. Sunderarajan, A, *The Sharing economy*, (MIT Press; Cambridge), 2016, p.1-6.
2. PricewaterCoopers, *Shaping our future: Global annual review*. Available at <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/about-pwc/global-annual-review-2015/campaign-site/pwc-global-annual-review-2015.pdf> (Accessed on 27 Aug 2018).
3. Librarianshipwreck, *If you want to see the sharing economy...Go to the library*. Available at <https://librarianshipwreck.wordpress.com/2014/07/10/if-you-want-to-see-the-sharing-economy-go-to-the-library/> (Accessed on 10 Sep 2018).
4. Ilovelibraries, *Sharing economy*. Available at <http://www.ilovelibraries.org/librariestransform/sharing-economy> (Accessed on 20 Sep 2018).
5. Gore E M, *Nonprofits should lead the sharing economy*, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, (2014). Available at http://ssir.org/articles/entry/nonprofits_should_lead_the_sharing_economy (Accessed on 30 Sep 2018).