

Peer-to-Peer Accommodation Renting Platforms: Initialising Stakeholder Collaboration to Regulate AirBnB

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation renting platforms has exacerbated perceptions of over-tourism and other issues among relevant stakeholders, many of which are geographically dispersed and difficult to identify, creating a special challenge to initiate stakeholder collaboration. This article uses frame analysis method to identify stakeholders and collaboration conveners, and their main issue-frames (diagnostic, prognostic and motivational). The fast-growing Airbnb sharing economy operation in China was studied. Practical findings included: First, this study simplified the complex public debate around Airbnb by identifying six main frames and twenty sub-frames through a systematic assessment of 158 news coverage items. Second, nine stakeholders involved in peer-to-peer online platform ecosystems were also identified: platform operator, competitor, media, resident, government, specialist, consumer, partner and provider.

Keywords: *Frame analysis, Countermeasures for Airbnb, Stakeholder collaboration.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Airbnb, the pioneer and largest peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing platform for renting tourist accommodation worldwide, enables domestic residents to rent out their under-utilized house or room(s) to visitors in exchange for payment [1]. This online platform-based business has achieved a huge success globally. The rapid growth of P2P sharing platforms has become a seemingly irresistible trend. However, rising anti-Airbnb sentiments feature prominently in recent media discourses, and its operations face numerous legal restrictions in some destinations. These concerns are not limited to Airbnb but also implicate other similar P2P platforms such as Homeaway.com, as well as P2P platforms in other sectors.

Mitigating these negative impacts of these P2P sharing platforms is a complex problem and cannot be addressed by any single stakeholder acting alone: individual stakeholders have limited remits, skills and powers [2]. Stakeholder collaboration may, however, provide some key insights into addressing the above challenges. There are two key benefits of

collaboration: First, collaboration brings together stakeholders from various backgrounds. The sharing of ideas, knowledge and insights among stakeholders results in a richer understanding of issues and creates opportunities for finding innovative solutions to problems. Second, intensive stakeholder collaboration provides opportunities for developing a mutual-benefit framework which is favourable for promoting collective benefits.

But there are two important challenges in deploying the conventional methods used in stakeholder research in the context of online P2P platform ecosystems. First, unlike analysing stakeholders in specific events, localities, companies or disaster recovery areas, the stakeholders involved in Airbnb and similar P2P platforms are widely dispersed geographically. In previous stakeholder research, most researchers conducted a series of interviews or questionnaires to identify the drivers of collaborations, such as powerful stakeholders or common issues [3], or examined existing collaborations to map stakeholders' connections under the pre-conditions of probably geographically bounded and readily

identifiable stakeholder locations [4]. However, many of the stakeholders of online platforms are not easily identifiable or accessible. It is, for example, very difficult to identify precisely who are the residents affected by Airbnb's externalities and to investigate their views. The stakeholders are located across very diverse geographical sites scattered around or in many cities. Second, there is lack of formal institutionalized collaboration in the peer-to-peer online platform ecosystem, thus limiting the possibilities for exploring relationships among stakeholders. These stakeholders have many unknown roles and interests.

A new method of stakeholder analysis is required in order to understand how to enact stakeholder collaboration in P2P platforms. This article, therefore, adopted frame analysis, which enables researchers to establish the initial conditions essential for collaboration building in P2P online platform ecosystems: finding conveners or brokers (who take the central place in the debate) and opportunities (the issues concerning most of the stakeholders). This method begins with the first phase of attempting to answer the question: what are the "problems" that collaboration is supposed to resolve. Frame analysis is proposed to determine the key issues facing Airbnb by analysing online data.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Frames, generally defined as cognitive schema, signify reality by selectively highlighting some features of a social situation [5]. It can also function as the action-oriented strategy through consciously presenting information in a particular way. In this sense, Snow and Benford (1988) identified three core framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing [5]. It is useful in understanding a collective interest as well as taking collective action [6]. Through core framing tasks, some vague problematic conditions are transformed to definable frames which serve a directive function towards people action. Specifically, diagnostic framing assists in knowing the causes of the problem, where such action has to be directed towards and who is to blame. Prognostic framing focuses on developing specific strategies to solve the situation. The role of motivational framing is to provide individuals with a rationale for engaging in solving problems. In communicating text, an issue can be interpreted from different perspectives and diverse discourse over an issue essentially reflects the imprint of power from various actors [6]. As

such, it is a useful research method in revealing complex social phenomenon [7], as well as investigating actors' interests on policy issues [8] and suggesting strategies to facilitate sustainability [9].

3. METHODOLOGY

Using the keywords "Airbnb" and "China" appearing in the headline, data was collected from a wide variety of sources such as government publications, newspapers, and magazines as well as online articles and reports written by advocates, critics and commentators. All articles were in Chinese. Excluding duplicate news articles, the search yielded a sample of 158 articles over the period of 2015 to 2018, resulting in more than 240 pages. This four-year period was chosen because it covers the time from the appearance of the first Airbnb-related news stories to the most recent newscasts. Media coverage has provided studies as a place for societal discussions. Thus, frames emerging from news coverage could provide a chance to understand what the major interests of various types of stakeholders or their key objectives are.

The first phase of analysis involved reading each article carefully and conducting an inductive approach to identify the issue-specific frames and corresponding themes of each article. Then, we calculated the frequency of each frames and themes. Based on the result, we illustrated what "problems" need to be addressed by the collaboration.

The data analysis was conducted using the following steps. First, we started by carefully reading the articles to get a basic understanding of the central organizing ideas hidden within the data. We found that the issue-specific frames identified by Leung et al. (2019) were appropriate to be the initial coding scheme in this study. Second, a pre-study was conducted among 50 randomly selected news articles which we read thoroughly to find returning frames and sub-frames. We allowed sub-frames to emerge out of data and places that emphasised an understanding of the meanings within the context of the texts. The emerging subframes were constantly compared to the concept of main frames, working back and forth between various categorizations of the main frames. Twenty subframes were identified in this stage by investigating the emphases in the news discourse. This resulted in a preliminary coding scheme with a list of frames and subframes based on the researcher's judgment and presented as a chart. In

the next stage of analysis, using this preliminary coding scheme, all 158 news articles were read through and the researcher created a different chart for each sample. If the sample had something similar to a "main theme", this topic was marked with a "1" (strong), while every other mentioned aspect was labelled as a sub-theme and marked with a "0.5" (weak).

4. RESULT

Six main frames were identified as key to promoting collective action. Six main frames are discussed below in the order of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing with sub-frames highlighted and frequency counts provided in parentheses. Diagnostic frames and prognostic frames are inseparable. The former defines the problem as "governance" and "multiple-relation". The latter indicates that "business model" may be the solution to problem. Motivational frames can be adopted as collective action frames for motivating and sustaining stakeholder collaboration.

Diagnostic framing assists in knowing what the causes of a problem or barrier are by naming it. We found that "governance" (n=38) and "multiple-relation" (n=35) are two issues reflected by article data. "Governance" refers to the processes of governing over the sharing accommodation. Chinese governments have welcomed the emergence of Airbnb and have to a large extent recognized the negative effects created by it. However, the administration in China, and around the world, seems to fail to address the problems generated by Airbnb. There are the following reasons: Firstly, both the difficulty to objectively define Airbnb and the unsuitable "regulations" (n=15) and "tax" standards (n=3) which are based on traditional lodging, resulting in significant regulatory gaps. At present, the governance of Airbnb mainly relies on "industry self-discipline" (n=4) and platform constraints. Secondly, "non-standardization" of key operational areas (n=16) brings about potential hygiene and safety hazard. Thirdly, government itself has not developed adequate capacities to regulate as some sample articles commented.

"Multiple-relation" is another frame that implies the key issues related to interactions and processes among the players in sharing accommodation: platforms, hosts who provide products/services, consumers who purchase products/services and community residents. Airbnb raises personal, property and payment "security" (n=17), as well as

privacy concerns. Since 2017, all kinds of negative news about Airbnb emerge endlessly, such as Pinhole Camera Scandal and Tenant's "destruction". Another subframe is "trust" (n=11). Trust plays a crucial role in virtually all P2P platforms. Since trading with strangers in Airbnb involves asymmetric information, both the landlord and the tenant are afraid of each other's opportunistic behaviour. According to the sample article No. 137:

However, "the trust mechanism established by various short-term rental platforms is too weak". The sample articles discussed "community relations" (n=9), with negative attitudes. Airbnb claims that it enables tourists to penetrate residential neighbourhoods and "live like a local". Ironically, many articles have reported that Airbnb is boycotted vigorously by the residents. A flood of complaints is made by residents living in high-grade residential areas about the increased levels of noise, environmental pollution and threats to security: they are very common in many countries.

Prognostic framing focuses on developing specific strategies to solve the situation. "Business model" (n=94) is one of the key emerging frames in the analysis. It refers to variety of issues related to the design, development, management, and operation of Airbnb. We used this term as one of the prognostic frames. Five subframes emerged within this frame: "strategy" (n=47), "growth" (n=33), "cooperation" (n=12), "product" (n=11) and "management" (n=9). As explained by the sample articles, "business model" is regarded as the main solution to solve problems.

Motivational framing encourages the public or specific actors to engage in sharing accommodation. Our data reveal two frames that explain people's motivation for participation in Airbnb: "consumption practices" (n=10) and "employment concern" (n=7). On the other hand, "externality" (n=29) is employed as a key frame to encourage more positive participation. The development of Airbnb has indeed produced some environmental, economic, socio-cultural externalities. Proponents argue that urban space can be more sustainably used and new economic opportunities fostered. It particularly helps to achieve the twin goals of alleviating poverty and boosting tourism. To the extent that sharing peers creates meaningful contacts, sharing practices increase social mixing. With regard to socio-cultural outcomes, Airbnb fosters cross-cultural exchange which is conducive to the spread and diffusion of knowledge and culture. It also helps to spread the awareness of

sharing more broadly among the public, even forming a wave promoting the culture of sharing.

In addition, we also identified nine stakeholders involved in peer-to-peer online platform ecosystems: platform operator, competitor, media, resident, government, specialist, consumer, partner and provider. Media, platform operator and government are the most influential stakeholders and have formed a power triangle in the network. Resident and consumer are all important stakeholders. However, platform operators adopted a one-way communication perspective while they rarely responded to the issues of "multiple-relation" proposed by consumer and resident.

5. CONCLUSION

The advantages of frame analysis used in this study are explained as following: First, this method uses online articles which are a low cost method and without constraints of space or time, and thus is an efficient way to identify geographically scattered stakeholders and their collective concerns. Second, Frame analysis offers a methodological perspective for addressing it. Frame analysis is an ideal tool as it can make key aspects of perceived over-tourism salient in communicating texts. Furthermore, in cases where there is no existing formal cooperation, it can still serve to explore intersections among stakeholders.

The results of this study have the following practical implications on the collaboration initiation in Airbnb accommodation renting ecosystems. Collaboration between Airbnb stakeholders is suggested to take place in the following aspects under power triangle leaders (media, government and platform operator):

As for enhancing governance, Airbnb and government are suggested to form co-operation governance by information sharing. Comprehensive collaboration between the government and a platform operator could be carried out in various areas such as proprietor and houses access audits, the settlement of consumer disputes, and the construction of credit rating systems. Second, specialists along with platform operators should cooperate with government in putting forward scientific and operational industry related standards as well as in clearly establishing the legal status of P2P sharing platforms.

With regard to multiple-relations, platforms should cooperate with media and provide media with information that they need in time. Meanwhile,

media should take responsibility on providing more balance discourse on Airbnb, not ignoring the positive impacts of tourism and the presence of tourists in the community. It could further develop its capacity to interpret situation to the public. When receiving complaints from consumers and residents, media is supposed to report it as fairly and balance as possible by taking advantage of accessibility to more evidences. Some empirical studies have proved that perception of overtourism depends largely on resident attitudes (Gurran & Phibbs, 2017; Dogru, Mody & Suess, 2019). As such, change of resident attitudes towards Airbnb can be a key factor. Based on the tenets of social exchange theory, we argue that public will support this type of business model when they perceived more positive impacts may be brought by Airbnb (Jordan & Moore, 2018).

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Lu Ding.

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