

Fostering the inclusion of women as entrepreneurs in the sharing economy through collaboration: A commons approach using the institutional analysis and development framework

Abstract

With public concerns about fostering the inclusion of women, especially those with low socio-economic status, governments and private entities have started to develop collaborative strategies to improve women's development. One such strategy is collaborations with sharing economy entities, which are online platforms that provide entrepreneurship opportunities for individuals despite geographical and structural barriers. This paper draws on Ostrom's concept of the commons to explore how to foster the inclusion of women as entrepreneurs in the sharing economy through collaboration. Thematic analysis reveals the nature and outcomes of policies geared towards women's development. While previous studies on the sharing economy have noted that the top-down nature of its operations has resulted in individualised gains, this paper highlights the collaboration within these settings – leading to individual and mutual monetary and non-monetary benefits – stemming from a shared digital and traditional commons with context-based ideologies and stakeholder actions. This paper gives practitioners a clear understanding of how they can successfully support and create a context for women's entrepreneurship in the age of digitisation.

Keywords: Airbnb; commons; digital entrepreneurship; sharing economy; tourism collaboration; women entrepreneurship

Now I think that I can fight any problem as I have SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) and Airbnb. Our next generation will get more income and opportunities.

Female Airbnb Host, India (Airbnb, 2022).

Introduction

Sharing economy platforms specialising in accommodation listings offer peer-to-peer exchanges to co-create value across borders while generating increased entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals with excess or unused lodging facilities (Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016). The sharing economy is a primary example of tourism technologies (Cai et al., 2021), which are tools that provide users opportunities beyond their geographical boundaries regardless of their status (Navio-Marco et al., 2018). These economic opportunities are widely categorised as digital entrepreneurship, which refers to 'new venture opportunities presented by new media and internet technologies' (Davidson & Vaast, 2010, p. 8). However, there is scant evidence of how the sharing economy and, to a greater degree, digital entrepreneurship, foster the inclusion of marginalised people as service providers (Dy, 2019), especially women with low socio-economic status. As Farmaki and Saveriades (2019) noted, 'the voice of women remains largely muted in extant literature' (p. 51). By contrast, an increasing body of literature has explored women's entrepreneurship in tourism (Abou-Shouk

et al., 2021; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020; Kimbu et al., 2021). Although previous studies are relevant, there is an ‘unquestioned assumption that entrepreneurship leads to women’s empowerment’ (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020, p. 8), while ‘entrepreneurship constitutes a precarious and poorly rewarded form of work’ (Ahl & Marlow, 2019, p. 60). However, the context of previous studies differs greatly from the current context that is increasingly driven by information and communication technologies. Technology platforms, which include those of the sharing economy, claim to facilitate the integration and empowerment of individuals due to the flexibility and anonymity available to individuals with gendered responsibilities (Bouncken et al., 2020; Schoenbaum, 2016). It remains unclear how women are included in the sharing economy, especially those with low socio-economic status and limited resources.

World Tourism Day 2021, designated by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation, operated under the theme ‘tourism for inclusive growth’, signalling the need to focus on accessibility and inclusion in tourism development for marginalised groups (UNWTO, 2022). Women are indeed considered one of these groups; however, it is imperative to note that such a call is not new in tourism, as the widely adopted United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) also focus on fostering inclusion. Specifically, Goal 5 of the UNSDGs focuses on attaining gender equality and women’s rights, thereby highlighting that it is essential to place women at the centre of tourism development (UN, 2021). Sharing economy platforms such as Airbnb, which specialises in sharing accommodation, have responded to the call through collaborative efforts seeking to celebrate and uplift women (Airbnb, 2020). However, supporting evidence remains scarce; hence, there is still a need for further empirical research to provide practical knowledge to be shared across platforms (Airbnb, 2022; IFC, 2018).

Sharing economy platforms are technological tools that can foster inclusion for women from low socio-economic backgrounds (Airbnb, 2022). Specifically, Airbnb, a peer-to-peer accommodation sharing platform, is known for its focus on corporate social responsibility. Airbnb is one of the few sharing economy platforms that has maintained its commitment to uphold good citizenship by proposing and, in some cases, successfully implementing collaborative corporate social responsibility projects with local municipalities (Von Briel & Dolnicar, 2020). Organisations and governments have been known to create tourism entrepreneurship opportunities for women through social policy initiatives geared towards their economic and educational development (Baum & Cheung, 2015).

In 2016, Airbnb partnered with the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), a national trade union founded in 1972 in India to help rural women find opportunities for income generation (Sewa, 2022). Together, they set out to provide home-sharing employment opportunities for disadvantaged women, an example of a social development intervention (Airbnb, 2017a). From a global perspective, women constitute 55% of Airbnb hosts and number over one million (Airbnb, 2017b). Airbnb initiatives remain one of the very few success stories, although practitioners call for strategies to aid the implementation of similar programmes. Much research on service providers as hosts within the sharing economy emphasises the co-created practices between guests and hosts (Johnson & Neuhofer, 2017; Mody et al., 2021). With limited studies on policy implementation, scholars have suggested that an added layer of collaboration may enable access, encourage participation and foster trust and mutual exchanges for female entrepreneurship (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2016).

By their nature, peer-to-peer platforms focus on sharing or collaborative consumption, signifying that interactions among users produce the experiences of the sharing economy. However, scholars have argued that this is not the case in practice, as sharing economy service providers follow a top-down model that resembles a transactional business model or

neoliberalism, therefore resembling traditional business operations (Gossling et al., 2021; Reinhold & Dolnicar, 2021). While this situation illustrates the need for scholars to move from dominant marketing lenses, such as Vargo and Lusch's (2008) value co-creation and service-dominant logic, to models based on structure, this would not be applicable for understanding collaborative efforts between women's networks and the sharing economy (Shah & Mody, 2014).

A collaboration 'occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engages in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to the domain' (Wood & Gray, 1991, p. 146). Research on collaboration in tourism has focused on interactions among traditional hospitality and tourism entities within a destination or intra-destination interactions (Fyall et al., 2012). However, collaborations in practice, such as between SEWA and Airbnb, resemble those between organisations in physical and virtual environments (Airbnb, 2017a). Fyall and Garrod (2020) call for scholars to investigate new collaborative contexts that include technology-based platforms empirically, potentially giving rise to new perspectives. While discussions on the theoretical foundations of collaboration and the sharing economy are lacking in hospitality and tourism, further afield, these platforms have been conceptualised using one of these three models: the commons (Wood & Gray, 1991) – including digital commons (Benkler, 2006; Benkler, 2015) – the prisoner's dilemma (Rapoport & Chammah, 1970) and the logic of collective action (Olson, 1965; Wood & Gray, 1991). These models emphasise that individuals benefit significantly from collaborating with others, resulting in maximum gains and minimum transaction costs (Mohlmann, 2015). However, Ostrom's (1990) commons theory has been predominantly applied to illustrate how virtual and physical communities can develop successfully using networks (Benkler, 2018; Pazaitis et al., 2017).

By drawing on a commons-based approach through the application of Ostrom's institutional analysis and development (IAD) framework, this paper explores how to foster inclusion for women as entrepreneurs in the sharing economy through collaboration. Ostrom's IAD framework is a relevant processual framework for understanding collaborations (Thomson & Perry, 2006). Specifically, the paper examines the context, actions and outcomes of the SEWA and Airbnb collaboration. Therefore, the paper makes both theoretical and empirical contributions. First, it introduces a new conceptual framework that can further justify the collaborative nature of the sharing economy. The findings show that the majority of accessible peer-to-peer listings result from the commons. This paper also addresses the theoretical and empirical gaps in sharing economy collaboration and entrepreneurship literature. While a commons-based approach to sharing has been discussed, this paper goes beyond digital commons studies and shows the varying granular components that can provide stakeholders with a practical understanding of developing these collaborative initiatives in similar contexts. The findings also expand on current tourism literature, as they go beyond the physical context to incorporate the digital commons and ideologies as necessary aspects that shape behaviour. The results explain specific actions and actors, with the latter demonstrating the situation of multiple stakeholders with one entity being more visible to individuals than another. The unique blend of traditional and digital commons has resulted in outcomes that are not only monetary but also non-monetary and are based on increased cooperation and emerging new subject identities.

The paper first reviews the sharing economy and entrepreneurship literature. Then, it provides an understanding of collaboration from a commons-based approach, followed by the methodology: a thematic analysis addressing cooperation between the sharing economy and networks focused on social development for women with low economic status. The paper

continues with the presentation of the findings and a discussion and conclusion with theoretical and practical implications for the hospitality and tourism industry.

Literature review

The sharing economy, entrepreneurship and women

Increased technological development has resulted in the formation of sharing economy platforms, which have had a significant economic and social impact on individuals, organisations and destinations (Mody et al., 2021). There is still little agreement on the definition of the sharing economy. It was first defined as a social practice, emphasising these platforms' collaborative nature (Belk, 2014). Other scholars have described the sharing economy as a technological tool, categorising it as an example of technology in tourism (Jamsek & Culiberg, 2019; Jung et al., 2021; Min et al., 2019). Technologies have three characteristics: interconnectedness, instrumentation and intelligence (IBM, 2009; Nam & Pardo, 2011). Furthermore, technology provides two-way communication and accessibility to users searching for entrepreneurial opportunities (Altinay & Taheri, 2019; Shereni, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). With the increased development of sharing economy platforms, scholars have argued that the business model has moved from one based on sharing to resembling traditional businesses (Reinhold & Dolnicar, 2021). Moreover, technology-based entrepreneurship has been labelled as digital entrepreneurship and defined as

The diverse opportunities generated by the internet, world wide web, mobile technologies, and new media, such as dot-com companies that benefited from the opening of the internet for commercial purposes; the fluid army of 'eBay entrepreneurs' who sell goods with little overhead cost by using the digital infrastructure of the electronic auction company; the wave of 'web 2.0' initiatives where companies or individuals develop new business models based upon the growth of social networks and mobile technologies; and, the development of weblogs ('blogs') that have credibly begun to rival traditional media firms. (Davidson & Vaast, 2010, p. 2)

To take advantage of these opportunities, individuals draw on entrepreneurial and digital skills and knowledge while being aware of the risks associated with entrepreneurship (Ngoasong, 2018). This form of entrepreneurship is based on neoliberal values that emphasise independence, increased productivity and competition (Kaye-Essien, 2020). However, according to Case (1995), the concept of competition aligns with masculine values and differs from that of sharing, which is traditionally a female value. Hosting can be combined with household and childcare duties; the latter is associated with women (Schoenbaum, 2016). Female hosts exercise caution by employing various strategies to screen guests (Farmaki, 2019; Su & Mattila, 2020). Airbnb has stated that over 50% of its hosts are women (Airbnb, 2017b). The gender ratio can differ among specific destinations. For instance, male participation is more than female in New York City (Sarkar et al., 2019). Bremser and Wust (2021) investigated if differences existed in one's willingness to host and found that none did in a survey of 359 persons. Women can be viewed as entrepreneurs because they draw on their resources and capabilities to take advantage of opportunities provided by the internet in exchange for economic gains (Davidson & Vaast, 2010).

The development of sharing economy platforms to create employment opportunities across networks is dependent on understanding the relationship between innovation and societies. It is essential to build systems that incorporate the technological environment with the socio-economic world dependent on firms, non-government organisations and governments (Benkler, 2015). Examining the Poor Law of 1834, Benkler (2018) note that its aim was to increase flexibility and employment in the labour market; however, this created instability in London and Manchester and ultimately led to collapse. He argued that this divergence continues in the technology age in which the power of individuals within the social environment is challenging new techno-economic models to foster greater inclusion and diversity. All technological choices involve deciding on social relationships; this is evident in cities such as New York City, which has adopted a minimum wage for Uber drivers, and Bologna, which has established rider rights (Benkler, 2018). The successful development of technological innovation within social networks is dependent on collaboration between entities focused on physical, social and technological environments.

There remains a lack of empirical evidence of how to foster the necessary inclusion. Kimbu et al. (2019) examine how tourism plans promote collaborations geared towards supporting women entrepreneurs and found that collaboration networks for these women are dependent on resources, networks, social capital and sustainable human capital management. While these findings can inform practitioners on how to better support women entrepreneurs, they can be further improved. Kimbu et al. (2019) only focus on the determinants of collaborative networks rather than providing a holistic view of the practices and outcomes of these initiatives. Benkler (2018) argue that by adopting a commons-based approach, practitioners would have access to a holistic framework and ensure the sustained adoption of technologies over time, avoiding disruption. The sense of community overrides the workings of neoliberalism, which is based on individualisation. Entrepreneurs are seen as commoners – a collective rather than individual identities (Pechtelidis & Kioupkiolis, 2020) – who draw on knowledge within the commons (community) to develop their expertise and establish businesses. According to Madison, Frischmann and Strandburg (2009, p.670), the ‘devil is in the details’ when it comes to understanding commons regimes. They subsequently proposed using Ostrom’s IAD framework to understand the core components of developing a collaborative environment (p. 670).

Towards a commons-based approach

The commons is a community in which goods are collectively produced and used, and the sharing of resources and activities is institutionalised among community members. Common-pool resources are either natural or human-constructed and can therefore include tourism facilities, local facilities, infrastructure and the natural and built landscapes (Briassoulis, 2002). The commons concept has been widely linked to Hardin’s (1968) work wherein he noted that common-pool resources must be controlled by the government or privatised to avoid the ‘tragedy of the commons’. However, Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom (1990) disagreed and argued for community-based governance. Individuals within a commons engage in commoning practices that represent ways to resist the hegemony of capitalism and neoliberalism. Commoning is all the acts involved in producing and sustaining the commons; these practices are not fixed but ever-changing (Lang, 2014).

By drawing on the commons concept, Ostrom (1990; 2010) provided insights regarding a successful commons-based (common-pool resource) approach for maintaining resources, solving problems and achieving benefits for the majority in a community. These core

principles are illustrated in Ostrom's IAD framework, namely contextual factors that entail biophysical characteristics, attributes of a community and rules-in-use; an action arena consisting of action situations and actors; outcomes that are the results from the interactions among actors; and evaluative criteria that are the tools used to evaluate the processes of interactions and outcomes (Ostrom, 2010). Communities can create and maintain institutions to manage shared resources, reduce threats and regulate themselves effectively (Ostrom, 1990).

Scholars have applied Ostrom's concepts and theories to tourism, predominantly within the context of sustainable tourism. For example, Nyuapane et al. (2020) draw on Ostrom's work to examine governance approaches in protected areas. Heenehan et al. (2015) draw on the concept of common-pool resources to explore community-based marine conservation. While these studies focus on governance, Laing et al. (2009) emphasis a different problem, as does this study. They were interested in proposing theoretical perspectives for revealing the elements of successful partnerships and used Ostrom's IAD framework due to its efficacy in revealing process-related partnership features. Specifically, they argue that commitment to the partnership is linked to the framework through the aspect of institutional change and partner responsibility. Furthermore, the authors note that context-related legislation was essential for successful partnerships. Laing et al.'s (2009) study is limited to partnerships among individuals in a traditional tourism development, which may not apply to technology-based contexts such as the sharing economy.

Although there are no studies examining collaboration and the sharing economy, scholars have explored the varying contexts that broaden the understanding of the core components of the IAD framework. For example, Damayanti et al. (2017) explore informal collaborations. By drawing on the IAD framework, they explained how factors influence stakeholders' collaboration decisions. They found that pedicab drivers and street vendors display competitive and cooperative behaviour sequentially where there is a single shared resource but simultaneously in the case of multiple shared resources. Although Ostrom's (1990) work can aid in identifying the possibility of a community-based development occurring (Damayanti et al., 2017; Damayanti et al., 2018; Heenehan et al., 2015), the concept and theoretical framework are yet to be applied to digital contexts in tourism research, unlike studies further afield.

The commons concept has been used to conceptualise online platforms as facilitators of co-production, resulting in them being known as digital commons. According to Pacheco (2016), a digital commons is an information and communication technology resource shared by groups based on equity, co-production and sustainability. These principles guide behaviour towards ensuring the fulfilment of needs for the greater good (Pazaitis et al., 2017). Examples of digital commons include Wikipedia (Nam & Pardo, 2011), smart cities (Yigitcanlar & Cugurullo, 2020) and the sharing economy (Pazaitis et al., 2017). These innovations do not solely focus on individualistic goals, such as increasing competitiveness, but are a mix of cooperation and competition (Benkler, 2018).

Benkler (2004; 2006) refers to the practices within digital commons as commons-based peer production, signifying that collective benefits are derived from community engagement. There are no individual benefits but instead shared results. A digital commons is open access, as it has a public domain, is growth-oriented and is at the core of advanced economies (Benkler, 2015). Innovative commons have numerous uncertainties, such as hacking and increased competition, which are temporary and may collapse or transform into an institution. They are formed during the early stages of innovative development and exist in various locations where technology is developed. The community is also not based on the

geographical proximity to resources but on connections and interests concerning the resources formulated. People act collectively to ensure effective resource governance and the maintenance of a digital commons (Benkler, 2015).

However, discussions on how digital commons can emerge within the traditional commons, namely the physical destination setting, are missing from the literature. There is a lack of studies on the relationship between the digital and traditional commons. Furthermore, the IAD framework is yet to be extended to newly emerging contexts, such as the sharing economy. This is salient in practice, as Frischmann et al. (2014) argue that digital knowledge commons must formulate a governance structure that enables the sharing of resources and facilitates engagement in producing resources.

Methods

A case study research design was applied to understand the development of sharing economy platforms to foster the inclusion of women from low economic statuses. The study examined the SEWA and Airbnb partnership in India, a collaborative initiative explored using Ostrom's commons approach (Benkler, 2018). Its classification as a collaboration is in keeping with Wood and Gray's (1991) perspective that is well-cited in tourism research. Before making this selection, a list of collaborative initiatives fostering inclusion in the sharing economy was compiled based on personal knowledge and information on sharing economy partnerships, as there is no official list available. The list for this study consisted of Airbnb partnerships in Mexico, Singapore, Canada, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, Haiti, India, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Curacao and Jamaica. The partnerships in Brazil and India were the only collaborations geared towards women. In Brazil, these entrepreneurs were awardees of the Sao Paulo Tech Women Prize. However, judging by company reports and press releases, the partnership in India focused on women with low socio-economic status, and the programme was advanced and catered to a wide range of women, which facilitated data collection (Airbnb, 2021).

Almost a quarter of the Indian population lives below the poverty line and survive on less than USD1.90 per day (UNDP, 2021). Nonetheless, the country is known for its significant gains from information and communication technologies (ICTs). It has a long-standing association with ICTs, which contribute over 13% to India's gross domestic product (GDP). India aims to reach a \$1 trillion digital economy and a GDP of \$5 trillion by 2025. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a unique form of digital transformation in India with cost realignment, automation and the implementation of new systems for improving efficiency (Gov, 2022). Although these changes were made possible due to emerging technologies such as big data, AI, cyber security and the internet of things, there is uncertainty regarding whether these technologies create opportunities or are equally available to all people and geographies.

Organisations such as SEWA are working on initiatives and projects that aim to improve the incomes of women in particular. SEWA was formed in 1972 as an association within the Textile Labour Association (TLA). It was the brainchild of Ela Bhatt who was the head of the women's wing of the TLA. She was inspired to create an organisation that would combine a union and a cooperative and address self-employed women's economic challenges. SEWA was created as a union for exploited self-employed women workers in the informal economy, which employs 86% of India's workforce (ILO, 2014).

SEWA has over 1.8 million women members in 18 Indian states (Poverty Action, 2022). Although it was initially formed in urban areas, it grew substantially in rural communities in the 1980s (ILO, 2014). Two-thirds of its members are from rural areas (Weforum, 2022) where agriculture is the main source of income (ILO, 2014). The goals of SEWA are full employment and self-reliance by fostering economic opportunities for female entrepreneurs with low socio-economic status. To foster the inclusion of rural women from poor backgrounds in sharing economy activities, one needs to collaborate with and understand these associations and communities. In 2017, SEWA partnered with Airbnb for its rural homestay project *Hum Sab Ek* (we are one) based in Gujarat. The aim was to create another opportunity for rural women through sustainable tourism via Airbnb (SEWA, 2022). The collaboration between Airbnb and SEWA is governed by a formal agreement. A memorandum of understanding was signed with the government of Gujarat in 2016 to boost women’s participation in rural tourism. Representatives from Airbnb, particularly from the Asia-Pacific region, visited, conducted meetings and shared resources with representatives at the destination (Airbnb, 2017a).

Female owners of SEWA homestays from villages and districts in Gujarat were chosen as participants in the study using a purposive sampling strategy. A purposive technique was employed, as Teerovengadum and Nunkoo (2018) noted that it enables researchers to choose participants based on set criteria. The participants were chosen according to pre-selected criteria; therefore, their contributions were deemed important (Veal, 2017). These criteria were women entrepreneurs in the Airbnb–SEWA partnership who had experience serving Airbnb guests. In the absence of an official list of women entrepreneurs in the programme, the researchers reviewed publicly available press releases in order to ascertain the names of possible participants. These individuals were directly contacted via the Airbnb platform; however, the efforts were futile. Direct contact was made with SEWA, which provided access to the Airbnb hosts.

SEWA specifically caters to women with low socio-economic status. Neither Airbnb nor SEWA defines this, which is a challenge in equal opportunity tourism research and practice. In SEWA’s report on the Airbnb partnership, five women explicitly described themselves as being from poor backgrounds, although their reasons were unclear (SEWA, 2022). During data collection, the participants identified as poor prior to joining SEWA, which was also the case in previous studies (Truong et al., 2014). This status had an impact on their ability to ascertain higher education (see Table 1). The researchers carried out further checks to ensure these individuals had low socio-economic status. It was difficult to ascertain net salaries to calculate whether the women were at the poverty line or below based on an estimate of USD1.90 per day, per UNDP (2021). Data such as precise income and expenditure were unavailable, although some participants provided estimates of their earnings from Airbnb. Four participants were uncertain. Out of 23 participants, eight earned less than USD684 per year, and 15 earned more. Table 1 provides further details on the estimated earnings per participant. The women agreed that their economic opportunities had improved as a result of participating in this SEWA program. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and some shared concerns regarding their decreasing income and uncertainty regarding alternative funds for survival.

Table 1: Participants’ background information.

Participant	Age	Educational profile (unschooled, primary [1st– 5th grade], middle [5th–8th grade], secondary [9th–	Family size	Approximate annual earnings: Indian rupees (USD equivalent)
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		10th grade], college [11th– 12th grade], university)		
1	56	Unschooler	9	1.5 lakh (USD1,974.72)
2	50	University	4	1.5 lakh (USD1,974.72)
3	48	College	2	1.5 lakh (USD1,974.72)
4	61	Primary	5	1.5 lakh (USD1,974.72)
5	50	Unschooler	4	1 lakh (USD1,316.48)
6	48	College	12	1.5 lakh (USD1,974.72)
7	41	Secondary	4	25,000 rupees (USD329.12)
8	46	University	3	50,000 rupees (USD658.24)
9	63	Primary	5	50,000 rupees (USD658.24)
10	51	Middle	5	Uncertain
11	28	Middle	7	1.5 lakh (USD1,974.72)
12	36	Middle	10	1 lakh (USD1,316.48)
13	30	Middle	7	Uncertain
14	28	Secondary	5	36,000 rupees (USD473.93)
15	55	Primary	4	50,000 rupees (USD658.24)
16	48	University	3	50,000 rupees (USD658.24)
17	44	College	2	25,000 rupees (USD329.12)
18	60	Unschooler	5	72,000 rupees (USD947.87)
19	30	Secondary	4	Uncertain
20	41	College	4	60,000 rupees (USD789.89)
21	55	Middle	3	1 lakh (USD1,316.48)
22	49	College	1	1.5 lakh (USD1,974.72)
23	52	Secondary	9	1.5 lakh (USD1,974.72)
24	47	Secondary	1	1.5 lakh (USD1,974.72)
25	45	Middle	4	Uncertain
26	48	Unschooler	6	1 lakh (USD1,316.48)
27	50	Middle	5	50,000 rupees (USD658.24)

This study employed a qualitative data collection method. Specifically, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each SEWA member who was a homestay owner. There was the possibility of uncovering complex, emotional sentiments. However, interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences, as the interviewer can pursue more in-depth information (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The participants were asked a series of semi-structured questions about their motivation for taking part in the homestay initiative, their experiences using Airbnb and their experiences hosting guests in their homes. Follow-up questions were asked to expand on responses. A total of 27 women were interviewed via Zoom or telephone, as personal visits were not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions. Data saturation was reached by the 27th interview. The average time for each interview was 30 minutes, with the longer interviews lasting up to 1 hour and 15 minutes.

The interviews were conducted by the co-author in the local language (Gujarati), which was the native language of the interviewees and interviewer. Notes were taken, and the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the interviewees. The interviews were later translated and transcribed into English. Both authors have much teaching, research and working experience in tourism and the sharing economy; this was critical to identifying key interviewees, interview and document translation, and accessing and analysing the interview information. The participants were given pseudonyms and identified with codes, such as MB

or SB. Data analysis was guided by commons and sharing economy literature. The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis to examine how to foster the inclusion of female entrepreneurs in the sharing economy. There were six stages of analysis: data familiarisation, initial coding, generation of themes, validity and reliability of themes, definition of and naming themes, and interpretation and reporting. The resultant themes and sub-themes guided the findings and discussion and are represented in the proposed framework for understanding sharing economy collaborations within a destination.

Findings and discussion

Towards a collaborative approach for gender equality in sharing economy businesses

Drawing on the IAD framework, the core aspects of context and action arena outcomes were revealed and provided a deeper understanding of how collaboration occurs to enable the inclusion and development of women entrepreneurs. First, the context was examined, then the action arena and outcomes. Unlike previous studies that drew on a commons approach, this discussion has drawn attention to the novel aspects of collaboration in the sharing economy, namely the context, such as the digital commons and ideologies; specific actions and stakeholders within the action arena; and outcomes associated with monetary and non-monetary benefits, increased cooperation and the development of new subject identities (see Figure 1).

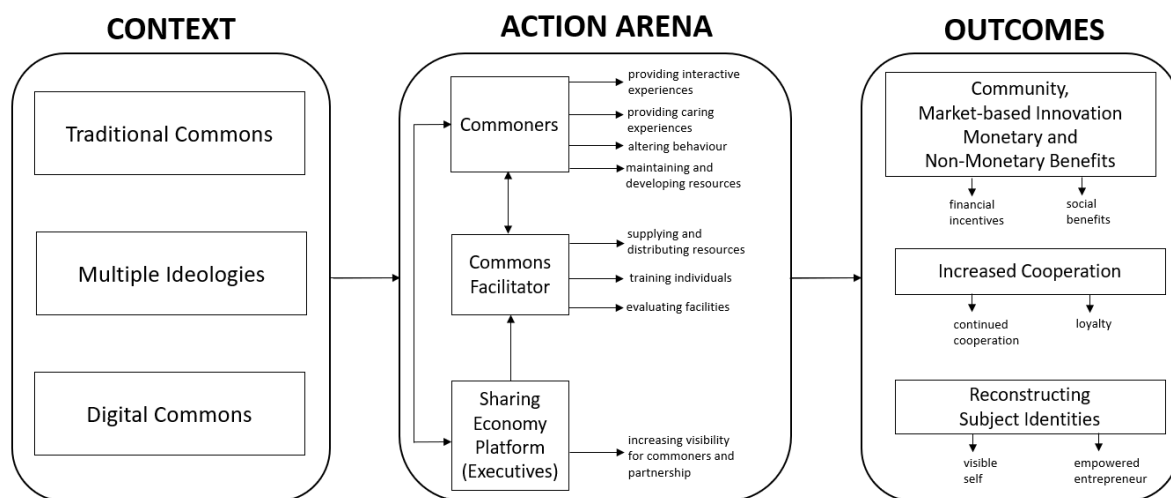


Figure 1: Sharing economy collaboration for women entrepreneurship (adapted from Ostrom, 1990).

Context

Three context aspects were revealed by the data analysis – traditional commons, multiple ideologies and digital commons – of which multiple ideologies and the digital commons were novel elements yet to be described in tourism literature.

The success of technological developments is dependent on the socio-environmental context (Benkler, 2018). The first context observed was that of the traditional commons, which was also the case in past contexts noted in the literature (Damayanti et al., 2017; Nyuapane et al., 2020; Ostrom, 2010). In addition to hosting, these women entrepreneurs executed a range of activities. However, being a homestay host was usually emphasised as being a vital role for them due to the array of outcomes, which will be discussed. As participant KB reported, ‘I don’t know the income of others. I do my patchwork activities and sometimes earn 10,000 rupees a month from it.’ Similarly, RB stated, ‘We are seven members in the house. Four are doing farming work, and we women are doing knitting work. Now due to COVID, everyone has come back to the village, so we have to work.’

There are homes and facilities, attractions in and around villages, and traditional cultural practices adding to the traditional life and experience at village homestays. Traditional food, cotton farming, salt farming, knitting and patchwork are some of the many practices that offer income opportunities for rural women. Firewood for cooking, timber for house construction and fodder for livestock are important aspects of tradition from a rural and sustainable tourism perspective. The physical resources exist, but there are limitations in their appeal to a wider market. SUMB, a senior SEWA sister, noted the following:

We hold talks, go to farmers who are doing farming and give them guidelines on how to make a good harvest. We talk to farmers, empower women to join SEWA. SEWA helps poor women and those who have never been exposed to anything. We talk about digital and new technology also to these women. Many of these women are educated, but they have never gone out of their houses, so they don’t know anything.

The second context aspect that emerged was the coexistence of multiple ideologies. There were clear cultural ideologies that guided the behaviour of the women entrepreneurs. Ideas such as early marriage and limited education for girls have shaped their past and present behaviours and hosting decisions. As GB reported, ‘In those days, there was not enough money to send boys to school, and girls were not sent because there was no need felt for it.’ SB believed that ‘in our culture, it is a practice that the girl has to go and stay at the boy’s house after marriage, so that’s why I am here in this village’.

There were also the Gandhian philosophies and values promoting equality and equity. The hosts often mentioned these ideologies that have shaped their thoughts and actions towards the guests. Additionally, SEWA operates on the principles promoted by Gandhiji. Gandhian thinking is the guiding force for SEWA’s poor, self-employed members to organise social change. SEWA follows the principles of *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence), *sarvadharmā* (integrating all faiths and all people) and *khadi* (encouraging local employment and self-reliance).

The use of Gandhian principles indicated a strong sense of unity rather than segregation and biases, which has been of concern to technology-based tourism scholars (Johnson, 2021). When asked about discrimination towards hosts or guests in the sharing economy, the following responses were given by the female hosts: ‘We all live with the Gandhian philosophy, so we

hate no one. We all are the same.’ (MB), and ‘Whether the guests are from India or outside, they all treat us the same way. They eat with us and enjoy with us.’ (GB).

Gandhian philosophy, principles and practices are central to how SEWA encourages high values and cooperation between its members and the village women whose lives they intend to improve. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, lived by the principles of truth, non-violence, integration of castes and faiths, and self-reliance. SEWA communicates these philosophies to its members through field visits, talks and discussions. The internalisation of these ideologies was displayed clearly during the interviews as these women gave credit to SEWA for uplifting them from their earlier circumstances.

The third context aspect was the digital commons (Pazaitis et al., 2017). While the sharing economy has been likened to online travel agencies (Phua, 2019), the participants did not refer to the sharing economy platform by name but as a homestay:

It is about the homestay project, no? It is where we put our home pictures, no? MB had shown me. Some other SEWA sisters had clicked the pictures of my home and bathrooms and everything, and they had put them in the computer for the world to see.
– RAM.

The hosts’ views have been further formed through the lens of Indian ideology: ‘we are one’. According to KB, ‘We don’t call this Airbnb. We think of this as our *Hum Sab Ek*, which means we are one, and so some of my sisters may not know about Airbnb as such.’ This gave new meaning to rural digital commons and their shared efforts. This view of cooperation contrasted with the neoliberal view of the sharing economy, which concentrates on individual productivity (Kaye-Essien, 2020).

The female hosts used different characteristics to describe the platform, based on communication and accessibility. Whereas technology-based platforms are seen as facilitators of two-way communication (IBM, 2009; Nam & Pardo, 2011), there was significant evidence of one-way communication, a unique element of the collaboration between Airbnb and SEWA. For example, not all homestay owners directly interacted with Airbnb representatives, nor did they use the platform to view bookings. Representatives from the SEWA sister network worked together to support the other women by informing them of new inquiries, booking dates and reviews received: ‘I have seen pictures of my home on Airbnb. MB (another SEWA sister who is also a super host) had clicked those pictures and put them on the computer.’ (GB); ‘I cannot speak fluent English, but my writing in English is okay due to the internet. I did not know any of this before. Now I work with the rural sisters and help them.’ (SUM).

GB’s feedback was not necessarily an indication of negative development. Rather, it indicated shared relationships among the SEWA sisters wherein those with strengths, such as using the English language or understanding technology, helped the others. The women entrepreneurs saw the opportunities from reaching out to guests using the internet and sharing economy portals. The hosts could attract domestic and international travellers; this was evidence of opportunities on the network, a key trait of technologies (Gretzel et al., 2015). As KSB reported, ‘It is only because of the internet that we can have guests at our home and for them to know about us.’ RB said:

[the] Australian team had come, and they had made a chimney for us in the kitchen. The whole day we were helping them. My mother-in-law and husband used to manage the language problem. We spent a lot of time with the guests.

There was also evidence of platform overuse, which was a concern for the women entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurs’ relatives, usually a son or daughter, were the ones accessing

the platform to inform themselves about the latest sharing economy developments and interact with guests. Thus, challenges are anticipated, as the individuals with technical expertise are younger than the majority of the women. As opportunities arise in major cities, there are concerns that many younger-generation persons may return to the urban areas, and the women entrepreneurs are not as comfortable with digital technologies yet. This further highlights the salience of technology-based competencies to digital entrepreneurship, especially in a resource-scarce environment (Ngoasong, 2018).

Action arena

The context informs the activities within the commons action arena. The action arena is where actors conduct activities that can result in beneficial outcomes for the network (Ostrom, 1990). Based on the data analysis, the actors included commoners, commons facilitators and the sharing economy platform and its executives.

Commoners are participants involved in commons development, taking into account various requirements (Ostrom, 2010). In this study, the commoners were the women entrepreneurs living in the community. They provided guests with enhanced and interactive experiences, as highlighted by the women: ‘we even taught them how to stick folder on the walls, how to cook bajri roti’ and ‘teach them our culture’. Unlike previous hospitality studies (Johnson & Neuhofer, 2017), many of their activities emphasised the need to care for others. These types of activities are yet to be described in hospitality literature. The care activities were aligned with the cultural values that underpinned the society in which the entrepreneurs were based. As a result, there was less focus on the business orientation of the sharing economy:

Our nature is the same, but we have to take care of a few things when guests are there. Be a little careful and take care. – BB

In addition to what I told earlier, it is also important to think that if our family members come, how we are taking care of them. So, we must take care of our guests just like family, as if they are ours. Give them good service, love and care... You must smile and serve with the heart. People become sad if you don’t give them love. If you give them one roti less, it is okay, but love is a must. We must also share with them what we know. – GB

The female entrepreneurs were assisted by other relatives, including their husbands. There was no consensus on whether women and men operated based on gendered roles, contrary to Case (1995). Nonetheless, the male counterparts had to alter their behaviour when the lodgings were occupied, particularly by female guests. This illustrated that not only did the female hosts have to adjust their behaviour, as noted by previous studies (Farmaki, 2019; Su & Mattila, 2020), but also the males who assisted with sharing economy activities:

We are 10 members in the house, but when guests come, they don’t even realise that we are so many. My husband and brother-in-law don’t come upstairs to the rooms if there are women guests, so the guests don’t feel uncomfortable. – RB

A patriarchal attitude has remained that can affect how these women do business. For example, SEWA representatives talking to women in villages also have to focus on convincing the men of the house or the husbands to ‘allow’ their wives or daughters to join SEWA and become self-reliant.

There was a continuous focus by the women entrepreneurs towards maintaining and developing resources. Most rural homes have the Indian style of commode, so the hosts renovated and

created Western-style toilets for the guests' comfort. Typically, the homes had one to two rooms for homestay purposes, and many hosts took loans for repair work in these rooms before registering with the homestay. SEWA was supportive in providing loans to women for home renovations:

We had a toilet, but we had to make civic changes; water leakage had to be repaired. Colouring work had to be done. We did all this little by little. We first took some loan from SEWA for about 50,000 rupees. – SB

SEWA was noted in this study as the commons facilitator, as it was the main and most evident stakeholder that enabled the development of the peer-to-peer accommodation listings (Ostrom, 2010). Other stakeholders included the sharing economy executives. However, their role went largely unobserved by the hosts, unlike previous hospitality cases that noted hosts as having direct interactions with Airbnb. SEWA played a key role in the homeowners' perception of the sharing economy platform:

I know some partnership is there, but I don't use Airbnb. I don't know how to use it. – GB

I have seen it all on Airbnb, but I have not put anything myself or replied to any reviews. – JAYAB

I have never seen my home pictures on computer also. I came to know that guests are coming to my home via phone from the SEWA office colleagues and coordinators. Then when the guests reached close to my house, they called, and then we went to fetch them and welcomed them here. – SDB

The SEWA executives supplied and distributed information and resources, provided training support and audits and evaluated the homes and facilities for readiness. JB stated, 'I was told when the inspection was done [by SEWA] that my home is largely ready.' Other statements included:

So SEWA office calls me and informs me [about bookings]. When the guests visit, my share (earnings) gets reimbursed in my bank account. There is a salary account of mine with SEWA. I get the guest reimbursement deposited there only. It depends on the package that the guest has taken. – SB

Initially, when we joined, we had received Airbnb training. We had also gone to a field training. We observed how it is done over there, and based on those experiences, we are able to do these things...training on hygiene, training on food preparation, menu preparation, preparation of Q-cards, etc. – MB

In return, the hosts developed the association by offering their time and expertise through 'giving service' (GB) to SEWA. Individuals participated in exhibitions and workshops to promote the association and its initiatives, such as this collaboration. However, this partnership with Airbnb is still seen as a community-based initiative rather than an official business. This was contrary to previous perceptions that saw the sharing economy as an enterprise or distribution system (Phua, 2019).

The existing literature has acknowledged the destination management organisation (DMO) as having a central role in collaborations (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014), but this was not the case in this research. SEWA was the association that took on this role alongside representatives from the peer-to-peer accommodation platform in this research. Airbnb executives created measures for increasing the visibility of the women's listings through targeted marketing. The company created online and offline marketing campaigns to help drive demand for these

specific Airbnb listings. This exposure provided the rural women with access to and inclusion in a technology-based platform, while the entrepreneurs increased the number of hosts on the platform, which also increased the value and offerings of Airbnb.

Outcomes

Commoning activities focus less on neoliberalism and capitalism practices (Rap & Jaskolski, 2019). The participants included the shared benefits, thereby illustrating the importance of the context, specifically the traditional commons and ideologies, as an influence on female entrepreneurial activities and outcomes (Benkler, 2018). The outcomes included community, market-based innovation, monetary and non-monetary benefits, increased cooperation and the emergence of new subject identities. Each aspect is discussed below.

Community and market-based innovation provided monetary and non-monetary benefits further classified as financial incentives and social benefits. While scholars have widely acknowledged the financial gains of participating in the sharing economy, some participants noted a slight uncertainty regarding the economic benefits, which supported the ideas of business management scholars Ahl and Marlow (2019). It was also illustrative of the uncertainties associated with digital commons (Allen & Potts, 2016). For example, RB stated ‘a little bit [of earnings from knitting]. Not much comes from the online [Airbnb] earnings.’ KPB said:

I have put my knitting work online, but not much comes from it...we were invited to one of the meetings about the homestay project, and that’s when I listed my home, but no guests have come so far.

There were social benefits, such as recognition of the hosts and their neighbourhood, which built self-confidence. Some interviewees indicated that they felt proud of themselves. One participant noted that there was a time when no one knew her in the village, but now when people see her, they say, ‘Oh, here is the homestay owner to whose house many guests are coming!’ The increased recognition not only occurred on an individual level but also at the community level, and it attracted attention from government officials and guests interested in developing the physical environment:

Some government workers come to inspect and then take feedback. One government official had come, and he saw that there were no roads. He asked me: there is no road near your home? In next few days, the road development had started. Once a guest had come, and the whole village was changed a lot. So, people were joking that you should have more such guests in your home so that our village can become clean. – GB

Infrastructural development of homes and villages has also taken place since the arrival of guests, which is a scenario usually associated with tourism destination development rather than the sharing economy (Butler, 2006).

Cooperation also increased among the SEWA sisters, employees and members. These rural women had a sense of loyalty and trust in SEWA along with faith in the enterprise because of what it has done and will continue to do for them. When asked ‘have you ever thought of doing something else or going somewhere else than where you are right now’, the response was a unanimous ‘no’. Examples included RB, who stated that ‘sometimes we have tensions at home, but when we come to our friends and colleagues, our tension goes away’. GB also reported:

So many people were considering to migrate, but now with homestay possibilities, people don't want to migrate to the cities and want to stay in the villages...I can never learn what I have learnt from SEWA elsewhere. I am what I am because of SEWA. Not just one woman like me, women have learnt and earned due to SEWA.

In a market-based world, people are generally competitive; however, the women did not compete in this case. They focused on cooperating, a major characteristic of a digital commons (Benkler, 2015; 2018). This cooperation resulted in them working together to ensure individuals remain engaged in the programme, representing a benefit to the SEWA–Airbnb initiative to further retain participants.

As a result of the collaboration, the participants reconstructed their subject identities in two ways: visible self and empowered entrepreneur. The visible self signified the increased sense of self that emerged. The female entrepreneurs aimed to be more aesthetically appealing by taking care of their visible selves. Actions included paying attention to their hygiene and how they dress, speak and present themselves. For some, staying well-kept has become second nature since they began hosting guests. An example of this was TBB, who reported, 'I am an independent and self-reliant person today. I dress differently now. I dress neatly and properly. I stay more hygienic than I did before'. The women also perceived themselves as empowered entrepreneurs, which was noted by previous scholars (Altinay & Taheri, 2019; Shereni, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). However, this empowerment was partial, as there was a feeling of sacrificing happiness, personal time and personal priorities.

Conclusion

This paper revealed how women can be included as entrepreneurs in the sharing economy through collaboration. By drawing on Ostrom's commons approach and thematic analysis, this study reconceptualised tourism collaboration with the sharing economy from being a tool to a digital commons existing in a traditional commons. A commons-based approach to the sharing economy has shifted the understanding of a platform solely geared towards market-based dynamics, such as individual goals of productivity and competition, to one of collaboration and cooperation for social development. Drawing on Ostrom's work, the paper identified the physical characteristics of the context, action arena and outcomes of the collaboration.

Building on Ostrom's IAD framework, this study provided a comprehensive outline of the core components of a physical–digital collaboration for entrepreneurship for women. First, in contrast to most studies on the commons (Damayanti et al., 2017; Heenehan et al., 2015; Ostrom, 2010), this paper illustrated that the context of collaboration is not guided by rules but instead by multiple ideologies within society. These ideas can help women handle and ignore situations where their gender and marital status may influence their entrepreneurial practices. The SEWA sisters worked equally with each other, and there was more of a sense of collaboration than competition. These aspects guided individual behaviour while facilitating equality and equity in everyday practices.

The sharing economy context extended Ostrom's framework to acknowledge the presence of varying digital commons that enable women's entrepreneurship. Specifically, the participants described the sharing economy in various ways, thereby adding to the literature on technologies in tourism, as the study illustrated the different meanings given by the users of the platform. Nonetheless, it still offered the opportunity to share resources within a community (Benkler, 2018). As a commons, it enabled access to an extensive network of

users and resources, but it was occasionally a platform of uncertainty and one-way communication, which contradicted previous views on tourism technologies (Nam & Pardo, 2011).

The study also explained the granular components of the actors and action situations in inclusion-focused collaborations. Furthermore, most conceptual models in tourism research have not illustrated the specific actions in collaborative situations (Laing et al., 2009; Mensah et al., 2021). First, the study found that there was a facilitator (commons facilitator) and other members of the collaboration (commoners), as in most collaborations. However, the findings went beyond previous studies to note that the facilitator was not the DMO. The commons facilitator worked with executives in the sharing economy. Despite providing support and guidelines for successful collaborations, the latter was (slightly) unknown to most commoners. In contrast to most studies that revealed the duties of sharing economy service providers, this research emphasised the duty of care by service providers for providing guest experiences. It also illustrated hosts adjusting their behaviour in providing guest experiences and interacting with the community due to gender relations, which contrasted with the structural understanding of developments in the sharing economy (Gossling et al., 2021).

The benefits to service providers of engaging in the sharing economy are usually tied to financial incentives and the need to exchange resources. However, this study illustrated that the benefits were far-reaching for individual suppliers and the community, as the engagement improved their self-image and recognition of the commons and shaped various identities. Although the neoliberal understanding of the sharing economy notes the need for competition among users to ensure success, this study found that there was increased cooperation among the women entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, continuous training on entrepreneurial and digital competencies is crucial to ensure a good experience for guests visiting the hosts and their homes. Going forward, all stakeholders should view the homestay initiative as a serious business opportunity and not just a side activity.

Ostrom's work had several limitations, which can be areas for future research. Research on the commons and digital commons present an oversimplistic view of production and consumption. The idea of collaborative production has been seen as a one-size-fits-all approach that solves the issues of privatisation and public ownership (Madison et al., 2009). Additionally, the studies have predominantly examined the commons and digital commons as detached from power relations. Therefore, they have failed to differentiate the unique characteristics that may affect individuals or highlight the political situations that influence one's access, level of engagement and autonomy in the commons (Kioupkiolis, 2019; Lau & Scales, 2016; Nancy, 1991). Furthermore, future studies can explore female perspectives with a broader sample of women and women-only collaborations via different sharing economy platforms in other contexts. Other methods and theories can also be considered, such as ethnography and longitudinal studies, to understand the actions of stakeholders using a processual approach. Some participants expressed concerns regarding their loan expenses, which could impact their net profit or loss. Future studies can assess the profitability of Airbnb for hosts from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Nonetheless, the novel insights and model that have emerged are still relevant, as they can provide practitioners a clear understanding of how they can successfully support entrepreneurship for rural women with low economic status in the digital age. This study also provided an analysis of how the sharing economy platform through partnership can provide opportunities for women to become entrepreneurs, thereby facilitating inclusion.

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