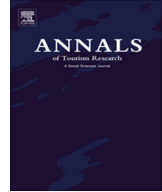




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## Research Note

## Current sharing economy media discourse in tourism



Mingming Cheng

*University of Technology Sydney, Australia*

This research note documents the current trends relating to sharing economy in tourism. It attempts to consolidate the new but fragmented and under-developed discourse on what impacts sharing economy has for tourism, and what further research inputs are required to harness the potential of sharing economy in tourism. By discourse, this note refers to the sense of “a large-scale, ordered, integrated way of reasoning/constituting the social world” (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000, p. 1125)—sharing economy in this case. Sharing economy describes the phenomenon as peer to peer sharing of access to under-utilised goods and services, which prioritizes utilization and accessibility over ownership, either for free or for a fee (e.g. Airbnb) (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015).

From international hotel chains to policy makers and academics, sharing economy has become the subject of attention and, to a degree, fear. The rapid and disruptive growth of sharing economy has left many unprepared and insufficient time for the tourism academic discourse to develop and mature. Researchers and practitioners kept to popular media for immediate and wide knowledge on sharing economy. While there are a number of articles that have been recently published in the tourism domain, the discourse in academic literature still remains under-developed and fragmented (Cheng, 2016). For instance, there is a currently naïve understanding of sharing economy as a concept within the tourism community (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015). Thus, there exists the need to document the current trends of sharing economy in the tourism academic community.

Tourism scholarship is not fully able, in its current state, to reveal the extent the sharing economy plays in relation to tourism (Heo, 2016). In particular, it fails to address complex social-cultural and social-economic categories, such as host-guest relationship, consumption practices and behaviors (Cheng, 2016). An opportunity for this kind of inquiry emerges in the context of understanding the current media discourse. Specifically, a close analysis of relevant news articles concerning sharing economy in tourism offers insights from which can be gleaned future trends and research directions to advance tourism researchers' and practitioners' understanding of the role sharing economy plays in the future of tourism field.

With this in mind, a total of 302 news articles from 47 international/national leading newspaper outlets (e.g. Wall Street Journal, The Guardian, and New York Times) from 2011 and 2015 concerning sharing economy in tourism were analysed by using the qualitative analysis software Leximancer as the concept of sharing economy did not enter the wide public discourse until 2011 (Martin, 2016).

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*E-mail address:* [Mingming.Cheng@uts.edu.au](mailto:Mingming.Cheng@uts.edu.au)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.07.001>  
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News articles appearing in national leading newspaper signals the issue’s relevance to the public and have the potential to affect public awareness and knowledge of this issue as well as the priority the government and politicians might give to it (Schmidt, Ivanova, & Schäfer, 2013).

Four broad areas of foci have been identified within the news articles including (1) Airbnb; (2) impacts on tourism socio-economic system; (3) People’s mobility; and (4) sharing economy start-up (Fig. 1).

While the themes of ‘Airbnb’ and ‘impacts on tourism social-economic system’ are not surprising, it clearly indicates the way sharing economy has started to transform our current tourism system. Its role of creating value for locals, tourists and other tourism service providers has been well acknowledged, some of which has been shared by our tourism scholars, particularly that sharing economy has incrementally helped visitors to access a wide range of products and services at a more affordable price (Shaheen, Mallery, & Kingsley, 2012), facilitated authentic encounters between tourists and locals (Molz, 2013; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2015) and contributed to employment and income of locals (Fang, Ye, & Law, 2016).

However, a consistent series of worries or fears have been reported concerning the explosive growth of sharing economy including increasing casualization of labor in tourism, avoidance of government regulation and fee regimes, the power of intermediaries in defining the rules and assigning risks, the threat to traditional tourism and hospitality businesses, and privilege of members

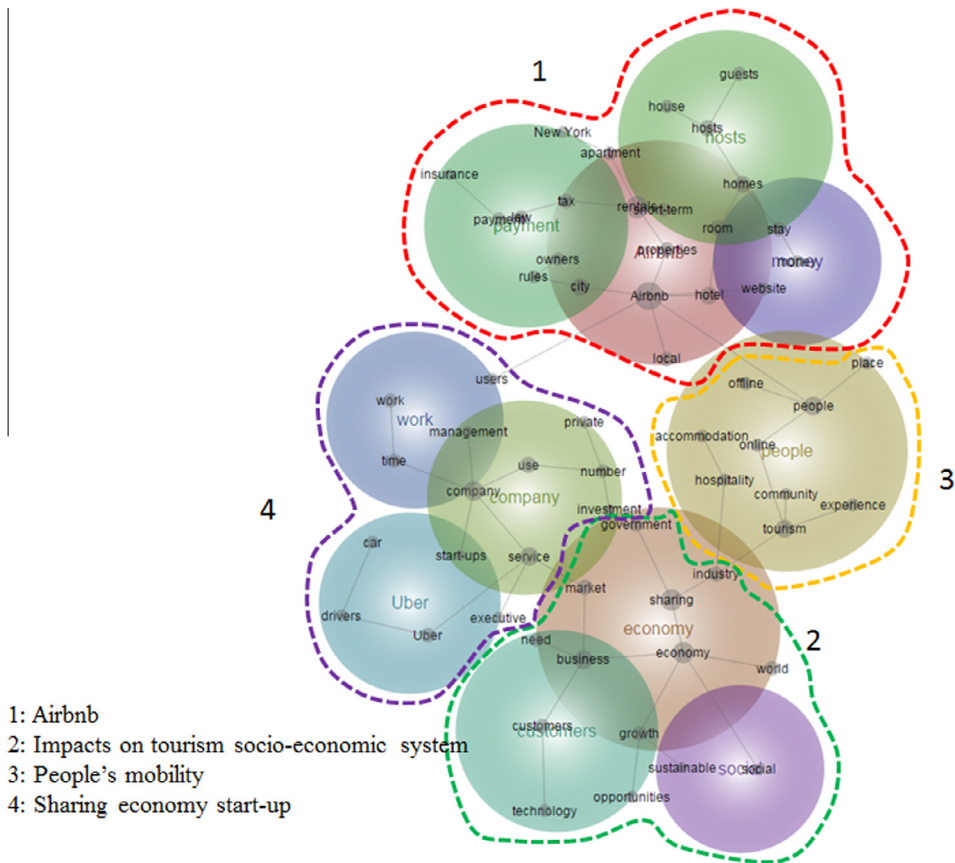


Fig. 1. Conceptual map of sharing economy media discourse. “The brightness of a concept label and circle reflects the importance of theme, while the size reflects the number of concepts. “Closely mapped concepts present a strong semantic relationship (Cheng, Edwards, Darcy, & Redfern, 2016; Smith & Humphreys, 2006).

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