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Types of Value in Digital Sharing Platforms

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

Consumers can achieve greater value in terms of access to goods when they use digital sharing platforms instead of owning and/or renting the goods in traditional marketplaces. In digital sharing business models, value creation and value capture are “shared” among the members of the network, distinguishing sharing from traditional business models (Reuschl et al., 2022). For users of sharing platforms, value is reflected in the perception of the worth of the sharing option relative to the non-sharing alternatives. In the context of sharing platforms, value co-creation is also a key concept. It refers to the collaborative creation and delivery of value whereby actors (here, participants in sharing) interact with each other to enable resource consumption and achieve mutual benefits. Users’ participation in sharing communities is of paramount importance for the success and sustenance of the community as well as the operation of platforms. Different types of value can be attributed to digital sharing’s heterogeneous platforms.

Participation in sharing is encouraged by its monetary value: to the user in the form of affordable access, and to the provider, in the case of peer-to-peer sharing models, as additional income earned from an asset. In addition, sharing offers the opportunity to enhance social experiences and build beneficial relationships. While making new connections is not the primary purpose or promise of sharing, research reports satisfaction with the relationships and new social networks that platform users develop with people they otherwise could have never met (Frenken and Schor, 2017). The altruistic value of sharing, which focuses on promoting pro-social values rather than seeking pure economic benefits, can be also evoked by platforms. Such sharing models often pursue missions to engender new practices that are commonly associated with sharing’s positive moral and pro-social connotations. Collaboration in sharing communities can be of emotional value for participants in terms of increasing their enjoyment and contentment. It can also result in increasing one’s self-fulfillment and life-enhancing values via promoting self-presentation, social identification, reputation, community belongingness, and the sense of being part of the mission and evolution of the digital sharing economy phenomenon. Above all, studies show that consumers in the sharing economy are more inclined to ecological sustainability and pro-environmental values of sharing compared to consumers of the conventional market (Roos and Hahn, 2017). Shared consumption enabled by digital platforms can optimize consumption processes by saving resources and increasing their life-time efficiency. This has the potential to create positive sustainability values in consumption practices and patterns.

Despite the perceived values of sharing, it is important to bear in mind that certain elements of platform-enabled sharing can decrease and erode value too. Value destruction prevents service functions from reaching their highest value (Singhvi et al., 2016). Instances of value erosion with respect to digital sharing platforms include promoting destructive and unfair competition within the sharing network, unequal access, inequality (e.g., peer-to-peer and platform-generated discrimination), low quality of services and poor value for money (due to lack of formal standard), as well as other associated risks with sharing such as endangering personal and public safety, privacy etc. With respect to the sustainability-oriented values of shared consumption, intensified use may be followed by faster degradation of resources and conditions whereby optimization values are partially or fully offset (for more, see Pouri (2021)). Therefore, it is important to conduct thorough evaluations with respect to sharing platforms and the values they create and destroy within their networks.

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