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**Author:**

Nawangpalupi, Catharina; Demirbilek, Oya Reside

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# Expressions of values related to car sharing in Australia

**Catharina Nawangpalupi** – Faculty of the Built Environment, University New South Wales Sydney, Australia, c.nawangpalupi@student.unsw.edu.au

**Oya Demirbilek** - Faculty of the Built Environment, University New South Wales Sydney, Australia, o.demirbilek@unsw.edu.au

## Abstract

Car sharing, which is regarded as a sustainable transport system, has been evidently operating very well in urban areas where public transport is well established. In Sydney, Australia, car sharing is used by different people with different motivations to join. As a result, there is a range of values expressed by its members related to their experiences of being a car sharing member. The paper aims to explore perceived values about car sharing as a sustainable system. A qualitative study using surveys, interviews, visual diaries/workbook, collage making, and design workshops was carried out to portray the expressions of values and to highlight different aspects of car sharing design that strongly relate to those values. Car sharing has satisfied individualism and also the values of sharing. It gives personal independence yet interdependence as well. It also allows for the emotions of a product experience although it is not a personal possession.

**Conference theme:** Values and Culture

**Keywords:** car sharing, values, service design

## Background

Car sharing has successfully brought a solution for people who deliberately choose not to have their own cars but still need to have access to a car. It is evidently operating very well in urban areas where public transport is well established. In situations where public transport is not a viable option for particular trips, car sharing becomes an alternative which fills the gap between public transport and private car option. A car sharing organization allows its members to use its fleet of cars for their mobility without having to own a car, with easy access to the cars as they are usually parked in the neighborhood. Car sharing offers flexibility in terms of the duration of

use and car access. Members can use a car only for a few hours or for a longer period of time and it usually has a range of different types of cars.

This paper aims to portray perceived values of GoGet Car Share members. GoGet Car Share is a car sharing organization in Australia. A coin metaphor is used to identify the values among the members. The paper highlights several opposing values perceived by car sharing members, including collective versus individualized service, independence versus interdependence, and flexibility versus orderliness. Furthermore, users' emotions associated with pleasurable when using car sharing are also presented.

## **GoGet Car Share**

GoGet Car Share is the first car sharing organization in Australia. Founded in 2003 in Sydney it is still continually growing and now it caters for urban dwellers in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane. We conducted a survey in March 2007 with 294 respondents which covered 37% of its members and it showed that the members were satisfied with the overall service (with the rate of 3.60 of 4). They highly rated the service quality related to personal attention and courtesy that was well above their expectations.

A further investigation about satisfaction levels and perceived values by car sharing members was carried out with qualitative methods. A 'between-method' triangulation was used to examine the consistency of members' perceived values. An analysis using surveys, interviews, visual diaries, and collage making in a design workshop shows notable results including opposing values and common values shared by the members.

## **Expressed values – two sides of the same coin**

### Collective versus Individualized

Car sharing symbolizes collectivism, which is "a social mechanism for organizing and enforcing group cooperation" (Ahuvia, 2002, p. 25). The shared car is a "joint identity", however, GoGet attempts to personalize their cars to give unique experiences for its members. A quote from a survey respondent showed how GoGet has successfully created the personalized image:

*The teams are motivated and enthusiastic, have "fun" branding in their newsletters, and personally follow up email and phone queries. :)*

It is supported by a photo collection made by a member (male, mid 50s), which proudly took a picture of another member next to the car that is named after her name (See Figure 1) and presented it in the design workshop. He further selected the keyword "personalized" three times

in his collages to emphasize the personalization feature of GoGet. An interview with a late 20s female also revealed that she loved the fact that GoGet's car has a name, "not just numbers".



Figure 1: One of photo collections from a GoGet member

Three interviews with members who gave up their cars when joining GoGet showed that they missed their cars, however, they can rationalize their decision as (1) she only needs the functionality (female, late 50s), or (2) they need to streamline their consumption (female, 30 yo and male, late 30s). However, one of these participants (female 30 yo) said that being a GoGet member, she could feel the car ownership. She uttered "when someone else booked the car at the same time when we wanted to book, we just joked about it.. 'ooh, we have to find out who took our car' ... not serious, of course".

### Independence versus Interdependence

Harb and Smith (2008) defined independence as a free entity which focuses on the individual not the "social unit" while interdependence is the interconnection and commitment between an individual and others.

The interview with a female participant revealed her feeling of being independent when she drove to her parents' house:

*I like driving, because I feel independent.. Yeah, I feel more normal and better.... I know it sound contentious...*

Similarly, another female participant (late 20s) in her diary stated that “I feel safer late at night if I’m driving” as she likes going alone.

Most members are aware of being bound to others when they use car sharing. Similar to a female participant who observed that everyone tries to respect each other, another female participant always takes good care of the car for the next user:

*I always cleaned the car before I leave so the next person does not get inconvenienced.*

The survey also revealed that punctuality was very important, such as expressed below:

*When other users are late, very inconvenient when u r using a car for a short time period!*

### Flexibility versus Orderliness

Members expressed the benefit of flexibility when using car sharing. While car sharing offers more flexible plans, the nature of sharing, being quite the opposite, demands the members to be more organized in planning their trips.

*When the car was returned late by a previous user, making it impossible to get to our meeting on time.*

*Car share is a lot more regimented. Returning a car dirty or late causes distress for both the next customer / member and the organisation.*

### **Expressed values – pleasurability**

Pleasurable feelings which are experienced when using a product can be identified into several categories, including the feeling of security, confidence, pride, excitement, satisfaction, entertainment, freedom, and nostalgia (Jordan, 1998). The use of GoGet gives pleasurability to its members. This is visible in the collages made by several participants (in Figure 2) in a design workshop where they chose to use “pleasure” as the key words for their use of GoGet.

Furthermore, members highlighted pleasure feelings in relation to the use of car sharing including the feeling of security, freedom, wellbeing, and entertainment. A male participant (mid 20s) proudly collected photos of the use of GoGet for his outdoor sport activities in his visual diary. A female participant used GoGet to get to her dance class for convenience in complementing her preference to walking: “feels good for walking as it is a free exercise and environmentally friendly”. Collages in Figure 2 show that some participants use keywords such as “free”, “empathy”, and “safety” as their main themes.



Figure 2: Selected collages created in a design workshop

## Discussions

A product usually stimulates users' attachment from three different experiences, for instance aesthetic, emotional and meaning (or narrative) experiences (Desmet and Hekkert, 2007). Similar to products, car sharing which combines a product (car) and its services also stimulates those experiences.

In terms of the experience of meaning, the use of car sharing exemplifies unique experiences. The findings above show that car sharing allows the users to perceive different and opposing values, which could bring personal fulfillment. Some members who do not benefit from complementing the opposing values may give up the membership.

One interview with a former member who gave up his membership stated that the difficulty to access the car in terms of distance and limited availability has challenged his willingness to support the system.

*I have since left GoGet as it no longer worked financially for me and wasn't that convenient. I am a big believer in sustainability, but when your personal sustainability is depleted, it is not very good.... My 6 yo son is also very grateful I no longer use GoGet as he was getting very tired of walking to and from the pods. It is still a great concept, and maybe when it gets to the point when there are several*

*cars all very close, and no mad rush to get the cars at peak times, it will become more appealing to a wider spectrum.”*

Another interview with another ex-member, who chooses to use car rental for his trips together with public transport, shows that the difficulty in having a high frequency of use prevented his preference to continue his car sharing membership.

*I still use Hertz (car rental) sometimes, particularly for one way rentals to the airport and for long term rentals. [When I used car sharing] I had one month of highly frequent use and it caused some distress with the organization as I was seen to be "monopolising" the cars, though my position was that I was acting only within my understanding of the rules. With Hertz I don't need to clean the car or get it back on time.*

In summary, the study shows that the richness of perceived values by members while using car sharing contributes to strengthen the attachment to the system. While the system allows users to experience opposing values, it provides them with opportunities to contribute to the dynamics of the system. This subsequently enriches the system values.

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