

Article

How Are Material Values and Voluntary Simplicity Lifestyle Related to Attitudes and Intentions toward Commercial Sharing during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Evidence from Japan

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Abstract: This paper attempts to elucidate how material values (MV) and voluntary simplicity lifestyle (VSL) are related to Japanese consumers' attitudes and intentions toward commercial sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper provides the following findings by employing the two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) approach to analyze the data ($n = 750$) collected in Japan during the pandemic from people with no experience in commercial sharing. (1) MV has a positive effect on attitudes. (2) VSL is divided into "simplicity," "long-term usage," and "planned buying." (3) Simplicity and planned buying are negatively related to MV, but long-term usage is not significantly related to MV. (4) Simplicity and long-term usage significantly affect attitudes, whereas planned buying does not. (5) Attitudes and subjective norms have positive effects on intentions. Consequently, two conflicting consumption orientations, MV and VSL, positively affect consumers' responses toward commercial sharing in a pandemic context. The author suggests that although the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic exists now, the sharing economy can still contribute to enhancing sustainability and alleviating technological inequality by attracting people with different values and lifestyles.

Keywords: material values; voluntary simplicity lifestyle; subjective norms; commercial sharing systems; sharing economy; COVID-19; sustainability; well-being



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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused considerable changes in people's values, lifestyles, and consumption behaviors by restricting social interactions, leading to economic hardship, and threatening physical/mental health and sustainability [1–4]. Due to restrictions on face-to-face contact by stay-at-home and social distancing orders, more people are suffering from anxiety, depression, loneliness, and frustration, which has escalated materialistic value orientation or the desire for mental well-being [1,3–6]. However, the pandemic has accelerated the utilization of internet communication technologies (ICT) in working and shopping [7,8]. Moreover, regarding consumption behaviors, the COVID-19 outbreak has forced many consumers to obtain products and services via ICT-enabled digital platforms [9].

Due to these significant changes in living environments during the pandemic, it is essential to determine how to attain well-being and sustainability by utilizing advanced ICT even after the pandemic. It has been claimed that the COVID-19 period deteriorated the social and ecological consciousness of sustainable consumption [2]. Under such circumstances, the sharing economy, in which commercial sharing systems (CSS) help in the efficient circulation of underutilized resources in society [10–13], may play a meaningful role in enhancing sustainability and help to overcome technological inequalities, as people can easily participate in the systems with their smartphones. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the accommodation and transport sectors in the sharing economy by restricting people's movements [5], it is widely accepted that engagements

in the sharing economy via ICT-enabled platforms can contribute to sustainability by utilizing limited resources efficiently and reducing the amount of waste disposal, as well as allowing people to access and use necessary items without purchasing and possessing them [10,11,14]. Because the COVID-19 pandemic has not only impacted the sharing economy but also affected people's values, lifestyles, and consumption patterns [1,3], it is essential to clarify how the pursuit of material or spiritual well-being is related to consumers' responses to CSS in the pandemic context. Therefore, this study focuses on the effects of values and lifestyle on attitudes and intentions toward CSS during the pandemic.

It is well-established that values and lifestyle lead to what/how to consume [15–21]. Thus, it is also probable that they will play considerable roles in determining whether consumers would utilize CSS, which refers to “marketer-managed systems that provide customers with the opportunity to enjoy product benefits without ownership” [22] (p. 109). With this postulation in mind, the current study focuses on MV and VSL to examine whether/how they are related to attitudes and intentions toward CSS.

MV (also known as materialism) is a consumption orientation in pursuing success and happiness through acquiring and possessing material goods [23–25]. Conversely, VSL describes a nonmaterialistic way of living to seek mental and spiritual well-being through low consumption, material simplicity, and ecological awareness [26–28]. Thus, VSL is the opposite of MV [25,29,30]. There are mixed views on how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the intensity of MV and VSL. Whereas some studies argued that the pandemic escalated MV to cope with uneasiness and the threat of death [4,6], another study claimed that such an influence is limited [3]. Furthermore, whereas there is a postulation that the pandemic has stirred up sustainable consumption motivated by VSL [31], another argument claims that the consciousness of ecology, society, and voluntary simplicity has deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby reducing sustainable consumption [2]. Apparently, the pandemic has multifaceted aspects of both MV and VSL. However, whether the pandemic strengthened or weakened MV and VSL is not the focus of this study. The current research focuses on the relationship between MV, VSL, and commercial sharing via digital platforms in a pandemic context.

CSS is composed of programs that allow consumers to access necessary products and obtain their benefits without ownership [22,32]. As part of the sharing economy, participating in CSS leads to access-based consumption, which means “transactions that can be market mediated but where no transfer of ownership takes place” [33] (p. 881), or collaborative consumption, which refers to “the reinvention of traditional market behaviors—renting, lending, swapping, sharing, bartering, gifting—through technology, taking place in ways and on a scale not possible before the internet” [34]. Focusing on CSS whose central feature is no transfer of ownership, past research has explored its relationship with materialism that values possessions, e.g., [32,35,36]. However, the findings are mixed, yielding little consensus. Meanwhile, only a few studies on the sharing economy have highlighted VSL. This is a bit surprising because lifestyles are directly related to acquiring and using goods and services [20]. Moreover, only a few studies have explored the combined effects of MV and VSL on consumers' responses to CSS.

To fill this gap, the current paper conducts an empirical study by considering both MV and VSL as the antecedents of attitudes and intentions toward CSS. Specifically, this study postulates a hierarchical relationship among MV, VSL, subjective norms, attitudes, and intentions. The theoretical rationale is based on research on values and lifestyle and the theory of reasoned action. On the one hand, the former explains that it is not only values that determine lifestyle but also values and lifestyle influence consumer behaviors [15–21]. On the other hand, the latter demonstrates that behavioral intentions are determined by attitudes toward behavior and social influence, that is, subjective norms [37]. By combining these two theoretical frameworks from a synthetic perspective, this study establishes and verifies a conceptual model comprising MV, VSL, subjective norms, attitudes, and intentions. Due to the conflicting orientations of MV and VSL, it is appropriate to clarify

how the two concepts are related to each other before determining consumers' attitudes and intentions toward CSS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study focuses on Japanese consumers without prior experience using sharing services. They can be considered potential customers in the rapidly growing sharing economy market. Despite the COVID-19 outbreak, the sharing economy market in Japan has expanded, reaching JPY 2.4 trillion in 2021 from JPY 1.89 trillion in 2018, and is predicted to exceed JPY 14.3 trillion in 2030 [38]. In this phenomenal growing market, it is worth investigating potential customers' attitudes and intentions to join CSS, as the sharing economy is expected to continuously spread because of advanced ICT-enabled digital platforms in the post-pandemic era.

The rest of this article comprises the following sections. In the next section, this paper reviews previous relevant studies, hypothesizes the causal relationships among the constructs, and suggests a conceptual model. Then, it conducts data analysis and derives the results. In the last section, this paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications, suggesting the study's limitations and areas for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. MV and VSL

Materialism refers to a consumption orientation for success and happiness by acquiring and possessing material goods [23,25,39,40]. Although research has discussed materialism from several perspectives, such as personality traits [23,39], consumer value [24,25], and identity motives [41], the consumer value perspective has been widely accepted in the field of consumer research [24,42]. In this perspective, materialism (i.e., MV) is defined as "the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods in achieving major life goals or desired states" [24] (p. 210). Richins and Dawson [25] proposed three domains of MV—centrality, success, and happiness. Centrality means that possessions are placed at the center of life; success indicates that people's success is determined by the quality and quantity of their possessions, and happiness represents the belief that material acquisition and possession lead to life satisfaction and well-being. Due to these characteristics, materialists tend to attach importance to the social status and image portrayed by possessions [40], resulting in exploring valuable objects to acquire and possess them [43]. Concerning this, MV is classified into an extrinsic value, that of decreasing pro-ecological behaviors of recycling and conserving resources [44]. Meanwhile, some recent studies reported that MV positively affected sustainable consumption [45].

VSL indicates a nonmaterialistic and sustainable way of living to pursue mental satisfaction and well-being, where people attempt to make life materially simple by refraining from unnecessary consumption and bear ethical and sustainable consumption in mind and thus use their resources, such as money and time, to achieve personal growth and self-actualization [27,44,46–49]. What drives this lifestyle is the belief that nonmaterial aspects of life are the central factors for happiness and well-being [49,50]. It has been argued that VSL stems from the anti-consumption movement that attempts to cope with ethical and environmental concerns caused by overproduction and overconsumption [26,51]. That is why voluntary simplifiers tend to place weight on eco-friendly and ethical consumption [44,48,52]. According to Elgin and Mitchell [52], VSL comprises five centric values: ecological awareness, human scale, material simplicity, personal growth, and self-determination. Furthermore, Osikominu and Bocken [49] proposed that VSL values include self-direction, stimulation, universalism, and benevolence, implying that VSL is a multifaceted lifestyle, having a consumption orientation that conflicts with MV. It is also argued that people practice VSL in different domains and degrees [26,29,53]; however, the common goal is psychological fulfillment and well-being through a materially simple life and reduced consumption [26,28,29,49].

Values are among the most considerable predictors of lifestyle [17,18,20]. For example, Carman [18] suggested a theoretical model to show the causal relationship between values, lifestyles, and consumption. Discussing the means-end theory of lifestyle from

a similar perspective, Brunsø et al. [17] also proposed a value–lifestyle–behavior chain and provided empirical evidence about the sequential relationship among the three factors. Moreover, Lastovicka [20] reviewed the theoretical networks in the lifestyle trait research to demonstrate that lifestyle patterns are determined by values and affect consumers' purchase decisions and post-purchase evaluations. Therefore, it is reasonable to predict a causal relationship between MV and VSL. However, the relationship is probably negative because of the following reason. As stated above, whereas MV emphasizes acquiring and possessing material goods [24,25], VSL attaches importance to reduced consumption and material simplicity [54,55]. Indeed, studies had found a causal relationship between MV and VSL [56] and their correlation [29,57]. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the former has a negative effect on the latter.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *MV affects VSL negatively.*

2.2. *MV and Attitudes toward CSS*

Although several studies had explored the effects of materialism on consumer response to CSS, their findings are inconsistent. For instance, in their empirical study, Johnson et al. [36] reported no significant relationship between materialism and attitudes toward using the internet in consuming apparel collaboratively. Moreover, Lindblom and Lindblom [58] found that materialism negatively affects collaborative consumption attitudes in consumer-to-consumer trading based on the transfer of ownership. However, other empirical studies had opposite findings. In their study conducted in the setting of accommodation and ride-sharing, Davidson et al. [35] found that materialism positively influences the willingness to engage in sharing via either perceived utility or transformation expectations. Similarly, in their research in the apparel-sharing context, Lee and Furukawa [43] found that materialism positively influences attitudes toward the use of sharing services.

Despite the mixed results in prior studies, MV would likely stir up positive attitudes to participate in CSS because it leads to a disposition to seek and explore valuable material goods for acquisition and possession [43]. Thus, MV is expected to play a facilitating role in forming positive attitudes toward CSS, where materialistic individuals can try out different types of products before purchasing and possessing them. Furthermore, consumers' economic hardship induced by the COVID-19 pandemic [1] may also lead to positive attitudes toward CSS, making products available at a relatively lower cost than buying them. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that MV positively impacts attitudes toward CSS.

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *MV positively affects attitudes toward CSS.*

2.3. *VSL and Attitudes toward CSS*

Unlike the case of MV, only a few studies have paid attention to VSL in the context of CSS. One exceptional study by Lee [59] reported that VSL does not significantly impact attitudes toward CSS. Despite Lee's [59] result, it is still expected that VSL would have a close relationship with sharing-based collaborative consumption [55]. This postulation is plausible because voluntary simplifiers minimize consumption and use their money and time cultivating nonmaterialistic sources of a meaningful life [44,46,49,54]. Therefore, sharing is a beneficial way of consumption for VSL-oriented consumers, as they can access the products when needed and use necessary material goods without ownership. CSS would also serve as a valuable tool to keep their lives simple. As VSL and collaborative consumption are related to sustainability-based anti-consumption behavior [60], we posit that a lifestyle of material simplicity will lead to positive attitudes toward CSS. Notably, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which encourages people to change consumption patterns for downscaling and planned shopping [1,31], individuals who pursue VSL are likely to have more positive attitudes toward CSS.

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *VSL positively affects attitudes toward CSS.*

2.4. Subjective Norms, Attitudes, and Intentions toward CSS

The theory of reasoned action illustrates the mechanism through which behavioral intentions are formed by attitudes toward behavior and subjective norms (i.e., social influence) [37]. Whereas attitudes mean “the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question,” subjective norms refer to “the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behavior” [61] (p. 188). This theory implies that the more positive attitudes consumers have and the more substantial social pressure consumers perceive, the stronger their intentions toward the behavior. Therefore, increased intentions lead to actual behaviors [37,61].

In the context of CSS, studies have reported that, consistent with the theory, attitudes are positively related to intentions [14,36,59,62–64]. However, there are slightly mixed findings on the effect of subjective norms on intentions. While many studies have found a significant impact of subjective norms on intentions [14,36,63,64], a few have failed to find a significant relationship between the two constructs [65]. Despite the inconsistency in prior studies, subjective norms are likely to affect intentions to use sharing services because of the sharing economy’s social benefits. By efficiently utilizing underused social resources, the sharing economy can contribute to sustainability [10–12,14]. As the COVID-19 pandemic strengthened social norms in a community [3], the social influence in favor of the sharing economy may encourage participation in CSS. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Attitudes toward CSS positively affect intentions toward CSS.*

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Subjective norms positively affect intentions toward CSS.*

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model of this research.

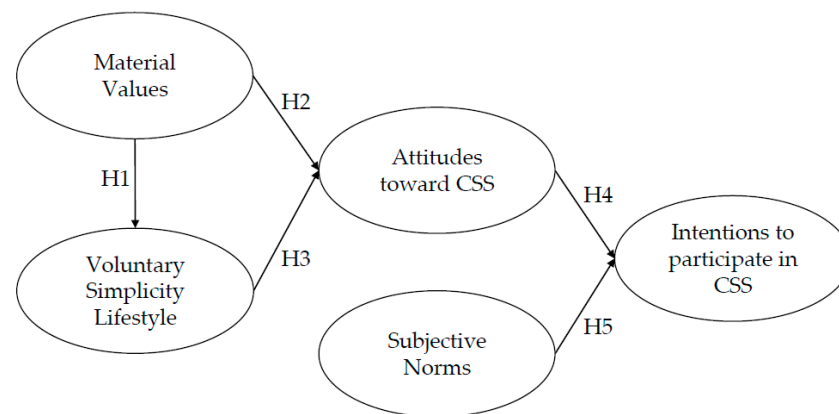


Figure 1. The conceptual model.

3. Methods

3.1. Measure

All items are adopted from well-established studies in which reliability and validity were proved. For MV, a nine-item version of the material values scale (MVS) was adapted from the study of Richins [24]. MVS was initially developed by Richins and Dawson [25] with 18 items. To ensure ease of use, Richins [24] shortened the scale to 15 items, nine items, six items, and three items and found that the 15- and nine-item versions have comparatively good psychometric properties. Therefore, the current study adopts the nine-item version of MVS. To assess VSL, a 12-item version of the voluntary simplicity lifestyle scale (VSLS) was adopted from the studies by Lee [29,66]. This is a revised short version of the original VSLS comprising 22 items, which Iwata [67] proposes. This VSLS is suitable for this research

because it was developed with Japanese samples. Three items were adapted from each of the studies of Hernández et al. [68] and Barnes and Mattsson [65] to assess attitudes and intentions. To estimate subjective norms, two items were extracted from the study of Barnes and Mattsson [65].

Except for the VSLs items drawn from Japanese literature, the questionnaire items in English were carefully translated into Japanese by three bilinguals who are fluent in both languages. First, two bilinguals translated the original English version into Japanese separately and then compared their translations for compatibility and consistency. Then, another bilingual checked again to ensure no compatibility and consistency issues between the English and Japanese versions. In the translation process, one reversed item of MVS was translated non-reversely for readability. The items were measured on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (disagreed) to 5 (agreed).

3.2. Data Collection

The data were collected from Japanese consumers via an online survey in the early summer of 2021, that was, during the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan. First, a screening survey was conducted to look for participants without experience in commercial sharing programs, including apparel- and car-sharing services. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and the participants were informed that anonymity was guaranteed; there were no correct/wrong answers, and the obtained information from this survey would be used for research purposes only. These explanations help reduce social desirability and common method biases [69]. Only those who agreed with it were allowed to participate in the survey. Then, the participants were asked to answer the main questionnaire. Regarding CSS, the participants were also informed that the sharing services covered by the study were limited to those available on digital platforms. This is because mediation by internet digital platforms is among the essential features of the sharing economy and CSS [11,34,62,70].

A total of 750 valid questionnaires were completed. The proportion of male and female respondents is the same, with their ages ranging from 20 to 79 years, comprising 16.5% for 20–29 years, 16.6% for 30–39 years, 16.8% for 40–49 years, 16.8% for 50–59 years, 16.8% for 60–69 years, and 16.5% for 70–79 years. Regarding their annual income, 27.6% earned under JPY 3 million; 26% earned JPY 3–5 million; 17.1% earned JPY 5–7 million; 11.5% earned JPY 7–9 million, and 17.9% earned more than JPY 9 million. As of July 2021, one U.S. dollar was approximately JPY 110.

3.3. Data Analysis

3.3.1. Assessment of the Measurement Model

As the first step of the analysis, the dataset ($n = 750$) is subjected to exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood extraction with Promax rotation in SPSS 26. Then, based on the threshold of factor loading (>0.4 [71]) and communality (>0.4 [72]), three items are removed from MVS, and one item is removed from VSLs. Whereas the remaining items of MV are grouped as one factor, the VSLs items are grouped into three factors, similar to previous studies [29,66]. The first one comprises four items about simple life and mental fulfillment; the second one comprises four items that represent a tendency for long-term usage of goods, and the third one comprises three items about the tendency to avoid impulse buying. Therefore, the three factors, i.e., the first one to the third one, are named “simplicity,” “long-term usage,” and “planned buying,” respectively. Each of the other constructs has one factor, i.e., attitudes, subjective norms, and intentions. The seven factors explain 60.41% of the total variance. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value is 0.88, indicating enough sampling adequacy. Each factor has satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from 82–93—MV ($n = 6$, $\alpha = 0.86$), simplicity ($n = 4$, $\alpha = 0.81$), long-term usage ($n = 4$, $\alpha = 0.86$), planned buying ($n = 3$, $\alpha = 0.84$), attitudes ($n = 3$, $\alpha = 0.87$), subjective norms ($n = 2$, $\alpha = 0.89$), and intentions ($n = 3$, $\alpha = 0.93$). Table 1 presents the results of the measurement model evaluation.

Table 1. The results of the measurement model.

Construct and Indicator	Factor	CR	AVE
	Loadings		
Material values		0.86	0.50
I like a lot of luxury in my life	0.76		
My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have	0.73		
I try to stay affluent, as far as possessions are concerned	0.73		
Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure	0.72		
I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things	0.70		
I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes	0.61		
Simplicity		0.82	0.53
I want to live simply rather than extravagantly	0.79		
A simple life is not miserable; rather, I want to live such a life	0.78		
I am more concerned with mental growth and fulfillment than with material affluence	0.68		
Material affluence is not so important to me	0.64		
Long-term usage		0.86	0.61
I am the type of person who continues using something old as long as it can still be used	0.83		
I try to use the items that I bought for as long as possible	0.82		
I don't buy something new shortly after it comes out if I have a similar thing already	0.74		
When I shop, I take a severe view of being able to use an item for a long time without getting tired of it	0.73		
Planned buying		0.84	0.63
Even if I have money, it is not my principle to buy things suddenly	0.81		
When I shop, I decide to do so after serious consideration of whether an item is necessary to me or not	0.79		
I do not engage in impulsive buying	0.78		
Subjective norms		0.89	0.80
People who influence my behavior encourage me to use sharing services	0.95		
People who are important to me think that I should use sharing services	0.84		
Attitudes		0.87	0.69
Using sharing services seems to be an intelligent idea to me	0.86		
My general opinion on the use of sharing services is positive	0.85		
Using sharing services is a good idea	0.78		
Intentions		0.94	0.83
It is very likely that I will use sharing services in the future	0.93		
I intend to use sharing services in the future	0.92		
I will consider sharing services in the future	0.88		

Notes: CR denotes composite reliability, and AVE denotes average variance extracted.

Next, following the procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing [73], this article conducts the structural equation modeling (SEM) by evaluating the measurement and structural models. The measurement model is estimated by conducting confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood in Amos 26. After the model is modified on the basis of the proposed modification indices, the results of the fit indices are as follows: $\chi^2 = 893.75$; $df = 253$; $\chi^2/df = 3.53$; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.94; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.058. The results are acceptably based on the suggestion of Hair et al. [71], which requires 0.92 or higher CFI with an RMSEA below 0.07 in case of a sample size of above 250 and observed variables between 12 and 30. The composite reliabilities and average variance extracted (AVE) range from 0.82 to 0.94 and 0.50 to 0.83, respectively, which meets the threshold requirements proposed by Fornell and Larcker [74] and Hair et al. [71]. Therefore, convergent validity is supported. Furthermore, a model in which all items are loaded on a single factor is evaluated to address the concern of common

method variance. This is a more sophisticated test than Harman's single-factor test [69]. The one-factor model does not fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 7640.24$; $df = 274$; $\chi^2/df = 27.88$; CFI = 0.32; RMSEA = 0.189). As it is found that the hypothesized model of data is better than the one-factor model, it is unlikely that a common method variance would be a significant concern in this research study.

Discriminant validity is tested following Fornell and Larcker's [74] criterion, where the AVE estimates for any two constructs should be greater than the squared correlation coefficient of the constructs. As presented in Table 2, this criterion supports the discriminant validity.

Table 2. Discriminant validity.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Material values	<i>0.71</i>						
2. Simplicity	−0.42	<i>0.73</i>					
3. Long-term usage	0.02	0.47	<i>0.78</i>				
4. Planned buying	−0.24	0.63	0.52	<i>0.79</i>			
5. Subjective norms	0.29	0.12	0.04	0.02	<i>0.89</i>		
6. Attitudes	0.19	0.31	0.31	0.18	0.41	<i>0.83</i>	
7. Intentions	0.22	0.14	0.01	−0.01	0.62	0.53	<i>0.83</i>

Notes: *Italic figures* in diagonal are the square roots of the AVE values. Scores in the lower triangle denote correlation coefficients.

3.3.2. Assessment of the Structural Model

Now that construct reliability and validity are confirmed, we estimate the structural model. Using Amos 26 again, the hypothesized relationships among the constructs are tested. Figure 2 summarizes the results.

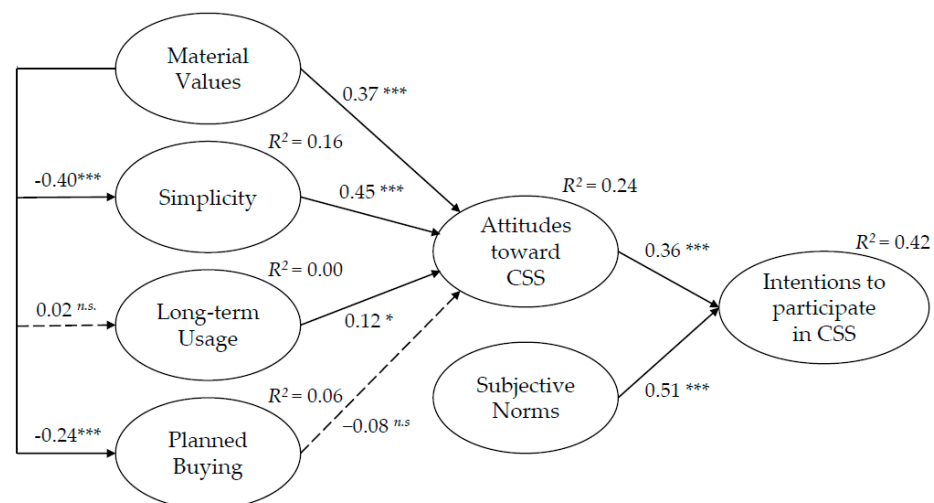


Figure 2. The results of the SEM. Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$. *n.s.* denotes not significant. CFI = 0.93, and RMSEA = 0.062. The dotted lines denote non-significant path.

As depicted in Figure 2, MV has a negative effect on two components of VSL—simplicity ($\beta = -0.40$; $t = -8.65$; $p < 0.001$) and planned buying ($\beta = -0.24$; $t = -5.39$; $p < 0.001$). However, a non-significant relationship is found between MV and long-term usage ($\beta = 0.02$; $t = 0.55$; *n.s.*). Therefore, Hypothesis H1 is partially supported. Next, as expected, MV has a positive effect on attitudes toward CSS ($\beta = 0.36$; $t = 7.18$; $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H2. For the VSL components, although simplicity ($\beta = 0.45$; $t = 6.85$; $p < 0.001$) and long-term usage ($\beta = 0.12$; $t = 2.28$; $p < 0.05$) have a positive impact on attitudes, planned buying does not have any significant effect on attitudes ($\beta = -0.08$; $t = -1.39$; *n.s.*). Therefore, except for planned buying, Hypothesis H3 is supported. Moreover, attitudes positively affect intentions toward CSS ($\beta = 0.36$; $t = 10.75$;

$p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis H4. Finally, as expected, subjective norms also have a positive influence on intentions ($\beta = 0.51$; $t = 14.81$; $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis H5.

In addition, to examine whether there are indirect effects of MV and VSL on intentions via attitudes, mediation analysis is performed with 5000 bootstrap samples and a 95% confidence level [75]. The results reveal that except for planned buying, MV, simplicity, and long-term usage indirectly affect intentions via attitudes. Table 3 presents the results of the mediation analysis.

Table 3. Indirect effects.

Paths	Standardized Coefficients
Material values → Attitudes → Intentions	0.15 ***
Simplicity → Attitudes → Intentions	0.15 ***
Long-term usage → Attitudes → Intentions	0.05 *
Planned buying → Attitudes → Intentions	−0.03 <i>n.s.</i>

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; * $p < 0.05$; *n.s.* denotes not significant.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1. Discussion

The COVID-19 outbreak profoundly affected people's way of consumption. As face-to-face contacts were constrained, more consumers have used online platforms to access products and services [1,7,8]. CSS allows people to consume various products collaboratively via digital platforms, enhancing sustainability [11,12,14]. Therefore, examining the impacts of values, lifestyle, and social influence on inexperienced consumers' responses to CSS is essential, especially during a pandemic that has unprecedentedly affected consumption patterns. By focusing on MV and VSL, the present paper investigates the relationships among MV, VSL, subjective norms, attitudes, and intentions toward CSS in Japan, where the sharing economy market has grown during the pandemic.

Overall, the main findings are as follows. Despite their conflicting traits, MV and VSL generally promote inexperienced consumers' attitudes and intentions toward CSS. Simultaneously, this research clarifies the multidimensional nature of VSL and the nonuniform relationships among MV, three VSL dimensions, and commercial sharing. This study's novel findings enable an empirical explanation of the uneven relationships. Only a few studies have paid empirical attention to how MV and VSL interact in the COVID-19 pandemic to affect consumer responses to CSS, leading to access-based or collaborative consumption in a sharing economy. By filling this gap, this study extends the literature by making their causal relationships explicit and clarifying their combined effects in a pandemic context.

Noteworthy specific findings are as follows. First, MV has a positive rather than negative effect on attitudes and then has a positive influence on intentions. This finding provides supportive evidence to previous investigations, such as those of Davidson et al. [35] and Lee and Furukawa [43]. A plausible interpretation of this finding is that MV is likely to increase consumers' desire to enjoy different types of goods through sharing services without having them. It has been claimed that materialists tend to explore valuable goods and information, aspiring for future ownership [43]. This tendency explains this result well. Interestingly, it is also found that despite its materialistic orientation, MV affects attitudes toward CSS in the same direction as VSL.

Next, it should be noted that VSL is classified into three components—simplicity, long-term usage, and planned buying. The multi-dimensionality of VSL has also been demonstrated in previous studies, e.g., [29,66,67]. As VSL pertains to a simple and frugal life in which people consume sustainably and ethically while reducing the amount of consumption [27,48,67], the three components capture its core characteristics well.

In addition, this study reveals that the three components have partly different relationships with other constructs. Regarding their relationship with MV, whereas simplicity and planned buying are negatively related to values, long-term usage does not have

a significant relationship. One possible interpretation for this result is that materialistic individuals appear to possess and use certain goods for a long time as far as the goods serve as symbols of social status or success. Moreover, materialists are likely to look for better goods to acquire and possess. As this group of consumers may have the two aspects simultaneously, it seems that MV is not significantly related to long-term usage. Thus, it can be concluded that MV is negatively related to VSL.

Regarding the relationship of the constructs with attitudes toward CSS, this study found that simplicity and long-term usage are significant predictors of attitudes, whereas planned buying is not. Planned buying reflects a cautious tendency in purchasing decisions in which impulse buying is curbed [66]. A possible interpretation of this result is that consumers with this tendency may be careful in participating in CSS, as they must pay access fees to use the goods. However, CSS allows consumers to try different goods without ownership, which is cost-effective. Thus, such mixed features are expected to result in a non-significant relationship between planned buying and attitudes.

Lastly, consistent with the theory of reasoned action, attitudes and subjective norms positively affect intentions toward CSS. This result is consistent with previous investigations, such as those of Johnson et al. [36], Kim et al. [63], and Lee and Chow [64]. In particular, subjective norms considerably affect intentions, implying that consumers with no experience in CSS are substantially motivated by social pressure. The influence of others' expectations to participate in CSS probably plays a significant role in triggering first-time use of sharing services.

In conclusion, developing a theoretical model based on values and lifestyle research and the theory of reasoned action, this study elucidates how MV, VSL, and subjective norms are related to consumers' attitudes and intentions toward CSS. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted people's values, lifestyles, and consumption patterns, only a few studies have examined the effect of both MV and VSL on the sharing economy during the pandemic. Filling this research gap, the present study contributes to a better understanding of complex consumer behaviors in the sharing economy, where materialistic and nonmaterialistic orientations coexist. This research indicates that despite the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sharing economy can still enhance sustainability and alleviate technological inequality during the post-pandemic era by attracting people who have different values and lifestyles into its ICT-enabled sharing systems.

4.2. Implications

This study empirically verifies the theoretical model illustrating the causal relationship among MV, VSL, subjective norms, attitudes, and intentions toward CSS during the pandemic. The participants of this study are Japanese consumers with no experience in commercial sharing. They can be regarded as potential customers in the rapidly growing sharing economy market. For such potential customers, this study has critical managerial implications, indicating that CSS can attract different types of consumers who have materialistic or nonmaterialistic consumption orientations.

Let us consider the example of apparel, often bought and discarded, to raise awareness of environmental and sustainability issues [76,77]. Due to their tendency to seek valuable material goods, materialistic individuals are likely to join CSS to explore valuable fashion products with the possibility of future ownership in mind [43]. Hence, marketers should provide such consumers with the opportunities to experience various fashion garments in their sharing service, especially with extrinsic social images, such as prestige and status. On the other hand, VSL-oriented consumers appear to participate in CSS to use necessary garments without assuming the burden of possession. Therefore, marketers should appeal to such consumers by informing them that CSS assists materially simple and sustainable lifestyles by allowing for a temporary and socially shared way of use without ownership, which reduces environmental impacts and helps in the pursuit of nonmaterialistic mental well-being.

Moreover, due to the significance of subjective norms on intentions, an effective way is to facilitate social pressure by making it known to the public that participating in CSS contributes to sustainability because it promotes the reuse of socially underused resources and reduces the amount of waste disposal. Such a heightened social expectation will motivate inexperienced consumers to join CSS.

CSS by ICT-enabled platforms makes participants readily access various products and services with their mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets. Regarding this technological phenomenon, this study finds that two conflicting consumption orientations—MV and VSL—simultaneously encourage consumers to participate in the systems. Therefore, diverse consumers with different values and lifestyles will likely consider engaging in CSS without feeling a critical technological barrier in the post-pandemic era and the current pandemic. Furthermore, CSS circulates limited social resources among people without disposing of the resources in a relatively short period [11,12]. Hence, despite the disruptive impacts of the pandemic on the sharing economy, CSS has the potential to contribute to sustainability by reducing technological inequality.

4.3. Limitations and Areas for Future Studies

This research was conducted at a point during the COVID-19 pandemic; this likely led to pandemic-specific findings on the effects of MV and VSL in the sharing economy context. This limitation raises the need to conduct a longitudinal study focusing on the pandemic and post-pandemic conditions to elucidate whether/how MV and VSL play different roles in the sharing economy with the transition of pandemic situations. Further, given the respondents in this study who have no experience with commercial sharing, future research should pay attention to experienced consumers to find a mechanism of how the experience of participating in CSS in the pandemic context leads to the perception of alleviating technological inequalities and contributing to enhancing personal well-being. One final point is to conduct an international comparative study with consumers from different countries, given that this research is conducted with only Japanese consumers. Given the global spread of COVID-19, such a study may be meaningful for better understanding the complex effects of MV and VSL from a cross-cultural perspective by finding homogeneous or heterogeneous results between countries and comparing them with those of this study.

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