

The Freecycle Network (Writing Sample)

Jerome Pullen Jr.

Overview

Freecycle is an online community developed to provide an outlet to give away and receive items at no charge to either party. The goal of Freecycle is to encourage the reuse of items and keeping valuable items out of landfills. It is a grassroots and entirely nonprofit movement of people who are giving and receiving things for free in their own towns. Originating on May 1st 2003 with creator Deron Beal sending out the first emails to friends and area nonprofits, Freecycle has established itself now in over 85 countries with 6,582,289 members and rising (Freecycle 2013).

Freecycle is simple and convenient to sign up and use. Users begin by entering a username, email address, and password. Once they have established this login information they are instantly able to use the service that Freecycle offers. Once signed in, users find the group in which they are a part of (usually their town or county of residence) and are then able to view items that are offered for donation as well as items that are requested by other users. Users can either post items for donation or request items from their “myfreecycle” page or directly on the group page. If a user finds a post of interest they then reply to the post directly on the page which sends it to the poster's email. Once communication is established, the poster chooses whether or not to get back to the user for information on where to pick up the item.

Freecycle provides users more than just the service of giving away and receiving items. By providing an easy to use online vehicle for sharing it fulfills the desire to experience the feeling of unity and an aggregate sense of self (Belk 2010). This feeling of unity contributes to the overall satisfaction of the people and communities that use Freecycle. Freecycle also offers the value of a “convenient and free service operated in local communities by local people, resulting in decreasing landfill waste and appears to be having a positive impact on both the livelihood of individuals and the environment.” (Groomes & Seyfang 2012). With the combination of providing a feeling of unity and decreasing waste, Freecycle offers great value to the people and communities who take advantage of its service.

Freecycle provides value to many different kinds of people. One group of people that benefit from Freecycle are known as simplifiers and are involved in the “simple living” movement. Simplifiers, aka “downshifter”, find more meaning in life by devoting less time and effort to work and consumption and more time to family and the “good of the commonwealth” (Shi 1985, 3-4). By giving away the possessions they rarely use, downshifter are able to simplify their

lives by removing excess clutter (Elgin 2000). Freecycle helps downshiftners to escape from the work-and-spend cycle of mainstream society by providing a free method of donating and receiving goods (Nelson, Rademacher, & Paek 2007). By providing this service, Freecycle is extremely valuable to people who wish to engage in a simpler lifestyle.

Freecycle also provides value by being an online entity. In recent years there has been a decline in sharing between intimate attachments of people which has resulted in people seeking virtual communities online to fulfill this need (Belk 2007). By providing a virtual online community of sharing between people, Freecycle is able to fill the void that has risen from this lack of close-relationship sharing. A main reason for this is that Freecycle allows users to interact with like-minded people who share the desire to engage in sharing behavior.

Freecycle offers a unique importance that is experienced both on and off the Internet. By being an online community for sharing, Freecycle is a combination of the oldest and most recent type of the way people engage in consumption (Belk 2010). Sharing, being one of the oldest forms of consumption, is a very important way of bringing people together. By doing this through the Internet, Freecycle brings this connection to people who never would come into contact any other way. This opens up many communal doors for each Freecycle group and for each individual user of Freecycle. Beyond the communal impact of these connections, Freecycle's importance extends into providing items to people who really need them. Donators may never realize the full impact of the items they donate on the lives of the receivers. Each donation has the potential to make a life-long impact that would otherwise be impossible if not for Freecycle.

Discussion

Motivations to donate to Freecycle: environmental beliefs

Our study participants' data suggest that the motivations to donate to Freecycle are driven by three types of environmental beliefs: (1) avoidance of landfills, (2) residual value remaining in product (re-use/re-purpose), and (3) simplicity (excess consumerism). Donators believe in helping the environment through the use of Freecycle in order to avoid the filling of landfills, getting full use of the value remaining in the product, and by avoiding excess consumerism. We describe these environmental beliefs and provide some examples.

Avoidance of landfills

Most of the donators were in strong favor of an effort to make the world a more sustainable place. Better environmental practices, aka a "green initiative" took centerfold in their motivations for donating to Freecycle. The following users make a point that we live in a wasteful society and the economy is created around products that wear down rapidly in order to encourage the constant upgrading of products in our lives.

"This, the economy, we just don't make stuff to last. You know, it's gonna eventually wear down and tear out. But what we have that we can reuse, shouldn't be going into a landfill. And they say about us, the worst thing they can say about American citizens is that we're wasteful. And it's truthful. We are way too wasteful. We are killing ourselves. We're killing the world around us. (Linda, age upper 40's) (begin.rtf 101)"

"I am so glad Freecycle is out there. Umm I think more and more people need to know about it, ya know. I ...I for one ya know...we're a throw away nation. We're a throw-away society and if I have something that...like laundry soap or even cleaning stuff that I can't use, why throw that down the sewer? Why throw it in the landfill? Somebody out there may want to use it. (Pat) (sedgwick.rtf 164)"

Avoiding the filling of landfills is a concern for many Americans nowadays. With evidence of climate change resulting from the emission of "greenhouse gases" more and more people are concerned about the future well-being of the planet. Freecycle offers a legitimate substitute for unnecessarily throwing things away that motivates donators to use its service.

Residual value remaining in product (re-use/re-purpose)

A good portion of the participants were in between the ages of 40 and 60. This generation of "baby boomers" was raised mostly by parents who had been through the economic depression of the 1930s. Because of this, they have been raised to understand the value of a dollar and to get the absolute maximum value out of any product they had purchased.

"I do have a thing about recycling, you know, and it just, I really hate to throw things out. My folks were raised in the Depression, so it was like you never throw anything out if somebody else can use it. (Judi) (anderson.rtf 120)"

"Sustainability and recycling I think it's a great thing. Especially for people who can find value in little things I guess that would be the biggest thing. (Lucas, age 22) (cayer.rtf 100)"

This ideology has also been passed along to younger generations of participants which has made an impact on the motivations for donating things that still hold residual value.

Simplicity (excess consumerism)

A growing anti-consumerism movement has been occurring within the United States over the past few decades. People have found that by avoiding the shopping culture and living simpler lives has given them a deeper meaning in life. The motivation to bypass the consumerism that is so prevalent in the country has created more interest in communities like Freecycle.

"I think it's a really good program – website – because, you know it kind of cuts down on consumerism and you know there's already so many things out there that aren't being bought so you know, if I don't want this and this person doesn't want that, then I think it's great that we can just kind of trade and make each other happy. (Katie, age 20) (glidden.rtf 043)"

"I would like to think that I'm very giving and you know, not necessarily always looking for money for something and you know they really just value helping other people out and not always gaining something just for themselves. (Katie, age 20) (glidden.rtf 061)"

Anti-consumerism Freecycle users have been motivated to donate to Freecycle in order to provide people with items in a simpler, non-consumerist fashion.

Proposition 1 Users who donate to Freecycle are motivated by environmental beliefs that include:

- a) avoidance of landfill
- b) residual value remaining in product (re-use/re-purpose)
- c) simplicity (excess consumerism)

Motivations to donate to Freecycle: transactional beliefs

Because of Freecycle's accessible structure and how little effort is required to begin using, donors are driven by four types of transactional beliefs: (1) ease of participation, (2) ease of exchange (no barter), (3) lower constraints of Freecycle vs. competitor (Goodwill, garage sale), and

(4) ease of assortment/clutter reduction. Donators believe that Freecycle provides a convenient and simple way of giving away items.

Ease of participation

Freecycle is easy to sign up and register for. One just needs to create a username, password, and provide an email address where they can receive information on the latest postings.

“Interviewer: How do you know what to do on Freecycle? Was it just through, like what you said, reading instructions?”

I read the instructions. ... Yea. It was very simple. (Judi) (Anderson.rtf 023)”

“Um, yeah I basically just kind of browsed through the listings of things that people were looking to get rid of and it was really simple, I was just able to contact the woman who I traded with and we met up at a specific kind of outside location and did the trade. (Katie, age 20) (glidden.rtf 057)”

“Great way to get rid of stuff you don’t want (Dale, age 54) (Wendorff.rtf 020)”

Unlike Ebay or Amazon, users do not need to provide financial information in order to use Freecycle. Because of its ease of participation, donators are motivated to use Freecycle to post their items for give away.

Ease of exchange (no barter)

For situations when users are moving or have a lot of unwanted items to get rid of quickly, they tend to prefer efficiency of time over monetary gain. Freecycle provides an efficient method for people who have plenty to give away to do so as soon as possible. Also, being that Freecycle is free to use and has no monetary transactions, users find it to be an honest method of transaction.

“I’m going to be moving soon and I’ll have a lot of things that I’m gonna want to get rid of and I know I’m not gonna be able to sell it all, so, and it’ll be easier to get rid of if its free. (Annie, age 24) (Dietz.rtf 139)”

“I think it made me feel that there is some sort of honesty out there because you never know when you are buying something if you will get scammed or not. And this makes it where there are no scams because you are getting it free so you don’t feel like you are going to get scammed when you are buying things. (Kait) (Biekkola.rtf 036)”

“I’d like to think that it’s pretty honest and straightforward and you know you’re just kind of doing a... a trade you know kind of with a neighbor. (Katie, age 20) (glidden.rtf 079)”

A good amount of Freecycle users have used Craigslist and other online retailers in the past so they know the time and effort it takes to use those and may have even been ripped off by someone on those sites. Freecycle provides a way for them to donate what they do not want without wasting excess time bartering on price or feeling taken advantage of in any way.

Lower constraints of Freecycle vs. competitor (Goodwill, garage sale)

Compared to the hassle of hauling heavy items to the thrift store or landfill, Freecycle offers a far less constrained method of giving things away. All the donator has to do is post online what they are giving away and the receiver will usually come to them to pick up the item.

"here we have to pay to extra to have stuff picked up here and honestly with the two little guys for me to go donate stuff its hard cuz I have to load them up and put them in a stroller and lug all my stuff in and for me to be able to give stuff away on their I don't get much of a tax break for giving stuff away at charity events so (Mother, age 44) (rogers.rtf 093)"

“Interviewer: Did you decide to do this also—to give away things that you have for free, rather than doing, you know, something like a garage sale, just because you want to help other people out? Or how did you...?”

Nicole: Well, I think that. But also because it just takes a lot of energy to put something like that together and a lot a time, which I don't have. Um, and I don't think I'd make a whole lot of money out of a lot of the stuff that I put on Freecycle anyway. (Nicole, age 31) (Nicole&Tyler.rtf 080)”

For people with busy schedules and children to look after, Freecycle offers an efficient and simple outlet to give away items which motivates donators to use the program.

Ease of assortment/clutter reduction

Certain events tend to spawn an influx of clutter that users do not need to keep around. Because donators want to get the full value out of products rather than waste, they look to Freecycle to find others that may be able to use their unwanted clutter.

"during Christmas I had this box of brand new random stuff, mostly re-gifting kind of items that you know I had gotten for gifts that I really didn't want or need, but I couldn't throw away (Jessica, age 33) (fesenmaier.rtf 071)"

"it's definitely made me less of a packrat if I know that I have something and I'm, I'm not going to use it but I also wouldn't necessarily get money if I tried to sell it then I definitely would look to putting it on there. (Katie, age 20) (glidden.rtf 053)"

Having the option to use Freecycle to give away clutter alleviates the feeling of wasting it. This resourceful method is a great way for donators to prevent the buildup of unwanted items without filling up the landfill.

Proposition 2 Users who donate to Freecycle are motivated by the following transactional beliefs:

- a) ease of participation
- b) ease of exchange (no barter)
- c) lower constraints of Freecycle vs. competitor (Goodwill, garage sale)
- d) ease of assortment/clutter reduction

Motivations to donate to Freecycle: beliefs tied to assisting others

A significant motivation found from Freecycle donators is the belief that they are helping out others. The three main beliefs tied to assisting others include: (1) empathy of others, (2) assisting the community, and (3) by feeling a direct connection to those helping. The feeling of helping out is indeed a strong motivator for donators to use Freecycle.

Empathy of others

Empathy is a big reason why people are motivated to donate to Freecycle. The strive to help out their fellow human in need drives people to participate and donate to Freecycle and other organizations as well. This is especially strong for donators who have been in tough situations in the past and want to help others going through a similar situation.

"I'm not the only single mom that had 15 years of raising a family by herself. There's someone else out there. (Linda, age upper 40's) (begin.rtf 164)"

"I wanna be able to help someone out that, really can't give back, you know. (Ryan, age 23) (Eric Buss&RyanOlson.rtf 230)"

"I have had people come to the house and they don't have anything or whatever they are looking for is so important to them that it is you know food items or clothes for their kids that they are so grateful to get it. It is nice to see it go to someone that really needs it. (Kat, age 44) (forsythe.rtf 084)"

Frequent donators of Freecycle begin to remember the usernames and email addresses of receivers whom they wish to help. Removing the anonymity provides a way for donators to recognize receivers who they feel empathy for and to continue to give to them in particular.

Assisting community

Frequent donators report feelings of assisting a community as motivation for donating to Freecycle. Seeing and getting to know the same people users interact with establishes the sense of community that keeps them coming back.

"I think it's the give and take, and, you know, just, I mean I guess seeing people, give something to the community, like I said, rather than Good Will or someplace where it's kind of, um, anonymous and you don't, I don't know, I like kinda just the fact (Megan, age 42) (Ryan & Megan.rtf 228)"

"Interviewer: What is the most important aspect of Freecycle to you?"

Michael: Just the community coming together to help eachother. (Michael, age 23) (skoog.rtf 114)"

By assisting this community, Freecycle operates as a social network of its own. Connecting people of similar interests with each other provides the social aspect needed in order for continuing use of Freecycle to prevail.

Direct connection to those helping

Witnessing firsthand the gratitude for donating is a more rewarding experience than anonymously giving items to a thrift store. For this reason many Freecycle users are motivated to have this

direct connection with the receivers as opposed to never knowing where their donations ended up.

"being able to see that appreciation continue, it makes me continue to want to give away, um, instead of taking it to Good Will where somebody's gonna have to purchase it (Nicole, age 31) (Nicole & Tyler.rtf 76)"

"I enjoy meeting the people who I receive things from and I give things to. Uh, some people just, I like to meet the people, some people just leave things like out on their front steps or front stoop and then you just pick it up from them. But I enjoy the experience of meeting the people also. (Noel) (howard.rtf 022)"

By being able to connect directly with the receivers of their items, donators are motivated to continue using Freecycle as their primary outlet of donating.

Proposition 3 Users who donate to Freecycle are motivated by feelings tied to assisting others through:

- a) empathy of others
- b) assisting community
- c) direct communication to those helping

Motivations to receive from Freecycle: economic drivers

Being that Freecycle is a free source to find free items, economic drivers seem to be the strongest motivation for participants to look for and receive items from Freecycle. The two categories we found for these drivers are: (1) frugality and (2) income.

Frugality

The interviews for this data took place two years after one of the largest economic collapses in history. America was still in recovery mode and jobs and money were tight. People were forced to look for cheaper alternatives for getting the items they wanted.

"Not having to go out and spend lots of money for something that somebody just wants to get rid of anyway. (Ingrid, age 52) (black.rtf 158)"

"Well, like I said before I like to use it as a tax write off. I often give donations to the site, well not often, but a few times. (Michael, age 23) (skoog.rtf 052)"

Thanks to Freecycle, users have the ability to find items for free that they were planning on purchasing anyways. Because of this, frugality is a key motivator of why people use Freecycle to pick up items as opposed to purchasing them elsewhere.

Income

Certain periods of life do not provide a substantial enough income for users to live comfortably off of what they make. Whether they are in college, raising children, or are going through another period in life that inhibits the ability to make enough money to get by, users use Freecycle to find items that they would not otherwise be able to afford.

"It helps out for the college lifestyle where you don't have a lot of money to spend on stuff anyway. (Katie, age 21) (swift.rtf 032)"

"Um yeah I have a lot of friends that participate on it because they don't have the money to go buy those kinds of things. And that is another thing with me because with me not working the last couple of years it has really helped. Such as if I need a white dress shirt for my son for his Christmas pageant or whatever. If I can find one then it is easier and it costs less than going to buy a new one. (Kat, age 44) (Forsythe.rtf 076)"

"I am umm a home-schooler and one of the ladies on one of the uh, umm email groups I belong to on homeschooling um was talking about doing things more economically, being able to do more economical things with her kids and she actually talked about Freecycle. (Alexis) (ku-bitschek.rtf 058)"

Freecycle provides an outlet for college students, parents, and other low income users to receive items that they would normally have to go without or sacrifice a meal for.

Proposition 4 Users who receive from Freecycle are motivated by the economic drivers of:

- a) frugality
- b) income

Motivations to receive from Freecycle: customization and treasure seeking

A fair amount of Freecycle users are interested in items that may not be available at retail establishments. For this reason, two motivators driving the receiving of items via Freecycle include (1) customization and (2) treasure seeking.

Customization

An interesting finding about Freecycle is the amount of users with similar interests. Some of these interests lie in customizing certain products. They use Freecycle to connect and find specific parts for customization of their product of interest.

"I was looking for bicycle parts because I like to um refurbish some old bikes and uh found out, especially in Minnesota, that there's a big community there so I found some uh, you know, invaluable to some people but valuable parts to me, I guess. (Lucas, age 22) (cayer.rtf 017)"

"its great, you stay connected with other bike enthusiasts or product enthusiasts (Lucas, age 22) (cayer.rtf 044)"

"its gratification being able to use something and see the, in my case, get something and use it towards an end product. You know, like finishing a bike with some recycle parts is a great feeling. You're not wasting any materials and you're saving some money while doing it. (Lucas, age 22) (cayer.rtf 052)"

By connecting with other users of similar interest, users are motivated to receive from Freecycle because of the possibilities networking opens in finding items that would have otherwise have gone unknown.

Treasure seeking

For users looking to find hard to find items that may not be readily available in stores Freecycle opens the door for anyone in the area to provide information on where to find the items. Also, users sometimes get lucky and find that there is someone out there willing to give away these hard to find items.

"I needed a new shifter knob on my old Schwinn and I found a set of them. I found that that way and got it for free, used it. (Lucas, age 22) (cayer.rtf 054)"

"When I'm in MN Ill maybe pick up a part or contact somebody who has a part. (Lucas, age 22) (cayer.rtf 040)"

Users who "treasure seek" are motivated to receive from Freecycle because of the possibility of these hard to find items being available.

Proposition 5 Users who receive from Freecycle are motivated by:

- a) customization
- b) treasure seeking

Motivations to receive from Freecycle: intermediary needs (use of goods for another function/business)

Not all receivers are looking to receive items for personal use; they instead hope to provide for a charity. Others look for items that they are able to resell or products to strip down and resell. For these reasons, the two motivators driving the receiving of items via Freecycle are the intermediary needs of (1) charities and (2) diggers.

Charities

Some users have found creative uses for Freecycle that extend beyond their own personal use. One such example is to supply charities with donations from Freecycle users. These users run their own charities and use Freecycle in order to bring in supplies.

"It's a huge benefit to the community. Um... it's not just in our, our aspect with the charity, but it's a huge benefit. I mean, um...we had a lady who lost everything they owned in a house fire. Um... ya know, we posted, it's gotten to the point now where your quote un-quote regular Freecyclers recognize Jen's email and they know that Jen's associated with Kids Come First. So, she'll put out, ya know, family of fire looking for anything, or any household. And she gets an array of responses because people know that 99.9% of the stuff that, that Jen takes in for our charity is going right out the door. (Andy, age 37) (crooker.rtf 121)"

"I run an at risk youth program, which I also use for, uh, Freecycle for now. (age 31) (Nicole & Tyler.rtf 012)"

Freecycle is a great catalyst for assisting people who would like to donate to a greater cause. These donators and charity organizers are motivated to receive from Freecycle in order to provide more goods to people in need.

Diggers

While most of the Freecycle community receives out of necessity there are a select few known as “diggers” who use it for their own monetary gain. Diggers tend to either look for items with valuable components to strip down and sell or they will incorporate items into a bigger project to sell. In the following examples, the users describe times when they were able to identify diggers on Freecycle:

“I call some of them diggers on there. You have people on there who will sit down and they will list off every household item you can imagine. In need of. Um, it’s hard for me, over the last five years to see all of these people, the same people, asking for tons of stuff. So I’m sure they’re people taking things in for free and then selling them or, ya know whatever the case is. It doesn’t matter what program you have, somebody’s there trying to take advantage of the system. (Andy, age 37) (crooker.rtf 153)”

“sometimes people put up in it like no resellers because sometimes I’ll put out a list of items and I might have thirty items on there and someone says I’ll take it all. Well, I know that if someone wants to take it all they don’t need everything that’s on that list ... So they’re looking to sell it or do something else with it you know so I don’t even respond to those people anymore. (Ingrid, age 52) (black.rtf 074)”

By scouring Freecycle for valuable free items to sell, diggers take advantage of a unique way to turn a profit. As seen in the example, however, some users catch on to diggers and may decide to prevent further exploitation of the Freecycle community.

Proposition 6 Users who receive from Freecycle are motivated by intermediary needs (use of goods for another function/business) for the following purposes:

- a) charities
- b) diggers

Benefits of donating to Freecycle: relational benefits

Donators of Freecycle often cite being able to interact and connect directly with the people they donate to as the most substantial benefits of donating to Freecycle. These relational benefits are divided into two categories: (1) sense of community and (2) development of friendships. It is clear that establishing a connection with others in the Freecycle community keep donators coming back.

Sense of community

Human beings are social creatures. One of the main benefits provided by donating through Freecycle is the sense of community that users feel from doing so.

"Most important I think to me is, having that network of people there, uh, that are readily available to me. (Eric Buss & Ryan Olson) (eric_buss&ryan_olson.rtf 242)"

"kinda like a support group for singles moms that were struggling, well I guess for single parents because there were some dads there too so. (Linda, upper 40's) (begin.rtf 017)"

"I really like that, for me, it creates, the giving and receiving, and it's just in the Eau Claire area, that it creates a sense of community for me. (Noel) (howard.rtf 054)"

By having this sense of community, donators feel that there will always be someone out there in need of their donations. The more they donate, the more belonging they feel to be a part of the Freecycle community.

Development of friendships

Another benefit received from donating to Freecycle is the development of personal friendships. Once in a while, donators enjoy other members of Freecycle enough to connect with them on a friendship level.

"And so um, now we have each other's phone numbers and stuff and so when I have more plants I call her first to see if she can use them for her patients and things. And so her and I have kept a relationship. (Michelle) (leduc.rtf 090) "

"I actually connected, uh, connected with the guy, uh, quite a bit. I was actually, uh, I was, I had posted to the Freecycle world, or the Freecycle community, I, I just reached out to the community and said, you know what, uh, I have a friend that, uh, that is in need of a washer, and, uh, is there

anyone out there that can help me? Here's this guy, uh... he posted on there, he said you know what, I have this washer, I'm, uh... you know, I'm, I guess I'm willin' to give away. (Ryan, age 23) (Eric Buss & Ryan Olson.rtf 095)''

Developing friends from Freecycle is definitely an added benefit to the donation process. By finding a worthy designated receiver, donors benefit from not worrying about whether or not the person really needs it. Also, making new friends from donating is great bonus!

Proposition 7 Users who donate to Freecycle obtain relational benefits that include:

- a) sense of community
- b) development of friendships

Benefits of donating to Freecycle: service benefits

Besides the additional relationships derived from donating to Freecycle, users also benefit from various service benefits that make the donating process easier and more efficient. Also, since most users are trying to save money by using Freecycle, they benefit from shared knowledge with other users on various ways to do so. The benefits derived from service are: (1) labor, (2) insight/information, and (3) reduction of clutter.

Labor

One service benefit of Freecycle is there is very little physical labor involved in donating heavy items. As opposed to hauling items out to the landfill or thrift store, receivers will usually come to the donor's residence and pick up whatever is being given away.

"I put a couch on Freecycle and it was heavy and within fifteen minutes it was gone and it was amazing. I was just like totally in love with Freecycle. (Merri Ann, age 64) (moe.rtf 030)''

"My aunt had to move from an assisted living home into a nursing home and she had tons of stuff it was overwhelming I thought I can't deal with this I'm not the one to have a thrift sale I just have too much going on so I went through the place and throughout the junk I mean like she had papers and boxes and that kind of stuff I threw in the dumpster but everything else in her apartment I boxed it and I set it out in the hallway you know in the assisted living it's like a hotel with the hallways and I posted on freecycle for anyone to come and take anything they wanted and

that saved me a ton of time to get rid of her stuff in one shot I think I did it for like three days and it was a great way to get rid of all of her stuff. (Brenda) (means.rtf 130) ”

There is far less effort required for users to donate heavy items on Freecycle as opposed to hauling them to a landfill or thrift store. Especially for users who are not able to manage heavy objects, assistance with labor is a huge benefit of using Freecycle to donate items.

Insight/information

Another benefit of donating to Freecycle is the added information users learn from one another on other ways to save money or find specific items of interest. In the following examples, Ingrid found a lady requesting Kohl's coupons and realized that she could use some herself so she contacted the lady for more information while Lucas uses Freecycle to stay in touch with the local community of bikers.

“Ingrid: I know she asked for the thirty pers- you know the Kohl's you know you get the flyer in the mail where they have either fifteen, twenty, or thirty percent off ... So she actually said wanted thirty percent off Kohl's coupon. So I emailed her I said hey did you actually and she got it so I asked her I said uhm...when was that sale and I was thinkin that I maybe should do the same because my daughter needed we were going to a funeral and she needed clothes ... And she said oh you're welcome to use my coupon. (Ingrid) (black.rtf 100)”

“I think mostly through word of mouth, maybe some online blogs about bikes. I like to keep in touch that way with the bike community. (Lucas, age 22) (cayer.rtf 019)”

By interacting with other users, Freecycle users can benefit from the information and insights shared on where money-saving opportunities are available and also discuss shared interests.

Reduction of clutter

One benefit user's note is the reduction of clutter that happens after donating to Freecycle. By getting rid of the excess items within their home, donators are able to clear more space.

“everybody's just trying to do the same thing I am you know they wanna you know get rid of the clutter in their house you know give it to a good home or you know they'd like to find ah uhm you know get something for free (Ingrid) (black.rtf 158)”

"I think it's a really good idea and a good way to um not only get rid of things that you have that you don't want or need anymore, but a good way, um, for other people to acquire things that they need and it's free which I'm sure is beneficial for a lot of people. (Annie, age 24) (dietz.rtf 131)"

Freecycle is a great medium to reduce the amount of clutter in donators' homes. After all, "one man's trash is another man's treasure". In the end, both donators and receivers benefit from this.

Proposition 7 Users who donate to Freecycle obtain the following service benefits:

- a) labor
- b) insight/information
- c) reduction of clutter

Benefits of donating to Freecycle: personal/affective benefits

A big contributor to why people donate to Freecycle is for the good feelings they receive from doing their part for society. These feelings are documented as personal/affective benefits and are categorized into: (1) karma and (2) generalized reciprocity.

Karma

One strong motivating factor for why donators use Freecycle is for the good feeling that they receive from it. Even if they don't believe in reincarnation, donators still benefit greatly from the belief of good karma they receive for their donations.

"Um it makes me it, it really makes you feel um like you've made points with a positive um entity. It's very effective in fulfilling needs people have and in um feeling good about yourself that you've helped someone. (Merri Ann, age 64)(moe.rtf 76-84) "

"I think it's, Freecycle, when I'm getting rid of things or cleaning out things that I don't want anymore, I give them second looks and think about, you know, before I would just take it to a thrift store, but even that, I like the idea of giving it away for free and, you know, what goes around comes around, so you know I like just, it's like giving someone a gift. Someone that you don't even know you are giving them a gift (Noel) (howard.rtf 024)"

By eliminating the option of selling items, Freecycle provides a way for donators to give purely from the good of their heart which provides the positive feeling of good karma.

Generalized reciprocity

Another benefit from donating to Freecycle is the ability for donators to give back what they have received from society. The feeling of generalized reciprocity eliminates any guilt the donator may have held prior to giving back.

“To be able to give back to people in need. For example, my youth. I, um... found a bed recently on there. (Nicole, age 31) (Nicole&Tyler.rtf 048)”

“I think it’s a good um a good thing I’ve got a lot of stuff I’d rather not have to hall off to goodwill or savers and because I never get out of it what is worth anyways. If I can help somebody what goes around comes around. (Judy, age 54) (mckinster.rtf 034)”

With the use of Freecycle, users are able to reciprocate the generosity society has bestowed upon them.

Proposition 8 Users who donate to Freecycle obtain personal and affective benefits from:

- a) karma
- b) generalized reciprocity

Benefits of receiving from Freecycle: ability to use budget for other items (spread consumption) and access to assortment

A good percentage of Freecycle users do not have very flexible spending budgets. By finding things for free on Freecycle it allows them to make more room for other necessary goods on their budget. Freecycle also enables an unlimited possibility of items to be available which may not otherwise be available where the users live. For those reasons, (1) ability to use budget for other items and (2) access to assortment are two benefits receivers from Freecycle experience.

Ability to use budget for other items (spread consumption)

Many Freecycle users do not have the luxury of affording everything they would like to have. A benefit of Freecycle, however, is the ability to free up some of that budget if they find items for give away that they were intending on purchasing anyways.

"I get all these e-mails every day I could use that I could that, like things I normally be able to get otherwise because they are not in my budget. (Mother, age 44) (rogers.rtf 239)"

"I've gotten like a bunch of cooking magazines on there and gardening magazines and um also I have an eBay business so I get a lot of my packing material on there. I post on there that I'm in need of bubble wrap and packing peanuts and that kind of thing.(Michelle) (Leduc.rtf 056)"

"I have twin boys its super expensive so I got umm I started I originally started asking for clothing up until like 2T to fill their closet and then um...I need a playpen for traveling back and fourth to Minnesota last summer so I actually got 3 playpens just for asking for one so basically for baby stuff. I've asked for baby stuff but then again if I have old stuff I give away equal amounts.(Mother, age 44) (rogers.rtf 078)"

By finding items for free on Freecycle, receivers are able to use their budgets for other items they would like to have.

Access to assortment

Many Freecycle users live in small communities that do not have many options for various items users would like to own. By using Freecycle, receivers benefit from the added variety created from nearby communities that may entail more options.

"A lot of people trade bike parts online and, uh yeah I guess, just doing it myself, because I don't know a lot of other people who actually use this site. Like I said, the Eau Claire area doesn't have as big, to my knowledge, of a community as uh Minneapolis, Minnesota, which I am the route, I usually take.(Lucas, age 22) (cayer.rtf 032)"

"if you're searching for or you um post a wanted ad basically, and you cant find that part or something. In my experience like I said I look for a lot of bike components ... for everyday things say if you're looking for a new coffee table a lot of people could help you out with stuff they have laying around.(Lucas, age 22) (cayer.rtf 098)"

By utilizing Freecycle's nationwide network, users are able to find a larger variety of options than from the limitations of their home town.

Proposition 9 Users who receive from Freecycle obtain the following benefits:

a) ability to use budget for other items (spread consumption)

b) access to assortment

References

Belk, Russell. 2010. "Sharing." *The Journal of Consumer Research* 36:5 (2010): 715-34. Print.

Belk, Russell. 2007. "Why Not Share Rather Than Own?". *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611:126 (2007).

Elgin, Duane. 2000. Voluntary simplicity and the new global challenge. *The consumer society reader*, ed. Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt. New York: New Press.

Groomes, L. Seyfang, G. (2012) Secondhand Spaces and Sustainable Consumption: Examining Freecycle's Environmental Impacts and User Motivations. 3S Working Paper 2012 05. Norwich: Science, Society and Sustainability Research Group. (pg.27)

Nelson, Rademacher, and Paek. 2007. "Downshifting Consumer = Upshifting Citizen? An Examination of a Local Community". *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611:141 (2007).

Shi, David E. 1985. *The simple life: Plain living and high thinking in American culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The Freecycle Network. "History & Background Information." *Freecycle.org*. N.p. 2010. Web. 06 Nov. 2013.