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ANTECEDENTS OF INTENTION TO USE SHARING ECONOMY SERVICES IN THE LATTER PHASE OF COVID-19

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Abstract

Purpose. *The sharing economy presents a crucial opportunity for companies, especially for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Through collaborative partnerships and sharing economy services, these companies can overcome limited resources, fostering growth and competitive advantage. However, identifying key variables that attract users and drive the usage of sharing economy services is essential for their success. The objective of this study is to analyse the impact of four categories of antecedents (i.e., COVID-19 related, technical, individual and personal, and environmental variables) on consumers' intention to use sharing economy services during an advanced phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Design/methodology/approach. *A total of 316 respondents participated in an online survey and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the proposed research model and test the hypotheses.*

Findings. *A positive and significant influence of technical (i.e., service quality), individual and personal (i.e., perceived value and perceived usefulness), and environmental antecedents (i.e., environmental orientation) on the intention to use sharing economy services has been detected, while a non-significant impact of COVID-19 related factors (i.e., fear of COVID-19, uncertainty of COVID-19, and perceived risk of travelling during COVID-19) has been identified. However, a significant moderating effect of fear of COVID-19 on the relationship between perceived value and the intention to use sharing economy services has been confirmed.*

Practical and Social implications. *The paper provides possible strategies that sharing economy providers could adopt to enhance their customers' intention to continue using their services.*

Originality of the study. *The paper seeks to fill different research gaps identified in the extant literature by shedding light on the effects of specific categories of predictors on the consumers' intention to use sharing economy activities during an advanced phase of the pandemic crisis.*

1. Introduction

In the context of COVID-19, consumer behaviours have significantly changed, particularly due to the emergence and persistence of various psychological issues associated with the crisis (Seçer et al., 2020; Zulauf et al. 2021;). In this scenario, businesses, especially SMEs, have confronted significant challenges brought about by the crisis (Belarmino et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2022).

In particular, activities within the Sharing Economy had to deal with a precarious situation due to the COVID-19 (Hossain, 2021).

Literature defines the sharing economy as "a socio-economic ecosystem that commonly uses information technologies to connect different stakeholders-individuals, companies, governments, and others, to make value by sharing their excess capacities for products and services" (Cornejo-Velazquez et al., 2020, p. 103).

Sharing economy activities, including car and accommodation sharing, experienced substantial growth before the COVID-19 pandemic, with projected revenues reaching around $335 billion by 2025 (PwC, 2015). Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent containment measures, Sharing Economy activities, particularly in accommodation and travel (Fortezza et al., 2019), have been significantly impacted, raising concerns about their survival (Hossain, 2021; Conger & Griffith, 2020). Research emphasises the importance of identifying key predictors of consumers' intention to use sharing economy activities across various stages of the pandemic (Hossain, 2021; Tan et al., 2022).

Indeed, while the effects of COVID-19 on sharing economy practices have been recognized, the analysis, mainly covering the early pandemic period, remains in the initial stage (Hossain, 2021). Limited knowledge exists regarding the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the Sharing Economy during more advanced pandemic stages and in the post-pandemic scenario. Understanding people's perceptions and attitudes towards sharing economy services during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial for addressing future ones. This knowledge offers valuable insights not only for health emergencies but also for less uncommon and unpredictable crises such as globalization, climate change, and conflicts.

Acknowledging that large-scale crises aren't black swan events (Mishra, 2020), businesses can utilize shared resources and collaborative platforms to support communities during times of need. Understanding how individuals adapt to sharing economy services in crises allows companies in these sectors to proactively plan for resilience and sustainability. This is especially crucial for SMEs, which encounter additional challenges in competitive adaptability, forecasting, and overall technology enhancement (Awheda et al., 2016). Partnerships characterized by collaboration and the

utilization of sharing economy services offer a solution for SMEs facing resource constraints (Sultan et al., 2021). Specifically, sharing economy services, which encompass resource sharing, exchanging, and leasing, enable SMEs to access resources that might otherwise be beyond their individual means (Randolph et al., 2023).

Based on these assumptions, the aim of this study is to analyse the impact of different antecedents on consumers' intention to use sharing economy activities, with a particular emphasis on a specific phase of the pandemic, namely 2021.

Concerning the antecedents, the paper has subdivided them into four areas. The first group of predictors is related to the pandemic context (i.e., "COVID-19 related antecedents"), and it is composed of fear of COVID-19, uncertainty of COVID-19, and perceived risk of travelling during COVID-19. The second category (i.e., "Technical antecedents") concerns the effective quality of the sharing economy activities (i.e., service quality) since it represents, in the sharing economy context, a phenomenon worthy of investigation (Akhmedova et al., 2021). The third area regards the consumers' perception towards the sharing economy services (i.e., "Individual and personal antecedents"), and it is composed of perceived value and perceived usefulness. Finally, environmental orientation represents the last investigated antecedent, which falls within the "Environmental antecedents" category. Notably, as corroborated by Hamari et al. (2016), sustainable consumption represents a key determinant of the intention to share.

Overall, by doing so, the paper seeks to fill different research gaps. In particular, by shedding light on the effects of specific-related factors on the consumers' intention to use sharing economy activities, the paper responds to the literature's call underling to identify key antecedents of this intention (Hossain, 2021; Wang et al., 2020). Additionally, it extends current research by examining the long-term impact of COVID-19 on the sharing economy during more advanced pandemic stages, particularly in 2021, which represents an intense phase of the COVID-19 crisis (Wang et al., 2021). Consequently, the study attempts to fill a specific gap related to the need to enhance existing studies, especially those focused on the early pandemic period (Hossain, 2021).

Finally, the analysis of the individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards sharing economy services during the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial, especially for SMEs operating in this sector, in addressing future crises of various types. In general, past pandemics have caused notable impacts on health, society, politics, and the economy. These lessons are essential for guiding future actions aimed at improving readiness and ensuring a more efficient response to subsequent pandemics (Neumann & Kawaoka, 2023). Same as past pandemics, COVID-19 has underscored the importance of global readiness and the capacity to manage every facet of such a crisis

(Cox, 2020). From this standpoint, by investigating four categories of antecedents (i.e., COVID-19-related, technical, individual, and environmental variables), the study aims to contribute not only to the understanding of consumer perceptions and behavior during Covid-19 but also to provide deeper insights into possible future trajectory of sharing economy services in public health emergencies of international concern (PHEIC) landscape. This is an aspect not to be underestimated, especially in light of the data from the International Health Regulations (IHR), which has declared as many as six events as PHEICs only within the years spanning from 2007 to 2020 (Wilder-Smith & Osman, 2020), including the H1N1 pandemic or the Ebola outbreak, which caused a considerable decline in travel and trade (Vaidya et al., 2020).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: while Section 2 provides the literature review, Section 3 presents the hypotheses development. Subsequently, Section 4 presents the methodology, and Section 5 shows the empirical results. Finally, Section 6 concludes the study by debating the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Intention to use and its predictors in the sharing economy industry

The sharing economy has garnered considerable attention in recent years. This innovative form involves individuals sharing or exchanging goods and services through digital platforms, fostering a collaborative and resource-efficient approach to consumption. It encompasses a diverse range of sectors, from transportation and accommodation to skill-sharing and asset utilization (Soltysova & Modrak, 2020). Central to the sharing economy is the concept of access over ownership, where individuals leverage shared resources to meet their needs (Barbu et al., 2018). This model not only provides economic benefits but also promotes sustainability and community engagement (De Las Heras et al., 2021).

Scholars have extensively explored the Sharing Economy model among SMEs, focusing primarily on the business model aspect (Sun et al., 2023). In more detail, the Sharing Economy represents a compelling opportunity for SMEs. These firms, inherently facing challenges in securing human resources, capital, and technology compared to larger ones, find themselves naturally inclined towards intensive collaboration and integration with business partners to overcome their limitations (Soltysova & Modrak, 2020).

However, a significant research gap exists in the analysis and understanding of user perceptions and experiences within the Sharing Economy

services (e.g., Chua et al., 2020; Dabija et al., 2022). Notably, literature underscores the importance of comprehending individuals' sentiments, particularly in the context of service adoption, with a specific focus on SMEs. Indeed, the perceived value and, notably, the customers' perceived risks become even more significant for SMEs operating within the sharing economy. This heightened significance arises from frequently inadequate and unavailable information about various potential risks (Mao & Lyu, 2017), including less regulated policies and the potential absence of professional service training for these providers.

Within this research line focused on the consumer perspective, some studies have directed their attention to identifying the main factors influencing consumers' intention to use sharing economy services in the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For instance, by specifically analysing the Airbnb service, Chua et al. (2020) investigated the positive influence of different antecedents (i.e., ease of use, convenience, security, reputation, normative influence, informative conformity) on the consumers' intention to use it. In their study focused on ride-sharing apps, Rasheed Gaber and Elsamadicy (2021) examined the key role of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, economic benefits, perceived infectability, and fear of COVID-19 as potential antecedents of intention to use Uber. Moreover, Dabija et al., (2022) hypothesized and corroborated the positive influence of trust and perceived value on the consumers' intention to use sharing economy platforms.

With the final aim of identifying the main categories of antecedents influencing the intention to use sharing economy services during more advanced pandemic stages, in the present study, the following groups of predictors have been analysed: (i) COVID-19 related; (ii) technical; (iii) individual and personal; (iv) environmental antecedents.

Concerning the COVID-19 related antecedents (i.e., "fear of COVID-19", "uncertainty of COVID-19", and "perceived risk of travelling during COVID-19"), we have chosen them since they are the main constructs specifically related to the pandemic scenario. Notably, among the different consequences provoked by the COVID-19 crisis, the feelings of fear, uncertainty, and perceived risk represent the most significant effects having particularly influenced consumers' attitudes and intentions (Erjavec & Manfreda, 2022; Halan, 2021).

With regard to the technical antecedents, "service quality" has been selected since it represents a critical factor in the sharing economy sector (Akhmedova et al., 2021; Zuo et al., 2019). Indeed, the quality optimization of the sharing economy activities allows to enhance customer satisfaction and intention (Nguyen & Hoang, 2022), thus turning it into a critical topic in service research (Ostrom et al., 2010).

The individual and personal antecedents, "perceived value" and "perceived usefulness" have been chosen since they play a critical role as major drivers of intention to use sharing economy activities (e.g., Chan et al., 2020).

Finally, in the last group, namely environmental antecedents, the variable "environmental orientation" has been inserted since, according to the extant literature (e.g, Möhlmann, 2015; Hamari et al., 2016), sustainability represents a key determinant of the intention to use sharing economy options.

3. Hypotheses development

3.1 COVID-19 related antecedents: Fear of COVID-19, Uncertainty of COVID-19, and Perceived risk of travelling during COVID-19

In recent years, the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental health have been widely explored. For instance, Schimmenti et al. (2020) argued that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lack of stable human connections along with the formation of negative feelings.

Among them, fear of COVID-19, uncertainty of COVID-19, and perceived risk of travelling during COVID-19 have been examined as major drivers influencing consumers' adoption of new travel behaviours and intentions (Agyeiwaah et al., 2021; Rather, 2021).

Conceptually, fear of COVID-19 has been defined as a negative emotional state encompassing the anxiety and despair felt because of COVID-19's potential effects, its high rates of transmission and fatality, and the absence of effective treatment (Jian et al., 2020). All these factors, combined with large numbers of asymptomatic people, constant shifts in infection and death trends, and the emergence of new variants, have also led to a sense of uncertainty of COVID-19 (Jian et al., 2020). Moreover, this sense has been strictly related to the perceived risk of travelling, namely the uncertainty and ambiguity perceived by individuals about a journey (Sageng et al., 2021), especially due to the instability dictated by the pandemic context (Rather, 2021).

By specifically focusing on the sharing economy services, extant research underlined how fear of COVID-19, uncertainty of COVID-19, and perceived risk of travelling have led consumers to adopt behaviours aimed at protecting themselves from the interaction with others (Rania & Coppola, 2022), especially by abstaining from travelling during the rising cases of COVID-19 (Dwivedi et al., 2022).

In particular, in their study, Agina et al. (2023) hypothesized a negative impact of fear of COVID-19 and uncertainty on tourists' intention to use Airbnb. The authors also assumed that a high-risk perception of traveling

negatively affects travel intention as well as the intention to use Airbnb.

Starting from these assumptions, it could be hypothesized a negative influence of fear of COVID-19, uncertainty of COVID-19, and perceived risk of travelling on consumers' intention to use sharing economy services. Thus:

H1. Fear of COVID-19 has a negative impact on intention to use sharing economy services.

H2. Uncertainty of COVID-19 has a negative impact on intention to use sharing economy services.

H3. Perceived risk of travelling during COVID-19 has a negative impact on intention to use sharing economy services.

3.2 Technical antecedents: Service quality

Service quality can be defined as "the difference between customer's expectations for service performance prior to the service encounter and their perceptions of the service received" (Ananth et al., 2011, p. 246). Overall, extant literature has deeply analysed the relationship between this construct and consumers' intention to use in different contexts such as digital platforms in the health sector (e.g., Pratminingsih & Utami, 2022), cloud e-bookcases (e.g., Chiu et al., 2016), and mobile services (e.g., Widiani et al., 2022).

Within the sharing economy industry, this variable assumes a key role since the sharing economy platforms are usually adopted by both the service providers (e.g., Airbnb hosts, Uber drivers) and the customers of the service (Wang et al., 2020). In this respect, some studies have analysed and corroborated the major outcomes of service quality such as customers' loyalty, trust (Wang et al., 2020), and likelihood of choosing a sharing option again (Möhlmann, 2015). By specifically focusing on customers' behavioural intentions, Chiang et al. (2021) hypothesized how the perceived quality of sharing economy platforms affects users' usage intention. Subsequently, Nguyen and Hoang (2022) identified a strong impact of service quality on customers' intention to use a ride-hailing service. Finally, Podrug and Grubišić (2023) corroborated how service quality positively and directly impacts the behavioural intentions of users in the sharing economy in both the accommodation and transport sectors.

Therefore, starting from these assumptions, the following hypothesis has been postulated:

H4. Service quality has a positive impact on intention to use sharing economy services.

3.3 Individual and personal antecedents: Perceived value and perceived usefulness

Perceived value can be defined as "the ratio of perceived benefits and perceived costs" (Kwak et al., 2021, p. 3), while perceived usefulness has been conceptualized as "the degree to which an individual believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her performance" (Arteaga-Sánchez et al., 2020, p. 729). Both concepts assume a key role in the sharing economy context since they can exert a positive effect on the intention to use sharing economy platforms (Dabija et al., 2022). More in detail, Kim and Kim (2020) analysed the significant influence of perceived value on consumers' intention to continue using bike-sharing services. Subsequently, Dabija et al. (2022) corroborated how the perceived value related to the experience of utilizing a specific sharing economy platform positively impacts the intention to use it.

Similarly, different publications have identified a positive relationship between perceived usefulness and behavioural intention (Wang et al., 2020). For instance, Cheng (2020) and Arteaga-Sánchez et al. (2020) found a positive relationship between perceived usefulness and intention to use sharing economy platforms. Thus, the more customers perceive that organizing their journey could be easier and more efficient through the adoption of a sharing option, the more likely they are to continue using it. Therefore, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

H5. Perceived value has a positive impact on intention to use sharing economy services.

H6. Perceived usefulness has a positive impact on intention to use sharing economy services.

3.4 Environmental antecedents: Environmental orientation

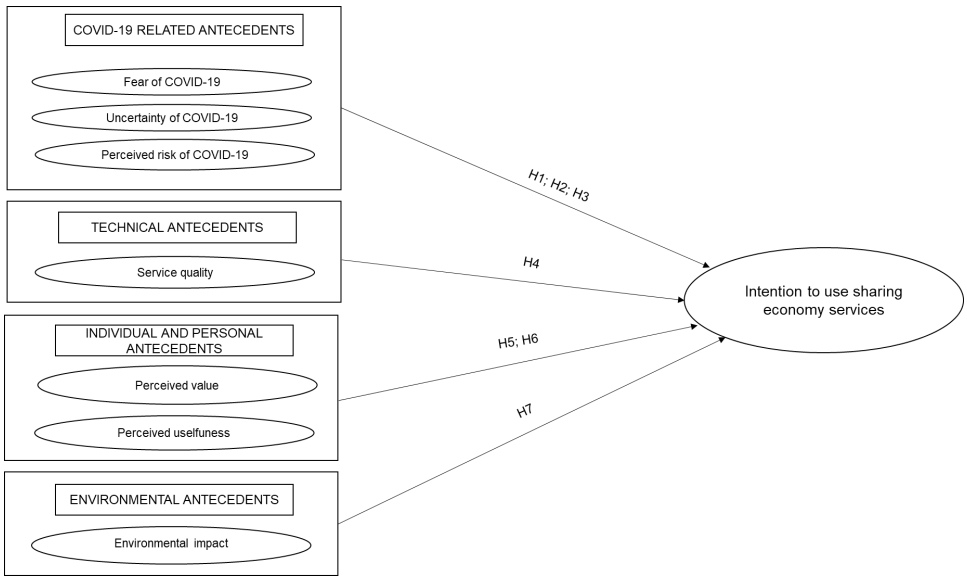
Among the different intrinsic motivators related to the intention to use sharing options, different studies underlined the leading role played by customers' environmental orientation. Notably, Hwang and Grifths (2017) and Carbone et al. (2018) found that consumers tend to be today more sustainable and environmentally conscious by increasingly embracing and adopting sharing consumption options with respect to individual ones. Moreover, Hamari et al. (2016) and Tussyadiah (2015) detected respec-

tively how sustainability has a significant impact on consumers' intention towards collaborative consumption and accommodation-sharing options. More recently, Khalek and Chakraborty (2022), Abutaleb et al. (2023), and Vătămănescu et al. (2023) examined the impact of environmental consciousness on behavioural intentions to use sharing economy services. Therefore, based on the above studies, the last hypothesis has been postulated:

H7. Environmental orientation has a positive impact on intention to use sharing economy services.

Figure 1 shows the overall model under investigation.

Figure.1 Conceptual model



Source: author's elaboration

4. Methodology

To reach the objective of the study, a cross-sectional research design has been adopted. About the selection of the sample, the snowball technique has been used to maximize respondents' participation.

Data have been collected in Italy from April 22, 2021, to November 11, 2021. The translation–back-translation method has been adopted to conduct the survey in the Italian language. Then a Google Form has been used for the survey administration, while the main social networks (i.e., WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn) have been adopted for its distribution. The

data collection gathered 320 responses, of which 316 were deemed valid. Table 1 illustrates the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1. Description of the sample (N=316)

Variable		%
Age	18-23	75,6%
	24-29	15,3%
	30-39	4,1%
	40-49	1,9%
	50-59	1,9%
	Over 60	1,2%
Gender	Male	35,6%
	Female	64,4%
Level of education	Middle School	0,6%
	High School	81,9%
	Bachelor/Master degree	16,6%
	Ph.D.	0,9%
Area of residence	Urbanized area	45,3%
	Urban agglomeration	46,3%
	Rural area	8,4%

Source: author's elaboration

With regards to the structure of the questionnaire, the first two sections have been composed of a set of items, that can be grouped into two categories: determinants of sharing economy, and intention towards using sharing services. The last part of the questionnaire concerned the socio-demographic profile of the respondents.

For the operationalization of the constructs, existing and empirically validated scales have been adopted. Survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement for each of the items using a seven-point Likert scale, anchored by totally disagree (1) to totally agree (7). Table 2 offers the complete list of the items along with the adopted source. The model's constructs align with the reflective paradigm commonly used in social sciences (Coltman et al. 2008), leading to specific operational steps that are reported in the following section.

Table 2. Constructs, items, and sources

Constructs	Main sources
FEAR OF COVID-19 1. I am afraid of the coronavirus 2. It makes me uncomfortable to think about the coronavirus 3. I am afraid of losing my life because of the coronavirus 4. When watching news and stories about the coronavirus on social media, I become nervous or anxious	Jian et al. (2022)
UNCERTAINTY OF COVID-19 1. I perceive the context of COVID-19 as very complex 2. I perceive the context of COVID-19 as unpredictable 3. I perceive the context of COVID-19 as changing rapidly	Jian et al. (2022)
PERCEIVED RISK OF TRAVELLING DURING COVID-19 1. In the current situation, I prefer to avoid travelling to large cities / destinations 2. I feel more averse to travelling due to the risk of the COVID-19 epidemic 3. In the current situation, I prefer to shorten the duration of my potential trips	Rather (2021)
SERVICE QUALITY 1. The design of sharing economy services (e.g. car sharing, house sharing) is appealing to me 2. I have quick and easy access to sharing economy services (e.g. car sharing, house sharing) 3. Sharing economy services (e.g. car sharing, house sharing) make it easy for me to conclude my transaction 4. The customer service of sharing economy services (e.g. car sharing, house sharing) is responsive to its customer's needs 5. I believe that sharing economy services (e.g. car sharing, house sharing) know about the needs of their customers	Möhlmann (2015)
PERCEIVED VALUE 1. Sharing economy services (e.g. car sharing, house sharing) are reasonably priced 2. Sharing economy services offer value for money 3. Sharing economy services offer good products for the price 4. Sharing economy services are economical 5. I enjoy using sharing economy services 6. Sharing economy services have a consistent quality 7. Using Sharing economy services would help me make more friends	Adaptation from Chin et al. (2020)
PERCEIVED USEFULNESS 1. I find sharing economy services useful in my daily life 2. Sharing economy services help me travel more conveniently 3. Sharing economy services improve the quality of my trip	Adaptation from Shao et al. (2020)
ENVIRONMENTAL ORIENTATION 1. By using sharing economy services, I reduce my use of natural resources 2. With the use of sharing economy services, I demonstrate environmental friendly consumption behavior	Adaptation from Möhlmann (2015)

INTENTION TO USE SHARING ECONOMY SERVICES 1. Sharing economy services are a better mode of consumption rather than buying options 2. All things considered, I expect to continue using sharing economy services often in the future 3. My participation in sharing economy services benefits me financially 4. My participation in sharing economy services saves my time 5. Sharing economy services help save natural resources	Adaptation from Hawapi et al. (2017)

5. Findings

First, Common Method Bias (CMB), Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Bartlett's tests, and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) analysis have been performed, then, the data have been analysed with a two-step approach (measurement model and structural model).

5.1 Common Method Bias, KMO and Bartlett's tests, and Variance Inflation Factor analysis

A statistical procedure using the post hoc Harman single-factor approach was to test that the data variance was not explained by one single factor (Babin et al. 2016). The eight factors have been then loaded into a single factor. The unrotated factor solution showed that the one-factor solution accounted for 45.771% of the explained variance, which was less than the 50% threshold (Podsakoff et al. 2003), meaning that CMB was unlikely to be an issue.

The KMO and Bartlett's tests were performed to assess the degree of unidimensionality of the scales. As suggested by Cerny and Kaiser (1977), KMO values above 0.6 indicate an acceptable sampling. The KMO value of 0.77 confirmed the adequacy of the sample (Field, 2013). In addition, the Bartlett's test of sphericity showed a significance level (p-value) of 0.000, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis stating there is no difference between the correlation matrix and the identity matrix.

The degree of multicollinearity has been also assessed through the value of the variance inflation factor (VIF). None of the VIF values for the latent variables were greater than 10, which indicates that multicollinearity was not an issue (Hair et al. 2017).

5.2 Assessment of the measurement model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was run using IBM SPSS Amos 22 to test if the empirical data conformed to the presumed model. The meas-

urement model included 28 items describing 8 latent constructs: Fear of COVID-19, Uncertainty of COVID-19, Perceived risk of COVID-19, Service quality, Perceived usefulness of sharing services, Perceived value, Environmental orientation, and Intention of sharing economy. A model is considered to have good fit when the Chi-square/df is below the recommended value 3.00, as suggested by Baumgartner and Homburg (1996), NFI, TLI, and CFI achieve 0.90 and RMSEA values are smaller than 0.09 (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Based on these cut-offs, the results show an acceptable model fit: $\chi 2/df$ =1.91, RMSEA = .054, CFI=.95, NFI=.90, and TLI= .94.

As Table 3 shows, reliability analysis has been carried out and the Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .82 to .92, exceeding the threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 3. Loadings, reliability and validity

	Items	Mean (SD)	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Fear of COVID-19	FC			.88	.90	.70
1		4.42 (1.73)	.884			
2		4.02 (1.93)	.931			
3		2.82 (1.80)	.610			
4		3.89 (1.86)	.874			
Uncertainty of COVID-19	UC			.89	.89	.74
1		5.60 (1.31)	.776			
2		5.61 (1.35)	.933			
3		5.56 (1.35)	.860			
Risk of COVID-19	RC			.92	.92	.79
1		4.38 (1.80)	.901			
2		4.08 (1.76)	.927			
3		4.10 (1.87)	.833			
Service Quality	SQ			.89	.84	.58
1		4.94 (1.38)	.745			
2		5.48 (1.29)	.903			
3		5.12 (1.31)	.656			
4		5.25 (1.31)	.717			

Perceived usefulness of sharing services	PU			.84	.86	.68
1		4.75 (1.62)	.638			
2		5.22 (1.35)	.951			
3		4.90 (1.44)	.859			
Perceived Value	PV			.89	.97	.93
1		5.19 (1.29)	.933			
2		5.26 (1.22)	.902			
3		5.19 (1.34)	.929			
4		4.86 (1.35)	.856			
5		5.04 (1.39)	1.176			
Environmental Orientation	EO			.82	.82	.69
1		4.47 (1.77)	.805			
2		4.36 (1.65)	.859			
Intention of sharing economy (SE)	ISE			.86	.86	.61
1		4.41 (1.28)	.791			
2		5.11 (1.33)	.866			
3		4.90 (1.30	.757			
4		4.67 (1.47)	.714			

Source: author's elaboration

Moreover, internal reliability and convergent validity have been respectively assessed by Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted. Both CR and AVE exceeded the minimum cut-off of 0.5, confirming that all measures have adequate reliability (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Factor loadings are higher than 0.4, as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Table. 4 - Fornell-Larcker Criteria

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Fear of COVID-19	0.834							
2. Uncertainty of COVID-19	0.458	0.859						
3. Risk of COVID-19	0.735	0.451	*0.888*					
4. Service quality	0.202	0.454	0.223	0.76				
5. PU of sharing services	0.222	0.263	0.244	0.535	*0.826*			
6. Perceived value	0.160	0.224	0.147	0.573	0.521	*0.966*		
7. Environmental orientation	0.345	0.187	0.346	0.285	0.344	0.293	*0.863*	
8. Intention of SE	0.235	0.319	0.248	0.677	0.711	0.648	0.282	*0.768*

Note: Values in Italic represent Square-root of AVE. Off-diagonal, below the Italic values are correlation coefficient.

In addition to Fornell and Larcker criteria (Table 4), following Senyo and Osabutely (2020), we also assessed discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of correlations (HTMT), which evaluates if two variables are perfectly measured by their true correlations by estimating the ratio of within and between constructs correlations (Henseler et al., 2015). To determine the presence of discriminant validity, the HTMT values must be lower than 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015). As shown in table 5, HTMT ratios are between 0.206 and 0.720. This confirms the discriminant validity between the constructs in the research model.

Table. 5 - HTMT Ratio

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Fear of COVID-19	–							
2. Uncertainty of COVID-19	0.510	–						
3. Risk of COVID-19	0.720	0.482	–					
4. Service quality	0.217	0.434	0.206	–				
5. PU of sharing services	0.279	0.290	0.237	0.545	–			
6. Perceived value	0.243	0.353	0.215	0.620	0.539	–		
7. Environmental impact	0.364	0.206	0.359	0.300	0.378	0.290	–	
8. Intention of SE	0.259	0.342	0.260	0.673	0.722	0.745	0.496	–

Note: Off-diagonal, heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations.

5.3 Assessment of the structural model

The final step in the data analysis assesses the structural model by examining the path significance and effect of each hypothesised relationship. To test the structural relationships among the research variables and the standardized path coefficients, a Structural Equation analysis (SEM) was performed. The fit indices for the structural equation model again achieved good fit both (RMSEA < 0.06, CFI > 0.90, NFI > 0.90, and TLI > 0.90). Table 5 shows the results of the SEM. Fear of COVID-19 has not a significant effect on intention to use sharing economy services, thus, H1 is not supported. Uncertainty of COVID-19 has also a not significant effect on intention to use sharing economy services (β = -0.032, p = 0.485), thus H2 is not supported. Same as the previous COVID-related variables, risk of COVID-19 has no significant effect on intention to use sharing economy services (β = -0.006, p = 0.883), not supporting H3. On the other hand, service quality has a significant positive effect on intention to use sharing economy services (β = 0.325, p < 0.001), thus H4 is supported. Perceived usefulness has a positive significant effect on intention to use sharing economy services (β = 0.311, p < 0.001), thus H5 is supported. Also perceived value has a significant and positive effect on intention to use sharing economy services (β = 0.211, p < 0.001), supporting H6. Finally, environmental orientation has a significant and positive effect on intention to use sharing economy services (β = 0.153, p < 0.001), supporting H8.

Tab. 5 - Results of hypotheses testing

H	Structural path	Proposed effect	SRW	t-Value	p-Value	Results
H1	FC → ICC	-	-0.002	-0.044	0.965	NS
H2	UC → ICC	-	-0.032	-0.699	0.485	NS
H3	RC → ICC	-	-0.006	-0.147	0.883	NS
H4	SQ → ICC	+	0.325	4.225	< 0.001	S
H5	PU → ICC	+	0.311	6.869	< 0.001	S
H6	PV → ICC	+	0.211	4.554	< 0.001	S
H7	EI → ICC	+	0.153	4.215	< 0.001	S

Note: SRW = standardized regression weight

5.4 Post-hoc analysis

In this research, the intention toward the sharing economy remained unaffected by COVID-related factors. Given the contingent nature of the COVID-19 crisis and the contradictory findings in the current literature regarding the influence of COVID-related variables, we opted to further considering them as intervening variables rather than sole determinants of the intention to use sharing economy services. Consequently, we conducted a post-hoc analysis to assess whether COVID-related variables could exhibit a moderating effect in the model. Specifically, we tested whether fear, uncertainty, and perceived risk of COVID-19 showed moderating effects in the relations between service quality, perceived value, perceived usefulness, environmental impact, and intention to use sharing economy services. Table 6 displays the results for all the post-hoc moderation tests.

Among the selected variables, the results show that only fear of COVID-19 shows moderating effects. Fear of COVID-19 moderates the relationship between perceived value and intention to use sharing economy services $R^2 = 0.07$, $F(1, 312) = 4.33$, $p < .05$, ß = 0.05, to such an extent that the higher the fear of COVID, the stronger the relationship between perceived value and intention to use sharing economy services. However, fear of COVID-19 does not moderate the relationship between service quality, perceived usefulness, environmental impact, and intention to use sharing economy services.

Tab. 6 - Results of post-hoc moderation analysis

Path	*B (SE)*	*LLCI*	*ULCI*
Fear of COVID			
Perceived value x Fear of COVID-19 → Intention to use	.052 (.03)*	.0028	.1012
Service quality x Fear of COVID-19 → Intention to use	.002 (.03)	-.0517	-.0548
Perceived usefulness x Fear of COVID-19 → Intention to use	.019 (.02)	-.0247	.0638
Environmental impact x Fear of COVID-19 → Int. to use	.025 (.02)	-.0191	.0689
Uncertainty of COVID			
Perceived value x Uncertainty of COVID-19 → Int. to use	.007 (.03)	-.0479	.0612
Service quality x Uncertainty of COVID-19 → Int. to use	-.028 (.03)	-.0812	.0244
Perceived usefulness x Uncertainty of COVID-19 → Int. to use	-.038 (.02)	-.0823	.0067
Environmental impact x Uncertainty of COVID-19 → Int. to use	-.008 (.03)	-.0581	.0414
Risk of COVID			
Perceived value x Risk of COVID-19 → Int. to use	.019 (0.2)	-.0247	.0638
Service quality x Risk of COVID-19 → Int. to use	-.013 (.02)	-.0596	.0330
Perceived usefulness x Risk of COVID-19 → Int. to use	-.018 (03)	-.2583	.2210
Environmental impact x Risk of COVID-19 → Int. to use	.002 (.02)	-.0364	.0369
Conditional indirect effects of perceived value and fear of COVID-19 on intention to use sharing economy services			
Low fear of COVID-19	.621 (.05)***	.5184	.7231
Medium fear of COVID-19	.712 (.04)***	.6245	.7991
High fear of COVID-19	.803 (.07)***	.6629	.9428

*Note. N = 316. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. Number of bootstrap samples 5,000; B = Unstandardized coefficients (bootstrap standard errors in parentheses); LLCI = 95% lower level confidence interval; ULCI = 95 % upper level confidence interval.*

5.5. Discussion

Although the implementation of the digital sharing economy provides many positive values, there are still few SMEs that adopt the digital sharing economy, due to knowledge challenges and limited resource capacity (Lestantri et al., 2022). The sharing economy has revolutionized how people access and utilize resources, especially in the accommodation and travel sector, and understanding what motivates people to use sharing economy services is crucial for businesses. In this view, by acquiring knowledge on the factors impacting consumers' willingness to use sharing economy services, SMEs could effectively tap into the sharing economy and gain a competitive advantage.

Overall, findings identified: (i) a positive and significant influence of service quality, perceived value, perceived usefulness, and environmental orientation on intention to use sharing economy services; (ii) a non-significant impact of fear of COVID-19, uncertainty of COVID-19, and perceived risk of travelling during COVID-19; (iii) a moderating effect of fear of COVID-19 on the relationship between perceived value and intention to use sharing economy services.

More in detail, concerning the COVID-19 related antecedents, the hypotheses have not been supported. This allowed us to confirm how the intention to use sharing economy services was not influenced by customers' negative feelings related to the pandemic situation. These results could be explained in light of the fact that the sharing economy providers have been able, during the crisis, to convince customers that their services could offer all the necessary precautionary measures to reduce the infection risks. Overall, these results are in line with previous studies, which identified a non-significant influence of COVID-19 related motives on continuance intention to use ride-sharing (Rasheed Gaber & Elsamadicy, 2021) and food delivery apps (Barbosa et al., 2020).

Regarding the significant moderating effect of fear of COVID-19, this outcome can be attributed to the heightened importance of perceived value in sharing economy services during the pandemic. These services provide a combination of flexibility, security, and customization that addresses users' specific concerns in the context of public health. For instance, the fear of contagion may lead individuals to avoid crowded places. Sharing economy services can be viewed as a valuable alternative where maintaining social distancing is easier compared to public transportation or traditional hotel facilities. Additionally, amid the pandemic, financial difficulties were widespread, and sharing economy services, often more cost-effective than traditional alternatives, emerged as a more accessible solution during a period of economic uncertainty.

As for the technical antecedents, results are in line with previous studies

(e.g., (Nguyen & Hoang, 2022)) corroborating the significant role of service quality in the formation of consumers' intention to continue using the sharing economy services.

About individual and personal antecedents, a positive impact of perceived value and perceived usefulness has been corroborated. This finding permits us to underline the key role of consumers' perception in their behavioural intentions, thus confirming previous studies (e.g., Dabija et al., 2022; Arteaga-Sánchez et al., 2020; Cheng, 2020).

Finally, with respect to environmental antecedents, it emerged a significant direct influence of customers' environmental orientation on intentions to use sharing economy services. This result confirmed previous studies (e.g., Abutaleb et al., 2023) underlining how sustainability currently represents a major driver of consumers' intention towards the sharing economy. More in detail, this allowed us to confirm how in 2021 (a stage in which the crisis was still particularly felt), the orientation towards environmental sustainability has represented a significant antecedent, which has led customers to opt for economic models based on sharing options.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Theoretical implications

The paper provides different theoretical contributions. Firstly, it enhances existing research by exploring the influence of specific COVID-related factors on consumers' intention to use sharing economy services, thus addressing a specific call that has emerged from the literature (Hossain, 2021; Yang & Lee 2021 and Tan et al. 2022). Indeed, while research has emphasized the relevance of examining the evolution of consumers' intentions and behaviours during COVID-19, particularly by focusing on sectors deeply disrupted by this crisis, such as the sharing economy, this analysis is still in its early stage (Hossain, 2021). Secondly, the study explores the potential long-term impact of COVID-19 on the sharing economy intention and its predictors, especially by focusing on a more advanced phase of the pandemic. In doing so, the paper responds to a further call of the research, highlighting that the analysis of the sharing economy in the context of COVID-19 has primarily concentrated on the early pandemic period (Hossain, 2021).

Thirdly, gaining insight into individuals' perceptions and interactions with sharing economy services during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential, especially for SMEs operating in this domain, as it aids in facing potential future challenges associated with public health emergencies, adapting to dynamic market conditions, and reducing potentially long-lasting eco-

nomic losses due to future pandemics (Neumann & Kawaoka, 2023).

Finally, the paper aims to establish a comprehensive framework composed of specific categories of antecedents (i.e., COVID-19 related, technical, individual, and environmental antecedents), that may influence consumers' intention to utilize sharing economy options in times of crisis.

Overall, our research encompasses four crucial categories of antecedents that investigate specific aspects such as government regulations, technological advancements, individual characteristics, and broader societal influences, all of which play significant roles in shaping consumer behavior in the sharing economy. Understanding the role of all these factors is not only vital for helping SMEs navigate the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic but also for anticipating and adapting to potential future public health emergency crises.

6.2 Managerial implications

The paper analyses a critical industry, being the sharing economy sector one of the businesses most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. This impact has raised concerns among various authors about the sector's survival (Hossain, 2021; Conger & Griffith, 2020). In particular, the study offers practical insights related to the possible strategies that sharing economy providers can employ to improve customers' intention to continue using their services, even after the end of the pandemic crisis.

By identifying key predictors influencing customers' intention to use sharing economy services, the paper underscores the significance of service quality, perceived value, perceived usefulness, and environmental orientation in shaping providers' strategies. Focusing specifically on service quality, it is crucial to offer responsive platforms with detailed and comprehensive information (Nguyen & Hoang, 2022). The adoption of the D.R.E.A.M.S.[1] model (Marimon et al., 2019) may enable sharing economy providers to develop platforms characterized by a high level of service quality. In further detail, this model entails: (i) streamlined data entry processes; (ii) incorporation of a user review section; (iii) authentication of user information via automatic verification of email, phone numbers, and social media accounts; (iv) content moderation, both textual and visual; (v) ensuring high-quality platform information; and (vi) incentivizing user-generated content. Moreover, it is of paramount importance for SMEs not only to share resources for innovation from a collaborative perspective (Metallo et al., 2016) but also to leverage their specific strengths by concentrating on delivering personalized and reliable services, ensuring that customers feel valued.

[1] *Declared; Rated; Engaged; Active; Moderated; Social*

Regarding the positive impact of perceived usefulness, results corroborate the importance of providing more effective, efficient, and user-friendly platforms, which could encourage consumers to continue using the service. In fact, more complex sharing systems could not only discourage users from re-adopting them but can also lead to the development of negative outcomes (i.e., hate) or service abandonment, prompting users to seek alternative services (Francioni et al., 2022). To create user-friendly platforms, providers may focus on search engine visibility and structural characteristics such as navigation menu, layout, readability, and navigation speed.

Then, based on our results, we argue that managers should carefully shape perceived value, emphasising cost savings and economic and social benefits, to provide tangible advantages over traditional alternatives and influence users' decisions. An interesting aspect is the moderation effect of Fear of COVID-19 on perceived value and the intention to use sharing economy services, serving as a caution. During the pandemic, safety concerns and hygiene measures take precedence, influencing individuals to prioritize health considerations. Increased fears of virus transmission heighten the impact of safety considerations on the intention to use these services. Furthermore, the trade-off between perceived benefits, such as cost savings, and associated risks, particularly the risk of exposure to the virus, becomes more pronounced. This intensifies the scrutiny of this balance, prompting individuals to seek services that offer value but also mitigate risks.

Regarding the significant impact of environmental orientation, it's noted how individuals now prioritize sustainable practices and eco-friendly choices. To leverage this trend, managers should develop communication strategies aimed at promoting the positive association between sharing economy services and environmental ideals. For instance, advertising content could highlight the role of sharing options in reducing pollution and energy waste (Sadiq et al., 2023). This approach aligns with Previati et al. (2022), who emphasize the need for SMEs to adapt their business models post-COVID by embracing digital transformation and green initiatives. By aligning with these updated principles, companies can meet evolving consumer needs with modernized digital solutions focused on quality and environmental sustainability.

Overall, firms can learn several crucial lessons from the COVID-19 crisis to better prepare for future challenges and the next pandemic (Neumann & Kawaoka, 2023). Our study highlights the enduring importance of maintaining high service quality and perceived value, even amidst disruptions caused by public health emergencies to meet consumer expectations and maintain customer loyalty, which are essential for long-term sustainability. Additionally, our research underscores the interplay between psychological factors, like fear of COVID-19, and consumer decision-making, which

should encourage firms to address consumer concerns, implement transparent communication, and safety measures, and offer value-added services to mitigate the impact of fear on consumer behavior.

6.3 Limitations and future research

The study is not free from limitations. Firstly, within the study, the translation–back-translation method has been adopted. However, it could lead to some potential limits related to the difficulty in verifying the variables' cultural adaptation (Francioni et al., 2022). Secondly, the sharing economy services have been analysed in a general way, without focusing on specific categories or brands. Therefore, it could be interesting, in the future, to compare different categories/brands of sharing economy services. Thirdly, following Patuelli et al. (2022), future studies could investigate the specific practices that businesses operating in different fields of the sharing economy undergo during crises. Then, by focusing on the investigated variables, it could be valuable to extend the conceptual model by also analysing the main outcomes of intention.

Caution must be exercised when drawing inferences from the study results, as the sample exhibits demographic imbalances. The majority of participants are female, aged 18-29, holding a high school diploma. These characteristics may introduce biases, making it crucial to interpret the outcomes within the context of this skewed demographic composition, recognizing potential impacts on the broader applicability of the study's conclusions. Future studies are encouraged to replicate the model proposed in this study with a more balanced sample. Consideration should be given to including diverse age groups, genders, and educational backgrounds. Additionally, conducting a multi-group analysis comparing various national contexts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the observed phenomena. Finally, conducting a longitudinal study to examine the post-COVID phase could provide valuable insights into the evolving outcomes over time.

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