



Framing the sharing economy: Toward a sustainable ecosystem

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ABSTRACT

The sharing economy has been a controversial phenomenon since its inception. This study employed the frame analysis method to examine and understand how the sharing economy is conceptualized in the news media discourse. A total of 340 online news articles regarding the sharing economy published between 2011 and 2017 were selected from 13 U.S. news entities. Six issue-specific frames and seven interest groups were identified to organize the whole public discourse of the sharing economy. Based on the frame analysis results, an ecosystem framework was proposed to display the underlying structure of the sharing economy. The findings reveal that the sharing economy is in its early stages and the ecosystem is not yet in healthy shape. Therefore, three strategies were suggested to pave the way for sustainable development of the sharing economy ecosystem: alignment to mutual interests, collaboration for shared success, and commitment to social responsibility.

1. Introduction

“Sharing economy” became a buzzword in the beginning of this decade due to the changing values and mindsets of the public and the development of technology-enhanced digital platforms (Cheng & Edwards, 2017). As an economic model, it enables individuals to share access to under-utilized goods or services for monetary or nonmonetary benefits (Belk, 2014; Ferrell, Ferrell, & Huggins, 2017). Although the sharing economy involves various products, services, and industries, the modern concept of the sharing economy gained popularity with the success of startups like Airbnb and Uber (Martin, 2016; Schor, 2016). Airbnb, the leading room-sharing company, was valued at over US \$25 billion, while Uber, the pioneer ride-sharing business, has an estimated value of \$62.5 billion (Telles, 2016). Thus, the growth of the sharing economy has always been interwoven with the tourism and hospitality industry (Cheng, 2016a).

The new sharing economy phenomenon has not only created new ways for individuals to generate income from their excess capacity of goods of services (Heo, 2016), but also changed the nature of product and service accesses and redefined the concept of ownership and employment (Ferrell et al., 2017). Proponents of the sharing economy extol its positive environmental impact, economic benefits (i.e., lower costs), and social benefits (i.e., increased social interactions) (Gonzalez-Padron, 2017; Schor, 2016). Nevertheless, the sharing economy has also invoked a series of debates as to whether this disruptive form of economy will lead to equitable and sustainable development of the

industry (Martin, 2016; Schor, 2016; Williams & Horodnic, 2017). Some major concerns of the sharing economy include the unfair competition between traditional businesses (e.g., hotels and taxis) and the sharing economy companies (e.g., Airbnb and Uber), the increasing casualization of the tourism and hospitality workforces, the elusion of government regulations, and the potential monopolization of the sharing economy companies (Cheng & Edwards, 2017; Williams & Horodnic, 2017).

Even though the sharing economy has become an ongoing concern for the tourism and hospitality industry, an extensive review of literature revealed the lack of a theoretical framework that explains its underlying structure and mechanisms of the sharing economy (Heo, 2016). Although previous studies have investigated the impact of the sharing economy on the tourism and hospitality industry (Cheng, 2016a, 2016b), they failed to address the holistic relationships among diverse parties involved in the sharing economy and the sustainable development of this new economy. Furthermore, given the immense impacts of this disruptive business model on the tourism and hospitality industry (Cheng & Edwards, 2017), both scholars and practitioners need a systematic understanding of the sharing economy.

Frame analysis is a classic theoretical method in mass communication research commonly used to interpret the basic conceptual and ideological framework of a specific social phenomenon (Morley, 1976). This social approach can be used to not only simplify and explain complex phenomena for the public, but also illustrate potential options and facilitate the decision-making process for policy-makers (Nisbet,

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2009). In order to understand and depict the organizing principles and underlying mechanisms of the sharing economy, the frame analysis approach serves as an effective tool in this study to uncover the news media discourse on this topic. By employing the frame analysis method, this study aims to address the gap in the literature by systematically assessing major news media coverage on the sharing economy. Specific objectives of this study are threefold: (1) identifying major frames, subframes, interest groups, companies, and sharing products in the selected news articles using the frame analysis method; (2) developing an integrated theoretical framework to reveal the systematic structure of the sharing economy; and (3) providing suggestions and insights to tourism and hospitality scholars and practitioners on how the sharing economy can achieve healthy and sustainable development.

To achieve the research goals, this paper proceeds with a review of literature in frame analysis and the share economy. In the methodology section, details regarding research design, data collection, and frame coding are explained. Subsequent sections discuss the results of frame coding and propose an ecosystem framework of the sharing economy. Finally, the conclusion and implications of this study are provided.

2. Literature review

2.1. Frame analysis

The idea of frame analysis originated from the work of Goffman (1974, p. 21), who defined frames as “schemata of interpretation” that can be used to decode the structure of experiences in individuals' social lives. Minsky (1977) considered frame as a mental representation of human knowledge of the world that is made up of layers, with high level frames providing more generality and lower level subframes adding more details. Later in the mid-1980s, frame analysis was advanced and applied extensively to social movement studies, shifting the focus toward how actors actively engage in the production of social issue meanings (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Since the early 1990s, the use of frame analysis has grown in media and communication studies to examine the way in which news is socially constructed (Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011). Frames are defined as aspects of a perceived reality that is made more salient in a communicating text in order to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). In other words, frame analysis reveals how people talk and think about a social issue “by examining how they think and talk about issues in the news” (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, p. 70). The goal is to understand how certain idea elements are linked together into packages of meaning and deployed in discursive activities in the news (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Different frame analysis methods have been reported in the previous literature. Frame analysis methods can be broadly grouped into two categories: issue-specific frames and generic frames (de Vreese, 2005). Issue-specific frames are pertinent only to specific topics or issues (de Vreese, 2005). For example, Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, and Fan (1998) identified four issue-specific frames of US national budget deficit in newspaper reports: talk, fight, impasse, and crisis. Shah, Watts, Domke, and Fan (2002) identified three issue-specific frames of Clinton presidency in the news discourse: Clinton behavior scandal, Conservative attack scandal, and Liberal response scandal. On the other hand, generic frames describe structural aspects and general features of news that can be applied across different topics and issues (de Vreese, 2005). For example, Iyengar (1991) proposed an episodic-thematic frame typology - the episodic frame focusing on one specific event while the thematic frame placing social issues in a broader context at the societal or governmental level. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) developed another commonly used frame typology: conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, morality, and economic consequences.

2.2. Frame analysis in tourism and hospitality

In the early 2000s, Santos and her colleagues employed frame analysis to explore socio-cultural aspects of tourism by revealing the ideological forces shaping tourism representations (Buzinde & Santos, 2008; Santos, 2004). For example, Santos (2004) identified both traditional and contemporary frames used in U.S. news articles to portray Portugal as a tourism destination. Buzinde and Santos (2008) distinguished regional politics and economy and the prowess of the white gentry as the two dominant frames of slavery emphasized in promotional materials of a cultural heritage site. Pan and Ryan (2007) analyzed New Zealand's image in print media reports and identified nature, adventure, and culture as the three master frames of destination image. Pan, Tsai, and Lee (2011) identified that atmosphere and leisure/recreation were the two most salient frames of New Zealand's image in two TV commercials.

More recently, the application of frame analysis in tourism and hospitality was expanded to other social and political issues. For example, Wu, Xue, Morrison, and Leung (2012) explored the Golden Week holiday policy reform in China and pinpointed six issue-specific frames: welfare and rights, economic effects, tourism development, distribution of power, policy-making, and cultural evolution. Pan and Ryan (2013) studied public policy changes in a film-induced heritage site in Hong Kong shaped by news media and identified three issue-specific frames: urban renewal, protect business profit, and conservation. Liu and Pennington-Gray (2015) applied two types of generic frames in examining the bed bug issue featured in news coverages. One was episodic-thematic frames and the other was health crisis-related generic frames. Carey and Mason (2016) investigated event crisis management in the 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games and used four generic frames: attribution of responsibility, conflict, consequences, and human interest.

2.3. The sharing economy

The concept of the sharing economy, often referred to as collaborative consumption, can be traced back to Botsman and Rogers's (2011) book, which defined it as “a system activating the untapped resources of assets through models and marketplaces that enable greater efficiency and access” (p. 24). A variety of definitions of the sharing economy are available in literature (Richardson, 2015). Dredge and Gyimóthy (2015) listed 17 terms related to the sharing economy, including sharing economy, social sharing, collaborative consumption, and peer-to-peer economy. They framed the sharing economy around the three metaphors: models of economic systems, human coexistence, and efficiency. Frenkena and Schor (2017) distinguished the sharing economy from the other types of platforms as it has the three defining characteristics: consumer-to-consumer interaction, temporary access, and physical goods. Although central to all definitional terms is the contested meaning of the word sharing (Belk, 2014), Ranjbari, Morales-Alonso, and Carrasco-Gallego (2018) extracted 11 common features characterizing the sharing economy from 67 different definitions in the literature. They then proposed a comprehensive definition for the sharing economy: an economic system in which an online platform connects the supply and demand sides to facilitate transactions of giving temporary access to idle resources. Thus, in the sharing economy, businesses utilize information technology to connect consumers with demands to providers with excess capacity (Gonzalez-Padron, 2017). Schor (2016) categorized sharing economy products into four main types: recirculation of goods, like eBay and Craigslist; increased utilization of durable assets, like Airbnb and Uber; exchange of services, like TaskRabbit and Zaarly; and sharing of productive assets, like Hackerspace and Skillshare.

Recently, the sharing economy has inspired research interests in the tourism and hospitality fields. The rise of P2P accommodation rentals has especially led to a plethora of studies on Airbnb, the most famous

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