



Can sharing make us embrace others more? The bias-reducing effects of sharing experience

Hongjoo Woo, Associate Professor, Yonsei University, Seoul  
Daeun Chloe Shin, Assistant Professor, University of Houston, TX  
Naeun Lauren Kim, Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota, MN

*Keywords:* Sharing, sharing economy, racial discrimination, social identity, intergroup contact, racial bias

**Introduction:** Online peer-to-peer platforms are the backbone of sharing economy, referred to as the social and economic system of transactions in which individuals share underused goods, services, or ideas peer-to-peer (Belk et al., 2019). While it is celebrated as an alternative consumption mode with the potential to offer several social benefits, such as environmental sustainability (Cha & Lee, 2022) and social connections (Minami et al., 2021), there is growing evidence of racial discrimination on these platforms (e.g., Nødtvedt et al., 2021). Findings have shown that racial discrimination manifests as biased consumer choices against service/product providers from a different racial group (i.e., racial outgroup). In the context of hospitality, people were less likely to rent apartments listed by the racial outgroup (Nødtvedt et al., 2021). Such outgroup discrimination has also been documented in other settings, including product markets (Zussman, 2013). In response to these findings, emerging research has identified effective trust cues that can reduce or eliminate discrimination against outgroup providers, such as good peer reviews and detailed self-descriptions in the provider profile (e.g., Zhang et al., 2022). What remains unexplored is whether individuals' fundamental attitudes toward the outgroup can be improved on the platforms, beyond situational behavioral intentions and choices. Drawing from social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) and intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), this study focused on the type of direct sharing experiences with another racial group on a platform (positive vs. negative). This study examined whether the effect of the sharing experience with a provider can be generalized to consumers' general attitudes toward the provider's racial group.

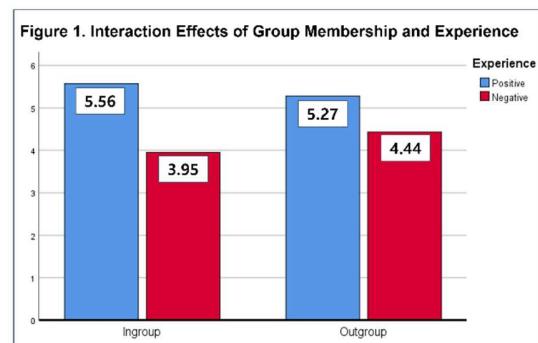
**Theoretical Framework & Hypotheses:** *Social identity theory* posits that individuals define themselves as part of a social group and distinguish their in-groups from outgroups (Tajfel, 1982). According to this theory, such identification generates in-group favoritism, by perceiving in-group members as more favorable than outgroup members although their actual conditions are the same (Tajfel, 1982). This tendency further makes people more tolerant of in-group members' flaws and more skeptical toward outgroup members (Tajfel, 1982). Recent research suggests that such stereotyping based on social identity plays a significant role in sharing economy. For instance,

consumers showed higher trust and intention to share toward in-group hosts in space sharing (Nødtvedt et al., 2021), while expressing higher distrust and suspicion toward outgroup guests in car sharing (Simonovits et al., 2018). Based on this, this study projects that such in-group favoritism will also appear in sharing platforms: *H1. Group membership influences consumers' attitudes toward the seller's racial group; attitude is higher toward an in-group seller (vs. outgroup seller).*

However, literature shows that there is a variable that could intervene such in-group favoritism: *experience*. Allport's *intergroup contact theory* proposes that a positive contact experience with an outgroup can change one's attitude toward the group more favorably, while a negative contact experience produces the opposite effect (Pettigrew, 1998). That is, the learning from a positive contact experience with an outgroup member can be generalized toward the outgroup as a whole (Pettigrew, 1998). Supporting this theory, a large body of literature has documented that the positive contact reduces outgroup bias (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2017). Based on this, this study conjectures that a positive/negative experience will also affect consumers' attitude toward the seller's racial group in sharing platforms and possibly intervene their preexisting group bias: *H2. Experience influences consumers' attitudes toward the seller's racial group; attitude is higher toward a positive experience (vs. negative experience). H3. Group membership and experience have an interaction effect on consumers' attitude toward the seller's racial group.*

**Methods:** Upon IRB approval, a 2x2 online experiment was conducted (in-group/outgroup [2] x positive/negative experience [2] = 4). As for the ethnicity of sample, Caucasian (in-group) and African American (outgroup) were selected to examine racial bias, considering previous studies (Simonovits et al., 2018). A total of 331 Caucasian consumers were recruited by a professional survey firm and randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. Participants were provided with a virtual product listing on sharing platform with a seller's image and a scenario of positive/negative experience, according to each condition, and reported their attitude toward the seller's racial group. The seller's images were developed through a pretest, where the pair of in-group/outgroup racial images with the lowest mean difference in attractiveness was selected to avoid the confounding effect of the model's attractiveness. Because participants could have difference preference toward a same-sex seller versus an opposite-sex seller, the sex of the seller's image was controlled to be the same with the participant. Manipulation checks, confirming the manipulated seller image's racial identity and type of experience, were asked, along with the product attitude measures to control the participants' preference toward the listed product. The measurements were adapted from previous research (e.g., Ohanian, 1990).

**Results:** The results of ANCOVA revealed that gender did not have a significant effect ( $F_{5,325} = .94, p = .33$ ) but product attitude had a significant effect as a covariate ( $F_{5,325} = 17.78, p = .00$ ). For hypotheses testing, there was no significant effect of group membership ( $F_{5,325} = .34, p = .56$ ) but a significant effect of experience ( $F_{5,325} = 57.32, p = .00$ ) on consumers' attitude toward the seller's racial group. Thus, H1 is rejected, while H2 is supported. Also, there was a significant interaction effect between group membership and experience ( $F_{5,325} = 5.55, p = .02$ ), supporting H3. As a follow-up analysis of the interaction effects, the results of planned contrasts further revealed that the effects of positive experience were not significantly different by group membership, but the effects of negative experience were significantly greater for in-group than outgroup ( $M_{\text{in-group}} = 3.95, M_{\text{outgroup}} = 4.44, F_{(1,327)} = 4.36, p = .04$ ) (See Figure 1).



**Conclusion:** The results provide promising evidence that experiences can be more influential than racial bias. Attitudes were comparable when the experience was positive regardless of the provider's group membership. This suggests that the positive sharing experience may have closed the attitudinal gap between the ingroup and the outgroup, consistent with empirical evidence for the beneficial effects of positive intergroup contact (Dovidio et al., 2017). Further, unlike the researchers who assumed that consumers would be more forgivable toward in-group members due to in-group favoritism (Tajfel, 1982), in the negative experience condition, participants reported even more negative attitudes toward the ingroup seller vs. the outgroup seller. This result can be explained by another tenet of social identity theory that people have positive perceptions of the ingroup and the violation of positive expectations leads to negative outcomes (Zhigang et al., 2020). The findings thus provide empirical evidence of the sharing economy's broader social value, extending the current literature that has examined social value primarily as a motivational determinant of participation, rather than as an outcome (e.g., Minami et al., 2021).

**Acknowledgement:** This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2021S1A5A8062257).

### References

- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Belk, R. W., Eckhardt, G. M., & Bardhi, F. (2019). *Introduction to the Handbook of the Sharing Economy: the paradox of the sharing economy*. In R. W. Belk, G. M. Eckhardt, and F. Bardhi, *Handbook of the Sharing Economy*. Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar Publishing.

- Cha, M. K., & Lee, H. J. (2022). Does social trust always explain the active use of sharing-based programs?: A cross-national comparison of Indian and US rideshare consumers. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 65, 102515.
- Dovidio, J. F., Love, A., Schellhaas, F. M., & Hewstone, M. (2017). Reducing intergroup bias through intergroup contact: Twenty years of progress and future directions. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 20(5), 606–620.
- Minami, A. L., Ramos, C., & Bortoluzzo, A. B. (2021). Sharing economy versus collaborative consumption: What drives consumers in the new forms of exchange? *Journal of Business Research*, 128, 124–137.
- Nødtvedt, K. B., Sjøstad, H., Skard, S. R., Thorbjørnsen, H., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2021). Racial bias in the sharing economy and the role of trust and self-congruence. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 27(3), 508–528.
- Ohanian, R. (1990). Construction and validation of a scale to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 19(3), 39–52.
- Pettigrew, T. F. (1998). Intergroup contact theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49(1), 65–85.
- Simonovits, B., Shvets, I., & Taylor, H. (2018). Discrimination in the sharing economy: Evidence from a Hungarian field experiment. *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 9(1), 55–79.
- Tajfel, H. (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 33(1), 1–39.
- Zhang, L., Xiong, S., Zhang, L., Bai, L., & Yan, Q. (2022). Reducing racial discrimination in the sharing economy: Empirical results from Airbnb. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 102, 103151.
- Zhigang, W., Lei, Z., & Xintao, L. (2020). Consumer response to corporate hypocrisy from the perspective of expectation confirmation theory. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 580114.
- Zussman, A. (2013). Ethnic discrimination: Lessons from the Israeli online market for used cars. *Economic Journal*, 123(572), 433–468.