

Chapter 15

Sharing Economy at the Base of the Pyramid-Research Framework and Future Directions



Israr Qureshi, Babita Bhatt, and Dharendra Mani Shukla

This book is an attempt to extend the boundary of the sharing economy literature by understanding the opportunities and challenges of implementing sharing economy models at the base of the pyramid (BOP). Compared to contexts generally studied in mainstream sharing economy models, the unique characteristics of the BOP contexts require a reconceptualization of several aspects of the existing models (Qureshi et al., 2021a). To this end, this book is the first step in integrating knowledge from various theoretical perspectives and empirical contexts. The diverse theoretical perspectives that the chapters in this book have drawn upon include digital social innovation (Qureshi et al., 2021b), platform cooperativism (Scholz, 2014), institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009; Qureshi et al., 2016), technoficing (Qureshi et al., 2021b), social intermediation (Kistruck et al., 2013), social entrepreneurship (Bhatt et al., 2019), collaborative consumption (Belk, 2010), resourcing (Feldman, 2004; Feldman & Worline, 2012), social capital (Bhatt, 2017; Coleman, 1988), and ecosystem perspectives (Adner, 2017). In terms of empirical contexts, this book integrates the understanding of various sharing economy models implemented across geographies such as Australia, China, India, Italy, and Malaysia. Thus, this book represents the beginning of a process of creating a rich body of knowledge about sharing economy models in the BOP context that has implications for both theory and practice.

In particular, the chapters by Galdini and Nardis (2021) (Part I, Chap. 2), Escobedo, Zheng, and Bhatt (2021) (Part I, Chap. 3), and Mannan and Pek (2021) (Part III, Chap. 11) contribute to the emerging literature on platform cooperativism

I. Qureshi (✉) · B. Bhatt
Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, Australia
e-mail: Israr.Qureshi@anu.edu.au; babita.bhatt@anu.edu.au

D. M. Shukla
Indian Institute of Management, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India
e-mail: dharendra.shukla@iimu.ac.in

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(Qureshi & Fang, 2011; Scholz, 2014), which, in contrast to platform capitalism, aims at enhancing trust, cooperation, and social capital, rather than rent-seeking through economic efficiency. Given the little understanding about the role of sharing economy model in the BOP context, these chapters make a significant contribution to the extant literature by highlighting that the transformative sharing economy models have the potential to bring radical social and environmental change in a positive direction. Considering that sharing economy in the BOP context is yet in its nascent phases of development, the findings of these studies have important implications for practice as well. Implementation of these transformative sharing economy models in the BOP can help address the challenges posed by traditional sharing economy models in terms of discrimination and inequality (Clausen & García, 2017; Kumar et al., 2018), an important topic highlighted by Attri and Bapuji (2021) (Part III, Chap. 10). Integrating the emerging stream of research on caste-related discrimination (Bapuji & Chrispal, 2020; Chrispal et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2021) and digital discrimination (Cheng & Foley, 2018; Wiprächtiger et al. 2019), Attri and Bapuji present a detailed account of various forms of discriminations that are prevalent in the existing models of sharing economy and challenges they pose for implementation of sharing economy models at the BOP. The conceptual discussion presented in this study has implications for all types of sharing economy model and provides insights for practitioners at multiple levels, including individual, organizations, and societies, in alleviating the concerns of discrimination in the sharing economy models.

However, if appropriately structured, the sharing models at the BOP can overcome challenges related to discrimination and exclusion and make positive contributions to sustainability and grand challenges (George et al., 2016). Chapter 4 by Qiu, Xu, and Bhatt (2021) contribute to the institutional entrepreneurship literature by highlighting how sharing economy models can help in the process of institutional entrepreneurship (Bhatt et al., 2019; Battilana et al., 2009; Qureshi et al., 2016). Institutional entrepreneurship plays a significant role in addressing the challenges of institutional voids that characterize the BOP context (Parthiban et al., 2020; Qureshi et al., 2016). Additionally, the findings of this chapter have the potential to inform practitioners that social relationships are useful in sharing economy models in the process of institutional entrepreneurship. In a related way, the chapter by Pillai, Shukla, and Qureshi (2021a) (Part I, Chap. 5) explores how sharing economy models can leverage the process of social intermediation (Kistruck et al., 2013; Shalini et al., 2021). The findings of this chapter contribute to the social intermediation literature by identifying the key characteristics of the sharing economy models that facilitate the social intermediation process. This study generates practical insights into how economic, social, and environmental values are created by social intermediaries (Parthiban et al., 2021; cf. Bansal et al., 2014). Continuing a similar line of contribution, Aditi and Bharti (2021) (Part II, Chap. 8) contribute to the collaborative consumption literature and suggest that shared consumption in the energy sector, along with development of critical infrastructure, can enhance sustainability and address the challenges of poverty (Belk, 2010; George et al., 2016). This

chapter offers several practical insights about the prospects and impediments of shared consumption in the energy sector in India.

The development of critical infrastructure is important to improve livelihood in resource-constrained contexts, and so is the market linkages (Hota et al., 2019). Hota and Mitra (2021) (Part II, Chap. 7) examine the significance of sharing economy models in accessing and mobilizing resources through the creation of market linkages. This chapter contributes to the social entrepreneurship literature by highlighting how principles of sharing economy can be leveraged in multiple functions of a social enterprise, including platforms, human resources, business model, and channel, thus enabling the process of social entrepreneurship in the BOP context (Bhatt et al., 2019; Qureshi et al., 2018b). However, as suggested in resourcing perspective physical resources do not by themselves lead to desired outcomes. These resources need to put to right use, and capabilities to use them need to be developed (Feldman, 2004; Feldman & Worline, 2012). Pandey et al. (2021) (Part II, Chap. 9) contribute to the resourcing perspective by highlighting how local and institutional actors engage in resourcing practices and value creation process in the sharing economy models at the BOP. Findings of this chapter present insights about resourcing and value creation and how they can help address societal grand challenges such as poverty.

Employing the lens socialization in the communities, chapters by Escobedo, Zheng, and Bhatt (2021) (Part I, Chap. 3) and Mannan and Pek (2021) (Part III, Chap. 11) contribute to the social capital literature by highlighting the role of transformative sharing economy models in developing social capital (Bhatt, 2017). Further, the chapter by Nungsari and Yin (2021) (Part II, Chap. 6) highlights the role of sharing economy models in promoting sustainable and inclusive development in the Malaysian context. Finally, the chapter by Bhatt and colleagues (2021) (Part IV, Chap. 14) contributes to the ecosystem perspective by emphasizing how ecosystem perspective can be applied to sustain sharing activities and to scale the social impact of sharing economy models (Adner, 2017).

In summary, this book makes a concerted attempt to generate a deeper understanding of the sharing economy models at the BOP and their theoretical and practical implications. However, considering the diversity of BOP context and numerous possibilities of innovative sharing economy models, we call for more research in this domain. Our aim is to initiate discussions and debates about sharing economy models and their potential in bringing positive social and environmental changes in the BOP context. Below, we present several avenues of future research in this domain.

15.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

The chapters in this book have integrated sharing economy literature with diverse theoretical perspectives such as platform cooperativism (Scholz, 2014), institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009; Qureshi et al., 2016), social intermediation (Kistruck et al., 2013), social entrepreneurship (Bhatt et al., 2019), collaborative

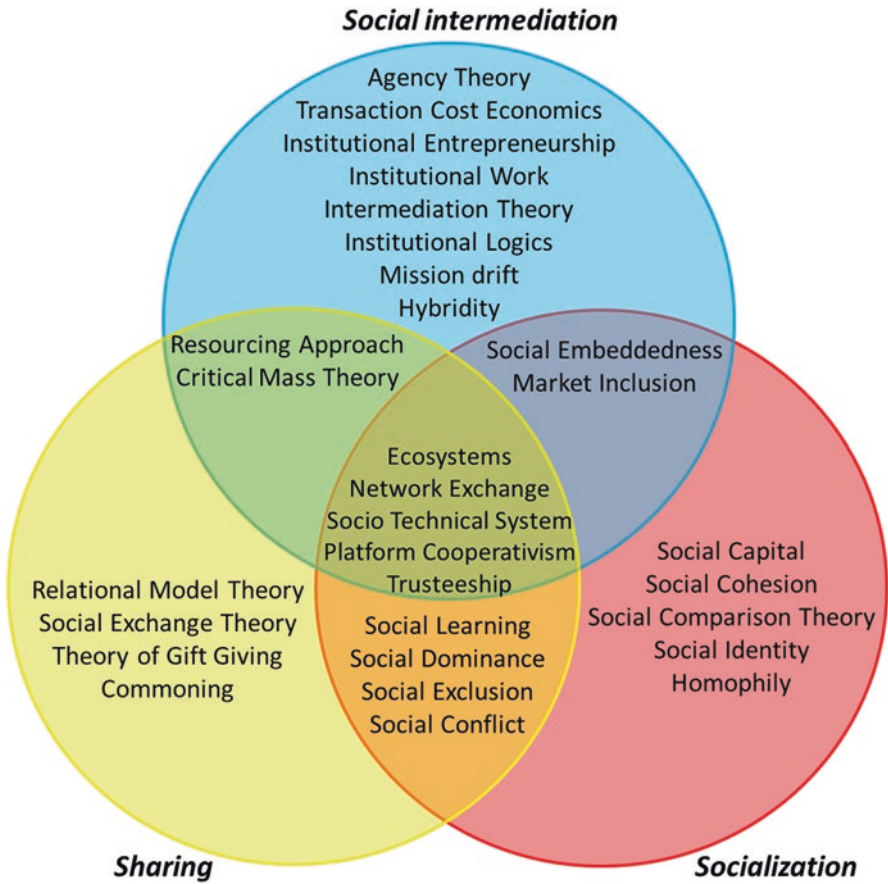


Fig. 15.1 3S Framework and theoretical lenses

consumption (Belk, 2010), resourcing (Feldman, 2004; Feldman & Worline, 2012), social capital (Bhatt, 2017), and ecosystem perspectives (Adner, 2017). Future studies can explore empirical evidence of sharing economy models and extend the boundaries of the theoretical perspectives discussed in this book.

In the introduction to this book, we presented the 3S framework – sharing, socialization, and social intermediation. We leverage the same framework to present various theoretical underpinnings for sharing economy at the BOP. Figure 15.1 presents three dimensions of the 3S framework and suggests theories that can be used to study each dimension, as well as their intersections. It is important to note that the list is indicative and not exhaustive.

15.1.1 Sharing Dimension

It is obvious that sharing is *the* foundation of sharing economy. A key debate in the domains is why community members share with each other and to what extent they share, that is, scope of sharing. Theory of gift-giving (TGG) suggests that sharing is rooted in cultural symbolism and follows norms of collective reciprocity (Corciolani & Dalli, 2014, Giesler, 2006). However, instead of dyadic exchange that would be predicted by strict reciprocity and social exchange theory (SET) (Davlembayeva et al., 2020), collective reciprocity is about community members sharing their assets without an expectation or immediate returns from those with whom they have shared. Fiske (1991) elaborates this in his excellent description of four elementary forms of human relations, sometimes referred to as relational model theory (RMT), which has been used to explain knowledge sharing (Boer et al., 2011; Qureshi et al., 2018a) and recently in the context of peer-to-peer sharing (Stofberg et al., 2019). SET, RMT, and TGG are all conceptualized from the focal individuals perspective with an assumption that resources are own by the focal individual. Commoning perspective (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015) provides a fresh lens to understand how communities decommoify and make public what is private, thus bringing private resources to be preserved as community resources that are then jointly curated. Commoning lens has not been used in sharing economy yet and represents an interesting opportunity.

15.1.2 Socialization Dimension

There is a rich tradition of research in this domain. Social capital is the main lens used for understanding why, how, and with whom people interact (Bhardwaj et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2014; Konrad et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2015). Social capital results in individual and community-level positive outcomes, including cohesive communities and individual well-being. However, not all types of social capital lead to positive community outcomes (Bhatt, 2017). Social identity (Gu et al., 2021; Stets & Burke, 2000) and homophily (Cho et al., 2020; Kandel, 1978) result in the sub-groups formation within the communities, and the presence of bonding social capital, instead of bridging social capital, lead to fragmented communities (Bhatt, 2017; Hawkins & Maurer, 2010; Zmyślony et al., 2020). Social capital can literally determine who is in and who is out, and who get to participate in the sharing economy (Attri and Bapuji – Chapter 10; Ferrari, 2016).

15.1.3 *Social Intermediation Dimension*

Social intermediation is performed by an entity that is concerned with social value creation rather than seeking economic rents (Kistruck et al., 2013). However, this entity has to generate sufficient revenues to sustain its operations, resulting in issues similar to that faced by social enterprises (Doherty et al., 2014; Parthiban et al., 2021). Extant research has extensively studied how social enterprise balances social and financial objectives – hybridity (Battilana et al., 2015), and when they fail to balance these two, how mission drifts happens (Bhatt, 2021; Ebrahim et al., 2014). These issues are equally salient in the context of social intermediation but have not been studied yet. A social intermediary, in contrast to a traditional commercial intermediary, is interested in maximizing value capture by the BOP producers (Parthiban et al., 2021); however, there is a likelihood of encountering agency issues in these transactions (Ebrahim et al., 2014; Tracey & Jarvis, 2007). Similarly, as a social intermediary strives to help marginalized individuals create value and ensure that most of the value thus created is retained by the marginalized, it will face issues related to transaction cost and its resolution (Kistruck et al., 2013). It is claimed that attenuated opportunism displayed by social intermediary determines the purposeful pursuit of social objectives (Kistruck et al., 2013). Does this attenuated opportunism of social intermediary conflict with dominant institutional logics of profit maximisation? (cf Bhatt et al., 2019; Zhao & Lounsbury, 2016; Riaz & Qureshi, 2017). Do social intermediaries help change institutions through institutional entrepreneurship (cf Qureshi et al., 2016) and institutional work (Bhatt et al., 2019).

Apart from the research domains aligned with these three dimensions, there are ample possibilities at the intersection of these dimensions, for example, the extant understanding of the platform cooperativism and their role in transforming society is understudied (Qureshi et al., 2021b; see also Hota et al., 2021; Pillai et al., 2021b). Future studies can further explore empirical cases that employ sharing economy models based on platform cooperativism and provide a nuanced understanding of implementation processes and mechanisms used. Similarly, how institutional or social entrepreneurship unfolds in the context of sharing economy is yet to be fully understood (Bhatt et al., 2019; Qureshi et al., 2016). The mechanisms through which sharing economy models enable the processes of social and institutional entrepreneurship can be explored in depth in future studies. In a similar vein, although the role of technology-based commercial intermediaries in the value creation and appropriation have drawn significant attention from scholars (Amit & Zott, 2001; Oh et al., 2015), the role of technology-enabled social intermediation is underexplored (Parthiban et al., 2021). The process of social intermediation could be helpful in realizing the potentials of both reformative and transformative sharing economy models. However, this has attracted little attention from scholars so far. Future studies can explore how the process of social intermediation may vary for reformative and transformative sharing economy models. Considering that the value

creation and appropriation logic may differ significantly for reformative and transformative sharing economy models, such comparative studies may bring deeper insight about the process of social intermediation in these contrasting models. Further, resourcing practices involved in sharing economy models can be further explored to understand how resources are leveraged in the reformative and transformative sharing economy models. Additionally, the application of ecosystem perspective can help understand not only the scalability and replicability of the existing sharing economy platform but also how these sharing economy models interact with other components of the ecosystem (Adner, 2017).

Alternatively, future studies can develop or integrate new theoretical perspectives to understand different sharing economy models. Future studies can broaden the theoretical bases of the sharing economy models by integrating them with other theoretical lenses. For example, several of the sharing economy models such as that of bHive and Drishtee highlight the role of place-based economies and agents in the process of development and implementation of sharing economy models. The emerging literature on place, which has origin in the discipline of Human Geography (Tuan, 1977; Wright et al., 2021), can bring insights into the role of place and local actors in the sharing economy models. Similarly, bricolage perspective can enrich the understanding of how microentrepreneurs leverage the available resources in an efficient and innovative manner to enhance value creation in the sharing economy models (Di Domenico et al., 2010; Hota et al., 2019).

15.2 Focus on Marginalized

A few sharing economy models explored in this book aim to address marginalized groups, such as farmers, the poor, and refugees. However, the broad implications of sharing economy models on addressing the challenges of the marginalized groups are yet to be understood well (cf Qureshi et al., 2021b). For example, given the resource constraint environment at the BOP, sharing economy models might need technoficing – using simple and inexpensive yet suitable technologies – to achieve more effective implementation and social impact (Qureshi et al., 2021b). Nevertheless, it is not all about technology, a few studies have highlighted that sharing economy models can be prone to exclusion and marginalization of some sections of the society (Clausen & García, 2017; Kumar et al., 2018). However, additional empirical studies may help understand the potential negative implications of sharing economy models at the BOP more comprehensively. Further, given the potential of sharing economy models to increase discrimination of different types, it may present an interesting avenue for future studies to explore the relationship between the types of sharing economy models and the nature of discrimination inherent in it (cf Qureshi et al., 2021b).

15.3 Geographic Context

The empirical contributions made in this book rely on sharing economy models employed in the BOP content of countries such as Australia, China, India, Italy, and Malaysia. However, the BOP population is present in almost all emerging and developed countries (Calavita & Kitty, 2005; Shaefer & Edin, 2013). Future studies may generate evidence from diverse geographic contexts to enhance understanding about the diversity of contextual challenges faced by the sharing economy models in different countries. For example, the social, cultural, and environmental context of African countries may differ substantially from those in eastern Europe or Asia. Thus, the characteristics of the sharing economy models can be very different in these geographic regions even if they aim to cater for the economically backward population in both regions. Further, to explore the role of the social, cultural, and environmental context on the characteristics of the sharing economy models, it might be a good idea to explore the sharing economy models of an international organization that aim to cater for people from similar economic and occupation background in different regions.

15.4 Methodological Contributions

The chapters included in this study primarily use qualitative studies to understand the nuances of sharing economy models in the BOP context. However, future studies can take quantitative or mixed-method approaches to enhance the understanding about the sharing economy models at the BOP. For example, the value creation and appropriation potential of different sharing economy models could be examined using a cross-sectional or longitudinal survey. Similarly, survey-based quantitative methods could be leveraged to understand the role of social intermediaries in reducing transaction costs or improving market linkages. Further, experimental techniques such as Randomized Control Trials (RCT) could be helpful in understanding the impact of sharing economy models (or its characteristics) on the target BOP population. For example, the extent to which sharing economy models help in building social cohesion in the community can be studied through natural experiments (cf Luo et al., 2021). Additionally, future studies can use mixed-method approaches to understand the role of sharing economy models in making economic, social, and environmental impacts.

We hope this book will become a starting point for various new research endeavours in the field of sharing economy for the BOP. We look forward to increase research activities in this important emerging field.

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Israr Qureshi is a Professor at the Research School of Management, Australian National University (ANU), Canberra. He is a Member of ANU Institute for Climate, Energy & Disaster Solutions, and an Associate Editor at *Business & Society*, *Information Systems Journal* and *MIS Quarterly*. He was a member (Civil Society Group) and observer (Technical Working Group) on the recently concluded Australian Sustainable Finance Initiative. Israr is currently involved in multiple research projects that investigate various social value creation through social intermediation, social entrepreneurship and digital social innovation. Israr's extensive research and pro bono advising of social enterprises and ventures in the base of the pyramid contexts helped him understand the potential of social intermediation, social entrepreneurship and digital social innovation in transforming society.

Babita Bhatt is a Lecturer at the Research School of Management, Australian National University. Her research interest lies at the intersection of community, civil society, and organizations. Her research expertise is in hybrid organizations, particularly social enterprises that are working in resource-constrained and socially challenging contexts. Her research mainly explores how organizational hybridity affects the social impact of social enterprises and what type of governance structures and mechanisms would result in more inclusive outcomes. Through several projects in China, India, and the Philippines, she has acquired expertise on the issues related to resource acquisition, scalability, and sustainability of social enterprises. Her work has been published in *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *European Journal of Marketing*, and *Information Systems Frontiers*. She has received funding from various research agencies in Canada, Hong Kong, and India.

Dhirendra Mani Shukla is an Assistant Professor at the Indian Institute of Management Udaipur. He received his doctoral degree from the Indian Institute of Management Lucknow. His research interests include social entrepreneurship, innovation, social networks, strategic alliances and inter-organisational relationships. His work has been published in *Journal of Business Research*, *Management Decision* and *Journal of Management & Organization*. His projects on social networks and entrepreneurship have received funding from MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource Development, India) and ICSSR (Indian Council of Social Science Research) under prestigious granting initiatives such as SPARC and IMPRESS. His work on interorganisational relationships and innovation received the Scholars Exchange Grant from ICSSR under Indo-Swiss joint research programme in social sciences.