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TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

Despite significant contributions to comprehending the phenomenon of the sharing economy in the digital era, there is still a lack of clarity about what it is and how to describe and understand it. Information Systems (IS) theories for *explaining* and *analyzing* (Gregor, 2006) can help achieve definitional and theoretical precision here.

"Theory for explaining" (Gregor, 2006) makes statements that provide a lens through which the sharing economy can be viewed or understood. This lens can be the *digital transition of sharing* that explains today's sharing economy, hence rephrasing the term as the Digital Sharing Economy (DSE) to refer to this specific approach. This type of theory gives explanations for how and why things happened in a real-world situation. Theory for explaining can fit the interpretivist paradigm, whereby the theory itself is an end product, is neither predictive nor prescriptive, and does not offer testable propositions (Gregor, 2006). Furthermore, technology can be the primary construct, with various conceptions in terms of both its scope and role. Correspondingly, digital technology explains (the why and how of) the existence of the DSE. The statement of relationship, which includes causal relationships, can be formulated as: the DSE is a by-product of digitalization which has been the enabler for sharing a broad range of physical and non-physical resources (transition of the technical aspect of sharing) and for operating beyond the limits of small groups and personal relationships (transition of the social aspect of sharing) (Pouri, 2021a). The modalities of the digital transition of sharing are explained regardless of associated prosocial and ethical norms, which can as a result eliminate bias in defining and picturing the phenomenon.

"Theory for analyzing," also called theory for describing, "[s]ays what is. [It] does not extend beyond analysis and description. No causal relationships among phenomena are specified and no predictions are made" (Gregor, 2006, p. 620). It is descriptive, devoid of normative assertions, and not critical; it does not suggest recommendations or strategies. Theory for analyzing the DSE, rather, describes *what the phenomenon is*, identifies sharing interactions, and characterizes them by dissecting all their (potential) patterns and classifying the DSE variants in 5504 possible different types of sharing systems (4 types of resource providers * 4 types of resource receivers * 8 types of sharable resources * 43 types of sharing practices) (Pouri, 2021b). The analytic theory of the DSE goes beyond classifying sharing systems and outlines its domain by stating what it is precisely, along with the theoretical insights that round out the picture. These insights (e.g., sharing markets regulation, price of sharing, participation and collaboration dynamics, community self-moderation) are useful since they distinguish sharing platforms and their markets from formal and fully regulated markets/economies, other platforms, businesses, and initiatives.

Applying these two types of IS theories in the context of the DSE is essential and regarded as the building-block for further endeavors in both research and practice because precise and thorough knowledge of the phenomenon is the initial step for any future pathways.

References

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