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**Review of *The Age of Sharing* by Nicholas A. John,
Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2017, 200 pages**

In the society we live today the concept of 'sharing' is at a common use, in multiple situations. People share houses, food, information, services, smiles, stories, photos, cars, pets, expertise and many other goods, services or emotions. Children at the very beginning of their lives are taught to share toys and experience; they grow up with the lesson of sharing learned. Sharing becomes, thus, a way of healthy communication between future adults. Today, companies start businesses that involve 'sharing' in different economic contexts. It is now virtually impossible to talk about 'sharing' without involving the social media and the intense activity that people carry out assisted by the new technologies of the digital age. The above-mentioned elements are practically the starting point of the impressive work by Nicholas A. John in his book *The Age of Sharing*.

Comprising seven chapters, the book debates the concept of sharing and its multiple approaches, which over time have been of considerable importance to various social groups, fields of activity, or to individuals. The concept evolved, historically speaking, and influenced the evolution of the society, especially today's reality. The author's perspective is both critical, when and how the concept has received valences that have raised questions about its correct use in a certain context, and optimistic, the concept is perceived as an emotional construct, an altruistic sense of life and the "basis for authentic human relationships" (p. 2). The complexity of the concept is revealed by John through a thorough and careful research of both material and immaterial things that the 'sharing' term possess.

The first chapter show evidence of the in depth literature review that the author has done on the concept of 'sharing' in his efforts to define it and to demonstrate its multiple meanings in contexts in which it has been used over time. Based on previous research, John underlines that his book adds to those discussions more relevant information. In this respect he proposes a new vision according to which "sharing is not just its communicative aspect, but the insight that sharing is a type of communication that implies a certain style of interpersonal relationship, one that is based on honesty, openness, mutuality, caring, equality, trust and fairness. These are the declared value of the sharing economy as well and also form a part of the internet imaginary" (pp. 15-16).

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Going further into the meaning of the concept, John calls, in the second chapter of his book, on the Oxford English Dictionary, as the starting point of research regarding the time when the concept has undergone transformations in its meanings from *distribution*, *division* and *partaking in*, to the communicative meaning that it has today. The question that arises in John's research is when and in which context sharing became *sharing-as-telling* and *sharing-as-caring*. Answers refer to moments of expressing spiritual experiences of people of Moral Rearmament activity and The Oxford Group, movements that preceded various therapeutic activities of support groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, in early 1930s. *Sharing-as-telling* "was said to bring a kind of redemption to the sharer, and to enhance a sense of fellowship among those present" (p. 23). Furthermore, *sharing-as-caring* "overlaps with the emergence of the hippie movement and the American counterculture" (p. 37), expressing emotions shared among members of communities who wanted to differentiate themselves from the crowd.

The moment in which the internet entered the lives of people marked an evolutionary point unprecedented in the history of mankind. The easy communication and information opportunities that the digital era offers have led to the construction of social networks that have quickly invaded the social life of individuals. In this virtual social construct, people share, collaborate, connect and build communities. This is the argument from which John starts his third chapter of *The Age of Sharing*. Being a prosocial environment, the internet and the social media have facilitated the use of 'sharing' both in terms of distribution and of communication. John describes the concept of sharing as a core value of the Internet, the 'core essence' of it (p. 67). The 2000-2007 period was one of the most valuable to the evolution of the sharing concept on the internet. John demonstrates that the concept has given rise to other subconscious and meaningful features, such as *sharing your world*, *sharing your life* and *keeping in touch*.

One of the most complex argumentations of the sharing concept is offered by John in the fourth chapter of his work, which refers to the 'sharing economy'. The concept has been, in recent years, of interest to the scientific literature, both for academics and practitioners in economic and business environment. As demonstrated by John and other authors, the 'shared economy' describes a new and competitive business model, which refers peer-to-peer services, in a collaborative and connected way. The model is appreciated by a large number of people worldwide, but it is not safe from negative aspects of legal regulation. Being an alternative business model, it offers value-for-money services, based on reputation and trust, elements that are built on the feedback shared with customers. However, this type of business model uses money, therefore the use of the 'sharing' concept in such a context is questionable. Thus, John's critical view of the concept provides important insights into clarifying how 'share economy' should be perceived.

In the fifth chapter, John goes back to the debate about interpersonal relationships that the sharing concept involves. He brings back into discussion the idea of therapeutic activity, based on communication and connects it with the digital culture. Sharing is, in this context, explained as a means to establish interpersonal relationships developed through talk, as "sharing as a particular type of talk, can be conceived of as the constitutive activity of therapy culture" (p 98). Social media is also part of this discussion, being connected to the need of the authenticity expression that people show through social media in self-presentation. John highlights the relationship that is established between self-presentation and people through social media: "if ours is the age of sharing, it is because in 'sharing' converge, on the one hand,

the authentic expression of self both as a means of intimate relationship construction and maintenance and as a means of self-understanding, and, on the other, the mode of our participation in social media” (p. 120).

The last chapter is dedicated to ‘sharing files’, using, of course, the Internet. The author highlights the pros and cons of this type of information sharing, pointing out that ‘sharing files’ is still one of the most widely used Internet practices. The debate takes place in a context dominated by intense activity where people use different platforms such as Bit Torrent to share files. All examples offered by John in this chapter have the role of arguing the ways in which file sharing assisted by the Internet influences social relationships and people’s lives.

In the concluding section of the book, the author reiterates important ideas discussed in the previous chapters. The aim of the entire book is to claim that ‘sharing’ transcends the idea of a simple exchange of goods, and that in its evolution the concept has undergone important stages that refer to economics, social media and emotions, incorporated in three spheres: ‘sharing’ as the constitutive activity of social media, ‘sharing’ as a model for economic behavior and ‘sharing’ as a category of speech. What makes these categories different are the sets of values that people associate with sharing; “these values include openness, honesty, mutuality, equality, trust and more” (p.147).

Finally, we can argue that this book is useful and valuable to people coming from multi-disciplinary activities that include sociology, business-economics, communication, and psychological research. Relying heavily on social media, such fields of study and practices have a major impact on the ‘sharing discourse. The critical perspective embraced by the author, who examines both pros and cons of the concept of sharing, makes *The Age of Sharing* an indispensable reading for any theoretician or practitioner in the areas mentioned above.