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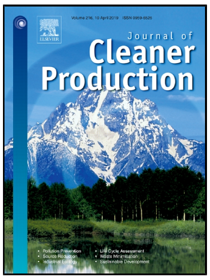

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Sharing Economy Revisited: Towards a New Framework for Understanding Sharing Models

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Abstract

In recent years, several scholarly attempts have been made to conceptually outline the contours of the sharing economy. However, there is still limited consensus on fundamental characteristics of sharing models, the markets they create, and the controversies surrounding them. Based on an assessment of existing typologies of the sharing economy, this paper outlines a new theory-driven framework for describing and analyzing business-to-consumer and peer-to-peer sharing models that draws on the nascent literature of partial organization. Emphasizing the core organizational characteristics of sharing models (membership, rules, monitoring, sanctioning, and hierarchy), this new framework moves beyond existing definitions and scales used to map and analyze the fast-growing sharing economy field.

Keywords: Sharing economy; Collaborative consumption; Business model; Business-to-consumer; Peer-to-peer; Partial organization; Conceptual boundaries.

1. Introduction

The sharing economy has recently become a popular umbrella construct for a wave of new renting, leasing, bartering, and pooling services linked to different aspects of life, including lodging, transportation, work, leisure, and fashion (Acquier et al., 2017; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Frenken and Schor, 2017; Plewnia and Guenther, 2018). Examples of new sharing models include *Airbnb*, *Couchsurfing*, *eBay*, *Grabshare*, and *Poshmark*. While the meaning and content of the sharing economy remain debated, we follow Acquier et al. (2017) and tentatively define the sharing economy as an umbrella construct for a variety of for-profit and non-profit, business-to-consumer and peer-to-peer setups that enable the compartmentalization of ownership and the usership of goods, skills, and services. Compartmentalization of ownership and usership pertains not only to separating ownership from usership (i.e., who makes use of a product does not have to own it and vice versa), but also entails a temporal dimension in the sense that ownership and usership can be traded, passed on, and occur sequentially. Although this compartmentalization can be arranged between various actors (e.g., businesses, private users, and governments; Choi et al., 2014; Olson and Kemp, 2015; Plewnia and Guenther, 2018), we emphasize business-to-consumer and peer-to-peer (also called consumer-to-consumer) sharing models in this paper, as these are the most discussed and best documented models in the current literature.

Overall, the sharing economy is said to represent a broader trend from an asset-heavy ownership era to an asset-light sharing era where the possession of "stuff" is no longer "(…) the ultimate expression of consumer desire (…)" (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012, p. 881). From a historical perspective, sharing is in itself not a new phenomenon and has always been an integrated part of everyday life (e.g., Benson, 2007; Gregson and Beale, 2004). However, advances of the Internet and mobile technology imply that sharing moves from the private sphere and personal networks to online/offline exchanges among strangers, i.e., new technologies allow sharing models and businesses to experiment with new organizational forms, adding further variety to the already very heterogeneous sharing models.

The rise and resulting plurality of the sharing economy are not without controversy. According to Codagnone et al., "the phenomenal growth of a few large commercial 'sharing' platforms, the increasing number of economic sectors affected, and conflicting interests among the stakeholders involved have made the 'sharing economy' a domain of conflictual rhetoric and public controversies, legal disputes, and even violent protests" (Codagnone et al., 2016, p. 6). Advocates typically argue that the sharing economy holds enormous untapped business potential, offers new and flexible job opportunities (in the so-called "gig economy"), and contributes to a better environment by optimizing the use of underutilized assets (Botsman and Rogers, 2010; Cohen, 2014; Gansky, 2010; WEF, 2013). On the contrary, critics view the sharing economy as a questionable phenomenon that threatens existing markets and institutions (Martin, 2016; Morozov, 2013; Netter, 2016).

The "sharing economy" concept itself also gives rise to debate, as there is little scholarly consensus about its definition and core building blocks (Acquier et al., 2017; Codagnone and Martens, 2016; Plewnia and Guenther, 2018). For instance, Belk (2014) criticizes existing definitions as being too broad and mixing marketplace exchanges with gift giving and sharing. To improve conceptual clarity, a number of typologies have therefore been developed to order and make sense of the different types of sharing. Distinctions are made, for instance, between pecuniary/non-pecuniary, for-profit/non-profit, conjoint/individual, true/pseudo, communal/commercial, physical/virtual, and two-sided/multi-sided sharing (Belk, 2014a, 2014b; Cohen, 2014; Hagiu and Wright, 2013; Netter, 2016). While these recent contributions arguably provide useful insights about the sharing economy, they are also indicative of a literature at an embryonic stage, which is still searching for a more solid conceptual foundation (Acquier et al., 2017).

The objective of this paper is to outline a theory-driven framework of sharing models and the markets they serve. Drawing upon the emerging literature on "partial organization" (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011; Ahrne et al., 2014), this paper explains how the five core dimensions of organizing (membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions) play a pivotal role in organizing the continuum between purely user-driven (communal) and purely platform-driven (commercial) sharing models. The new framework allows for description and analysis of the fast-growing sharing economy phenomenon without indulging in speculations about strategic intent and normative ideals of what sharing should be. The new framework is not above reproach but provides a useful starting point for empirical studies and further theoretical development of the emerging field of sharing.

The development of our framework builds on the observation that existing classifications are often phenomenon-based rather than theory-based and remain largely silent about the fundamental organizational characteristics underlying the sharing models. Moreover, while existing classifications arguably provide valuable insights into the conceptual understanding of the sharing economy, they often focus on one or two dimensions only (e.g., ownership type and ownership motivation; Cohen, 2014) while leaving out a number of other factors that hold analytical and explanatory power. Consequently, there is currently a lack of insights into the broader organizational characteristics that can be used to describe and analyze sharing models. For instance, the tensions and debates surrounding sharing models (e.g., *Airbnb* and *Uber*) may well be rooted in imbalances within and between the core organizational components (membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions) and the ways in which they have been communicated to stakeholders. The notion of partial organization (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011; Ahrne et al., 2014) offers a useful theoretical framework to analyze and explain the composition of, and eventual imbalances between, the organizational features of sharing models, which in turn can improve our understanding of the tensions and debates related to different approaches to sharing and collaborative consumption. Therefore, in this paper, the partial organization perspective is used to outline a new conceptual framework to analyze and explain sharing economy models. In the discussion section, we will discuss the strengths and future work needed to better understand sharing models as partial organizations.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We briefly explain our approach to developing the conceptual framework before we introduce major definitional challenges and normative debates surrounding the sharing economy and its different business models. This is followed by an outline of our multidimensional, conceptual framework for understanding sharing models, which is structured around the emerging academic literature on partial organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011). The framework is supplemented with concrete case examples of sharing models serving as "strategic narratives" for illustrating the individual components of the new framework (Dahan et al., 2010). The paper concludes with a discussion of the presented conceptual framework and points to avenues for future research, such as applying a more distinguished stakeholder perspective and paying more attention to the role of agency when it comes to different practices and models of sharing.

2. Framework Development

Before we discuss the definitional and normative peculiarities of sharing models and introduce the notion of partial organization, we briefly explain our approach to outlining our conceptual framework. Following the discussion of the importance of conceptual research by Meredith (1993) and others (e.g., Whetten, 1989, 2009), the development of conceptual frameworks is a necessary step between the description of a new phenomenon (e.g., the emergence of commercial sharing and collaborative consumption; Belk, 2014a) and the development of theories to explain and predict this phenomenon – or facets of it (e.g., the influence of local context on sharing models' stakeholder value creation effects; Dreyer et al., 2017) – as the research field evolves along the so-called "normal research cycle" (Meredith, 1993). The normal research cycle is a continuous iteration between phases of description, explanation, and testing with the purpose of developing and refining theory (Figure 1). Meredith argues that conceptual models and frameworks are needed to move from one phase to another.

According to our reading of the literature, most current research on sharing is in a transitory stage between description and explanation (the overview paper by Acquier et al., 2017, is a case in point). Conceptual frameworks are needed to reflect upon the knowledge available in this field and to prepare next steps (including proposition testing and theory development).

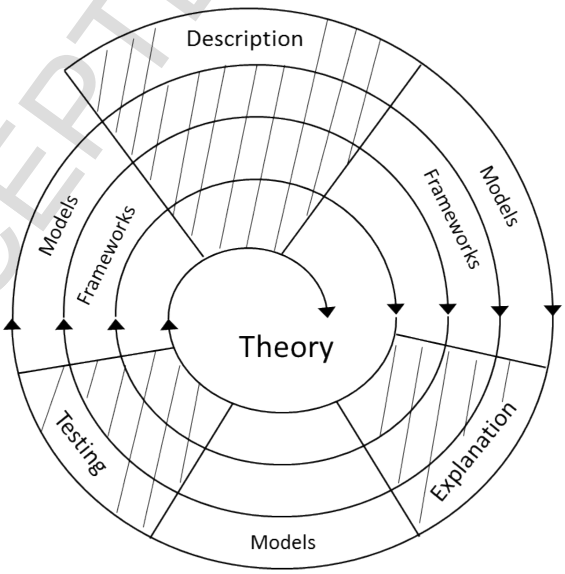

Fig. 1. The normal research cycle and role of conceptual research (source: Meredith, 1993).

Conceptual research involves the development of concepts, models, and frameworks, where a "concept is a bundle of meanings or characteristics associated with certain events, objects, or conditions" and a "conceptual model is … a set of concepts, with or without propositions, used to represent or describe (but not explain) an event, object, or process" (Meredith, 1993, p. 5). Conceptual frameworks are different from concepts and conceptual models in that they are developed for explanatory purposes, i.e., as a form of pre-theory. Frameworks can result from induction, i.e., inferring conclusions from occurrences of a phenomenon, or deduction, i.e., from theoretically grounded predictions about a phenomenon (ibid.). The framework outlined in this paper is deductive in nature. It connects (i) major conceptual dimensions from partial organization theory (membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions) and (ii) major types of sharing models (user-driven/communal and platform-driven/commercial). The resulting conceptual framework offers a new means to analyze sharing models as "more complete" or "more partial" organizations and to better explain and predict, for example, tensions that may result from an imbalance in their organizational features (e.g., informal rules in combination with explicit mechanisms of behavioral control).

Therefore, selected sharing classifications and major dimensions of partial organizations are introduced. In the second step, both perspectives are merged as a new framework taking the shape of a 5x2 matrix that represents a unification of multiple continua of sharing model characteristics that are discussed in the sharing economy literature. This new framework represents an important consolidation stage in sharing economy research. It follows from Meredith's (1993) argumentation that this work is needed to facilitate the movement from empirical observation to conceptual consolidation and theorizing, which can, in turn, be applied to new empirical observations, and so on. Seen from the perspective of the normal research cycle (Figure 1), conceptual research on sharing models has an important function in the quest for a better understanding of the sharing economy and new approaches to facilitating production and consumption in the 21st century. New conceptual consolidations are indispensable for revealing incompletely-described phenomena (cf., Meredith, 1993). As will be shown in the next section, such phenomena obviously exist in the case of sharing models.

3. Understanding Sharing Models

In the last decade, the advances of the Internet and mobile technology have given rise to a phenomenon, which we have come to know as the "sharing economy" (Acquier et al., 2017; Botsman and Rogers, 2010). In general, the phenomenon encompasses a variety of different products and services that are distributed or accessed by sharing or through collaborative practices. Today, it is possible to find sharing models in practically every sector including transportation, healthcare, financial services, food, fashion, telecommunications, construction, etc. (Muñoz and Cohen, 2018; Olson and Kemp, 2015). Examples range from platforms facilitating short-term rentals (e.g., *Airbnb*) and ridesharing (e.g., *BlaBlaCar*) to tool sharing or fashion swapping. Historically speaking, sharing practices have always been a part of everyday life, such as with the circulation of maternity clothing and children's wear (e.g., Gregson and Beale, 2004), furniture, or tools (e.g., Benson, 2007). Most of these practices have been performed on an informal level, i.e., within families or among neighbors or groups of friends. Fueled by technological development and digital literacy, many of these social practices are undergoing a transformation, transcending the informal realm of personal networks and facilitating sharing among strangers online and offline. Olson and Kemp (2015) review various sharing models and show the order of magnitude in terms of users and revenues achieved by commercial lodging, ridesharing, and other sharing services, some of which turned into multi-billion dollar businesses. This transformation implies that the sharing economy includes informal and small-scale initiatives as well as commercial and large-scale businesses.

Because of this variety, the sharing economy is often considered a rather ill-defined concept lacking clear definition or common understanding (e.g., Acquier et al., 2017; Codagnone and Martens, 2016). For instance, in a recent bibliometric analysis, Ertz and Leblanc-Proulx (2018) argue that the sharing economy is an improper, misused, confused, and inaccurate term. When referring to the sharing economy, a number of related, sometimes overlapping labels are utilized. Frequently, these concepts, which often build on strong normative underpinnings and idealizations (Acquier et al., 2017), are used interchangeably, such as "collaborative consumption" (Botsman and Rogers, 2010), "(market mediated) access-based consumption" (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2014a), "the mesh" (Gansky, 2012), "connected consumption" (Dubois et al., 2014; Schor, 2014; Schor and Fitzmaurice, 2015), "peer-to-peer economy" (Stalnaker, 2008; Bauwens, 2010), "platform economy" or "gig economy" (Kenney and Zysman, 2016; Friedman, 2014; Stokes et al., 2014). Based on a review of 430 secondary and primary sources (literature review, media accounts, analysis of sharing models), Codagnone et al. (2016) suggest that for the sharing economy "(a) there is no consensual definition and (b) the overwhelming majority of available definitions are 'ostensive' rather than 'intentional'" (Codagnone and Martens, 2016, p. 7). More specifically, there appears to be a lack of connotative, clear-cut definitions (i.e., intentional definitions) that clearly delineate what the sharing economy is. Most definitions have tended to frame the sharing economy phenomenon pragmatically through the deployment of examples, specific cases, or common features (i.e., ostensive definitions). Accordingly, Acquier et al. (2017, p. 1) find that "[o]ne of the rare points scholars agree on is how hard it is to define the sharing economy and to draw clear conceptual and empirical boundaries." Table 1 provides selected examples of how the sharing economy and related concepts are characterized in the literature.

Table 1. Definitions of the sharing economy and related concepts found in the literature.

Source (alphabetical)	Concept and description
Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, pp. 881-882)	*Access-based consumption:* "(…) transactions that may be market mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place (...). Access is similar to sharing, that the both modes of consumption do not involve a transfer of ownership (…).

	However, access and sharing differ with regard to the perceived or shared sense of ownership (…). In sharing, joint possessions are free for all to use and generate no debts, and responsibilities, such as caretaking or not over-using the object, are shared. In contrast to sharing, in access there is no transfer of ownership or joint ownership; the consumer simply gains access to use an object. Additionally, access may differ from sharing in that access is not necessarily altruistic or prosocial, as sharing is (Belk, 2010), but can be underlined by economic exchange and reciprocity."
Botsman and Rogers (2010, pp. xv-xvi)	*Collaborative Consumption:* "(…) traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting and swapping, redefined through technology and peer communities. Collaborative Consumption is enabling people to realize the enormous benefits of access to products and services over ownership, and at the same time save money, space and time; make new friends; and become active citizens once again"
Frenken and Schor (2017, pp. 4-5)	*Sharing economy:* "Consumers granting each other temporary access to under-utilized physical assets ('idle capacity'), possibly for money. Typical goods that are currently being shared are cars and homes."
Hamari et al., 2016, p. 2049)	*Collaborative Consumption:* "(…) peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services."
Plewnia and Guenther (2018, p. 576)	*Sharing economy:* "(…) activities or platforms which facilitate the sharing of material, products, product services, space, money, workforce, knowledge, or information based on for-profit or non-profit transactions in a variety of different market structures (B2C, C2C, C2B, B2B, and G2C)."
Täuscher and Kietzmann (2017, p. 253)	*Sharing economy:* "In the sharing economy, new ventures develop and deploy digital platforms to enable peer-to-peer sharing of goods, services and information. The underlying proposition of sharing economy firms is that they can add value by allowing owners of resources to make their idle personal assets (e.g., rooms or homes) available to those who need them (e.g., travelers)."
Vaskeleinen and Münzel (2018, p. 273)	*Sharing economy:* "(…) services intended to replace ownership with the sharing and exploitation of underused assets, ranging from cars, houses, and parking spaces to pets, books, clothes (…)."

While some definitions are overly inclusive and broad, others are far too narrow to cover what in practice is labeled as the sharing economy. The most frequently used concept, collaborative consumption, popularized by Botsman and Rogers (2010), can be considered a rather all-encompassing approach, defining collaborative consumption as "systems that reinvent traditional market behaviors ─ renting, lending, swapping, sharing, bartering, gifting ─ in ways and on a scale not possible before the Internet" (Botsman, 2015). This pop-literature definition has received a fair amount of critique from the well-established consumer behavior and marketing scholar Russell Belk (see his work on sharing: Belk, 2007, 2010, 2014a, 2014b; Belk and Llamas, 2011, 2012). Belk (2014a) criticizes the definition put forth by Botsman and Rogers (2010) as too broad, mixing marketplace exchanges with gift giving and sharing. Instead, Belk (2014a, p. 1597) suggests defining collaborative consumption as involving "people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation. By including other compensation, the definition also encompasses bartering, trading, and swapping, which involve giving and receiving non-monetary compensation." Belk (2014a) hence positions collaborative consumption at the intersection between sharing transactions and traditional marketplace exchanges, seeing commonalities with both approaches. This definition, however, excludes any form of non-reciprocal transaction or gift giving, when compensation is not involved. According to Belk (2014b), these acts and processes of providing temporary access, instead of ownership, without a fee or any form of instantaneous or future compensation can be labeled “true sharing”. True sharing stands in vast contrast to the commercial ventures, utilizing the largely positively connoted “sharing rhetoric”, which Belk (2014b) labels “pseudo sharing”. Pseudo sharing can be said to represent “a business relationship masquerading as communal sharing. It may not be altogether unwelcome and it may be beneficial to all parties as well as friendly to the environment. But it is not sharing, despite promoters often employing a sharing vocabulary” (Belk, 2014b, p. 11).

These definitions offered by Belk (2014a, 2014b) expose where sharing opponents and proponents are divided, as both camps argue intensely for what sharing can or cannot do (e.g., Codagnone and Martens, 2016; Netter, 2016). As Wittel (2011, p. 4) suggests, sharing is used for different social practices with different functions and different motivations. It is used for a multitude of social and ethical realities. There is a danger of conflating different social qualities of sharing which in turn may produce distortions, illusions, and delusions.” The risk of ambiguous definitions, along with “sharewashing” efforts rendering distinctions between sharing models and traditional models as merely impossible (e.g., Price and Belk, 2016), is fueling the call for more nuanced definitions of what sharing is as well as the different social practices, functions, and motivations that are associated to it. Several authors propose such definitions. Table 2 illustrates some of the most renowned continuums used to describe sharing models. This overview shows that although, or rather because, several clear-cut definitions are proposed, there are various interpretations of what sharing is, or not. Therefore, instead of struggling for “right” or “wrong” definitions, it is more appropriate to accept the sharing economy as an umbrella construct that does not offer a universal definition, but instead requires a nuanced discourse about its different meanings, social practices, functions, and motivations (Acquier et al., 2017).

Table 2. Sharing continuums.

Authors (alphabetical)	**Sharing continuums**		
Acquier et al. (2017)	Community-based economy	Platform economy	Access economy
Belk (2014a); Belk (2014b)	True sharing		Pseudo sharing
Bucher et al. (2016)	Social sharing motivation	Moral sharing motivation	Monetary sharing motivation
Codagnone and Martens (2016)	Not-for-profit orientation		For-profit orientation
	Peer-to-peer		Business-to-consumer
Cohen (2014)	Non-pecuniary ownership motivation		Pecuniary ownership motivation
	Individual ownership type		Conjoint ownership type

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<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Constantiou et al. (2017)</td><td colspan="3">Loose control exerted by platform owner</td><td colspan="2">Tight control exerted by platform owner</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Low rivalry between platform participants</td><td colspan="2">High rivalry between platform participants</td></tr>
<tr><td>Habibi et al. (2016)</td><td colspan="3">Pure sharing</td><td colspan="2">Pure exchange</td></tr>
<tr><td>Hagiu and Wright (2013)</td><td colspan="2">One-sided market</td><td colspan="2">Two-sided market</td><td>Multi-sidedness market</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Lamberton and Rose (2012)</td><td colspan="3">Lower exclusivity</td><td colspan="2">Higher exclusivity</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Lower rivalry</td><td colspan="2">Higher rivalry</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Plewnia and Günther (2018)</td><td colspan="3">Tangible good or service</td><td colspan="2">Intangible good or service</td></tr>
<tr><td>Business-to-consumer (B2C)</td><td>Consumer-to-consumer (C2C)</td><td>Consumer-to-business (C2B)</td><td>Business-to-business (B2B)</td><td>Government-to-consumer (G2C)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">For-profit</td><td colspan="2">Non-profit</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sundararajan (2016)</td><td colspan="3">Gift economy</td><td colspan="2">Market economy</td></tr>
<tr><td>Wittel (2011)</td><td colspan="3">Anti-commerce</td><td colspan="2">Profit-seeking</td></tr>
</table>

As current attempts to structuring the sharing economy lead either to classifications with a narrow focus on particular industries or broad philosophical debates about the true nature of sharing, we suggest a framework to describe and analyze sharing models that is neither bound to particular industries nor based on debatable normative underpinnings and thus supports more nuanced analyses and debates. The concept of "partial organization" (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011) is proposed as a concept based on which an "agnostic" framework can be developed that emphasizes key elements of organization, which allow characterizing sharing models (i.e., sharing organizations and their sharing markets) as what they are: diverse and sometimes hardly comparable types of organization.

4. Introducing Partial Organization

As organizational research has tended to limit the description of the contemporary global order to formal organizations, networks, and institutions, there is a risk that important aspects of the studied phenomena have been overlooked (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011, p. 10). Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) first introduced the concept of partial organization in an attempt "to broaden the concept of organization to include some aspects of the order that exists outside and among organizations" (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2009, p. 1). This broader definition of organization as a special form of social order recognizes that organization does not just take place within but also outside and between formal organizations, thus voiding the distinction between organization and environment. As an example, Rasche et al. (2013) demonstrate how corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be organized through complete as well as partial organization (standards and cross-sector partnerships). Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) suggest that there is a distinction between organized and non-organized forms of "decided order in which people use elements that are constitutive for formal organizations" (p. 3), thus acknowledging that organization entails various forms of partial as well as complete organization. The concept of partial organization has subsequently been used to explain phenomena such as crowdfunding (Nielsen, 2018), standardization (Brunsson et al., 2012), social movements (e.g., Haug, 2013; den Hond et al., 2015; Frenzel, 2014; Laamanen and den Hond, 2015), and meta-organizations (Berkowitz and Dumez, 2014.

In the context of the sharing economy, the notion of partial organization is particularly valuable in terms of the organization of sharing markets, facilitated by "user-driven communal initiatives" and "commercial multi-sided sharing platforms" (MSP), which enable the sharing of underutilized inventory between distinct consumer groups by creating and serving one-, two- or multi-sided markets (e.g., Codagnone and Martens, 2016; Hagiu and Wright, 2015). According to Eisenmann et al. (2006), multi-sided platforms can be defined as services and products that enable transactions between distinct user groups in multi-sided networks. These platforms are characterized by a specific infrastructure, by specific rules, and can take many forms. The markets enabled by MSPs differ from traditional ones with regards to the location of costs and revenue, due to its distinct user groups. Looking at the sharing context, there are a variety of different platforms and facilitated marketplaces. Some are two- or multi-sided, such as *eBay*, *Poshmark*, or *Airbnb*, while others are one-sided, such as *Avis*, *Mud Jeans*, or *Le Tote*, and resemble pure resellers (i.e., one-sided markets) (e.g., Grinevich et al., 2015).

Typically, markets are considered an environment outside formal organizations and assumed to not be arranged in the sense of complete organization (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011). This traditional view limits studies of organizational characteristics to those that remain within the (however defined) boundaries of a focal organization and tends to ignore the implications for the structure and functioning of markets. This is particularly critical in the case of sharing models as these often have consequences for a broad range of users, suppliers, and other external stakeholders (e.g., Dreyer et al., 2017). While markets and organizations are usually described as two completely different sets of social order, Ahrne et al. (2014) suggest that markets and organizations are rather similar, in the sense that they are both based on decision and an actively decided order. With decision being at the core of organization (ibid.; Luhmann, 2000), the elements constitutive of formal organizations pertain to decisions concerning "membership", "hierarchy", "rules", "monitoring", and "sanction". While formal organizations make use – and need to make use of – all five elements of organizing to legitimize their existence as complete organization (Ahrne et al., 2014), partial organization requires only one or a few of these elements. Markets too can, therefore, be considered partially organized if they show traits of one or more of the five elements constituting formal organizations.

Depending on the degree of organization, sharing models – integrating both more organized and less organized focal organizations and their corresponding market environments – can be positioned along a continuum ranging from no organization to complete organization, with partial organization occupying the space between those extremes, with a sheer endless variety of possible combinations of the five organizing elements. Each of these elements can take various forms (e.g., free membership, paid membership, flat hierarchy, steep hierarchy, etc.), which allows for various sharing model designs. This is reflected by a growing number of one- and two-dimensional classifications that try to capture this variety. This leads to our point that a framework based on the five organizing elements – which in fact is a five-dimensional framework – provides a much more comprehensive set of descriptions and analyses of sharing models grounded in organization theory.

The five aforementioned organizational elements can be defined as follows (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011): *Membership* pertains to the question of who can become a member and who cannot. While in some cases there might be formal rules for who can obtain membership status, in other cases this is more informally regulated. Membership status creates an identity that is different from those of non-members and provides members with the perks of being treated differently than non-members. Membership, however, also brings with it certain expectations in terms of behavior by members and can be revoked. *Hierarchy* pertains to those who have the initiative and power, i.e., those whose decisions are binding for current and future members. These decisions are usually binding as long as members wish to continue as members. Organization decisions on *rules* are concerned with the "common notions about what they are doing and how to do it" (Ahrne et al., 2014, p. 5). Besides formal rules of participation, there can also be informal rules or recommendations, which can concern any aspect such as product design or prices as well as any kind of behavior or action. Decisions concerning *monitoring* are closely connected with the organizational element of rules. More specifically, they concern how to monitor what members do, feel, and think. Besides more top-down monitoring strategies, where one stakeholder group holding power monitors another stakeholder group, mutual monitoring enables the deliberation of experiences and the evaluation of all members' actions. Finally, *sanctions* can be both a positive and negative approach to coercing members to do what they are expected to do. While positive sanctions provide incentives, such as prizes, negative sanctions impose penalties. Both types of sanctions can impact member status, identity, and resources.

5. Sharing between Partial and Complete Organization

In highlighting the key building blocks of organization, Ahrne and Brunsson's (2011) concept of partial organization provides a useful starting point for developing a new framework of sharing models, which build on, but move beyond, the existing categorizations frequently used to describe the sharing economy. However, just as the literature on partial organization can shed more light on the sharing economy, partial organization research can also benefit from previous scholarly attempts to conceptualize this floating signifier. In particular, a conceptual framework based on the literature on partial organization can meaningfully be combined with insights from the sharing economy debates at least when it comes to (1) the ownership structure and (2) the actors involved. In the following sections, we will describe these dimensions in more detail.

Distinguishing user-driven/communal and platform-driven/commercial sharing models

Cohen (2014) advocated for a sharing economy taxonomy based on a distinction between ownership motivation as well as ownership structure. Here, items up for sharing can be individually or conjointly owned, with the act of sharing being driven by either pecuniary or non-pecuniary motives. Along similar lines, Belk (2014b) suggests to distinguish between "true sharing" and "pseudo sharing" initiatives; a divide, which, to a large extent, explains a great deal of the controversy around the sharing economy and its conceptual shortcomings, with "commercial sharing" cases (e.g., Uber, Airbnb) dominating the discourse about the phenomenon (e.g., Netter, 2016). On the basis of the sharing taxonomy introduced by Cohen (2014) and the distinction of different sharing types offered by Belk (2014b), we distinguish between user-driven/communal and platform-driven/commercial initiatives. In some *user-driven/communal initiatives* goods are owned by a single person, allowing temporary non-commercial lending to family members and friends (Cohen, 2014). In other cases with conjoint ownership, collective ownership and usership are enabled, such as car-sharing clubs or non-commercial hospitality exchange (e.g., *Couchsurfing*) or free-of-charge fashion libraries (e.g., *Klädoteket*). *Platform-driven/commercial initiatives* span from cases based on conjoint ownership to individual ones (ibid.). Conjoint commercial platform-driven initiatives range from short-term rentals, such as in the case of car-sharing schemes (e.g., *Car2Go*, *DriveNow*), fee-based clothing and accessories rental (e.g., *Kleiderei*), to subscription-based product-service systems (e.g., *Mud Jeans*, *Le Tote*). In these cases, people pay for the benefit of using a product, without having to own the product themselves.

Conceptualizing actors in the sharing economy

The partial organization literature defines three groups of stakeholders: "profiteers", "others", and "sellers and buyers" (Ahrne et al., 2014). "Profiteers" are defined as "individuals and organizations that participate in market organization in order to further their own economic interests. They do not operate as traders [...], rather they are able to earn money through the organization of the primary market." (ibid., p. 8) The second group, "others", is conceptualized as "persons and organizations that try to influence the organization of markets […]. They have little or no interest in making a profit, and they try to help sellers, buyers or whoever is affected by what sellers or buyers do." (ibid., p. 9-10) "Sellers and buyers", according to Ahrne et al., (2014), "act on markets that are largely organized by others and profiteers, with whom they may not share interests. The reactions of buyers and sellers to market organizing influence the way markets function." (ibid., p. 10) However, this understanding of stakeholders seems overly simplified. The labels "profiteers" and "buyers and sellers" are misleading in the sharing economy context. With "profiteers" covering the group of actors who facilitate and initiate sharing models, it seems suitable to label them as “facilitators”. Also, bearing in mind that not all sharing models involve physical products and money, but also different kinds of service and other forms of compensation, we suggest conceptualizing “buyers and sellers” as “users and providers”. Finally, instead of referring to “others”, there is a need to encompass other stakeholders who influence, or are influenced by, sharing models irrespective of their motives (banks, investors, regulators, suppliers, unions, logistics partners, community groups, etc.) (Netter and Pedersen, 2019).

Sharing models as (more) partial and (more) complete organizations

In Table 3, we group sharing models along the five organizational dimensions defined by Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) – membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions – as well as their tendency to be organized more or less partially. Overall, it is expected that user-driven/communal sharing models display higher levels of partial organization compared to commercial sharing models, which are more closely positioned towards the complete organization end of the spectrum. An example of sharing models with communal elements could be a free-of-charge clothes sharing/swapping service whereas their commercial counterparts would be any fee-based fashion rental schemes (Cohen, 2014). The distinction between user-driven/communal and platform-driven/commercial sharing models bears similarities with the work of Codagnone et al. (2016) who talk about “true” sharing (non-profit, community-based) and commercial sharing (for profit, organization led). It should be noted, however, that communal and commercial business models can be intertwined. For instance, it is possible to envision a communal-driven sharing model (e.g., bike sharing) linked to more commercial business models (e.g., bike production) (Cohen and Kietzmann, 2014). Moreover, sharing models are not set in stone but may evolve over time, e.g., as a result of strategic reorientation or a need for more standardization and formalization (Ahrne et al., 2014). For instance, Muñuz and Cohen (2018) describe how the sharing models of *Airbnb* and *Rent the Runway* have evolved from peer-to-peer platforms to business-to-consumer models. Additional explanation will be provided in the following sections, where the characteristics of more partially and more completely organized sharing models are described in greater detail.

Table 3. Sharing models along organizational dimensions and type.

Model / Dimension	**User-driven/communal (more partial organization)**		**Platform-driven/commercial (more complete organization)**
Membership	Belongingness	↔	Signing up

Hierarchy	Diffused	↔	Central
Rules	Informal	↔	Formal
Monitoring	Implicit Social control	↔	Explicit behavior control
Sanctions	Social exclusion/non-pecuniary	↔	Platform exclusion/Pecuniary

Membership. Usually, sharing models are initiated by facilitators, i.e., individuals, groups of individuals, or formal organizations who set up the formal framework for membership and interaction. These formal frameworks usually contain rules or guidelines in terms of who might act as user and provider. For instance, sharing models can use identity checks, algorithms, interviews, and ratings to screen potential users and providers (Felländer et al., 2015). In communal sharing models, this is usually informally regulated, with few, if any, rules in place. Frequently, membership results from belonging to a certain group or relationships external to the sharing model itself (e.g., family, school, job, sport, or local community). In comparison, commercial sharing models often have formal requirements for membership such as access to information and communication technology or payment forms. Moreover, access is based on subscription and not given by the existing networks and relationships of potential members (Netter and Pedersen, 2019). Taking control over membership status requires formalization and resources, which explains why many commercial sharing models opt for more complete and formally-organized membership. Note that membership status can be disputed by users, providers, and others. For instance, Uber drivers have been subject to criticism from labor unions and regulators (Netter, 2016). Moreover, a negative side effect of screening and managing memberships may be that certain users and providers gain privileges whereas others are systematically disadvantaged (e.g., minority groups), thus creating a hierarchy within the sharing model (see next section) (Codagnone and Martens, 2016).

Hierarchy. The organizational dimension of hierarchy pertains to questions of initiative and power. While the formal initiative and decision-making power are usually held by the facilitating actors on the sharing model, order is frequently negotiated and emerges over time as a consequence of resolving conflicts and tensions between the different parties involved (Netter and Pedersen, 2019). In communal sharing models, there is little formal hierarchy among users, although some actors may possess more power than others by virtue of their resources, relationships, and/or networks. In commercial sharing models, the platform providers ultimately hold the decisive right to select in/select out members and impose sanctions. For instance, in the case of one-sided platforms or resellers such as *Mud Jeans*, *Le Tote*, and *Vigga*, users interact exclusively with the facilitator and have no control over the terms of the transaction. However, commercial platforms can also consciously decide to refrain from using hierarchical power, e.g., to escape responsibility for sharing activities (Nielsen, 2018). Moreover, the nature of the product and service can also influence the level of hierarchy found in commercial sharing models. For instance, Codagnone et al. (2016) explain how the sharing of space (*Airbnb*) and transportation (*Uber*) give rise to different levels of (de-)centralization. Either way, commercial sharing models are characterized by a certain degree of information asymmetry, which benefits the facilitators, even though trust-building mechanisms (e.g., user and app reviews) and the existence of competing platforms on the market enable users and providers to maintain a certain degree of influence over the fate of the platforms (Netter, 2017).

Rules. Many sharing models operate in legal grey areas, without formal rules (e.g., Orsi, 2013). However, in the wake of lawsuits and media-scandals, more platforms are starting to implement additional regulations (covering, for instance, insurance, safety issues, and workers' rights) or safeguards for established players and their employees (e.g., Chang, 2015; Eichhorst and Spermann, 2015; Hartl et al., 2015; Sørensen, 2016). For example, *Airbnb* had to adjust terms and conditions as a result of negative media stories about the misuse of apartments (Netter, 2016). Communal sharing models are, for the most part, characterized by few rules, with most issues being informally regulated by shared norms rather than a comprehensive list of explicit requirements. As noted by Ahrne and Brunsson (ibid., p. 93): "If there are already strong norms in a certain field that coincide with the values of the organizers, it is unnecessary to decide about rules (…)". In fashion libraries, for instance, rules primarily pertain to how many items can be rented or swapped at once, the duration of the rentals, in which condition items should be returned (e.g., washed or unwashed), and the possible fees in case rentals are delayed or damaged. In commercial platforms, the sharing of goods and services comes with a number of formal rules formulated by the platform. These rules, which for the most part are developed by the facilitator, primarily cover issues such as community etiquette, complaints, inventory, guidelines for personal profiles, transaction guidelines, or the handling of logistics and returns (Netter and Pedersen, 2019). Accepting these conditions is an explicit requirement for members. However, the level of formalization also depends on the products and services shared. For instance, *Landshare* is characterized by fewer rules than *Uber,* for example – at least partly due to greater variation in *Landshare's* transactions, which require users and providers to agree on the terms outside of the platform (Felländer et al., 2015). Likewise, in their comparison of *Airbnb* and *Uber,* Codagnone and Martens (2016) argue that sharing models like *Uber* are more dependent on matching users and providers in real time, which demand more centralization, formalization, and control.

Monitoring. Sharing is often said to be based on "trust among strangers" (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). However, in practice, levels of trust differ significantly, and this gives rise to very different monitoring practices. A certain degree of monitoring of what members do, feel, and think is necessary, as a system solely built on trust would eventually be at risk of being exploited by less trustworthy stakeholders, which could put the overall operations of the initiative at risk (Ahrne et al., 2014; Netter and Pedersen, 2019). Moreover, failure to monitor the quality of transactions between users and providers has been identified as one of the root causes of unsuccessful sharing models (Täuscher and Kietzmann, 2017). In communal sharing, monitoring is less relevant as there is a tacit assumption that users want to belong to the community and thus subscribe to its rules. Members have the opportunity to express their feelings in a rather unstructured manner, through *Facebook* posts, or direct verbal feedback in the venue or at member events (Pedersen and Netter, 2015). The implicit social control of users, therefore, extends beyond individual sharing activities. In commercial sharing models, it is common to have formal reputation-based systems for monitoring and sanctioning such as trust scores and rankings for users, which are little more than sophisticated behavior controls intended to ensure compliance with the rules of the platform (Netter and Pedersen, 2019). Facilitators also have possibilities for monitoring and following up on transactions through systems for payment and shipping. In the case of mobile-based sharing models, users and providers can also give general feedback in app stores, which also act as gatekeeping mechanism for potential future members (Netter, 2017).

Sanctions. The organizational dimension of sanctions is somewhat misleading, given that sanctions can include negative as well as positive means to enforce rules (Ahrne et al., 2014). While positive sanctions (e.g., prizes) act as incentives or rewards that reinforce positive or desirable behavior, negative sanctions (e.g., penalties) can limit current or future membership and participation in the sharing organization and in its market. Sanctions are highly dependent on who has the initiative and power (i.e., hierarchy) to make decisions that are binding for stakeholders. In terms of negative sanctions, the ultimate sanction in communal sharing models is that you are excluded from the community. For instance, the crowdfunding platform *Kickstarter* explicitly states that it holds the right to sanction projects through rejection, cancellation, interruption, removal, and suspension (Nielsen, 2018). As sharing is not born with a financial component and guided by explicit contracts, there is little room for setting fines or introducing other types of financial sanctions. From a user perspective, negative sanctions could also include leaving the sharing model or discrediting it publically, whereas positive sanctions cover, for instance, endorsements, recommendations, or the recruitment of new members. In commercial sharing models, non-complying users may be excluded from the platform and charged with financial sanctions if they have somehow violated the terms specified in the rules. Positive sanctions or incentives, on the other hand, can include loyalty programs, special status, or added features.

6. Discussion

In the previous sections, the concept of partial organization was introduced in an attempt to develop a new conceptual framework that highlights the organizational characteristics of sharing models. By analyzing sharing models along the organizational dimensions of membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions, it is possible to develop a more nuanced understanding of the sharing phenomenon, which acknowledges, but also moves beyond, existing conceptualizations and models.

The continuum indicated in Table 3 can be used, for example, to describe existing sharing models and to classify these according to organizational similarities. Such a classification could be used to develop organizational taxonomies that allow for more comprehensive descriptions and analyses of the sharing economy in practice. Furthermore, such a classification could also be used to systematically identify the different business models that underpin the differently organized sharing models (e.g., ranging from non-profit and self-sufficient to profit-driven and competitive sharing models). With many initiatives struggling, for instance, with regards to securing financial means to cover their expenses (i.e., communal approaches) or current legislation (i.e., commercial approaches, which are in close competition with established industries), partial organization can not only offer a lens to understand current challenges but also offer a strategic tool for developing a successful sharing model that moves beyond key business model building blocks and integrates major components of organization. Consequently, a better alignment of sharing models with the organizational structures supporting these business models should be possible due to an increased awareness of the variety of organizational design options.

The new framework can also help to explain some of the apparent tensions, instabilities, and paradoxes surrounding the sharing economy debate (Acquier et al., 2017; Netter and Pedersen, 2019). As an example, a recurrent tension concerns the apparent clash between the commercial market logic and communal non-market logic. Laurell and Sandström (2017, p. 59) argue that: "(…) the notion of a sharing economy seems to be riddled with tensions between non-market logics of idealism and a form of platform capitalism driven by for-profit firms." Likewise, Richardson (2015) describes the sharing economy as a paradox that is portrayed as a symbol of capitalism as well as an alternative to capitalism. However, little is said about the root causes of this tension, even though many other organizations/sectors are not met with criticism for being commercial in nature. Here, the proposed framework can help analyze tensions in sharing models as imbalances within and between organizational characteristics and offer insight into the way actors involved perceive such imbalances. For instance, the extensive use of ratings and rankings (monitoring) may conflict with the underlying value of communal sharing, which is largely dependent on non-codified trust (Frenken and Schor, 2017).

The new framework can also help explain some of the developments of sharing models and the impacts on users. As an example, it has been observed that the ability of sharing models to establish social connections among users sometimes declines over time (Frenken and Schor, 2017). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) also observed low levels of trust and community-feeling among users of a car-sharing model characterized by command and control governance, although the authors do not make conclusions about the relationship between the variables. Based on the new framework, it can be hypothesized that the level of trust and sense of community may be rooted in the evolution of sharing models from partial to complete organizations. As some sharing models become scaled up, formalized and professionalized, they may discourage users interested in the social community and network (ibid.). This effect may also depend on the values of user groups (cf. Martin et al. 2017), where some may value close and personal relationships, and others may prefer rather anonymous relationships to maintain their privacy. Privacy concerns, in turn, can conflict with heavily formalized and monitored relationships. Considering the values and expectations of different user groups can thus lead to a better understanding of other sources of tensions that need to be addressed by the organizational designs of sharing economy models. Research on the influence of values on new business models indicates that values, defined as notions of the desirable, can fundamentally shape new organizational set-ups (e.g., Breuer and Lüdeke-Freund, 2017).

Although the new framework provides useful lenses for analyzing sharing models, it is not a panacea that can explain everything in relation to the sharing economy. As an example, the narrow stakeholder orientation permeating the partial organization literature has significant limitations when translated into a sharing economy context. For instance, Laurell and Sandström (2017) identified 31 actor groups contributing to discussions of the sharing economy on social media alone. Therefore, if the objective is to gain a thorough understanding of the sharing economy, it is a questionable practice to lump important actors (e.g., tax authorities, labor unions, competitors, politicians, and citizens) into the broad category of "others". Therefore, more work has to be done in order to better accommodate contemporary stakeholder thinking into the literature on partial organization and sharing models. The above-proposed definition of actors related to partial organizations can serve as a starting point for such a discussion, which might be guided by the overarching question of who is exerting agency in relation to sharing models and what are the effects and their organizational characteristics.

7. Conclusion: Towards a New Framework for Understanding Sharing Models

New systems for sharing and collaboration are increasingly gaining a foothold in society. The development has also sparked an academic debate about how to define, structure, group, and categorize the rapidly growing number of initiatives that fall under the popular "sharing economy" umbrella. For instance, the work of Belk (2104b) highlights the risks of being seduced by corporate rhetoric, where commercial actors hide behind the positive connotations associated with concepts such as sharing, participation, and collaboration. However, there are a number of shortcomings in the existing literature in describing the broad span of sharing models and their distinct characteristics. For instance, Cohen's (2014) use of motivation as one of the key dimensions of the sharing economy is problematic. After all, it is usually the *activities* rather than the underlying motivation that define an industry. Moreover, Belk (2014) suggests a very normative and restrictive definition of "true" sharing, which seems to diverge significantly from the common use of the term. While more conceptual rigor is definitely called for, dismissing what the large majority of scholars and practitioners associate with the sharing concept also seems to miss the mark. Rather than labeling the large majority of sharing models as "pseudo", it seems more fruitful to discuss whether and how it is possible to improve the understanding of the sharing phenomenon while at the same time acknowledging its diverse nature.

To this end, this paper turned to the emerging field of partial organization, which served as a starting point for developing a new framework for sharing models. It was argued that a deeper understanding of the core organizational characteristics (membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring, and sanctions) provides a good foundation for understanding and categorizing organizations within the sharing economy, which we understand as an umbrella construct that needs nuanced and careful analyses and debates (Acquier et al., 2017). It is worth mentioning, however, that the new framework should be seen as an addition, rather than an alternative, to existing categorizations of the sharing economy. Therefore, the new framework combines the focus on organizational characteristics with existing distinctions between user-driven (communal) and platform-driven (commercial) sharing models. No claim is made, however, that the new model captures everything linked to the sharing economy umbrella construct. For instance, the paper is centered on the organizational characteristics of sharing models rather than the goods or services being shared, the process of sharing, or the relationship between the user and the shared goods or services (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). Moreover, in line with most of the currently available literature, the paper especially focuses on business-to-consumer and peer-to-peer sharing models. It is left to future research whether the model developed in this paper is applicable to alternative market structures, e.g., business-to-business, consumer-to-business, government-to-consumer, or government-to-government sharing models (Codagnone et al., 2016; Plewnia and Guenther, 2018).

The sharing economy is likely to continue being a contested concept in academia and in practice. Not only will the boundaries of the fast-growing sharing economy and its normative underpinnings undoubtedly inspire new debates, but the jury is still out on whether the sharing economy has a net positive or negative impact on the economy, society, and the environment. The new framework presented in this paper should, therefore, only be seen as one small step in a much broader effort to come to terms with, and make sense of, the sharing economy concept.

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