

Sharing Versus Pseudo-Sharing in Web 2.0

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ABSTRACT The Internet has opened up a new era in sharing. There has also been an explosion of studies and writings about sharing via the Internet. This includes a series of books, articles, and web discussions on the topic. However, many of these apparent cases of sharing are better characterized as pseudo-sharing – commodity exchanges wrapped in a vocabulary of sharing. The present paper reviews subsequent research and theorizing as well as controversies that have emerged surrounding sharing and what is best regarded as pseudo-sharing – a wolf-in-sheep’s-clothing phenomenon whereby commodity exchange and potential exploitation of consumer co-creators present themselves in the guise of sharing. The paper begins with a pair of vignettes that highlight some of the contested meanings of sharing. By detailing four types of pseudo-sharing and four types of sharing that are specifically enabled or enhanced by Internet technologies, the paper argues that pseudo-sharing is distinguished by the presence of profit motives, the absence of feelings of community, and expectations of reciprocity. It concludes with a discussion of theoretical, practical, and ethical implications of pseudo-sharing and offer suggestions for future research.