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A comparative study of collaborative consumption between China and the UK

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative consumption (CC) involves consumers sharing goods and services, promoting resource circulation and reuse. This study examines consumer perceptions and behaviours related to CC through an online survey conducted in the UK and China with 630 respondents. It compares engagement in CC practices before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings indicate that while most respondents have used CC, frequency remains low. Economic benefits and cost savings are the primary motivators, whereas sustainability is not a top consideration. Differences in CC participation emerge across demographic groups and between the two countries. The study evaluates purchasing behaviors, key influencing factors, and cultural differences in CC engagement. By addressing gaps in consumer attitudes and behaviours, this research provides new insights into motivations, participation contexts, and factors shaping CC adoption in China and the UK.

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1. Introduction

There is a growing consensus that the main environmental issues facing our planet are partly rooted in consumer overconsumption as a result of economic growth (Alzubaidi et al., 2021). The negative effects of overconsumption on the natural environment are associated with a number of other issues. In addition to poverty, inequality, and real financial hardship for those with limited resources, people are driven to consume at continuously high levels, resulting in adverse effects on society and collective well-being (Ardley & May, 2020). There is an increasing call for the decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation and a transition towards a low-carbon, resource-efficient economy where innovative systems based on shared usage could, in theory, replace unsustainable consumption patterns (Piscicelli, 2016). Multiple stakeholders are involved in such a transformation, such as designers, manufacturers, distributors, service providers, and individual consumers. Consumers are in a unique position to influence the adoption of this approach, since the fundamental purpose of providing products and services is to meet consumers' future needs. In recent years, more and more people are adopting a pro-environmental attitude. However, there is limited evidence of changes in consumer behavior, which reflect the growing environmentally conscious attitude. It is believed that this gap, known as the value-action gap, could be one of the greatest obstacles to the adoption of sustainable practices (Essiz et al., 2023).

Collaborative consumption (CC) is an emerging trend, which provides an alternative consumption model and contributes to greater sustainability (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). The term CC encompasses concepts, such as sharing, trading, swapping, and renting of consumable products. Additionally, CC also covers redistribution markets, collaborative lifestyles, as well as product-service systems (PSS) (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Gopalakrishnan & Matthews, 2018). CC is considered by many scholars as a potential promising pathway towards sustainability, capable of reducing the negative effects of mass production

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and consumption, as well as disrupting hyper-consumption (Arrigo, 2021; Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Leismann et al., 2013). In CC research, a greater emphasis has been placed on studying consumers' perceptions of natural environmental values and attitudes, as well as their behavioral intentions to adopt new sustainable marketing practices (Samarasinghe, 2012). Determining what values or intentions of consumers impede or promote the acceptance of collaborative consumption practices represents a major challenge for their growth. A critical and empirical investigation of the factors that motivate consumers to adopt sustainable consumption and their underlying motivations is needed.

This paper thoroughly examines the evolving landscape of collaborative consumption (CC) in the context of 21st-century sustainability concerns, with a specific emphasis on its growing importance in China and the UK. It elucidates the profound influence of mobile internet and information technology in fostering resource sharing, as exemplified by China's remarkable strides in the sharing economy and the UK's deliberate endeavors to position itself as a global sharing economy epicenter. Despite the evident enthusiasm for CC, the study highlights a conspicuous gap in understanding regarding consumer engagement and a noticeable disparity between intentions and actions in purchasing behaviors across both nations. Its objective is to understand the multifaceted influences of cultural, societal, economic, and technological variances between China and the UK on consumer participation in CC, stressing the necessity for a nuanced grasp of consumer behaviors shaped by different factors. Through this comparative analysis, the study not only aims to illuminate the sustainability implications of consumption patterns but also endeavors to steer them towards a more sustainable trajectory, thereby furnishing invaluable insights for businesses, policymakers, and the broader sustainability agenda.

2. Literature review

Since the beginning of the 21st century, sustainability has become a ubiquitous topic. In this era of energy crisis, environmental degradation, and financial collapse, corporations and consumer groups are promoting their sustainability initiatives, and both are actively seeking sustainable solutions (United Nations, 2023). Resource efficiency in production and technological innovation do not suffice to reduce the current use of natural resources. Both social innovations and an equally valuable strategy of sustainable consumption are required. Goods must be utilized longer and services that enable CC patterns must be extended (Leismann et al., 2013). Recently, attitudes toward consumption have shifted, as a result of greater concern about the environmental, social, and developmental impacts of consumption. Growing concern over climate change and the demand by consumers for social cohesion have led to collaborative consumption being an attractive alternative for consumers (Albinsson & Yasanthi Perera, 2012; Kim & Jin, 2020). These CC practices, which are participatory, peer-oriented, and more or less informal, help revitalize, augment, and expand the original boundaries of collaborative consumption into a burgeoning movement (Ertz et al., 2019).

Through the use of the mobile internet and information technology, consumers can share idle resources, such as products and houses, and provide a variety of services, such as travel and knowledge sharing (Huang et al., 2021). With the rapid development of Internet technology and mobile payment, logistics infrastructure, and a huge demographic dividend, China's sharing economy has been reshaping China's economic patterns (Zhang, 2019). In recent years, China's sharing economy has experienced explosive growth. The scale of sharing economy transactions in China reached approximately 3.69 trillion yuan (\$583.77 billion) in 2021, a 9.2% increase over the previous year. During the period 2021–2025, it is expected that the sharing economy will penetrate more deeply into a variety of daily life services and production activities. Developing the sharing economy will contribute significantly to improving the effectiveness of digital transformation in the real economy (Chi et al., 2020). While government support for the development of the sharing economy is commonplace, the UK announced its plans to build a global center for the sharing economy. It is estimated that 25% of UK adults share online, and global revenues of approximately £9 billion could reach £230 billion annually by 2025. In key sectors such as holiday accommodation and car sharing/car rental, the sharing economy is expected to reach 50% market share by 2025 (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2014).

Yet not much information is available on why users engage in collaborative activities in China and the UK or, more importantly, why many people do not participate in this growing trend. Furthermore, it is

unclear whether there exists a value-action gap in the actual purchasing behavior of Chinese and British consumers in the context of collaborative consumption. There is a need for insights into both how (un)sustainable consumption behaviors impact natural and social systems and how these behaviors can be steered in a more sustainable direction. Appropriate methods for assessing the sustainability of consumption behaviors are crucial to the success of this enterprise. Based on the perspectives of the field, the development of such methods is hindered by two factors: (1) an inability to establish a consensus concerning which consumption behaviors should be considered sustainable, and (2) the absence of an integrated reference framework that integrates existing fragmented research on different consumption behaviors (Geiger et al., 2018). This study seeks to understand consumers' purchasing behavior in China and the UK to contribute positive change. In today's society, there are countless opportunities for individuals to purchase and consume goods and services, both for meeting physical needs and expressing their identity (Smith et al., 2008). Understanding consumer behavior is essential. Therefore, this research focuses on the effects of different variables, including the impact of internal factors (e.g. attitudes, values, subjective norms) on purchasing decisions, as well as the influence of external factors (i.e. contextual factors) on their actual behavior, also, how attitudes are translated into consumer behaviors.

2.1. Theoretical background

Environmental concern has a stronger association with social psychological variables, such as attitudes, beliefs, and worldviews (Newman & Fernandes, 2016). It is useful to review social psychological theories for consumer behavior to gain a deeper insight into why certain behaviors are motivated and what causes them to change (Alzubaidi et al., 2021; Emekci, 2019). The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is one of the most widely cited and influential models in the field of human social behavior analysis and prediction (Ajzen, 1985). According to the TPB model, human behavior is determined primarily by behavioral intentions. A perceived behavioral control (PBC) is defined as the perception that an individual has of the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior, as well as the resources or opportunities available to them in achieving the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of CC, PBC may refer to how easy it is to rent, borrow, and share, as well as how design can help people to better grasp this concept.

TPB can be adopted to investigate consumers' purchasing behavior in the context of collaborative consumption since environmental consciousness is a psychological dimension that determines individuals' tendencies towards pro-environmental behavior, and it is comprised of multidimensional constructs that influence attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, actions, and intentions (Mishal et al., 2017). Many sociological and psychological factors are responsible for driving people to consume insatiable quantities of products and services (Jackson, 2005). The elaboration of a valid critique of environmentally and socially significant consumption will require a deeper understanding of what users do and how they interact with products, as well as the hidden factors behind their daily decision-making processes (Bhamra et al., 2011). The quality of the environment is strongly dependent upon the patterns of human behavior, and thus changes in human behavior are believed to be necessary (Steg & Vlek, 2009). In previous studies, it has been shown that TPB is the most widely used theory in the context of CC (Abutaleb et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Toni et al., 2018). It is suggested by Botsman and Rogers (2010) that an individual's environmental and social concerns are significant influences on collaborative consumption behavior. In light of this, it is useful to integrate TPB into the context of collaborative consumption.

Another widely cited theory is the attitude-behavior-context (ABC) theory (Guagnano et al., 1995), according to which consumers' behavior can be considered a complex interrelationship between attitude and contextual factors. Based on the simplified model, actions, or behaviors (B) are related to attitudes (A). Attitudes are overridden by context, whether it is negative or positive (Zepeda & Deal, 2009). A consumer may have a negative attitude toward certain behavior that a person normally would not perform unless compelled to do so. On the other hand, a consumer may display a behavior in order to gain certain anticipated benefits (C) and such behavior only manifests when the consumer has a positive attitude toward it, dependent upon the influences of the surrounding environment (Zhang et al., 2018). The 'Attitude-Behaviour-Context' model seeks to overcome the limitations of the internalist versus externalist dichotomy. In the ABC model, behavior is viewed as the result of interactions between internal attitudinal variables and external circumstantial factors (Stern, 2000). In addition to attitudinal factors,

such as intentions, context plays a critical role in determining individual behavior (Guagnano et al., 1995). The predictive effect of personal factors on purchasing behavior is determined by contextual factors, such as infrastructure availability, costs, and social norms (Stern, 2000). For this study, ABC theory offers several advantages as a theoretical basis. As it was developed within the context of environmental psychology, it is well suited to explain consumer behavior (Qin & Song, 2022). The second advantage of using this model is that it permits researchers to concentrate on precisely examining the value-action gap, considered to be one of the essential research problems in consumer research (Schäufele & Hamm, 2017). Finally, it emphasizes the importance of contextual factors, which are strongly related to consumers' actions and purchase decisions (Arsil et al., 2019; Sajeewanie et al., 2019).

The notion of pro-environmental behavior encompasses a spectrum of actions aimed at fostering beneficial environmental changes and mitigating the detrimental impacts of human oversight on our surroundings (Yusliza et al., 2020). Environmental consciousness, as a psychological dimension, shapes individuals' inclinations towards pro-environmental behavior, manifesting through multidimensional constructs that impact attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, actions, and intentions (Mishal et al., 2017). According to the ABC theory, behavior is influenced by attitude and context (Arsil et al., 2019). The full effect of attitudes on behavior can only be observed in situations where the context surrounding the potential behavior is neutral. In light of ABC theory, attitudes are thought to reflect the predispositions that give rise to a desire to act with pro-environmental intentions, and these attitudes have the ability to impact pro-environmental behavior (Stern, 2000). Through the application of ABC theory, it is possible to investigate how attitudes influence behavior in a collaborative consumption context. In addition, learning how to reduce the gap between the attitude and behavior of consumers can increase their engagement with CC.

2.2. Conceptual framework

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the rationale underlying collaborative consuming behaviour, we have constructed a conceptual framework that demonstrates our focus of research but also informs our study design. It is important to note that TPB has some inherent limitations, primarily due to its emphasis on the connection between intention and behaviour, while ignoring the impact of other factors on actual behavior. The ABC model, however, requires consideration of the structural dynamics between attitudes and contextual factors. In this study, the essence of both TPB and ABC is integrated and a conceptual framework for CC behavior is proposed. Positive and negative contextual factors are included as drivers and barriers for CC behavior respectively (see Figure 1).

In existing CC research, a greater emphasis has been placed on studying consumers' perceptions of natural environmental values and attitudes, as well as their behavioral intentions to adopt new sustainable practices (Arrigo, 2021; Matharu et al., 2020). Determining what values or intentions of consumers impede or promote the acceptance of CC practices is essential for promoting its growth. However, at present there is a shortage of empirical studies on the current practice of collaborative consumption and its impact on the adoption of sustainable behaviors by consumers.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic created major barriers to in person shopping, due to social distancing and lockdowns. On the other hand, online shopping is on the rise. Since the start of the pandemic, no survey has been conducted regarding consumers' purchasing behavior in relation to collaborative consumption. It is unclear whether the pandemic has had any impact on consumers' attitude toward and behavior of CC, and whether such an impact varies for different groups of people, such as people of different ages and income levels. For this study, the main research question is: what are the current consumers' attitudes toward sustainability and their behavior in relation to collaborative consumption, as well as potential links between the two in China and the UK? This research seeks to answer this question through a comparative survey in China and the UK.

3. Research methods

This study was conducted through an online survey. As a first step, a pilot test was conducted before the questions were finalized for the main survey. The survey has a total of 15 multiple choice questions

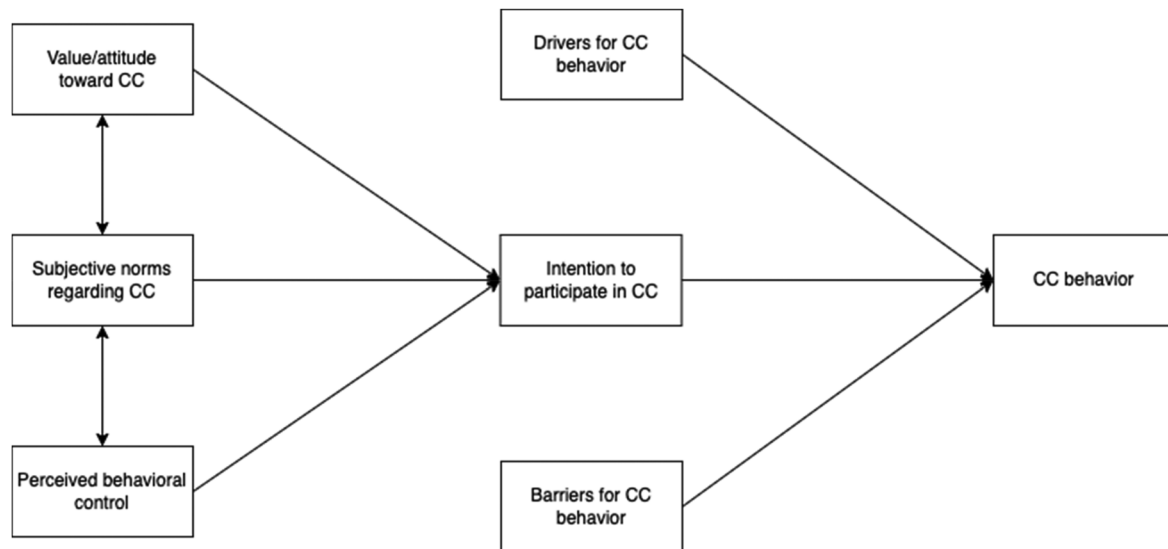


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for CC behavior.

and a final open-ended comment question. These include questions about respondents' profile, such as gender, age and income level; questions on their shopping behavior; as well as questions about their attitude and practice related to sustainability and collaborative consumption. Some questions require one answer from multiple choices, using a five-point Likert scale; other questions allow multiple answers to be selected. These will be explained further in the Results section.

The survey was distributed in both the UK and China. China and the UK are chosen for comparison for several reasons. Firstly, they represent diametrically distinct cultural and societal contexts, enabling the researcher to scrutinize how culture, values, and social norms influence individuals' willingness to engage in collaborative consumption. Secondly, the economic conditions and market structures in China and the UK diverge significantly. China has a rapidly growing e-commerce industry while the UK has a more mature market. Comparing them will help to gain an understanding of how these disparities impact consumer participation in collaborative consumption, through online or offline platforms, which will be valuable for businesses and policymakers. Thirdly, the two countries have different variations in technological infrastructure and mobile internet applications penetration. China boasts a robust digital ecosystem dominated by local giants like Alibaba and Tencent, while the UK features a more diverse information communication technology landscape. These disparities may impact the technology accessible to consumers and the user experience on collaborative consumption platforms, both of which influence adoption levels and consumer preferences. Finally, China and the UK have experienced different development paths and are currently at different development stages. People of the two countries may have different attitudes towards sustainability and environmental concerns. CC is often regarded as a more environmentally friendly alternative to traditional consumption. A comparative study can reveal whether differences in attitudes exist and whether attitude differences have any impact on collaborative consumption behaviors. Both China and the UK wield significant influence in the global economy. Thus, a comparative study between these two nations can yield insights with far-reaching implications for businesses and governments worldwide.

The survey was created using Microsoft Forms and the link was sent to all potential participants via email, messages, and social media. The survey utilized the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling begins with a convenience sample of initial subjects, since a random sample would not restrict the population as hidden. Participants can estimate the social network connecting the hidden population using snowball sampling and respondent-driven sampling (Etikan, 2016). When completing the survey, respondents were encouraged to share the link as widely as possible. This is in line with snowball sampling, which allows researchers to gain access to individuals living outside the boundaries (Browne, 2005). An estimate of the minimum sample size can be calculated based on the target population size

(Eng, 2003). Taking these two regions together, a sample size of 385 is required, which means at least 385 measurements or surveys are needed to achieve a 95% confidence level. A total of 630 responses were received, 214 from the UK and 416 from China. IBM SPSS Statistics was used to analyze the data and the results are presented in the following section. This study employs a non-statistical analysis technique, which uses analytical descriptive analysis. The analysis is not conducted by making statistical calculations, but rather by analysing the data following the processing of the data. This method was chosen to offer a thorough and comprehensive description or explanation of the phenomenon. Moreover, the application of non-statistical analysis techniques may provide more qualitative insights and be easier to understand.

Not having a refusal rate of this survey may indicate potential biases from the collected samples; however, a response of 630 was sufficient to saturate for analysis as it exceeded the expected benchmark. In addition, our main aim was to compare different groups within the sample rather than generalise to the broader population. Specifically focusing on China and the UK, the study was designed to explore cultural, economic, and social factors that may influence CC practices in these countries. In addition to being significant players in the global economy, China and the UK have differing cultural backgrounds and socio-economic structures, which makes comparisons between these two countries particularly intriguing. The study sought to provide valuable insights for policy-makers, businesses, and researchers interested in understanding consumer behavior and market dynamics in the CC marketplace. While the findings may not be directly applicable to other populations, they offer valuable context-specific knowledge that can inform decision-making and future research endeavors.

4. Results

It is illustrated in Table 1 that the majority of respondents in China were female, whereas the majority of respondents in the UK were male. 10 respondents selected the option 'prefer not to say'. The vast majority of the respondents, 93.51% and 93.93% respectively, in both countries are below 50 years of age. This may reflect the fact that the survey was conducted online, and respondents were encouraged to distribute the survey via their social network. The largest representation came from the 25–34 group, followed by the 35–49 group. Annual household income was divided into 8 groups, with an additional choice of 'prefer not to say'. The thresholds for each group were defined in the local currency in each country, considering their respective income levels. The UK has a higher proportion of people in the

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents.

		China (%)	UK (%)	All
Gender	Male	164 (39.42%)	117 (54.67%)	281 (44.6%)
	Female	244 (58.65%)	97 (45.33%)	341 (54.1%)
	Prefer not to say	8 (1.92%)	0 (0.00%)	8 (1.3%)
Age	18-24	75 (18.03%)	48 (22.43%)	123 (19.5%)
	25-34	209 (50.24%)	66 (30.84%)	275 (43.7%)
	35-49	105 (25.24%)	87 (40.65%)	192 (30.5%)
	50-64	24 (5.77%)	11 (5.14%)	35 (5.6%)
	65-74	3 (0.72%)	2 (0.93%)	5 (0.7%)
	Prefer not to say	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.0%)
Average annual household income	Under £10,000 (or under ¥50,000)	60 (14.42%)	43 (20.09%)	103 (16.3%)
	£11,000–£19,000 (or ¥51,000–¥99,000)	133 (31.97%)	30 (14.02%)	163 (25.9%)
	£20,000–£29,000 (or ¥100,000–¥149,000)	97 (23.32%)	25 (11.68%)	122 (19.4%)
	£30,000–£39,000 (or ¥150,000–¥199,000)	33 (7.93%)	20 (9.35%)	53 (8.4%)
	£40,000–£49,000 (or ¥200,000–¥249,000)	24 (5.77%)	7 (3.27%)	31 (5%)
	£50,000–£59,000 (or ¥250,000–¥290,000)	15 (3.61%)	6 (2.80%)	21 (3.3%)
	£60,000–£69,000 (or ¥300,000–¥349,000)	9 (2.16%)	5 (2.34%)	14 (2.2%)
	£70,000+	24 (5.77%)	21 (9.81%)	45 (7.1%)
	Prefer not to say	21 (5.05%)	57 (26.64%)	78 (12.4%)

lowest income group. As this question is sensitive around disclosures (Warner et al., 2020), the results may reflect a cultural difference, with more people in the UK choose 'prefer not to say' than in China. The majority of respondents were from the three lowest income groups, as many of them are young salaried workers who are active on online social media and participate in online shopping as well. A study conducted by Lai (2017) indicates that because the economy is growing rapidly, most people can earn more income and have access to unlimited online products, and the younger generation has become increasingly involved in online shopping.

Respondents were asked about their shopping habits before COVID-19, including whether they normally shop online or in store (Table 2) and their shopping frequency (Table 3). The results show differences of consumption habits in the two countries. Online shopping is more common in China compared with the UK. 17.3% of Chinese respondents answered 'I always shop online' and another 51.7% answered 'I predominately shop online'; the corresponding answers from the UK respondents were 3.3% and 26.6%. One possible explanation is that Chinese respondents were relatively younger, and they have a greater level of comfort with new technologies and online interactions. In December 2021, digital devices were the most popular device among Chinese netizens, with 99.7% Chinese netizens access the Internet using mobile phones compared with 35.0% using desktop computers, 33.0% using laptop computers, 28.1% using televisions, and 27.4% using tablet computers (CNNIC, 2022). The popularity of online shopping among Chinese consumers has increased significantly over the past few years. This new innovative shopping pattern offers consumers a wide variety of goods. It also provides a huge market and numerous opportunities for businesses.

The survey reveals that not only more Chinese respondents are likely to engage in online shopping; but also, they tend to shop more frequently compared with their UK counterparts (Table 3). Over half of the Chinese respondents do online shopping at least once a week; 10.6% do it every day. In comparison, more British respondents preferred offline shopping over online shopping. The difference in offline shopping frequencies between the two countries is smaller, compared with online shopping. Chinese consumers' preference for online shopping is partly driven by service providers who use big data technology to analyse consumers' loyalty, purchasing power, and demands then offer matching services (Fu et al., 2020).

Respondents were asked about collaborative consumption services that they have used before the pandemic. A list was presented, allowing respondents to tick multiple answers or enter a new one. The results (Table 4) shows that more than half of Chinese respondents used bike-sharing and ride-sharing. The most popular CC activities in the UK are ride-sharing (42.5%) and flea markets (39.7%). As a form of collaborative consumption, bike sharing has seen rapid growth with the development and implementation of public bicycle access systems in China. As one of the most challenging aspects of sustainable urban development, public transit has been officially recommended for most Chinese cities when it comes to transportation planning (Wang, 2002). As cities become ever more crowded in China, cars have become an unsustainable mode of transportation, especially in urban areas. Most cities have to develop

Table 2. Shopping habits of respondents.

	Total	I always shop online	I predominately shop online	I don't have a preference either way	I predominately shop in store	I always shop in store
All	630	12.5%	43.2%	23.3%	17%	4%
UK	214	3.3%	26.6%	23.8%	35.5%	10.7%
China	416	17.3%	51.7%	23.1%	7.5%	0.5%

Table 3. Frequency of online and offline shopping by respondents.

		n	Everyday	Once a week	Twice a month	Once a month	Less than once a month
How often do you do online shopping?	All	630	7.7%	35.9%	29.8%	15.2%	11.2%
	UK	214	2.3%	22.9%	23.8%	25.2%	25.7%
	China	416	10.6%	42.5%	32.9%	10.1%	3.8%
How often do you do offline shopping?	All	630	8%	28%	30%	18.6%	15.4%
	UK	214	8.9%	34.6%	20.1%	19.6%	16.8%
	China	416	7.7%	24.8%	34.6%	18.3%	14.7%

Table 4. Previous use of collaborative consumption by respondents (multiple choice).

	Total	Bike sharing	Ride sharing	Hospitality sharing	Car Boot sale	Co-working	Swap meets	Flea markets (second-hand market)	None of above	Other
All	630	42.7%	48.9%	27.5%	20%	20.3%	8.4%	28.1%	11%	1.6%
UK	214	23.8%	42.5%	14.1%	18.7%	20.1%	6.1%	39.7%	26.6%	4.7%
China	416	52.4%	52.2%	23%	20.7%	20.4%	9.6%	22.1%	2.9%	0

transportation solutions for high density population (Zhang et al., 2015). Promoting low-carbon commuting through bicycle sharing among Chinese residents is of vital importance (Cai et al., 2019). The sharing economy is becoming increasingly popular in China, beginning with the adoption of the bike-sharing system introduced in 2014 by the first commercial bike-sharing web company, OFFO, which was able to meet the enormous demand, especially in the downtown areas of major Chinese cities, leading to the creation of a booming new market (Choi & Choi, 2020). The use of bicycle sharing can reduce both energy consumption and environmental pollution (Mao et al., 2021). Several benefits are associated with bicycling, including improved health, a reduction in economic expenditures, and a feeling of relaxation for residents (Zhang et al., 2015). In comparison, there is a limited availability of shared bikes for commuting purposes in the UK. It is also noticeable that only 2.9% respondents from China had not used any of the listed CC services, while the ratio for the UK respondents is a lot higher at 26.6%. The causes for this may include differences in both commuters' attitudes and the availability of CC services in both countries.

Due to the fact that the number of respondents from China and the UK is not equal, and there are nearly twice as many Chinese respondents as British respondents. As a result of the large population base, a greater number of Chinese respondents were reached. Consequently, the results of this question cannot be statistically compared in order to align with the aim of this study. However, the responses can be used to gain insight into the overall sentiment of the two countries. Furthermore, the results can be used to identify any potential differences between the two countries.

Möhlmann (2015) suggested that despite the importance of sharing economy and collaborative consumption practices in marketplaces, there is still a lack of knowledge regarding drivers of collaborative consumption across different contexts. To find out the main drivers for collaborative consumption, respondents were asked to rank four benefits, including community benefit, economic benefit, sustainability benefit and convenient benefit. The result shows that economic benefit is currently the top consideration for CC in both China and the UK. 40.79% of all respondents ranked it 1st and another 25.24% as 2nd choices. It is followed by community benefit. Community benefit refers to members of collaborative consumption networks may feel a sense of belonging to the community they are engaged with, as is the case with members of other social networks. An individual's sense of belonging is related to their enjoyment of life (Verneert et al., 2021). Taking part in such a practice makes consumers feel part of the community, adding to their enjoyment and desire to share that experience with others (Barnes & Mattsson, 2017). It is surprising that sustainability is ranked at a lowly 3rd, with only 16.67% respondents ranked it as a top benefit. In fact, more people put sustainability in the bottom two rankings instead of the top two. However, it appears that the UK respondents are more sustainability conscious than Chinese respondents, with 57.01% UK respondents ranked it as the top two compared with 41.59% in China. It is clear that convenience is the least important factor for CC, with more than half of all respondents putting it as their fourth choice, 64.49% in the UK and 51.92% in China. It appears that this contrasts with some earlier studies in which convenience played an important role in collaborative consumption (Kim & Jin, 2020; Lee et al., 2021).

A question was posed to respondents concerning their frequency of engaging in collaborative consumption before the COVID-19 pandemic. It is evident that the Chinese respondents were more active in using collaborative consumption platforms (Table 5). 59.1% of the Chinese respondents used CC platforms once a week or more, whereas the corresponding number for UK respondents is only 25.7%. On the other hand, 25.2% of UK respondents only used CC less than once a month; another 22.4% never used CC at all. Only 7.2% of Chinese respondents claimed to not have used CC. One of the reasons for

such a difference is the higher level of availability of CC platforms and services, such as online shopping and bike sharing, in China. This is a demonstration that context influences behavior, as stated by the ABC model.

In both countries, the majority of respondents expected to increase their use of collaborative consumption in the future (Table 6), which indicates a general growth trend for CC. The pace of change is expected to be faster in China than in the UK. 67.5% of the Chinese respondents and 50.9% of UK respondents suggested that they will either 'significantly increase' or 'slightly increase' their CC activities. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments had implemented a number of lockdown measures, such as social distancing and shutting down shops. These obviously had an instant impact on the way people shop. It is still unclear to what extent the impact will last. The survey asked respondents whether COVID-19 influence their future use of collaborative consumption. 60.2% of respondents indicated that the pandemic would have had an impact. It is important to note that these two questions (Tables 5 and 6) focus on the differences between the two groups, and do not address the possibility of a connection or claim of a link (Table 7).

The survey found that many respondents, 66.8% in the UK and 40.4% in China, prioritized saving money as the reason for CC behavior regardless of their income levels. This is consistent with earlier presented finding of economic benefit being ranked the top benefit of CC by all respondents. In addition, more Chinese respondents (53.4%) chose 'reduce idle items' as the reason for CC, which is followed by 'protect the environment' and 'saving money'. The British respondents appeared to be more concerned with 'protect the environment' apart from 'save money'.

Information is considered an essential first step in encouraging people to behave sustainably as it influences their beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding consumption. However, if their attitude toward the CC is not positive, this can also negatively affect these processes (Longo et al., 2019). More than two-thirds of all respondents identified themselves as 'active' or 'slightly active' sustainable practitioners

Table 5. Pre-pandemic use of CC.

	Total	Everyday	More than once a week	Once a week	2 or 3 times a month	Once a month	Less than once a month	I have never done a collaborative consumption
All	630	5.3%	24.3%	18%	15.9%	9.5%	14.4%	12.4%
UK	214	7.5%	10.3%	7.9%	14%	12.6%	25.2%	22.4%
China	416	4.3%	31.5%	23.3%	16.8%	7.9%	8.9%	7.2%

Table 6. Impact of COVID-19 and future use of CC.

How will your collaborative consumption use change in the future?	Total	Significantly increase	Slightly increase	Stay the same	Slightly decrease	Significantly decrease
All	630	14.6%	47.3%	28.2%	7%	2.8%
UK	214	19.6%	31.3%	30.4%	13.1%	5.6%
China	416	12%	55.5%	27.2%	3.8%	1.4%
Is your response to Question 9 influenced by Covid-19?	Total	Highly influenced	Somewhat influenced	Not sure	Less influenced	Will not be influenced
All	630	21.2%	39%	25.2%	7.7%	6.7%
UK	214	25.2%	31.3%	22.9%	7.9%	12.6%
China	416	19.2%	43%	26.4%	7.7%	3.6%

Table 7. Main reasons for using collaborative consumption platforms in the future (multiple choice).

	Total	Save money	Protect environment	Reduce idle items	Have the opportunity to meet other friends	Follow the trend	Promote sustainability	Other
All	630	49.4%	50.2%	48.3%	28.3%	15.2%	32.4%	1.1%
UK	214	66.8%	62.1%	38.3%	15.4%	6.1%	54.7%	2.8%
China	416	40.4%	44%	53.4%	34.9%	20%	20.9%	0.2%

when asked about their self-descriptions (Table 8). A similar number of people expressed confidence in living a sustainable lifestyle (Table 9). This, at least, shows a high level of awareness of sustainability. However, most people do not associate collaborative consumption to sustainability; sustainability benefit was ranked 3rd out of four (Table 10).

When asked about their environment-friendly activities, most Chinese respondents chose 'reduce waste' (63.2%), 'reduce energy consumption' (56%) and 'using public transport' (53.1). Popular answers from the UK respondents are 'reduce waste' (70.1%), 'responsible purchasing' (65.4%), 'reduce energy consumption' (61.2%) and 'household recycling' (56.1%).

The survey found that more than half of the participants in both countries believe that collaborative consumption platforms are disruptive, as they provide innovative options for their ways of purchasing, sharing, and living. CC was viewed as disruptive by the majority of respondents, and as a result, consumers must alter their behavioral patterns in order to adopt them. To facilitate such a change, it is necessary to provide drivers and overcome barriers. There are many behavioral barriers that currently hinder the development and adoption of collaborative consumption (Tables 11 and 12).

Table 8. Self-description as a sustainable practitioner.

	Total	Active sustainable practitioner	Slightly active sustainable practitioner	Neutral	I don't regard sustainability as my priority	I have no interest in sustainability
All	630	20%	50.3%	24.8%	3.8%	1.1%
UK	214	22.9%	46.3%	25.7%	2.8%	2.3%
China	416	18.5%	52.4%	24.3%	4.3%	0.5%

Table 9. Sustainable lifestyle confidence.

	Total	Very confident	Somewhat confident	Neutral	Unconfident	Very unconfident
All	630	20%	50.6%	24.3%	4.6%	0.5%
UK	214	29.9%	43.9%	18.2%	6.5%	1.4%
China	416	14.9%	54.1%	27.4%	3.6%	0

Table 10. Ranking of CC benefits.

		1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice
Community benefit	All	33.81%	32.70%	22.06%	11.43%
	UK	30.37%	25.23%	31.78%	12.62%
	China	35.58%	36.54%	17.07%	10.82%
Economic benefit	All	40.79%	25.24%	26.83%	7.14%
	UK	38.79%	32.71%	22.90%	5.61%
	China	41.83%	21.39%	28.85%	7.93%
Sustainability benefit	All	16.67%	30.16%	27.94%	25.24%
	UK	27.57%	29.44%	25.70%	17.29%
	China	11.06%	30.53%	29.09%	29.33%
Convenient benefit	All	8.73%	11.90%	23.17%	56.19%
	UK	3.27%	12.62%	19.63%	64.49%
	China	11.54%	11.54%	25.00%	51.92%

Table 11. Environment-friendly engagement on a daily basis (multiple choice).

	Total	Household recycling	Reduce energy consumption	Reduce waste	Using public transport	Buying second-hand	Responsible purchasing	None of above	Other
All	630	44.6%	57.8%	65.6%	51%	30.8%	38.6%	1.4%	1%
UK	214	56.1%	61.2%	70.1%	46.7%	31.8%	65.4%	3.7%	2.8%
China	416	38.7%	56%	63.2%	53.1%	30.3%	24.8%	0.2%	0

Table 12. Future disruptiveness of collaborative consumption platforms.

	Total	Highly disruptive	Slightly disruptive	Stay the same
All	630	14.3%	57.3%	28.4%
UK	214	29.4%	51.4%	19.2%
China	416	6.5%	60.3%	33.2%

5. Discussions

The survey found a high level of awareness of sustainability and inspiration for a sustainable lifestyle amongst all respondents, with 70.3% of them claim to be 'active' or 'slightly active' sustainable practitioner. However, most of the respondents do not approach CC practice from a sustainability perspective, particularly in China. Only 11.06% of Chinese respondents ranked sustainability benefit as the top benefit of CC. 18.8% and 21.9% of Chinese respondents, who identified themselves as sustainability practitioners, listed sustainability as their third and fourth priority respectively. A similar disconnect between value and behavior is also found in the UK. Only 36% of British respondents who ranked sustainability as their top choice attributed 'protect the environment' or 'promoting sustainability' as reasons for using CC platforms, while the percentage among Chinese respondents was even lower, at 19.8%. Furthermore, British respondents, while being more committed to protecting the environment and promoting sustainability, are less active in engaging in CC practices. 60.2% of them used CC only once per month or even less and 22.4% of them never used CC. On the other hand, the Chinese respondents used CC more frequently, probably due to relevant CC services are more accessible in China not due to their stronger commitment to sustainability. The survey results clearly demonstrate that environmental issues are not a top priority for consumers in either country when it comes to collaborative consumption activities. It is evident that respondents regarded themselves as sustainable practitioners and claimed to be confident about a sustainable lifestyle; however, when it came to actual behavior, they viewed economic benefits and idleness reduction as the most significant aspects. As a result, what consumers report as concerns or intentions has little correlation with what they actually do. The results confirm the existence of a value-action gap. According to the current sample, likewise, green consumption is not fully prioritized, possibly due to other priorities such as certainty, comfort, and convenience (Essiz et al., 2023; Williams & Hodges, 2022).

According to the ABC theory, consumers' behavior is determined by a complex interrelation between attitude and contextual factors (Guagnano et al., 1995). This survey found evidence of a positive attitude toward CC by most respondents from both China and the UK. Around 95% of all respondents had experience of some forms of CC and many of them, 62.2% of Chinese respondents and 56.5% UK respondents, plan to increase their use of CC in the future. There are similarities and differences in both countries in the level of CC use and the types of CC services. At present, the overall level of CC adoption is higher in China than in the UK. 'Ride sharing' is a popular CC service in both countries; 'bike sharing' is more popular in China and 'flea market' is more popular in the UK. Such a difference is a good illustration of the impact of contextual factors - service availability in this case. Bike-sharing services have expanded in many cities in recent years in China. Using shared bikes for short-distance trips is convenient, inexpensive, and flexible. Accessibility of the bike-sharing service contributed to its popularity in China, particularly among the younger generation. Similarly, as concerns about the environmental and costs of consumer goods have grown, second-hand retail has gained popularity in recent years. The UK has more than 3800 shops that specialize in the sale of second-hand goods (Statista, 2022). In addition, the UK is a leading market for used and second-hand goods throughout the world. In 2018, it ranked as the second-largest exporter of used clothing in the world (Statista, 2022). Understanding both consumers' attitudes and contextual factors as well as the relationship between the two is essential for a successful promotion of CC adoption.

The survey also found that demographic factors, such as gender, age, and income, have an impact of people's CC practice. Respondents from low-income groups tend to use CC more frequently. 74% of the frequent CC users, those who use CC at least three times a month, in China came from the bottom three income groups; this number is 53% for the UK. This may be due to financial constraints on their purchasing decisions. Conversely, CC activities were less frequent among higher-income groups in both China and the UK, with 50.8% and 40% respectively. It is consistent with the findings that 'economic benefits' is regarded as the number one benefit of CC and 'saving money' as one of the top reasons for participating in CC. This is in line with the study conducted by Luri Minami et al. (2021), where perceived economic benefits had a greater impact on their participation behavioral intention. The research also found that 'reduce idle items' was another key factor that drives CC engagement, particularly for Chinese consumers. This study demonstrates that CC is not only a promising way to facilitate sustainability, but also an alternative method for reducing unwanted items,

meeting more friends, or following the trend. Therefore, CC is an attractive tool for businesses to promote their products and services to consumers. Furthermore, it can assist companies in reducing their environmental footprint and enhancing their social responsibility. Respondents who frequently engaged in CC practices were mainly between the ages of 25–49 in both China (79.4%) and the UK (80%).

The availability of CC services and accessibility of CC service platforms have a direct impact on the adoption of CC. The higher level of some CC practices in China, such as bike sharing, is mainly due to such services are easily available to ordinary citizens, especially in urban areas. Whilst sharing economic activity has brought great convenience to people, it has also led to undesirable and unsustainable behaviours that violate regulations and debase social norms, for example, abandoning shared bicycles in undefined or restricted areas, rivers or lakes, vandalism or fitting personal locks to prevent bicycles from being used by others (Yin et al., 2018). There is a need for society and companies involved to cultivate and elicit sustainable social behaviors as they pursue economic benefits (Chi et al., 2020).

China and the UK represent diverse consumer landscapes with distinct cultural, social, and economic contexts. Insights into cross-cultural consumer preferences, decision-making processes, and adoption patterns can be gained by studying collaborative consumption patterns in these two markets. Such insights are essential for businesses operating in global markets, as they enable them to tailor their strategies to meet the evolving needs and expectations of consumers in both regions. Additionally, the collaborative consumption model has gained increasing prominence as a sustainable alternative to traditional ownership-based consumption patterns. By investigating collaborative consumption behaviors in China and the UK, researchers can uncover the underlying motivations, barriers, and drivers influencing consumers' adoption of shared consumption practices. This knowledge can inform the development of more targeted and impactful interventions aimed at promoting sustainable consumption behaviors and reducing resource waste, thereby contributing to broader sustainability initiatives on a global scale.

Further, the collaborative economy is characterized by the use of digital platforms and technology-enabled services, which facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges and resource sharing. Examining collaborative consumption behaviors in China and the UK can shed light on the role of digital technologies, regulatory frameworks, and institutional infrastructures in shaping consumer behaviors and market dynamics. These findings can be used to inform policymakers, businesses, and platform operators about the regulatory and technological requirements that are necessary to foster the growth of collaborative consumption ecosystems and maximize their economic and societal benefits.

6. Conclusions

To inform strategies for navigating the evolving CC market, this study aims to gain insight into the factors influencing CC purchases. However, this study does not intend to predict particular outcomes or generalize across entire national populations. However, it is intended to provide considerations for future research in this field. This survey study found evidence of collaborative consumption practices in both China and the UK. The majority of the respondents used some forms of CC and are expected to increase their uses in the future. However, the frequencies of CC use are lower than the frequencies of shopping habits. The existing popular CC practices are related to sharing services, such as bike sharing and ride sharing, rather than second-hand goods exchanges. Such a difference highlights the impact of service availability on consumer behavior and the important role of service providers. Many sharing services adopt a business-to-consumer (B2C) model and are driven by investors, who are more interested in expansion by providing services at very low costs. Although the B2C model also applies to the resale of used goods, such as through second-hand shops, its scale is much smaller. Consumer-to-consumer (C2C) model is more often used through car boot sales and online commerce platforms, such as Taobao in China and eBay in the UK. However, the number of people currently engaging in C2C activities is smaller.

Economic benefit is considered the most important benefit of CC and 'save money' is one of main reasons given by respondents for engaging in CC. 'Protect environment' is also given as a top reason for CC. However, the sustainability benefit of CC is not highly ranked by the respondents. It appears that most respondents do not make the link between CC practice and sustainability. More awareness efforts are needed to encourage citizens to adopt CC as part of a sustainable lifestyle. In addition, the survey found differences in CC behavior, caused by demographics, such as gender, age and income level. Bigger

variations are found between China and the UK, which are likely caused by a combination of contextual factors, such as culture norm, consumption habits, and quality and availability of CC services. This investigation revealed some useful insights of existing CC practices and the influencing factors in the UK and China. Further study is needed to explore drivers, barriers for CC and ways for increasing the use of CC. The research scope also needs to expand to include other stakeholders, such as service providers.

This study examined Chinese and British consumers' collaborative consumption behaviours for several reasons. The concept of collaborative consumption represents a significant shift in consumer behaviour, which impacts a wide variety of industries and has the potential to reshape traditional consumption patterns. A deeper understanding of how consumers engage in collaborative consumption in different cultural contexts can provide valuable insights into the underlying motivations, barriers, and preferences driving this trend.

In addition, the comparison of collaborative consumption behaviours between Chinese and British consumers presents an opportunity to identify cultural nuances and socio-economic factors that influence sustainable consumption practices. Taking into consideration diverse cultural perspectives and market dynamics, researchers can identify effective strategies for promoting sustainable consumption by examining similarities and differences between these two consumer groups.

Moreover, the study's findings can inform policymakers, businesses, and other stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of collaborative consumption initiatives in fostering sustainable lifestyles and reducing environmental impact. Based on the findings of this comparative analysis, targeted interventions and marketing strategies tailored to specific cultural contexts may be developed to assist in the transition towards more sustainable consumption patterns.

The use of snowball sampling can be beneficial in gaining access to hidden populations or networks, but it is not without limits, including in the context of studies relating to collaborative consumption. It is acknowledged that responses collected using such a sampling method may be influenced by sample bias, especially when addressing willingness or intention to participate in collaborative consumption. Since respondents are frequently recruited through social media channel which can grow response rate; however, it may also influence on their overall sentiment. Therefore, the responses of this type of survey sampling should be interpreted cautiously when attempting to generalise any knowledge.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an accelerated digital transformation of the market, alongside a swift evolution in the understanding and implementation of the collaborative consumption. This rapid pace of change may render the findings of this research potentially outdated or less relevant. However, these studies can provide valuable insights into how Chinese and British consumers interact with CC and how different factors affect their purchasing decisions. The data collected can be used to inform future marketing strategies and product development. It would be worthwhile to investigate any global markets related to CC and any relevant behavior. Further research into the impact of CC on consumer behavior would be beneficial. Additionally, exploring any cultural differences between Chinese and British consumers, as well as any potential cultural differences between global markets, using statistical analysis, could provide further insights.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

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