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DOCTORAL THESIS

SUMMARY

Online reputation management in the context of sharing economy

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Abstract

This thesis aims to address what it takes to build, manage or overthrow reputation in today's sharing economy from the users' perspective. The sharing economy phenomenon directs the attention towards the online platforms, as enablers of transactions between individuals, as market models that allow the sharing of access to idle resources such as goods and services, and as virtual communities relying on, and going back to real-life applications. The sharing structures are still emerging and rapidly evolving, comprising organizational, socio-economic, societal, cultural and interpersonal substructures. The ongoing academic efforts in addressing these substructures from the user perspective do lack a comprehensive overview. To the best of my knowledge, my work is the first to center reputation as an indicator of user trust and satisfaction, signalling propensity to cooperate and co-create value, an inquiry worth and requiring further development.

Summary

There have been significant changes to the ways in which the online platforms are playing their role in shaping the way in which participants collaborate and consume. The fact that online technology had become a prime facet of postmodern value facilitation and co-creation in key areas within the sharing economy phenomena encapsulates the purpose of this study to align, assess and analyze the relationship between reputation, trust and value facilitation and their role on users' opinions, attitudes and behaviors towards the enabling platforms. The literature review provided the basis for speculating on the possible outcomes of innovation, and following through with the theoretical knowledge shaped the foundation for novel empirical inquiries leading to rich findings that contribute to academic progress and add value to practitioners' agendas through the proposed frameworks of assessing, evaluating and measuring relationship systems between the proposed variables of reputation, trust, value dimensions, user satisfaction and word-of-mouth.

When studying the sharing economy, the two constituting components of its denomination are theoretically and empirically iterated: the act of sharing and the economic weight it carries. Whilst the denominations are experiencing tensions within multidisciplinary inquiries, they open up the discipline to a plethora of knowledge that advances cultural, social, political and economic ideas through its lenses and practices. In the quest to advance knowledge around a new topic, latitudinal gradients and longitudinal nuances remain uncovered in the scholarly literature. One gap that particularly stood out was the role of reputation in the sharing economy. Heavily understudied, the notion of reputation in the context of the sharing economy provides the opportunity to connect many factors to expand awareness and practical understanding of this new field of inquiry situated between socio-cultural and economic landscapes enabled by technology.

The thesis is composed of five chapters, dedicated to theoretical inquiries within the scholarly literature (Chapters 1, 2), to the methodological approach (Chapter 3) and to the empirical research and subsequent findings (Chapters 4, 5).

The first chapter explores the emergence of the sharing economy from a historical, anthropological, organisational and sociological perspective. Historically, the first theoretical notes on what later developed to be the phenomenon of 'sharing economy' were inspired by community structures studied through the lenses of human ecology theory. The notable capacity of anthropology to reveal insights on how human cultural heritage can help design

our collective future, through a multicultural, multitemporal record of diverse modes of transfer and access is undeniably useful in contextualizing the scale that technology allows for it. Anthropological and sociological records of sharing and giving have been long associated with tales of morality and non monetary economies. As such, provided with a framework for organizing principles around the collaborative acts of consumptions within communities, the topic pivoted towards consumption trends and patterns, and how consumer behavior influences community structures. The way people understand their role in this increasingly global society is part of the liquid modernity that places the individual as a central agent for change (Hellwig et al., 2015, pp.57-58). In this context, the sharing economy is not only motivated by economic needs, but it is also an intentional expression of lifestyle, through the values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors it vindicates. The interplay of social, technological and economic structures is driven by consumers' needs and wants. In the given scenario, users' needs are shaped by and shape the outlined macro-factors. On the one hand, the sustainability-driven agenda is enabling consumption sub-movements, such as "organic", "green" or "ethical" consumption. On the other hand, the disruptive potential of the sharing economy lies in its power to uphold these "ideals and energy for societal change" (Hellwig et al., 2015, p.60). On the other hand, the "liquid modernity" is challenging the traditional networks of support. The term, coined by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000), addresses the challenges of the "liquidity" (instability) of traditional social relationships and lifestyles. New paradigms of "liquid lifestyle" driven-values encapsulate the reimagining and defining of the "New Rich" (Ferriss, 2007, p.9): smart, light and flexible consumption over mobility-constraining and high-maintenance consumption. Embracing the liquid lifestyle requires an abandonment of the traditional meanings of affluence (luxury) by using the currency of the New Rich: time and mobility. Global nomadism, immateriality-driven liquid lifestyle are redefining the relationships to possessions (Bardhi et al., 2012), and the previous notions of social status (Belk, 2007). As such, the sharing economy label is constructed "as a dramaturgic opposition to the hard logics of (corporate) capitalism and hyper-consumption" in an increasingly "marketized" society, coupled with anti corporate capitalism trends, consumer activism and attempts to solidify the role of community and authenticity within consumption behaviors. (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004, Gilmore and Pine, 2007). The promise of a "new democracy" is asserted, as the sharing economy claims to "re-establish humanity" in the economy by creating "marketplaces built on human relationships rather than empty transactions" that "empower people to make meaningful connections." (Albinsson and Perera, 2012, apud Rachel Botsman, 2010).

In order to generate collaborative consumption events in today's world, the role of social technology and the increasing sense of urgency around resource depletion prove to be key factors in shaping the dictons of the new paradigm and in facilitating and encouraging mainstream adoption Growing environmental awareness and major societal shifts that address the economic inequalities facilitated the emergence of the sharing economy. Recognizing the 'limits of growth' from a sustainability-driven perspective, a new paradigm of economic, environmental and social development was employed to manage the outgrowths of the system and the accumulated frustrations with the current misfalls of the capitalist system of production and consumption. Faced with humanity's greatest challenge, climate change requires the advancement of alternative forms of production and consumption.

Seen as an alternative to the market based activities by addressing the triple pillars of sustainability: people, planet, prosperity, the positive impact of the sharing economy (S.E.) is altogether environmental, social and economic. Building on human-centered approaches that contribute to new socio-economic paradigms requires placing *sharing* at the core of its activities. In studying the phenomenon of 'sharing economy' as a holding vessel for the old practice of sharing, leveraged by the power of technologies, the choice to apply the lenses of anthropology, sociology and organizational studies provided context and reasoning for exploring the evolution of social relations, culture and human behavior in technologically-enabled, value-oriented activities with social consequences and economic implications. Embodying different forms of ventures, much of the future of the sharing economy depends on users' motivation to participate in it. In return, users are empowered to co-create the value proposition of the sharing economy. By reimagining the economic system to fit environmental and social equity goals, the sharing economy is transforming the sharing practices to reproduce social relations and solidify cultural practices (Belk, 2010). The effects of the value shifting paradigm are being transferred to the sociocultural context. People are becoming 'everyday' social designers, shaping the way they understand themselves as global citizens through the consumer culture.

Understanding that the sharing practices are built around and foster value in various forms was pivotal to the writing of this thesis. The academic literature emphasizes the ways in which the sharing economy is challenging the Marxian notion of value, in the sense that it's changing the use value over exchange value and, in varying degrees, relies on a partnership between the peer economy and the market. It is also argued that a 'general equivalent' of value in the context of sharing economy is the notion of reputation, being the backbone of value production and consumption processes across all collaborative contexts. As such, the

second chapter analyzes the six foundational perspectives of reputation (the game-theoretic perspective, the strategic perspective, the macro-cognitive perspective, the micro-cognitive perspective, the cultural-sociological perspective, the communicative perspective) through the lenses of organizational theory and corporate reputation before systemizing reputation in the context of sharing economy. Traditionally, the relevance of corporate reputation was supported by a growing recognition that a significant proportion of a firm's market value lies in intangible, off-balance sheet assets, rather than in tangible book assets. However, in the context of online spaces, reputation is more than a business metric. It has become an effective mechanism to reduce uncertainty and complexity, decrease risk aversion and encourage positive behavior among customers and organisations, and among users in peer-to-peer online environments. In societal contexts, social and behavioral scientists claim that reputation is key to sustaining or breaking cooperation in human societies. As a result, new tools and methodologies emerged to help assist reputation analysis and organisational decision-making processes. Conventional methods used to establish and evaluate activities designed to achieve competitive advantage are modified to respond to the challenges of the new technological environments. The traditional processes are exposed to online influences that have the ability to shape emotional states, cooperative attitudes and purchasing behaviors. To my knowledge at the moment of writing the thesis, there aren't yet studies that focus on how to build, manage and convert reputable capital in the context of the sharing economy. Measuring online reputation is not, and might never be, an easy task. The main barriers are related to the public space- private space dichotomy, as well as to the costs and resources needed to analyze all the information present in the online space, the Internet dispersion causing real challenges to organizations or public actors. Although there are not many studies attempting to make a comparison between online and offline reputation analysis, it is certain that a determining role in their formation, regardless of the environment in which they circulate, is the content (Sabater-Mir et al., 2015, pp. 6-8).

The reputation features in the online environment are important both for the evaluation and for the creation of reputation management programs. In the dynamic context of sharing economy, the role of users and the platforms revolves around three core elements: the social aspect, relying on human cooperation, the economic aspect, responsible for exchanges and transactions, and the technological aspect, the institutional form of containing and balancing the fragile socio-economic system by providing a newly built environment that challenges traditional models and shapes opportunities inside and outside the ecosystem.

To assess the core features of reputation, the thesis proposes six perspectives to make sense of the virtual footprint clustered by each platforms' aggregated cues and signals. In an extensive review on the major social mechanisms that have been proposed to explain interactions in sharing economy environments, human cooperation forms emerge: kinship, reciprocity, reputation, signaling, punishment, social systems, rules and norm psychology. For this reason, an important aspect of the collaborative economy is given by its potential to generate a connection between strangers in order to create value through the high degree of trust it provides. Moreover, the inherent inability to assess the quality of goods prior to purchase or exchange on the sharing economy platforms is neutralized by two-fold reputation information, designed to increase trust, credibility and to assist participants in their decision making. The literature tackling this subject is expanding as I'm documenting it, so for the purposes of this thesis, the reputation construct was narrowed down towards recognizing its value as an asset that has the power to influence the decision-making process of participants on peer-to-peer online platforms. Translating the six perspectives of reputation to the online environment, while keeping intact the particularities of the collaborative pillar of the sharing economy embodies the conceptual foundation that helps narrow the research problem to a particular moment and socio-cultural setting.

The exploration of the empirical practices of digitally-empowered forms of collaboration that rely on reputation negotiation brings forward the concept of 'collaborative consumption' (Botsman & Rogers, 2010), exploring the nature of socio-economic exchanges. Central to sociological thought, the evolution of the relationship between society and the market is revived. The particularities of the collaborative model in the context of exchanges and redistribution dynamics, as well as the relevance of the particular conceptions of reputation and value that sharing practices are built around and foster, are discussed. In developing the collaborative consumption-driven definitional landscape, prior research efforts to define this domain were explored in relation to consumption practices.

When considering the relationships between consumption, the environment and wider sociological endeavours, the analysis of the main theories concerning the interdisciplinary approaches to collaborative consumption helps identify a number of currents and interrelated issues which can lead to establishing an agenda for "re-engaging with foundational approaches to consumer culture" (Evans, 2018). Through the scholarly contributions to the theoretical repertoires, I argue that understanding the particularities and the role of consumption within the socio-economic realm of the sharing economy matters in forecasting its future developments. The thesis takes a sociological and cultural perspective to examine

the evolution of the co-creation processes towards the digital environment. Questions regarding the particularities of the collaborative model pertaining to the sharing economy arise. Encapsulating the findings through the lenses of consumption culture theory and value appropriation, two key themes emerge: the consuming subject and the value of goods and services. The controversies between contemporary cultural change and the political economy of commodity exchange are discussed. In terms of the consuming subject, the research approaches the multi-sided user, emphasizing the role of the prosumer. Whilst post-industrial views on the 'The Third Wave' (Toffler, 1980) evoke in great detail projections of the social changes required for transitioning from the consumer society towards the *prosumer society,* the role of prosumers has only recently been recognized as one of the five key defining features of the sharing economy, laying the ground for future research (Eckhardt et al., 2019).

Turning consumers into prosumers has long been the purpose of service-led industries. One particular example worth mentioning is that of McDonald's, where customers are put to work to eliminate the cost of employees (e.g., waiters). In Marxian terms, the prosumer of the sharing economy produces surplus value by licensing immaterial value such as knowledge, skills or time, and by reintroducing and circulating idle assets (or their functions) in the economy. One of the similarities between prosumption 2.0 and prosumption 3.0 seems to cover the producers of value, the users of the respective platforms in both cases.

Both prosumerism 2.0 and 3.0 constitute systems of exchange where abundance ("the growthmania") is the dominant paradigm, since value creation is accessible to anybody in various forms. As such, the "co-creative destruction" (Chen et al., 2012) becomes itself a process of prosumption, where platforms play an intermediary role between consumers, providers and the prosumers. However, there are a few notable differences in regards to innovation, especially when considering the tools of co-creation enabled by the platforms: content-creation tools and content-oriented algorithms on Web 2.0 (e.g. content creation formats such as Instagram Reels, meaningful interactions algorithm by Facebook), versus reputation-led ecosystems on Web 3.0 (e.g. reputation scores, user comments, platform badges). In respect to differences, scholars pinpoint towards the 'owner' of the capitalized resources: organizations and corporations on Web 2.0 (e.g. Amazon, Facebook, Google), versus provider-peers on Web 3.0 (e.g. hosts on Airbnb). As for the potential for profit, seems that on Web 2.0 profits still belong to corporations (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010, p.26), whilst on Web 3.0, the bulk of the profits return to providers (on individual level), but they are still split with the platform (on a collective level).

The notion of value is extensive, and as a result, there is broad literature from the fields of economics, philosophy and business trying to get a hold of its' meaning and underpin its' usefulness. According to Woodall (2003), consumers are referencing the term both in quantitative and metaphysical ways. Within the theoretical framework proposed for this study, the value aspects taken into consideration are built on both subjective and objective meanings, within the contextual limitations proposed by Smith. Considered a pivotal determinant of customer behavior, the perceived value was tied early on to the highest level of abstraction a product can receive. The most complex level is the payoff of the product to the consumer is depicted through a chain of benefits linked to the emotional payoff. In other words, customers perceive value as the relationship between what they "get" (benefits) relative to what they have to "give up" (costs or sacrifices) (Zeithaml, 1988). To explain consumer choices, five consumption values influencing consumer behavior were identified — functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value (Sheth et al., 1991). The proposed model is still the cornerstone of advancing theoretical or empirical models across various disciplines including economics, sociology, several branches of psychology and marketing and consumer behavior. More recent frameworks have captured the cost/sacrifice aspects, as well as business relationship values such as personal interaction or service support (Smith and Colgate, 2015, apud Park et al., 1986, and Ulaga, 2003). The limitations of these frameworks are contingent on how well they capture the construct of value, the sources of value and the customers' evaluation dimensions. Smith (1978) emphasizes the role of limited conditions (the context) in determining environmental, social and cultural factors as by utilitarian or economic considerations. Throughout the research, the conditional value is rooted in the reputation building practices necessary in the unprecedented context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Departing from the current observations and studies that reflect or bear on the existence of the gap in the literature, the third chapter presents the rationale for the research, highlighting the relevance of research, its aim and contributions. The research scope addresses the main gap in the scholarly literature regarding the role of reputation in the context of sharing economy. From conceptualization, to construct development and operationalization, the third chapter covers the mixed-methodology sequence by aligning the qualitative and quantitative research objectives of the study. The novelty and complexity of the research area drives the framing of the study as a guide for its conduct.

The research problematizes the interplay of reputation in the complex ecosystem of trust, value facilitation, user satisfaction and word-of-mouth. To provide a better understanding of

the research aim, both quantitative and qualitative studies are conducted by employing a sequential mixed methodology: the follow-up quantitative findings are led by the initial qualitative insights. The mixed methods study follows a sequential design, and separate objectives are addressed for a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. Current research in this area mainly focuses on the role of trust of one-sided users (consumers) and little research has been done on the provider's or prosumer's trust-building and reputation-building mechanisms in the sharing economy. To my knowledge, this is the only study that empirically validates and examines a conceptual model that takes into account the relationship between the constructs of reputation, trust, value dimensions, user satisfaction and word-of-mouth from the three-sided perspective of users (consumers, providers, prosumers).

The research was designed to explore the unfolding insights of the reputation and trust building mechanisms on collaborative consumption platforms and examine the role of value facilitation in the process. Given the geographic sampling and the size and depth of the study, definitive elements of both an exploratory and descriptive research design were required. The qualitative research helps give meaning to the data, while the empirical results can be generalized to contexts that are relevant to the area of study within different collaborative paradigms or socio-economic landscapes. The empirical study comprises both descriptive and inferential analysis of data. The design of the study guides the exploratory analysis of the characteristics of the population of the study in relation with the studied phenomenon of collaborative consumption, and relies on statistical tests to evaluate the existing relationships between the proposed variables and draw inferences from sample data to achieve the objectives of the study.

The sequential design allowed for data cross-examination, leading to the main findings. By exploring how reputation can play role in making strategic business decisions through user-oriented experiences, trust-building mechanisms and value co-creation facilitation, the main objective of the study is to construct the first of its kind model that incorporates all these elements into a cohesive and coherent theoretical and practical framework for the Romanian market.

To build true deductions about the theoretical framework in reality, the operationalization process involves measuring the values on the empirical indicators of the hypotheses to determine if the theoretically predicted values are achieved or approximated in the research test. In order to achieve reasonable levels of validity within the theory-research cycle, empirical indicators employed in testing the theory must have a reasonable level of reliability. The testing of an applied theory is an ongoing process and must result in continuous

refinement of the theory, by proving or improving the adequacy of the theoretical framework. In the process of identifying and developing the variables (set of indicators of items) for measuring the proposed underlying constructs, both reflective and formative scale measures were analyzed and adapted accordingly. In order to strengthen the construct validity, the construction of dependent and independent variables were previously validated, analyzed, pre-tested and CF modelled to avoid the influence of variables extraneous to the research context. Scale Reliability measurements, internal consistency reliability measurements were applied. Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability significant values were computed and validated for each construct. Moreover, due to the unique combination of factors that corresponded to theoretical constructs, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were employed to map the items and aggregate individual items into composite construct measures.

For the purposes of this research, the sharing economy's impact upon key foundations of reputation building processes through user experience and value appropriation, as well as the relational and transactional aspects of the decentralized system are being further explored.

The fourth chapter is concerned with the in-depth perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that Romanian millennials hold in relation to the sharing economy as a phenomenon, as well as their motivations and narratives around sharing economy platforms within the collaborative consumption pillar. The study aims to explore in depth the sharing phenomen, with the desire to uncover nuances of use of the collaborative platforms through users' thoughts, feelings and attitudes that are difficult to observe. The rather ample interrogative approach was conducted as an inquiry that will further help pinpoint towards measurable variables integrated with the proposed theoretical framework, leading to typologies and patterns that further help build subsequent quantitative scales, adapted to the particular context and sample. The lack of empirical studies on the development of the sharing economy in Romania requires an initial assessment with theory-development and instrument-development variants.

The originality of the study consists in creating unique comparative frameworks that consolidate differentiating patterns between traditional and sharing economy providers, applied to the particularities of the Eastern Europe culture and societies. The inductive and exploratory nature of the research design allow to outline the profile of the 'collaborative prosumer' in Romania, as well as to address the structural changes caused by unfamiliar and uncertain situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The originality of the study is given by the unique socio-economic context that prevails a first of its kind crisis that has ripple effects on multiple layers, such as consumption habits, reliance on technology, interpersonal trust,

safety related and health concerns. Moreover, the chosen socio-demographic profile allows for a comprehensive and ample, fairly unique exploratory study that aims to describe and analyze the characteristics of the collaborative consumption pillar among Romanians, with a focus on the Millennial user, amplifying cohort traits and characteristics as reflections of their digital lifestyles, within the sharing environment.

The results contribute to identifying salient factors and informing predictions about relationships in order to help develop testable hypotheses.

The fifth chapter embodies the chosen research topic: the role of reputation on the perceived trust, value outcomes, user satisfaction and word-of-mouth behaviors on collaborative consumption platforms. Guided by the first research objective, the study enabled the development of the user profile on collaborative consumption platforms, whilst identifying the main preferences and particularities of participation (platform types, usage particularities, user roles). In regards to the relationship system between reputation, trust, user satisfaction, word-of-mouth and the value aspects from the users' perspective, the research places the role of reputation in building trust and facilitating value applications in the collaborative consumption model, unraveling the direct and mediated effects on user satisfaction and word-of-mouth. Throughout the research, delimitations and relationship systems between reputation and different kinds of value are studied, analyzed and measured, thus contributing to the scale construction and validation of the first value facilitation framework adapted to the collaborative consumption model. Finally, the third objective was build around the contextual analysis of collaborative consumption in times of the pandemic. The novelty of the study also consists in depicting the changes in user participation levels during the Covid-19 pandemic, compared to pre-Covid times, within different socio-demographic groups. The originality and added value of the empirical research stands in the measurement and analysis of the conditional value of safety during Covid-19 pandemic in the sharing economy, a value scale that was constructed and validated for the first time in this study. The obtained results help generate typologies and patterns that further help build subsequent quantitative scales, adapted to the particular context and sample.

The significance of the study lies in the thorough and complex portrayal of the construct of reputation within the relatively new phenomenon of sharing economy, outlining its role in shaping decisions through trust-building mechanisms, value facilitation and user-oriented collaborative practices. The detailed investigation and analysis is at the forefront of reframing the 'global village' as a technologically-enabled system built around providing market value in dynamic socio-economic and cultural paradigms.

The chosen research topic emerged with the purpose of filling an awaited and long-anticipated gap in the scholarly literature within the field of sharing economy pertaining to the collaborative consumption pillar, in regards to reputation-building mechanisms and their impact on the value outcomes (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Eckhardt et al., 2019). Within the consumption value theory paradigm, practical applications in the field of sharing economy platforms are still missing. Moreover, the chosen socio-demographic profile allows for a comprehensive and ample, fairly unique exploratory study that aims to describe and analyze the characteristics of collaborative consumption among Romanians, with a focus on the Millennial user (Chapter 4).

The previously carried qualitative study, along with the thorough literature review helped shape the research problem around the user-perceived reputation on the different collaborative platforms by millennial users. The analysed data allowed me to identify several possible contributory factors: overall trust, perceived value aspects, user satisfaction and word-of-mouth. In addition, the socio-demographic variables ranged from user role, to frequency and longevity of use on five different types of platforms, along with age, gender, income, education and residence variables.

The research objectives are operationalized through research questions to which valid, empirically-proven answers are expected to be found by the end of the study. As mentioned, the novelty and complexity of the research area drives the framing of the study as a guide for its conduct. The quantitative study analysis aims to achieve "dependable knowledge" (Kerlinger, 1968, p.27) by employing working instruments and the tentacles of theory as a means for seeking solution to human problems (Nenty, 2009, p.23). The logical sequence of the study is presented below.

Findings highlight that there have been significant changes to the ways in which the virtual community of consumers are co-creating the process of business. As such, platforms rely on users to shape the reputational landscape, to the degree that a new paradigm of trust negotiation is not only in effect, but central to the rapidly evolving and technologically enabled collaborative socio-economic ecosystems.

The purpose of this research stems from the observation that collaborative consumption applications within the realm of the sharing economy require and rely on a good reputation to survive. Broadly correlated with deductive expectations of research strategy at different points throughout the execution of the study, the data analysis extends its' purpose of mapping the socio-demographic characteristics of the user profile on collaborative consumption platforms and pinpoints towards the particularities of the local phenomena, while also modeling how the

phenomenon is changed during unexpected situations where uncertainty and risk factors are increased (the Covid-19 pandemic).

Exploring the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of Romanian millennials in regards to collaborative platforms helped uncover the five main types of collaborative platforms they use: transportation, accommodation, food services, collaborative marketplaces and niche platforms.

The evolving nature of their relationships with these platforms signalled the existence of an emotion-driven attitude towards the use of the collaborative platforms that unveiled individual and social experiential expectations and oscillating value-risk perceptions. While many aspects related to advantages or obstacles of using sharing economy platforms intertwine with personal preferences that might or might not translate into traditional market allegiance, the perceived differences are a result of different angles and lenses the millennials display. Translated into motivations to use the collaborative platforms, the preferences and avoidant characteristics of the collaborative platforms align with digitalized lifestyles that shape perceptions around time management, relationships and the language of needs.

The attitudes towards sharing economy, in general, and towards sharing economy in Romania, in particular, as well as the main differences perceived in comparison with traditional actors are shaped by socio-cultural factors that go beyond the intermediary role of the platform. It often concerns economic shortcomings, political frustrations and infrastructure related requirements or personal pragmatic needs. More so, the unanticipability and unpredictability of the 'human' factor leads to either transcendental experiences of trust, connection, solidarity or hedonic benefits between peers, or to a spectrum of prejudices, social polarization, automatized relationing, and even antisocial behaviors.

The main driver of sharing economy platforms consists in its double-sidedness — and the roles that users can take (consumer, provider, or both) are interchangeable, shaping the role of the prosumer through the lenses of the access-community-platforms cores of the sharing economy and its linked behaviors. The platform dynamism as a service in itself shapes future research to reveal its' socio-economic, cultural and environmental dimensions. The fluidity of services is also keeping prosumers engaged in the sharing economy, which they can leverage more so than they would with traditional business models. In relation to the self-assumed roles of prosumers, the cyclicity and exponential growth of the collaborative platforms is a result of nurturing innovation through empathy engineering. Moreover, value perception, facilitation and mitigation can contribute to the successful development of a platform and its further impact on the society. In this sense, the conceptual model analysis revealed that out of

the eight dimensions of value, the 'Functional Value' is the only kind of value that has remained a predictor and not an outcome of Reputation, Trust, User Satisfaction and Word-of-Mouth. Incorporating aspects that are at the core of the digitized lifestyles (friendly interface, seamless user experience, quick process), the functional value is without any doubt the main promise of collaborative consumption platforms. To argue in favor of this statement, it's enough to remember the main functionalities of any such platform: search filter, price filter, pre-filled forms, personalized options, and the list can go on. Platforms do compete in providing the best digital experience, because it's part of their retention process. But as soon as it becomes the arching standard, there's no space to compete for function anymore. The most relevant example to validate this point is the analysis of the 'Psychological value'. Whilst most interviewees mentioned the importance of "minimizing costs" (i.e. saving time, saving effort), the actual levels of assigned value were very low in measuring their effects on the actual perceived reputation, trust, user satisfaction or word-of-mouth. One explanation could be anchored in the over-saturation and fulfilment of such needs by all platforms. As their main positioning, collaborative consumption platforms already strive and compete to innovatively solve the structural needs, problems, wants and desires of users that traditional players are lagging behind with. One of the most prominent values where collaborative platforms prove to be more advanced than their traditional equivalents is the security value: cyber-security systems evolve at such a fast pace that the problem of data security or payment guarantees are a thing of the past. Given the online habitat of the collaborative environment, the edge of technological innovation, alongside algorithm enhancements provides huge competitive advantages that are directly tied to reputation and word-of-mouth. The 'convenience economy' is strategically intertwined with the 'experience economy' in order to create experiential and social value for the users. Sharing economy platforms offer the means and tools to create unique user experiences. Strongly tied to hedonic consumption, consumer behaviour is influenced by the emotive aspects of one's experience with the products. While utilitarian information processing requires function, result and purpose, the experiential consumer seeks fun, enjoyment and pleasure. As a result, experiences are posited to hold a greater economic value than what goods or services can provide. The design of collaborative spaces aims to create 'entertailing' spaces (retail + entertainment) to stir interest and desire and promote positive attitudes and engagement in order to support the culture of (co-)production innovation and consumption behavior. Still, the sharing economy couldn't function without the underlying 'trust economy', as trust is a prerequisite for social and economic exchanges. Platforms leverage trust by building reputable brands, as well as by

intermediating and incentivizing reputation signalling between participants, through reviews, rating and other forms of trust building mechanisms. The mediation process through reputation and trust-building mechanisms is part of the general assessment experience, and constitutes a crucial role in shaping satisfactory interactions and transactions between users. Alongside reputation, trust is a driver of value creation, which leads to user satisfaction and word-of-mouth. Previous studies assess the importance of user satisfaction and word-of-mouth when transactions comprise intangible products or services. In the era of servitization, collaborative consumption is based on intangible benefits of idle products that are servitized (eg. accommodation, transportation). The research shows that word-of-mouth is one of the most influential information sources that affect consumer decision, expressed directly on the platforms through reputation signalling features (ratings, comments, reviews) or outside the platforms in social circles, thus attracting new users. This is why this study aims to trigger various modalities to incorporate value aspects into the design flow and satisfactory user experience on the collaborative platforms. Viceversa, the value aspects can be leveraged to build reputation, trust, user satisfaction or nudge word-of-mouth behavior, according to the provided model.

As such, building this data-driven framework brings tremendous value to academics and practitioners as it is ready to be implemented, tested and adapted to any platform type. Moreso, the sustainable competitive advantage lies in building communities around platform brands by leveraging purpose-driven values into their user-oriented services. That is to say, professional recommendations can be drawn from the research as to what values are most impactful to users, depending on the type of platform, on the age bracket of the main audience, or based on user role, frequency of use, or preferred device.

Finally, given the uniquely challenging context platforms face (the Covid-19 pandemic), the analysis extended to revealing challenges and opportunities in relation to the sharing economy phenomenon during a global crisis with multiple unforeseeable consequences that require different strategic communication and management approaches. The socio-cultural aspects of using sharing platforms in Romania during the Covid-19 pandemic were discussed. From personal responsibility, to social and societal expectations, from perceived values to lifestyle changes, the novel perspectives about the collaborative services add dimensionality and depth to understanding the sharing phenomena in this unprecedented context.

The limitations of this study are tied to theoretical and methodological constraints that derive from the lack of prior research studies on the topic, the unprecedented context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the sample size and the longitudinal effects on the study.

In terms of sample size, the number of the units of analysis was satisfactory to assess significant relationships between the variables. However, the sub-samples weren't uniformly distributed across gender and user roles. One explanation could be the real lack of equal distribution across user roles, or the law of large numbers. Still, the measurements were weighted across the study sample to ensure the validity of results. The novelty of the topic brings both advantages and disadvantages to the study. The opportunity to identify new gaps in the literature and to describe the need for further research is highly valuable to researchers and practitioners. The lack of prior research studies on the topic (reputation in the sharing economy, the role of reputation on collaborative consumption platforms, value dimensions facilitation, etc.) brought forward the need to lay a foundation for understanding the research problem through new lenses, relying on literature review for developing the conceptual framework and the research typology. In this sense, the pilot test helped refine the scales and guided the structure of the research to expand both on the exploratory and inferential data analysis methodologies. Finally, the longitudinal effect stems from the time available to investigate the research problem. Measuring change or stability in a fast-paced, dynamic, constantly evolving environment (sharing economy) is especially hard to achieve when the whole world is experiencing unprecedented changes and unpredictable outcomes. Keeping up with the adaptive responses of the platforms, together with the changing perceptions of users was a challenge that eventually contributed to refining the scales to a point where system stability was achieved in terms of variables relating to conditional circumstances. Limitations could point to the need for further research in areas where the pilot study raised questions, or towards gathering parametric data for richer information on context-related factors.

The thesis aims to tap into the emerging reputation economy, where the discussed aspects form a holistic view upon collaborative practices. From experience economy to trust economy, from social economy to solidarity economy, from convenience economy to on-demand economy, the collaborative economy englobes the 'anytime, anywhere, anyone' philosophy while constantly reshaping its multifaceted roles and functions, sweetening its technological edges with human insight.

Theoretical contributions

For theoretical contributions, this study aims to contribute to the growing literature on reputation and trust in the sharing economy context from the perspective of users and the particular roles they carry: customers, providers and prosumers. Current research in this area

mainly focuses on the role of trust of one-sided users (consumers) and little research has been done on the provider's or prosumer's trust-building and reputation-building mechanisms in the sharing economy. To my knowledge, this is one of the few studies that empirically validates and examines a conceptual model that takes into account the relationship between the two main variables (trust and reputation) from the three-sided perspective of users. Secondly, the research explores holistically the perceived and co-created value aspects belonging to the collaborative consumption platforms. Unlike previous studies that only focus on certain value types (i.e. functional), this research not only generates a very deep and broad in scope value outcome model, but measures and examines their effects on trust, reputation and user satisfaction. Third, this paper goes beyond narrow corporate reputation models contributing to the growing evidence on the effect of structural platform reputation on institution-based trust by confirming its legitimacy and applicability in the context of sharing economy. Fourth but not least, the reliability and validity of measurements regarding the constructs of reputation, trust, the measured value aspects, user satisfaction and word-of-mouth in the online environment proves that they are successfully adapted to technologically enabled collaborative, peer-to-peer socioeconomic ecosystems.

Practical implications

For practical implications, this study provides guidelines for sharing economy platforms and start-up companies within the realm of collaborative consumption to establish effective institutional mechanisms for their users. First, as a typical two-sided market connecting the demand and supply sides, the platform has a tremendous opportunity to learn about and enhance the levels of trust and usage by paying attention to the needs carried by each of the presented user roles: customer/consumer, provider/seller, and prosumer. Second, the platforms can recognize the role of reputation-building mechanisms in the overall organizational performance and further invest in reducing risk and privacy related issues, as well as in upgrading the social responsibility actions and their true impact. Third, the collaborative platforms and applications should further measure and adapt data-driven systems and functions and scientifically proven behavioral tools and features for value outcomes to contribute to the elevation of user satisfaction. Fourth, in order to achieve maximum levels of reputation, trust and user satisfaction, platforms should also pay attention to local factors, from advantages and disadvantages residing in socio-cultural attitudinal or behavioral patterns, to economic and political challenges and innovations.

The sharing economy platforms are expected to have major societal impact in the coming years, creating an aura of relevance around the study for academicians and practitioners altogether, from organizational researchers, to start-up founders in the collaborative space, to policy makers. While trying to fill the lack of qualitative and quantitative studies that explore collaborative consumption, further research is needed to investigate usage patterns, challenges and potential opportunities across different platform categories or socio-demographics.

While there are still underdressed research questions that derive from this particular research, there are many opportunities left to study the role of reputation within the sharing economy spectrum from various angles. There is still value to be covered on the other three composing pillars of the sharing economy (collaborative production, learning and financing), questions to be answered to in relation to value facilitation in the post-materialist society, and the notion of trust in a challenging times where priorities are changing on a personal and societal level.

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