

# 14 Rethinking Tourism Models in the Platform Era of the Sharing Economy: Implications for tourism marketing and management

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## Introduction

Over the last three decades, tourism has experienced significant changes due to the emergence of digital platforms and services, which have transformed the industry and its associated ecosystem (Briel & Dolnicar, 2021; Buhalis et al., 2020). Digital platforms have emerged progressively as competitors for long-established (physical) suppliers of goods and services traditionally provided locally or via agencies, and often using face-to-face communication. Since its inception, tourism has been a key contributor to the economy as well as an early adopter of new technologies aimed at enhancing customer satisfaction (Buhalis et al., 2019). Not surprisingly, the sharing economy has capitalised on tourism's favourable pre-disposition towards innovative technologies by developing a number of online platforms, which have grown rapidly to become household names (e.g. Airbnb, Couchsurfing, ToursBy-Locals, EatWith, and SocialCar, among others). However, the homogeneous term 'sharing economy' encompasses, mostly, a myriad of online relationships and activities by individuals and organizations (Reinhold & Dolnicar, 2021). This rather eclectic phenomenon includes different types of exchange and interaction between individuals, who rent, lend, trade, barter, or swap goods, services, transportation solutions, space, or money using the Internet as their main channel for this (Möhlmann, 2015).

Although the sharing economy has become a key factor in the new tourism ecosystem, where sharing economy platforms often co-exist with other forms of digital platforms beyond this concept, there appears to be a growing level of confusion among practitioners and scholars alike with regards to which elements of this ecosystem actually belong to the sharing economy and which do not, arguably due to a lack of demarcation. For instance, even though the sharing economy (Altinay & Taheri, 2019; Priporas et al., 2017) is largely understood and acknowledged as a wide-spread phenomenon, conceptual synonyms have also emerged. However, the lack of consensus with regards to the use of these terms to categorise elements of the wider sharing economy remains arguably a source of confusion for scholars and policy-makers alike, which has contributed to the development of negative perceptions of the sharing economy (Curtis & Lehner, 2019).

This chapter seeks to develop a better understanding of this field of knowledge as well as its future development. The sharing economy represents a key source of innovation for tourism, particularly with regards to rethinking and redesigning existing practices and business models for the sector. This chapter attempts to shed new insights on the key themes underpinning the sharing economy in general and, more specifically, its relevance to tourism marketing and management. Although currently there is a wide range of businesses that tend to converge towards the platform economy, it is envisaged that in the medium to long term, discussions trying to differentiate the platform economy from the sharing economy may become obsolete and even redundant.

From a methodological perspective, this chapter offers a review of the literature on this topic.

## **The rise of digital platforms and the sharing economy in tourism**

Over the last decade, the tourism sector has undergone a significant shift, due to the emergence of digital platforms and services, which have led to a profound transformation of the tourism ecosystem. The sharing economy has developed progressively to become a viable alternative to more traditional suppliers of goods and services in tourism (Hu et al., 2019). This has been driven primarily by the development and proliferation of digital platforms (Leung et al., 2019; Schor, 2016), which today range from peer-to-peer accommodation (e.g. Airbnb, Couchsurfing, 9flats...), to tour guiding (e.g. ToursByLocals), hospitality (e.g. EatWith) and transport (e.g. SocialCar, Uber, Zipcar) among others (OECD, 2016).

The term 'sharing economy' has been used in recent tourism studies to refer to a myriad of exchange relationships and customer trends in tourism, which include tourists, tourism destinations and online providers. However, this concept lacks a clear set of boundaries (Hossain, 2020). Although the sharing economy (Belk, 2014; Sundararajan, 2013) is largely interpreted as a wide-spread phenomenon, scholars have referred to it using a large number of conceptual synonyms such as the 'collaborative economy' (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Kovács, 2021), 'collaborative consumption' (Möhlmann, 2015), 'access-based consumption' (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), the 'peer economy' (Briel & Dolnicar, 2021) or the 'platform economy' (Dann et al., 2020; Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Rogers, 2016; Salet, 2021), among others. More specifically, and mainly referring to smaller-scale initiatives, terms such as the 'gig economy' (Friedman, 2014; Woodcock & Graham, 2019; Page-Tickell & Yerby, 2020), and the 'on-demand economy' (Berg, 2016; Gurvich et al., 2019) have also been used.

The sharing economy involves different types of exchange between individuals, though scholars (e.g. Dolnicar, 2017; 2019; Reinhold & Dolnicar, 2021) have pointed out that the term 'sharing economy' may be misleading in this respect as not all of these exchanges are carried out between equals. On the other hand, the concept of 'peer-to-peer economy' does imply that the exchange (monetary or in kind) is carried out between equals (Wirtz et al., 2019) and that these exchanges may be of a non-commercial nature.

Various studies have attempted to define the sharing economy concept, as shown in Table 14.1. Building on this, Eckhardt et al. (2019) identified a series of characteristics common to all these definitions, which revolve around the concepts of temporary access, transfer of economic value, platform mediation, expanded consumer role, crowdsourced supply, reputation systems and peer-to-peer exchanges. On that basis, Eckhardt et al. (2019) defined the sharing economy as "*a scalable socioeconomic system that employs technology-enabled platforms to provide users with temporary access to tangible and intangible resources that may be crowdsourced*". However, a higher level of complexity arises when trying to differentiate between what the sharing economy is and what it is not. Furthermore, a rather nebulous line appears to exist when trying to demarcate the sharing economy from the mainstream economy (Täuscher & Kietzmann, 2017).

**Table 14.1:** Sharing economy definitions

Source	Definition
Lessig (2008, p. 143)	Collaborative consumption made by the activities of sharing, exchanging, and rental of resources without owning the goods.
Bardhi & Eckhardt (2012, p. 881)	Transactions that may be market mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place.
Lamberton & Rose (2012, p. 109)	Marketer-managed systems that provide customers with the opportunity to enjoy product benefits without ownership. Importantly, these systems are characterized by between consumer rivalry for a limited supply of the shared product.
Botsman (2013)	An economic model based on sharing underutilized assets from spaces to skills to stuff for monetary or non-monetary benefits.
Heinrichs (2013, p. 229)	Economic and social systems that enable shared access to goods, services, data and talent. These systems take a variety of forms but all leverage information technology to empower individuals, corporations, non-profits and government with information that enables distribution, sharing and reuse of excess capacity in goods and services.
Stephany (2015, p. 205)	The value in taking underutilised assets and making them accessible online to a community, leading to a reduced need for ownership.
Kathan et al. (2016, p. 663)	This so-called sharing economy phenomenon is characterized by non-ownership, temporary access, and redistribution of material goods or less tangible assets such as money, space, or time.
Sundararajan (2016, p. 23)	The sharing economy is an economic system with the following five characteristics: largely market based, high impact capital, crowd based networks, blurring lines between the personal and professional, and blurring lines between fully employed and casual labour.
Puschmann & Rainer (2016, p. 95)	The use of an object (a physical good or service) whose consumption is split-up into single parts. These parts are collaboratively consumed in C2C networks coordinated through community-based online services or through intermediaries in B2C models.
Habibi et al. (2016, p. 277)	An economic system in which assets or services are shared between private individuals, either for free or for a fee, typically by means of the Internet.
Hamari et al. (2016, p. 2049)	The peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services.
Frenken & Schor (2017, pp. 4–5)	Consumers granting each other temporary access to under-utilized physical assets ('idle capacity'), possibly for money.
Narasimhan et al. (2018, p. 93)	The recent phenomenon in which ordinary consumers have begun to act as sellers providing services that were once the exclusive province of ordinary sellers.
Arvidsson (2018, p. 289)	A new arena of economic action that builds...on common resources that are in themselves not directly susceptible to market exchange.
Perren & Kozinets (2018, p. 21)	A market that is formed through an intermediating technology platform that facilitates exchange activities among a network of equivalently positioned economic actors.
Eckhardt et al. (2019, p.5)	A technologically enabled socioeconomic system with 5 key characteristics (i.e., temporary access, transfer of economic value, platform mediation, expanded consumer role, and crowdsourced supply).

Source: adapted from Eckhardt *et al.*, (2019)