
Does the Sharing Economy do any Good?

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Abstract

Despite the benefits offered by sharing economy, researchers have identified several challenges preventing disadvantaged groups (e.g. low socioeconomic status, un(der)employed and/or users

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from emerging regions) from receiving the same level of benefits as those from advantaged populations. This panel brings researchers from the sharing economy and mobile crowdsourcing space whose research has identified unique challenges for underserved populations. We consider the opportunities offered by these platforms to disadvantaged communities and examine to what extent these platforms instead may recreate disadvantage, as well as the workarounds communities employ to make these platforms work for them. We examine the opportunities for the CSCW community to address these challenges going forward.

Author Keywords

Sharing economy; crowdwork; employment; emerging markets; underrepresented groups

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation: Misc.

Introduction

Sharing economy applications (e.g., Uber, Lyft, and Airbnb), and mobile crowdsourcing markets (e.g., TaskRabbit, GigWalk) have provided a range of new opportunities. For example, allowing individuals access to cheaper resources; providing access to resources otherwise unavailable; or a source of (additional) income. Despite these benefits, some platforms have contributed to the vicious cycle of recreating disadvantage [4], and have offered little benefit to the

very individuals who could stand to benefit the most [e.g.2,3]. In this panel, we discuss the question, "Does the Sharing Economy do any Good?".

This panel brings in a group of researchers with a diverse set of skills, expertise, perspectives, and experience researching sharing economy applications. The goal of the panel is to discuss 1) the challenges uncovered in prior work (e.g., discrimination, perceived safety concerns, limited trust, technical and methodological challenges); 2) opportunities for CSCW to address these challenges and barriers to doing so; 3) next steps for CSCW researchers and practitioners.

Points of Discussion

The panel's will discuss the following questions:

- What are the opportunities for the sharing economy to benefit populations who may have limited education, limited access to resources or be un(der)employed?
- Why are individuals from low-SES areas less able to benefit from these applications?
- What are the unique challenges they face?
- What are some of the methodological challenges of studying these applications among underserved populations?
- What are the opportunities for HCI and CSCW from a design implementation and policy perspective?

Panelists and Position Statements

Airi Lampinen is a Postdoctoral Researcher at Mobile Life Centre, Stockholm University in Sweden. She has studied extensively interpersonal dynamics in both monetary and non-monetary peer-to-peer exchange, in particular in the realms of local online exchange and

network hospitality. Her research has highlighted barriers to participation, ranging from a fear of indebtedness to logistical issues, as well as discrimination that has its roots in the tendency of people to prefer to socialize with those similar to themselves. Her position, *Insights and challenges from the Case of Local Online Peer-to-Peer Exchange in a Single Parents' Network* is summarized below:

Even when participation does not necessitate direct financial investment, other requirements may inhibit adoption of peer-to-peer exchange. In this study, such requirements included the initial social commitment and time investment to build trusted relationships and embrace a new online peer sharing system. Our initiative to deploy an online peer-to-peer exchange system for a community network of single parents – a group of people in need of goods, services, and social support in their local neighborhoods – illustrates that pressures related to a specific local context (e.g., single parenthood in a specific geographical and societal setting) can impede opportunities to engage in peer-to-peer exchange, even when individuals view the social and material benefits of participation as desirable and necessary. In deploying the system and working with the single parents' network, our team encountered considerable challenges with regard to 1) social organization of the network as a 'community', and 2) encouraging social exchange through a peer-to-peer exchange platform. The difficulties associated with balancing efforts to attract a critical mass of users with the desire for trusted relationships between network members. While the two need not be mutually exclusive, accomplishing both proved difficult in this case.

Jacki O'Neill is an ethnographer at Microsoft Research India, with over 15 years' experience in HCI/CSCW. She works in the Technology for Emerging Markets area seeking to design technologies, which can play a part in helping people to improve their lives. As well as studies of crowdwork, she has most recently been studying the adoption of so called 'ridesharing' technology by auto-rickshaw drivers in India. Her position statement is summarized below:

Auto-drivers are clearly a vulnerable population – they have very low incomes and whilst they typically have enough to manage their day-to-day needs (by working very long hours in a noisy, hot, tiring job), most do not make savings and therefore any extra financial burden can put them into financial difficulty. They typically live in slum or slum-reclaimed housing and 70% do not own their own autos – renting them instead. They are however independent workers ("micro-entrepreneurs" in the language of the peer economy!). The two biggest challenges are 1) *Designing for Equity*. How to design peer technologies which take into account the welfare of the drivers, whilst equally serving the customer, to the benefit of the whole system (that is, so that workers, customers and platform work together to produce the best possible service, with the most equitable outcome for all). 2) *Platform as "stealth employer"* – auto-drivers are currently independent workers, but there is a risk that they will lose their independence if they become reliant on the platform for work – they will have to comply with the platforms regulations, system of evaluation and so on, and the platform providers will become employers in effect, but without any of the responsibilities to their workers.

Loren Terveen is a professor of computer science and engineering and member of GroupLens Research at the

University of Minnesota. His expertise is in collaborative filtering, web search and information management, intelligent interfaces, organizational memory, and visualization. His primary research interest is in using technology to help people create and develop strong ties and in helping people form communities based on shared interests. His position, is summarized below:

There is much excitement about the sharing economy as a new paradigm for work; it seems to offer the possibility of more flexible transactions, easier ways for people to get their tasks accomplished, and new opportunities for participation and compensation. However, studies have painted a more complicated picture. For example, our study of Task Rabbit [0] showed that existing socioeconomic (SES) conditions impose several types of barriers to participation; people from low-SES areas may have a hard time participating in the sharing economy as consumers or producers. Studies of Uber and Lyft drivers (e.g., Lee et al. [4], and our own unpublished work) suggest similar issues with these systems. Moving forward, a major challenge for sharing economy systems will be to broaden opportunities for participation while maintaining the trust that is necessary for these systems to work.

Cory Kendrick is a Data Science Manager in Policy Research at Uber. Her team uses data science, mapping, and economics to research Uber's service in underserved neighborhoods, and she offers unique insights and perspectives given her expertise in data analytics. She holds a B.A. in Cognitive Science from Dartmouth College, and has worked on user-based research at Google Maps, on the Diversity & Inclusion team at Google, and at Beats Music and Apple.

Tawanna Dillahunt (Moderator) is an Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan's School of Information. Her expertise lies in addressing real-world problems (e.g., unemployment, environmental sustainability, education) affecting marginalized groups and individuals, primarily in the U.S. Her position, *Insights & challenges from Active Job seekers from Disadvantaged Communities* is summarized below:

While Botsman and Rogers [1] suggested trust between strangers, idling capacity, critical mass, and belief in the commons as requirements for the sharing economy to work, research exploring the feasibility of the sharing economy among active job seekers from disadvantaged communities suggests new requirements. Active job seekers in Southeast, Michigan showed distrust in aspects of the sharing economy applications such as an imbalance in background check requirements (e.g., required for workers but not consumers) and distrust in the rating systems used. Participants were unclear about the reviewers who provided ratings, and preferred to have a connection to these reviewers. Participants also conveyed a willingness to lend but were reluctant to borrow from others because of their need to feel independent. Privacy issues around sharing assets such as space in the case of Airbnb and safety issues around the exchange of goods (e.g., these needed to occur in safe physical spaces such as police stations) were raised. Finally, the perception was that these applications work well for neighborhoods high in collective efficacy though sharing economy applications would be beneficial if they could create jobs and revenue, and foster reciprocity among these communities.

Format of the Panel

The moderator will introduce the panel goals and panelists. Each panelist will present their perspective and findings as they relate to these unique populations; with a focus on the challenges and constraints of particular implementations, sociotechnical matters and methodological challenges and limitations in studying the unique effects the sharing economy and mobile crowdwork have on these populations. Forty-five minutes will be allotted for discussion with the audience facilitated by the moderator.

Requirements

The panel requires a projector and microphones for the panelists (5) and audience (2).

References

1. Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers. (2011). *What's mine is yours: How collaborative consumption is changing the way we live*. HarperCollins Publishers.
2. Tawanna Dillahunt and Amy Malone. 2015. The Promise of the Sharing Economy among Disadvantaged Communities. *ACM CHI*. 2285-2294.
3. Airi Lampinen, Kai Huotari and Coye Cheshire. (2015) Challenges to Participation in the Sharing Economy: The Case of Local Online Peer-to-Peer Exchange in a Single Parents' Network. *Interaction Design and Architecture(s)*, special issue on peer-to-peer exchange and the sharing economy.
4. Min Kyung Lee, Daniel Kusbit, Evan Metsky, and Laura Dabbish. 2015. Working with Machines: The Impact of Algorithmic and Data-Driven Management on Human Workers. *ACM CHI* 1603-1612.

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