Sharing Behind the Scenes: Understanding User Bypassing Behavior in Sharing Economy

ABSTRACT:

Sharing economy platforms facilitate people's sharing of underutilized resources by adding value to their users, such as reducing transaction costs and building trust. However, it is discovered by practitioners that users may actually bypass, or 'disintermediate', the platforms to strike direct deals on their own. This phenomenon motivates this research to understand sharing economy user bypassing behavior. Specifically, we investigate their motivations of bypassing and behavioral strategies of overcoming trust barriers. Drawing insights from disintermediation literature, we conduct a single case study on Airbnb, a renowned accommodation sharing platform. Our findings show that Airbnb hosts have both economic and non-economic motivations to bypass the platform, and they are able to overcome trust barriers through leveraging the unbundling of intermediary functions. Our study makes several theoretical contributions: uncovering the virtues and defects in current sharing economy business model, detailing the actual behavioral strategies of disintermediation, augmenting predominant economic view of disintermediation, and proposing a 'spillover effect' of embedded relationship on economic action.