Trust and Discrimination on Collaborative Consumption Platforms

With a Special Focus on Ridesharing Platforms

Working Paper: 2019

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Abstract: Collaborative consumption platforms are rapidly spreading worldwide, establishing an innovative type of services. We focus our attention on the relation between online trust and the discrimination of ridesharing service users. Our central argument is that the personalization of transactions through the built-in selection mechanisms results in various types of discrimination. The ethical implications and recommendations will be considered, as both literature and our previous pilot research – which tested racial and ethnic discrimination on one ridesharing platform – illustrate that racial and ethnic background both serve as a basis for discrimination on online sharing platforms. We conclude by outlining that discrimination is not recognized and responded to as a negative consequence of the trust-building features, further adding recommendations on how this situation may be handled, as well as the responsibility that platforms have in this situation. Our contribution to this segment of the literature on sharing economy entails a discussion about ethical concerns and

the need for empirical evidence in order to further comprehend and provide suggestions when facing discrimination in this new type of business models.

Key words: collaborative consumption, consumer protection, discrimination, ridesharing, sharing economy, trust

1. Introduction

There has been growing interest in the field of sharing economy and collaborative consumption platforms. Studies focused on companies such as AirBnb (Ert et al. 2016; Edelman et al. 2016; Murphy, 2016; Zervas, 2017), Uber, and Lyft (Cannon and Summers, 2014; Ge et al. 2016). On the one hand, some scholars depict sharing economy as a positive paradigm change from the conventional economic business model, with a potential of the democratization of socio-economic relations (Belk, 2010). On the other hand, another line of argumentation highlights the potential "neoliberal nightmare" of the sharing economy (Martin, 2016), or how disadvantaged people are excluded from sharing economy activities (Schor, 2017).

The spread of sharing economy platforms changed practices related to consumer consumption, displaying benefits as well as potential risks. An essential change in consumption is represented by the shift in consumer choices when it comes to *owning* versus *using on demand,* the latter being facilitated by the sharing economy. The importance of ownership of a product in itself starts to be less important and access and experience resulted from sharing the product are more important features for consumers in sharing economy. Russell Belk summarized this important feature by saying "*You are what you can access*" (2013, 1598).

Creating social links and building social capital have crucial roles in the sharing economy organizations. Some sharing platforms, especially the ones that are labeled with the term "peer-to-peer", such as ridesharing companies or Airbnb, are providers of risky, "high-stakes" offline experiences, thus making trust between users a crucial resource. *Digital trust* is a required and essential resource for sharing platforms. In online interactions, trust has to be approached differently, as the level of trustworthiness is not known (Chen and Fadlalla, 2009, 87). Because of this anonymity, there is hardly any trust when there is no available information about someone you will share an offline experience with (Cui et al. 2017). Privacy concerns are a highly relevant subject in the discussion about trust and the personal information of consumers (Chen and Fadlalla, 2009, 85). Thus, the sharing economy creates a unique form of social capital that relies on positive and negative exchanges (Codagnone et al. 2016b). The "*visual-based trust*" in online transactions (Ert et al. 2016), demographic information in order to gain trust (Cui et al. 2017), and prior experiences of others (rating system for ridesharing platforms) need to be taken into account in order to analyze the characteristics of the sharing economy companies.

We do not argue that platforms are morally and legally responsible for actions which are unambiguously performed by service providers—for instance, drivers in car sharing — rather, we hold that, apart from the benefits they offer, sharing economy platforms should act against the potential for discrimination resulted in the transactions these companies intermediate.

2. Theoretical background and previous research

2.1 The sharing economy, collaborative consumption, and regulation

Despite the fact that there is an increasing attention given to the topic of sharing economy, there is no clear definition of it, being also used variously in practice (Martin,

2004, 151). There are authors who argue for an optimistic view regarding the sharing economy (Belk, 2010; Sundararajan, 2016; John, 2017), while others highlight problematic issues related to the legal and regulatory framework (Malhotra, 2014), or policy changes within these platforms (Cannon and Summers, 2014). Arnould and Rose (2015) criticize Belk's (2010; 2013) view about sharing, arguing that "the concept suffers from a number of ontological and epistemological flaws", being conceptualized in an idealistic manner. Internet and information technology (Belk, 2013; Koopman et al. 2015; Hamari, 2015), as well as the importance of creativity in society (Moore and Robinson, 2015), brought changes in transactions and attracted new forms of connections between providers and consumers. Offline experiences require trust between strangers acquainted in an online setting.

According to Codagnone and colleagues (2016a), consumer welfare is increased due to the capacity of service delivery and lower prices. In contrast, a widespread criticism is that sharing economy has nothing to do with sharing (Slee, 2015; Scholz, 2016), as Airbnb is basically a short-term renting platform, and Uber is operating as an unregulated taxi company. Uber is further criticized for its exploitative system, in which drivers work in precarious labor conditions without social security. Sundararajan (2016) also argues about the way several companies, while considered to be car sharing platforms, do not have a significantly different business model from traditional car rental companies (e.g. Zipcar and car2go vs. peer-to-peer Turo). In consumer research, various practices are included in the category of sharing, such as *collaborative consumption, commercial sharing systems, co-creation* etc. (Belk, 2013, 1). The term *collaborative consumption* became popular after the study published by Botsman and Rogers (2011), and it is gradually gaining importance in the literature. The consumer is not just obtaining a product or a service, he or she is also providing them to others. These "joint activities" (Felson and Speath, 1978, 614) are

understood as being in between sharing and regular exchange in the marketplace (Belk, 2013, 3).

As various sharing economy platforms grow very fast worldwide, the model they provide develops in a rather hectic manner (EPRS, 2017). The blurring distinctions between public and private, as well as the information asymmetry, raise concerns. These blurring distinctions entail mainly regulation problems, whereas the information asymmetry might also lead to moral hazards, according to Cohen and Sundararajan (2017). Moral hazards include risks such as receiving less careful services (e.g. less careful driver), lower levels of effort made by the service provider (e.g. dirty car seats) compared to services provided by the regular economy (e.g. ridesharing vs. regular train services).

Contrasted with the conventional economy business models — in which service providers are offering their services to their consumers — in the sharing economy, the relationship between the service provider and the consumers is different: the individual consumer relates both to the platform provider and to an individual, who is typically referred to as a *service provider*. The different model provided by the sharing economy can raise certain legal and ethical labor-related concerns. Zrenner (2015) argued that the practices of numerous sharing platforms create several concerns with regard to market competition, legality, and consumer protection. At the same time, the fact that the sharing platforms only facilitate the transactions between people outline the potential approach of these companies toward responsibilities. Vaskelainen and Tura (2018) carried out an extended mapping of problems associated with the sharing economy. As a result of their analysis, various concerns were identified related to safety, discrimination, unfair competition, and worker classification. Thus, analyzing and comparing the differences between groups deems to be essential. Lambin and Palikot (2018) demonstrated that minority drivers in ridesharing companies, although discriminated, needed to persist with more interactions and gain

reputation in order to be less discriminated. Consequently, the reputation system works in order to compensate for the discrimination against certain minority groups.

2.2 Trust and risk in collaborative consumption platforms

A classic formulation of *trust* comes from James Coleman, who defined trust as "the willingness to commit to a collaborative effort before realizing how the other person will behave" (1990, 79). Piotr Sztompka's (2003) sociological framework about trust defines this concept as a necessary response in the face of unknown future circumstances and outcomes. Online sharing economy platforms, which have a certain level of anonymity and leave room for deceit, undoubtedly present such unknown circumstances. The digital economy—based on digital computing technologies—produces various forms of risk and trust, as opposed to the conventional marketplaces, mainly because the platform providers do not directly offer services to people, they are only "intermediaries" (Codagnone et al. 2016b, 48). To create trust in response to these risks, users tend to provide more robust information on newer forms of P2P collaborative consumption platforms. Ridesharing is unique in comparison to other types of collaborative consumption platforms of transportation for various reasons, one being the involvement of personal contact between drivers and riders.

Online trust can be defined as "an attitude of confident expectation in an online situation of risk that one's vulnerabilities will not be exploited" (Corritore et al. 2003, 740). To create and maintain online trust, collaborative consumption platforms incorporate review and reputation systems, as well as the pervasive use of personal photos of the service providers which serve as identity verification. Furthermore, online transactions also encompass new risks, such as privacy concerns and security assurances, or the fear of losing money during the exchange (Beldad et al. 2010).

According to Sundararajan, trust stems from the following five channels: (1) The service user's own *prior interactions;* (2) Learning from the *experiences of others*; (3) *Brand certification* (placing faith to a brand name); (4) Relying on *digitized social capital*; (5) *Validation from external institutions or entities*, digital or otherwise, governmental or non-governmental (2016, 114-116). In business-to-consumer (B2C) platforms, trust can also be built in a different manner from that in peer-to-peer sharing platforms. Bonds between seller and buyer rely on the numerous ways online trust is built among strangers. The importance of trust-building in ridesharing platforms was outlined by the joint research between BlaBlaCar's founder and professor Arun Sundararajan, research aimed at exploring the working mechanism of online trust, and the resulting levels of trust created. BlaBlaCar is a ridesharing and carpooling company that intermediates the offline experiences between drivers who want to share seats in their car to riders who want to reach the same destination. The data revealed that the role of full profiles including photos, reviews, and verification, as well as the brand effect of BlaBlaCar, are crucial in creating digital trust, making the riders and the drivers who had never met trust each other almost as much as their family members or friends.

There is growing research evidence that these sorts of information have a key role in establishing online trust (Liu, 2012; Király-Dén Nagy, 2014; Ert et al. 2016). Veskalainen and Tura (2018) argued for the existence of a 'sharing paradox': neither online nor physical privacy concerns directly affect the sharing behaviour, as these effects are mediated through either online trust or the perceived benefits. However, publicly available profiles in sharing platforms, often linked to the Facebook or LinkedIn profiles of the users, may not only facilitate online trust, they can also provide a space for racial and gender-based discrimination (Edelman and Luca, 2014; Edelman et al. 2016; Ge et al. 2016; Simonovits et al. forthcoming).

2.3 The working mechanism of discrimination in the sharing economy

In the literature on labor market discrimination, there is a distinction between *statistical* and *taste-based* discrimination. The main idea of taste-based discrimination is that certain people do not like members of a certain out-group so they do not want to be in contact with them unless they are compensated somehow. Becker (1971) revealed three forms of taste-based discrimination. The first two refer to (i) *employers* and (ii) *co-workers* who prefer not to work with people from minority groups because they have a preference against them. Additionally, (iii) *discriminatory customers* are only willing to purchase a product from minority workers if they can pay less for it. The theory on statistical discrimination, originally developed by Phelps (1972) and Arrow (1973), posits that in the absence of direct information about a certain fact or ability, a decision-maker would substitute group averages. Discrimination in the labor market may exist because employers do not have sufficient information about an applicant's ability, therefore they base their employment decisions on the applicant's visible features of race, ethnicity, age, and gender.

In our view, both theoretical models can be well applied to understand how discrimination works in the online sharing economy platforms. Adjusting Becker's model to sharing economy companies, we can substitute the role of employers with the role of the *individual service providers,* while *co-riders* can be seen as co-workers in the specific case of ridesharing. Discriminative consumers are consumers on the online platforms who do not want to use a service or purchase a product offered by a service provider belonging to a certain community or group. The model of statistical discrimination can be applied to the decision-making process of the individual service providers: as they do not have enough information on the trustworthiness and future behavior of the service users (riders), they base

their decisions on the visible characteristics of the applicants provided by their profile photos, as well as the cues provided by their names (features of race, ethnicity, age, and gender).

Some authors in labor economics literature suggest that discriminative preferences of employers are generally costly (Lovász and Telegdy, 2010), as it might happen that, due to discriminative decisions, an employer does not find the most suitable candidate for a position. This reasoning on discrimination can also be applied to online collaborative consumption platforms (e.g. vacant seats in the car). Edelman and his colleagues (2016) found that guests with African American-sounding names were roughly 16% less likely to be accepted as Airbnb guests than identical guests with white-sounding names. The authors concluded that while personalized host and guest profiles enhance building trust between hosts and guests, they also enable user discrimination based on their race or gender.

Other studies have examined different actors involved in transportation services, such as pedestrians, drivers, and taxi drivers. Goddard and his collaborators (2015) found evidence for the discrimination of drivers against pedestrians of a different race. African American testers had to wait 30% longer for a car to stop compared to the white testers. Furthermore, Ge and her colleagues (2016) carried out a study of 600 app-hailed trips in the Seattle area and almost 800 in the Boston area to test the different types of discriminatory practices in Transportation Network Companies (TNC). Comparing the services provided by Lyft, Uber, and Flywheel (in Seattle), the authors found the strongest evidence on racial discrimination in the case of Uber's services in both metropolitan areas. Discrimination against riders with African American-sounding names was observed in significantly longer waiting times as well as in more frequent cancellations. Researchers also concluded that women passengers were being taken on longer and more expensive rides in Boston, compared to men passengers. As a result of the fieldwork, the authors also identified and categorized the following four potential sources of discrimination: (i) Before the ride; (ii) When requesting a ride; (iii) When taking

the fares; (iv) After the ride (Ge et al. 2016, 22). Most recently, Simonovits and her colleagues (2018) carried out a small-scale controlled field experiment on one well-known international ridesharing platforms operating in Hungary, BlaBlaCar, in order to test potential discrimination against passengers of different nationalities. In this paper, we will discuss the most important results of the research, being singular when it comes to discrimination testing for a ridesharing and carpooling service.

3. Conceptual and methodological framework

In online sharing economy, responsibilities of the platforms are also shared. The problem of regulation is stemming from the *triangular relation* within the P2P business model. P2P marketplaces are predominantly based on online transactions between consumers and sellers, who are both individuals, while the platforms are companies.

Figure 1: Labor relations in the sharing economy business model (ridesharing)
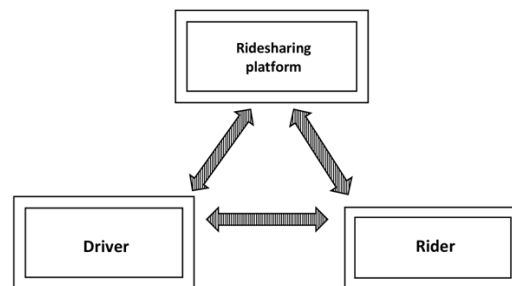
In the (i) relationship between the *individual consumers* and the *private service providers*, the online transactions are realized between these two actors. An example of a regulatory issue can be seen when the service provider causes an unpleasant experience or causes harm to the consumer, or vice versa.[2] Focusing on relationship (ii), between the *platform providers* and the *private service providers*, the problems emerge from the undefined labor relations that might result in precarious labor conditions or violations of local

laws (underpaid drivers). Finally, in the triangular relationship, (iii) among *platform providers*, *individual consumers,* and *private service providers,* discrimination of consumers is more likely to happen as an unintended consequence of using personalized profiles compared to online platforms based on conventional business models, working through automatic online transactions (e.g. BlaBlaCar vs. Eurorail). In many online ridesharing platforms, racial or any other kind of discrimination are prohibited either by anti-discrimination policies or by rules of conduct that articulate desirable behavior. However, discrimination still exists in practice, as the built-in selection mechanism results in unintended consequences such as discriminating platform users that belong to certain groups or minorities (i.e. both drivers and riders can choose whom they want to share the ride with). Yet, creating and maintaining trust is crucial in peer-to-peer online platforms because the verification of identities, intentions, and capabilities of the service providers is essential in these interactions. Such a dilemma can be solved through certain incentives and practical measures.

Figure 2: The process of building trust and the potential consequences in the sharing economy business model
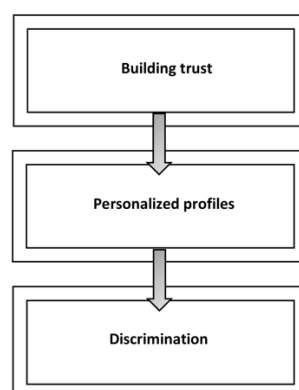
Consequently, the questions raised are manifold: (i) Is discrimination based on certain grounds prevalent on the ridesharing platforms, in terms of race, nationality, and gender? (ii)

Are there any good practices on the collaborative consumption platforms fighting discrimination that can be applied to ridesharing platforms? (iii) How may these kinds of unintended negative consequences be eliminated or mitigated? (iv) Who is responsible for the prevalence of such discrimination? Our analysis covered these questions.

4. Results

There have been various distinctions and terms used in the literature discussing sharing economy platforms for transportation. Our focus on BlaBlaCar is determined by two major reasons: (1) in contrast to other platforms, BlaBlaCar concentrates to a high extent on enhancing trust both through the personalized profiles of its users and the rating system; thus, the company can reveal an interesting case of inquiry; (2) there is a scant amount of studies directed towards analyzing this specific sharing economy platform in contrast to other well-known platforms.

One initial and major distinction concerns the fact that, while many car sharing platforms are closer to the business-to-peer (B2P) economic models (Sundararajan, 2016), ridesharing relies more on peer-to-peer (P2P) interactions. Consequently, the relation between the private service provider and the individual consumer is the essence of the transaction intermediated by the platform. The three companies that we compare here rely on P2P interactions: BlaBlaCar, Uber, and Lyft. BlaBlaCar offers P2P ridesharing and carpooling services; Uber and Lyft provide ride-hailing services, and all three represent good examples of platforms that offer 'high-stakes' offline experiences. A second distinction regards the fact that Uber and Lyft are closer to taxi services, while BlaBlaCar provides long-distance services that facilitate interactions between drivers who want to go to a certain destination and riders who are headed to the same destination.

In the case of Uber and Lyft, issues of legality and taxes are questioned, as well as unloyal competition with other firms. Conversely, BlaBlaCar does not directly compete with any other already established and regulated company with a traditional business model. In addition, there are no legal issues regarding the city or state law compliance for BlaBlaCar. All three platforms use the two-way rating system, regulating how drivers and riders behave, at the same time aiming to make them more prone to being polite and respect their clients. For BlaBlaCar, the "D.R.E.A.M.S." framework (*Declared; Rated; Engaged; Active; Moderated; Social)* is presented as a trust-based formula for its users who are searching or accepting rides (Mazzella and Sundararajan, 2016*)*. The D.R.E.A.M.S. framework is an innovation that puts emphasis specifically on the importance of personalized profiles in order to build trust between service users.

Uber and Lyft both have anti-discrimination policies on their websites. However, Uber recently was the subject of various concerns about safety and discrimination, as the media flourished with cases (e.g. harassment, alleged assaults). BlaBlaCar does not have an explicit anti-discrimination policy, rather addressing these issues with several rules of conduct for its users. A measure that BlaBlaCar introduced is the "Ladies Only" option that is aimed at assuaging women's concerns for their safety. However, the "Ladies Only" option can be rather controversial, giving that it conceals bigger trust issues in ridesharing, being in contradiction with the idea of trust-building in order to end or diminish in-group preferences.

**Table 1. Features of the selected sharing economy platforms**

Company	Type of service	Rating system	Safety	Anti-discrimination	Potential problems for actors
Uber	Ride-hailing; Short-distance services;	Decentralized monitoring; Two-way rating;	Rider and driver safety tips are available; The phone number stays private for both rider and driver;	Specific policy for anti-discrimination;	Favoring consumer satisfaction over driver welfare; sidestepping the regulations, taxes, and charges that are present in the traditional business; discrimination; privacy; worker classification
Lyft	Ride-hailing; Short-distance services;	Decentralized monitoring; Two-way ratings;	Critical Response Line; Background checks for all drivers; Zero-Tolerance Policy for drug and alcohol; Vehicle Standards; Insurance Protection Plan;	Specific policy for anti-discrimination;	Taxation; difficulties in regulation; privacy; unfair competition; discrimination; worker classification;
BlaBlaCar	Ridesharing; Long-distance services;	Decentralized monitoring; Two-way rating;	Moderated profiles; Insured journey; Ladies Only Policy; D.R.E.A.M.S. framework for enhancing trust;	Rules of conduct;	Difficulties to enforce regulation; worker classification;

While BlaBlaCar gives increased attention to trust-building, we argue that there is no focus on the various types of discrimination resulted from the unintended consequences of personalized online profiles; however, the platform outlines the importance of personalization and trust between the private service provider and individual consumer. In our view, BlaBlaCar's "Ladies Only" policy can run counter to the objectives of creating and maintaining trust among people of different gender, race, ethnicity, and age. As previous research in the field of sharing economy revealed several problems concerning discrimination, one main concern relates to the regulatory measures that can solve similar issues.

We contend that evidence and solutions are highly necessary in order to ameliorate the negative effects of discrimination in the relations intermediated through sharing economy platforms which rely on P2P interactions. As far as the empirical analysis on BlablaCar is concerned, we carried out a small-scale field experiment in 2017 to test the prevalence of discrimination based on racial and ethnic background between four minority groups, also taking into account gender in Hungary (Simonovits et al. 2018). Eight profiles with different

countries of origin were used (4 men and 4 women), yielding altogether 160 cases (Table 2). The main hypothesis was that private service providers (drivers) differentiate between in-group and out-group in terms of the racial and national identity of the individual consumer. The research focused on the reaction of the driver to the requests both in terms of quantitative and qualitative measures. Significant differences were found in the outcomes — differentiated between positive and negative reaction of the drivers — by different profiles both in terms of gender and nationality (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Positive outcomes by profiles (N=160)
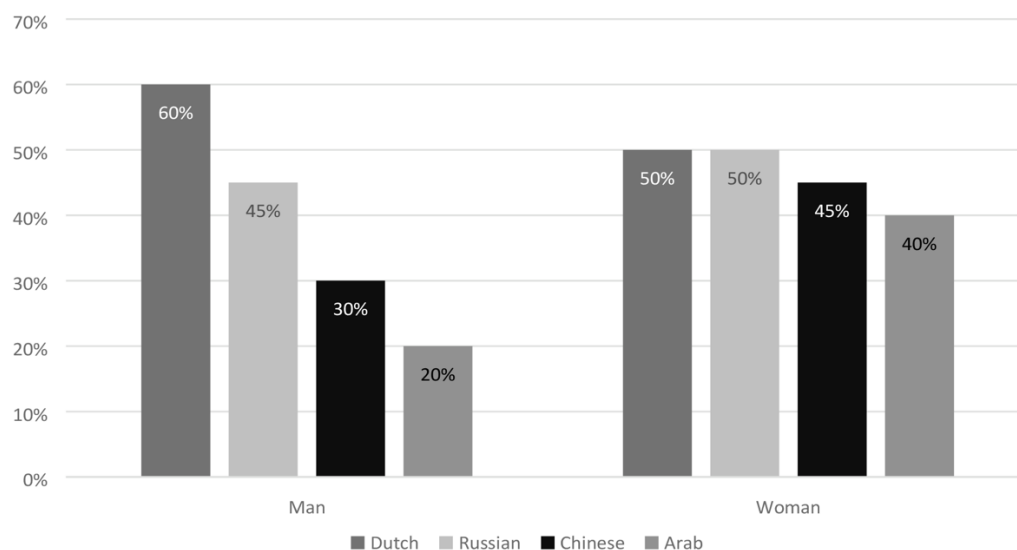
Source: based on Simonovits et al. (2018)

The least accepted requests were that of the Arab man's profile, while the highest level of acceptance was encountered by the two Dutch profiles (the Dutch man received 60% positive answers out of all answers). Comparing the difference in means within the same gender, the only significant difference was found between the Arab and the Dutch profiles. As further analyses on averages of the different subsamples only showed clear evidence of interaction effect by gender and nationality in case of the men subsample, the conclusion is that Arab men were the least welcomed on the platform.

Because communication is crucial in building trust, we further analyzed the messages received from the drivers in terms of quantitative and qualitative aspects. Giving the fact that

no significant differences were seen, the conclusion was that the discriminative drivers mostly expressed their negative attitudes in ignoring the riders' requests. As a second step, we used qualitative analysis of the messages received from the drivers, according to *style* and *content* (n=111; 69% of all the total observations). The style was operationalized in checking whether the reply contained any kind of greeting ("hello", "hi" or the username). The qualitative analysis of the requests was also carried out based on the different answer patterns. The typical identified refusals were the following: (i) There are no free places in the car anymore; (ii) Canceling, rescheduling or postponing the trip; (iii) Longer or international rides are preferred, instead of riders traveling within Hungary. Furthermore, in some cases, the lack of English language skills and already taken seats were both used as explanations in the answers. We only found impolite answers — such as "No"— sporadically. In some cases, when "the car is already full" was given as an excuse — especially to Hassan, Li, and Chen — going back and checking the ride at a later point we found that in fact there were still available seats (Table 3 in Appendix).

5. Discussion and recommendations

Discrimination remains a policy concern in various fields where social interactions are vital, most importantly on the labor market (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004), housing (Massey and Lundy, 2001; Card et al. 2008), and access to services (Uri et al. 2012). While discrimination is a concern that cannot be fully eliminated, online marketplaces have the means to rule out discrimination, as digital transactions can result in such negative consequences. In our view, it would not be beneficial to completely depersonalize online platforms. In the case of Airbnb, the anti-discrimination regulations were introduced by the platform in 2015 as a consequence of various complaints from consumers and research about

discrimination (Edelman et al. 2016). Moreover, the "Open Doors" policy has been in effect on AirBnb since 2016 as a consequence of similar reasons (Murphy, 2016).

Our empirical analysis showed that discrimination can still persist on platforms where trust is put forth through an extensive use of personal information. This discussion puts forward potential improvements regarding discrimination on the analyzed sharing platforms. We gathered and made three types of recommendations:

(i) Suggestions about profiles and requests for rides:

Ge and her colleagues (2016) recommended a number of different options for reducing discrimination within TNCs. The authors suggested that platforms can replace the personal information of the users with user-specific IDs. Based on the experimental analysis of Airbnb, Edelman and Luca (2014) put forward the importance of eliminating, or at least reducing, the importance of host photos, as these might give rise to discrimination. In our view, the visual representation of the users provides important sources of trust. An important step towards reducing discrimination against riders on ridesharing platforms would be to increase the instant acceptance of requests, something Edelman and his collaborators (2016) also suggested for Airbnb. The *instant approval* of the requests promotes inclusiveness and providing incentives for drivers to use an already available on the platform. BlablaCar puts emphasis on trust-building, but anti-discrimination measures for potential race and ethnicity issues have not been introduced by the platform, as opposed to the measures introduced by Airbnb.

Although our experiment found evidence of discrimination against riders that use BlaBlaCar between minority groups, drivers may also be potential targets of discrimination, just as hosts on Airbnb. When it comes to the drivers on ridesharing platforms, emphasis should be on the aspects that are strictly relevant to the services they provide through the

platform, such as the experience of the driver, punctuality, reliability, as well as car safety and comfort issues. A beneficial consequence of altering the platform accordingly may also lessen prejudices resulting in potential discriminatory behavior against certain groups of people.

(ii) Suggestions about legal and regulatory matters:

According to Ge (2016), fixed fares between pick-up and drop off points should be set in order to rule out taking female passengers on longer rides. The self-regulation of platforms is stressed by Miller (2016), as well as Cohen and Sundararajan (2015). The main idea is shifting the regulation from governmental bodies towards the platforms and making self-regulatory solutions work. Edelman and Luca (2014) also argued that any changes by Airbnb would likely be driven by ethical considerations and public pressure, rather than legal regulation from outside. We also share this view and think it is much better working *with*, and not *against* the platforms. In legal and regulatory terms, self-regulation can include periodic audits of drivers to measure levels of discriminatory behavior towards a certain group of passengers (Ge et al. 2016). In our view, the platforms need to take into account potential negative consequences, thus be responsible for not creating an environment that discourages any type of discrimination.

(iii) Suggestions for future research:

Ert el al. (2016) concluded that Airbnb guests use not only the information on the listings but also information on the hosts before making their decision. Future research about sharing economy platforms should address the current practices and mechanisms. Collaborations between researchers and the platform providers may be considered in order to improve the services, as seen in the example of Laura Murphy and Airbnb (2016). Both

online surveys and individual/group interviews may serve as potential tools to explore the ideas of the users on current services and possible improvements.

6. Conclusions

Collaborative consumption platforms are trying to cope with the unintended negative consequences of online transactions in various ways. We have seen that both Airbnb and BlaBlaCar put strong emphasis on detecting and correcting platform features that may result in the discrimination of certain users ('Ladies Only' policy in the case of BlaBlaCar). On Airbnb, regulations regarding anti-discrimination became gradually stricter through modifications that were made within the company. Based on the previous research in the field and on our own pilot study, significant levels of discrimination were measured on various grounds. The platform provider bears the main responsibility of creating and maintaining an environment that encourages trust among *all people* who use their services, outlining the protection and security of consumers. Our argument gives an account on ethical and legal responsibility for discriminative behavior in the case of ridesharing platforms when intermediating the relation between people. Fighting discrimination may be carried out by the platform through promoting different incentives and principles related to the equal treatment of the platform users.

Appendix

Textbox 1: Text examples used in the field experiment of the two ride sharing platforms in Hungary 2017 (Further variations were added and adjusted to the exact situation)

Request:

Hello! I would like to join you in travel from Budapest to ... *(Debrecen, Szeged, Bratislava, Graz...).* I won't have any luggage with me. Can you say please, where is the meeting point in Budapest and do you still have one free place?

Hi! I would like to travel with you to *(Debrecen, Szeged, Bratislava, Graz...)* from Budapest. I have only a small backpack. Please let me know, where is the meeting place in Budapest and if you still have one free place?

Reply:

Reject: Thank you. I will search for other option. Have a nice day.

Approval: Thank you for information, but unfortunately, I need to postpone my trip. Have a nice day.

Table 2: Attribute variables and experimental design in the pilot research (BlaBlaCar, routes starting from Hungary, 2017)

Attributes	Attribute level
Data collection	15th June - 30th July 2017 (weekdays and weekends)
Ridesharing platform	BlaBlaCar (blablacar.com)
Routes	8 internal routes (within Hungary) 5 external routes (cross-border routes towards neighboring countries)
Nationality (experimental stimulus)	Dutch (benchmark)/Russian/Chinese/Arabic
Gender (experimental stimulus)	Men and women
Social status (control variable)	Homogenous (university students)

From Simonovits et al (2018)

Table 3: Descriptive results of the messages received by the drivers: salutations, ways of refusal

	Experimental Profiles	Number of received messages (N)	Typical ways of refusals, in decreasing order of the number of cases (Number of refusals)
Total		**110**	
Men	**Dutch**	17	No free seats (2),
			Expressing uncertainty of the ride (2)
	Russian	11	No free seats (1), uncertainty of the ride (1)
	Chinese	11	No free seats (2)
			"No" (1)
			Taking someone else (1)
			Longer distances/international rides are preferred (1)
	Arabic	11	No free seats (3),
			Expressing uncertainty of the ride (2)
			Longer distances/International rides are preferred (1)
			"Sorry, I can't take you" (1)

Women	Dutch	14	No free seats (2)
			Expressing uncertainty of the ride (1)
			"No speak English" (1)
	Russian	16	Expressing uncertainty of the ride (3)
			No free seats (2)
			Lack of English language skills (2)
	Chinese	15	No free seats (4)
			Longer distances/International rides are preferred (1)
			Lack of English language skills (1)
	Arabic	15	No free seats (4)
			Longer distances/International rides are preferred (1)
			Taking someone else (1)
			Lack of English language skills (1)

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