

2023

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Recommended Citation

Althaus, Maike; Grieger, Nicole; Vorbohle, Christian; and Mueller, Michelle, "Business Models for Cultural Event Platforms – A Taxonomy Approach" (2023). *MENACIS 2023*. 2.
<https://aisel.aisnet.org/menacis2023/2>

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BUSINESS MODELS FOR CULTURAL EVENT PLATFORMS – A TAXONOMY APPROACH

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

The cultural event sector is an essential part of the global economy, and digital platforms have revolutionized how cultural events are promoted and commercialized. Cultural event platforms (CEPs) not only allow users to find events that might interest them, but also provide additional (data-driven) services. As these services offer new ways of creating, delivering, and capturing value, it is crucial for CEPs to develop an innovative business model to that end. However, this is currently challenging due to (1) a lack of empirical knowledge about possible business model elements and (2) significant differences among platform providers. To address these challenges, we propose a classification approach in the form of a business model taxonomy for CEPs. Using well-established taxonomy development methods, we conduct a literature review and analyze business models of existing CEPs. By capturing the various characteristics of CEP business models, our taxonomy enhances both innovation on and the financial sustainability of these platforms. This research informs practitioners developing and managing CEPs about the variety of business model characteristics they can choose from, thus providing the foundation for a cumulative stream of research on business models for CEPs. In future research, we will evaluate the robustness of the taxonomy.

Keywords: Cultural Event Platforms, Business Models, Taxonomy

1 Introduction

As technology advances, its impact on various industries of society becomes more prominent. The cultural industry, as one of the largest global sectors is also facing this development and is experiencing significant changes due to the rise of digital technologies (FMEAE, 2020). Digital platforms, in particular, have changed how cultural events are promoted and commercialized. Cultural event platforms (CEPs), such as Eventbrite ([eventbrite.com/](https://www.eventbrite.com/)) or UiTinVlaanderen ([uitinvlaanderen.be/](https://www.uitinvlaanderen.be/)), help users discover cultural events, especially in the vicinity (and beyond), and provide access to additional services such as ticketing systems. Moreover, with the help of advanced digital technologies such as predictive analytics and artificial intelligence (Davenport et al., 2020), CEPs can offer personalized and constructive recommendations based on user's preferences and past behaviors, showcasing the potential for data-driven services to enhance the vibrance and sustainability of the sector. The emerging cultural data space also presents new technological opportunities for data sharing and data sovereignty among CEPs (Acatech, 2023), potentially reducing editorial overheads and increasing the visibility of local artists. Digital technologies enable fundamental changes in the way CEPs operate and affect the company as a whole, including the transformation of processes, services, and business models (Wiesböck and Hess, 2020). The business model represents the focal business logic of a company

(Teece, 2010), and IS research has highlighted how powerful the concept is for understanding and mediating the linkage between technological advancements and attaining strategic business goals (Al-Debei and Avison, 2010). Digital innovation is not just about technology but also about the development of a business model that drives economic success. A moderate technology coupled with a great business model can create more value than a superior technology paired with a mediocre business model (Chesbrough, 2010). Put differently, in the words of Teece, “technological innovation does not guarantee business success – new product development efforts should be coupled with a business model defining their ‘go to market’ and ‘capturing value’ strategies” (Teece 2010, p. 183). Hence, although digital technologies are transforming the cultural industry and enabling new ways of creating value, it is crucial for companies to couple this technological progress with the development of an innovative business model (Li, 2020). Yet despite the huge potential of digital platforms, developing a financially successful platform business model is not an easy task (Yoffie et al., 2019). Each digital platform has to understand the network effects between both sides of the market (Beverungen et al., 2020) and, additionally, identify suitable and coherent business model elements to gain competitive advantages (Täuscher and Laudien, 2018). However, to the best of our knowledge, we currently lack empirical knowledge about specific business model elements for platforms in the cultural event sector, and, hence, how these platforms currently create, deliver and capture value. Moreover, there are significant differences between CEP providers, in terms of, for example, cultural domain focus, geographical scope, or government support. The cultural industry is shaped by cultural policy mandates in certain countries, resulting in government intervention and subsidies. Both products and platforms in this market receive partial state subsidies, highlighting the sector's heavy dependence on government support to provide access to culture for the population. Globally operating and profit-seeking platform providers with a broader cultural domain range might be able to commercialize different business models than local platforms with a focus on specific domains but not necessarily prioritizing profit. The lack of knowledge about existing business models and the fragmented and diverse landscape of cultural platforms present a major business model innovation challenge for platform providers, but also an opportunity to create a more sustainable and efficient ecosystem for cultural events. In order to address this gap, we illustrate the current configuration of business models in CEPs in the form of a taxonomy showing specific business model characteristics, thereby creating a foundation for the presentation and discussion of structured knowledge about business models for CEPs. Hence, the aim of this study is to answer the following research question: *What are the dimensions and characteristics of CEPs’ business models?* To answer this research question, we propose the development of a business model taxonomy for CEPs. Taxonomies are artifacts that describe and classify existing or future objects of a domain, and help researchers and practitioners to understand and analyze a domain. Business model taxonomies are specific types of taxonomies focusing on the classification and analysis of business models (Möller et al., 2021). Using well-established taxonomy development methods (Nickerson et al., 2013; Kundisch et al., 2022), we conduct a literature review and analyze business models of existing CEPs. Our final taxonomy captures various dimensions and characteristics of CEP business models, intending to offer valuable empirical knowledge for business model design and support the ongoing digital transformation process of the cultural industry.

2 Research Background

2.1 Business Model Research

Research on business models is a rapidly growing field and the concept's usefulness has been emphasized many times (Foss and Saebi, 2017; Massa et al., 2017). Since then, much effort has been made to formalize the term (e.g., Al-Debei and Avison, 2010), but definitions differ between disciplines and studies (Massa et al., 2017). Thus far, the concept’s evolution is broadly divided into three research strands, respectively focusing on: (1) the attributes of real organizations, (2) cognitive or linguistic schemas and, situated in between these two viewpoints, (3) formal conceptual representations (Massa

et al., 2017). We position our article in the latter strand of formal conceptual representations, and thus define a business model as the basic mechanisms through which a company creates value for the customer, brings its products and services to the customer's market, and thus generates profit (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010; Teece, 2010). Business model taxonomies are an essential part of business model research and are considered relevant in various industries (Möller et al., 2022). For instance, Remane et al. (2016) identified carsharing business models, clusters, and archetypical patterns that can be used for the systematic development of new business models. Möller et al. (2022) identified 31 papers presenting a business model taxonomy and summarized the prevalence and differences of business models, thus providing a comprehensive overview and provide guidance on how to create taxonomies in the context of business models. Five of the 31 business model taxonomies identified by Möller et al. (2021) deal with characteristics of generic digital platforms, including, for example, the differentiation of platform participants into, e.g., B2B, B2C or C2C (Perscheid et al., 2020).

2.2 Business Models, Platforms and the Creative Industry

The existing literature on business models in the cultural industry often focuses on analyzing the individual attributes of real companies (see Massa et al., 2017), and their competitive advantages, while neglecting the formal conceptual characteristics of business models, e.g., for CEPs. For instance, researchers have worked on developing business models for the French online press, creating three classes in which a press can be classified (Benghozi and Lyubareva, 2014), or developed a business model for e-funding in creative industries (Gui et al., 2017). Other studies have dealt with determining the potential of cultural industries in general (Anatolyevna, 2021), or with platform strategies in the movie industry (Trabucchi and Magistretti, 2020). Overall, most studies on value creation in the cultural industries provide great insights on specific attributes for business models, offering general recommendations for the cultural sector (e.g., Li 2020) or strategic advice for specific industries (e.g., Moyon and Lecocq, 2015). However, there is still a need for a comprehensive and structured classification approach of business model characteristics for CEPs. In this study, we address this research opportunity by developing a taxonomy of German language cultural event platforms.

3 Method

Developing a taxonomy is an established method in both the IS literature and business model innovation, as recent studies such as Weber et al. (2022), Bergman et al. (2022) and Szopinski et al. (2019) show. Taxonomies provide researchers and practitioners with a simplified way to communicate complex issues. In this study, we draw on established methods for developing taxonomies (Nickerson et al., 2013; Kundisch et al., 2022) as well as on a method for designing business model taxonomies (Möller et al., 2022) and conducted a three-step research approach: 1) defining the problem and target objects, 2) creating the taxonomy, and as a future step, 3) evaluating the taxonomy.

1) Defining problem and target objects: As our research objective is to identify the business model elements of CEPs, our focus is on CEPs that have identifiable information available about their business model. Additionally, we include the functions that CEPs must offer to effectively implement their business model. For this research, we defined the meta-characteristic as the conceptual representation of a business model for CEPs (Massa et al., 2017) and searched for any dimension or characteristic describing elements of the business model of platforms for cultural offerings.

2) Taxonomy development: To ensure the quality of our taxonomy development, we followed Nickerson et al.'s (2013) objective and subjective ending conditions. Objective ending conditions ensured that the taxonomy definition was met, with the exception of allowing multiple features in one dimension to better represent the complexity of a CEP's business model. Subjective ending conditions mean that the taxonomy has to be *precise, robust, comprehensive, extensible, and explanatory*. To refine our taxonomy, we conduct two deductive conceptual-empirical and an inductive empirical-conceptual iteration.

	Iteration 1	Iteration 2	Iteration 3
Approach	Conceptual-to-empirical	Conceptual-to-empirical	Empirical-to-conceptual
Value Proposition	Cultural Domain Range	Cultural Domain Range	Cultural Domain Range
	Key Value Proposition	Key Value Proposition	Key Value Proposition
Value Creation	Data Origin	Data Origin	Data Origin
	Price Discovery	Price Discovery	Price Discovery
	Review System	Review System	-
	Design Options for special needs	Design Options for special needs	-
	Geographic Functions	Geographic Functions	Geographic Functions
	Community Functions	Community Functions	Community Functions
	Ticketing	Ticketing	Ticketing
		Offered Services	Offered Services
Value Delivery	Technology Device	Technology Device	Technology Device
	Geographic Scope	Geographic Scope	Geographic Scope
	Registration Options	Registration Options	Registration Options
	Customer Relationship	Customer Relationship	Customer Relationship
	User Segment	User Segment	-
		Supply Segment	Supply Segment
Value Capture	Revenue Streams	Revenue Streams	Revenue Streams
	Revenue Source	Revenue Source	Revenue Source
	Business objective of operator	Business objective of operator	Business objective of operator
		Cost Structure	Cost Structure
Sum	16	19	16

Legend: = added or removed dimension in current iteration

Figure 1. Development of dimensions for CEPs business models.

1st iteration (conceptual-to-empirical): As a number of scholars have already developed various taxonomies to categorize and describe business models for different industries and technologies, we build on this literature as a first step. To identify business model taxonomies in the IS literature, we build on the review of Möller et al. (2022). Since their search only went up to 2021, we searched for literature in the IS domain from 2021 to 2022 with the same search criteria, thus collating a comprehensive and complete body of literature. We derived the initial dimensions and characteristics by meticulously reviewing the identified business model taxonomies relevant to our meta-characteristic (i.e., dealing with digital platforms or the creative industry). During this iteration, we added 16 dimensions, such as revenue streams, revenue source and the operators' business objectives (see Figure 1).

2nd iteration (conceptual-to-empirical): To further strengthen the focus of the dimensions and characteristics towards CEPs, we conducted another literature review using the database Web of Science. We first developed a search string dealing with the cultural context (e.g., culture, event, creative, etc.), the area of interest (marketplace, platform or industry), and business models (business model, value creation, value proposition, success factor, revenue), which we applied to title, abstract, and keywords. Of the resulting set of 104 articles, we identified 30 to be relevant, based on reading the title, abstract and (if necessary) the full text. The analysis of these 30 articles revealed three additional dimensions (i.e., cost structure, supply segments and services offered), alongside further characteristics, which we added to the dimensions identified in the first iteration.

3rd iteration (empirical-to-conceptual): For our third iteration, we thoroughly examined German cultural platforms based on literature and online sources. These platforms come in a variety of forms, from simple event calendars to platforms with advanced ticketing systems. We focused on the German market because Western industrialized nations have experienced an impressive cultural boom since the

1970s, resulting in a remarkable diversity of cultural offerings (Burton and Scott, 2003). To find the most relevant platforms, we conducted a thorough internet search (Google) and then consulted with an expert in the field. Thanks to her extensive network, we were able to expand our initial list and identify 23 German cultural platforms worth investigating and promising to provide valuable insights. We examined their business models in more detail and thus refined our taxonomy and excluded three dimensions that were not relevant to any of the CEPs in our set.

3) Taxonomy Evaluation. To ensure the completeness and reliability of our taxonomy, we plan a comprehensive evaluation in several stages, which we outline in detail in our discussion of future research in section 5 below. By taking this approach, we aim to enhance the robustness of our taxonomy, making it more accurate and useful for researchers and practitioners alike.

4 Preliminary Taxonomy

The resulting taxonomy of business models of CEPs currently contains 17 dimensions, each with two to eight distinct characteristics (Figure 2). In the following, we explain the taxonomy's dimensions and characteristics by providing detailed descriptions. As we have structured the dimensions based on the major building blocks of a business model according to Günzel and Holm (2013), we describe the dimensions along with the value proposition, value creation, value delivery, and value capture.

	Dimension	Characteristics				Exclusivity
Value Proposition	Cultural Domain Range	Film and Theater	Art and Exhibitions	Music and Dance	Humor	NE
		Sports and Leisure	Literature	Festivals / Parties	Other	
	Key Value Proposition	Ease of Use		Brand Awareness	Networking / Community Building	NE
		Search for Information		Complements	Ticketing	
Value Creation	Data Origin	Input by Supply Side	Input by Demand Side	Internal (by Platform)	External	NE
	Price Discovery	Full Discovery		Partial Discovery	No Price Discovery	ME
	Geographic Functions	Travel Time Filtering	Transport Options to Event	Location Link	Map	None
	Community Functions	Like	Follow	Calendar	User Reviews / Comments	NE
		Blog		Social Media Sharing	None	
	Offered Services	Streaming	Loyalty Program	Different Languages	Personalization	NE
		Ticket Alarm	Online Archive	CRM / Marketing	Event Statistics	
	Ticketing	Direct	Indirect	Secondary Market	Raffles	None
Value Delivery	Technology Device	Website		Mobile App	Both	ME
	Geographic Scope	Global	National	Regional	Local	ME
	Registration Options	For Users	For Creative Artists	For Both	None	ME
	Customer Relationship	Newsletter	E-Mail	Phone	Stores	NE
		FAQ	Chatbot	Social Media	None	
Supply Segments	Small Cultural Creators		Large Cultural Creators	Both	ME	
Value Capture	Revenue Streams	Commission Ticketing	Commission for (Data) Services	Subscription / Freemium	Commission Links	NE
		Advertising	Public Support	Donations	Other	
	Revenue Source	User	Creative Artists	Third Party	None	NE
	Cost Structure	Internal Maintenance		External Maintenance	Not Disclosed	ME
Business Objective of Operator	For Profit			Non-Profit		NE

Note: ME: Mutually exclusive, NE: Non-exclusive

Figure 2. Taxonomy of business models of CEPs.

Value Proposition

Cultural Domain Range: Which categories of cultural events does a given platform provide information about? For example, some CEPs promote music and dance events, while others present readings or other literary events. In total, we identified 8 cultural domains.

Key Value Proposition: What is the key value proposition that a given platform offers? Some platforms (e.g., rausgegangen.de) focus on networking and building/strengthening a community, whereas others focus primarily on ticketing (e.g., ticketmaster.com). We identified a total of 6 characteristics for this dimension.

Value Creation

Data Origin: Where does the information on the given platform originate from? The information found on CEPs can be generated by the cultural practitioners (artists), by those interested in culture (customer), by external third parties, as well as by the platform provider.

Price Discovery: Is the price for the event presented on the CEP stated accurately, does it give only a price range, or not specify the price at all?

Geographic Functions: What geographical functions does the platform offer? Some (but not all) platforms offer travel time filtering, provide possible transport options to the events, a link to the location, or they have their own map on their website.

Community Functions: What functions are given to support the maintenance of the community? Some platforms offer the possibility to like, follow, write reviews or comments, or communicate with the community via a blog. Other CEPs provide the function to share the calendar or social media sharing in general. Not all platforms offer options for interactions among the community.

Offered Services: What services are available via the platform that go beyond the activities associated with the value proposition? Here we have identified 8 different characteristics, including, for example, the offer of event streaming, or a ticket alert.

Ticketing: What kind of ticketing does the CEP offer? A distinction can be made between direct and indirect ticketing, raffles, secondary markets for already purchased tickets, and no ticketing service.

Value Delivery

Technology Device: What technology device does the CEP provide? Does it offer a website, a mobile app or both?

Geographic Scope: What geographic scope does the platform cover? Are global, national, regional or local events presented?

Registration Options: What options are there for registering on the platform? Can only users, creative artists, both or none of the above groups register?

Customer Relationship: Which channels are used for the customer relationship? Some platforms communicate via newsletter, e-mail, phone, stores or chatbots, while others rely on social media, FAQs on the website, or none at all.

Supply Segments: Is the CEP based on events offered by small or large cultural creators, or both?

Value Capture

Revenue Streams: How does the given platform generate revenue? In addition to commissions for ticketing, for (data) services or for links, the CEPs create revenue through advertising, public support, donations, subscriptions/freemium or other sources.

Revenue Source: Which CEP operator is the source of the revenue? Is it the user, the creative artists, a third party, or is there no revenue source?

Cost Structure: What is the cost structure of the CEP? The platform can be maintained internally by its own staff or externally. For some platforms, this information is not disclosed.

Business Objective of Operator: What is the business objective of the operator? A CEP can operate for profit or not-for-profit.

5 Discussion and Outlook

Our taxonomy of CEP business models is of great value to researchers as well as practitioners. By providing a systematic framework to classify different CEPs business models, our taxonomy helps to identify, understand, and systematically compare currently implemented business models in the market, and their specific elements. This is especially beneficial for entrepreneurs looking to start a new platform, platform managers innovating their existing business model, or venture capitalists potentially investing in a given platform. Our taxonomy also serves as a benchmark for platform operators to evaluate their innovation opportunities, identify strengths and weaknesses, and compare themselves to others to develop a competitive advantage. Therefore, our artefact provides an information for the business model innovation phases of ideation, prototyping and decision-making (Wirtz and Daiser, 2018). In addition, our taxonomy contributes to research on business models and cultural studies by providing a structured approach to classify and understand different platform business models, facilitating further knowledge creation and complementing the research strand on business model taxonomies (Möller et al., 2022). Thus, it promotes new insights into the cultural event industry and highlights current trends and opportunities. With this taxonomy we further contribute to uncovering fundamental business model constructs and relationships in this industry. This contribution will be extended in the future, e.g., through a planned cluster analysis, that will assist future researchers in the development of a taxonomic theory used to develop higher-level theories (Gregor, 2006; Varshney et al., 2015). In future research, we intend to place a strong emphasis on the demonstration, evaluation and applicability of our taxonomy. To achieve this, we will apply the rigorous 3-step approach proposed by Kundisch et al. (2022). The approach involves examining whether the created artefact is a taxonomy, whether it is applicable, and useful. To this end, we plan to investigate the objective and subjective ending conditions of our taxonomy and develop a comprehensive evaluation strategy using Sonnenberg and vom Brocke's (2012) evaluation criteria from Design Science Research. Our evaluation strategy will employ a variety of methods, including an out-of-sample CEP classification, focus groups, and expert interviews. By testing the robustness and understandability of our taxonomy with these approaches, we aim to ensure that it is not only accurate and useful, but also easy to understand and apply. The final taxonomy will provide guidance for stakeholders of the cultural industry about how to leverage the new opportunities brought about by digital technologies to develop financially sustainable and innovative CEP business models.

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