How to grow the sharing economy? Create Prosumers!

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Abstract

The sharing economy has changed many rules of business. One of those rules is the role of the firm and – importantly – the role of consumers, who can perform two roles and become both providers and consumers, i.e. "prosumers". Therefore, the key network effect to leveraging the power of the sharing economy is for one-sided users, those who are consumers (e.g., Airbnb guests) *or* providers (e.g., Airbnb hosts), to add the second role and perform as providers *and* consumers and become prosumers (e.g., those who are Airbnb guests *and* hosts). Surprisingly, no studies have investigated this important phenomenon and measured how one-sided users may become prosumers. An online survey of 305 Airbnb users showed that trust and gratitude had a significant positive influence on service providers' and consumers' intentions to adopt the respective other role and become prosumers, and that those with high gratitude and trust had the highest intentions to become prosumers. However, consumers and providers differed markedly in how trust and gratitude influenced their intention to become prosumers. This study expands our understanding of trust and gratitude and highlights the potential for sharing platforms to create prosumers from both pools of one-sided users. Furthermore, it also makes a valuable contribution to the prosumer and sharing economy literatures by being the first to empirically measure users' intentions to become prosumers in the sharing economy. We discuss the implications of the findings for practitioners, and suggest how future research could help leverage the sharing economy.

Keywords

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, many alternative peer-to-peer platforms such as Airbnb, Lyft and Uber have emerged, creating a new way to deliver and experience goods and services (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). Collaborative consumption, or the sharing economy, is the peer-to-peer activity of sharing goods and services, commonly achieved through community-based online platforms (Belk, 2014). This new way of consuming and using goods and services provides a means for sustainability by creating an exchange network between consumers that widens the traditional norm of ownership or possession (Layton, 2016) through renting or sharing (Heinrichs, 2013). Overconsumption of today's resources, based on short product lifecycles, planned obsolescence and a continual desire for the 'new', is a key social and environmental issue (Klein, 2014; United Nations, 2019). The sharing economy offers consumers the ability to "avoid, or at least delay, waste by bartering, swapping, gifting, renting, trading, lending, and borrowing multiple, underused or unwanted goods" (Piscicelli et al., 2015, p. 21). Yet, consumer research on understanding the motivations and barriers in participating in the sharing economy remains scant (Cohen and Kietzmann, 2014; Lee et al., 2018).

Central to the success of sharing economy platform businesses is their ability to generate network effects. Platform business models rely on the interplay between a triangle of actors: a platform operator (e.g., Airbnb), a peer service provider (e.g., the Airbnb host, henceforth referred to as the provider) and the consumer (e.g., the Airbnb guest) (Benoit et al., 2017). When successful, platforms "catalyze a virtuous cycle" where one user group spurs more from the other (Eisenmann et al., 2006). For example, the greater the range and choice of accommodation offered by Airbnb hosts, the greater the demand by Airbnb guests and vice versa. In other words, two-sided platforms, providers and consumers benefit from growing the base of active users. In this sense, it is of interest to all platform operators to learn more about how to grow this base of users by convincing those who are only providers *or* consumers to also adopt the other role. In this context, we term users who play the role of provider *or* consumer as "one-sided users". Conversely, we define users who play the role of provider *and* consumer as "prosumers". The goal then, for platform operators, is to transition one-sided users to prosumers to grow their base.

This leads to two important research opportunities. Firstly, consumers' ability to play more than their traditional role and become prosumers has been recognized as a key feature of the digital age (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). Despite the importance of prosumers, how providers and consumers may become prosumers has thus far received scant attention in the literature. Secondly, providers' and consumers' ability to expand their role and become prosumers has recently been recognized as one of the five key defining features of the sharing economy and has been recognized as an important area for future research (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Again, as yet we do not know how this important phenomenon, the creation of prosumers, takes place in the sharing economy.

Most individual-level or consumer-based studies have focused on consumers (e.g., Böcker and Meelen, 2017; Edbring et al., 2016; Neunhoeffer and Teubner, 2018), fewer on providers (e.g., Hawlitschek et al., 2016; Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2016; Schreiner et al., 2018), and very few studies have investigated both consumers and providers (e.g., Böcker and Meelen, 2017; Sung et al., 2018). As outlined above, to leverage the power of the sharing economy, it is beneficial to convert as many network nodes (i.e., users) into prosumers. This would provide greater demand from within the network and increase the network's ability to service that demand (i.e., its capacity). Furthermore, platform businesses in the sharing economy need

one-sided users to to become prosumers, to benefit from network effects and the resultant economies of scale (Constantiou et al., 2017; Eisenmann et al., 2007). In other words, "the value of the platform to the service user depends on the service provider, and the value of the platform to the service provider is influenced by the service user" (Sung et al., 2018, p. 2).

This study responds to the lack of research on one-sided users' intentions to become prosumers in the sharing economy, while taking into account the triadic nature of the sharing economy. Its aim is to contribute to the research on, and practice of, managing two-sided platforms so that all three stakeholders (i.e., platform, provider, and consumer) benefit. Specifically, we investigate how providers' (e.g., Airbnb hosts) and consumers' (e.g., Airbnb guests) intentions to become prosumers are influenced by their impression of the platform operator (e.g., Airbnb). Research has shown that motivations for participating in the sharing economy vary between consumers and providers (Böcker and Meelen, 2017). Therefore, we examine both providers and consumers' intention to become prosumers. To our knowledge, this is also the first study to provide an empirical measure of how one-sided users intend to become prosumers.

To understand why one-sided users would consider becoming prosumers, we take a relationship marketing approach. In relationship marketing, trust is central and critical to successful marketing relationships (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002) and a major determinant of forming a strong relationship (Achrol, 1991; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust is the ability to rely on an individual, group, or organization (Rotter, 1967). In the B2C e-commerce context, trust involves elements of ability (competence), integrity (reliability), benevolence, and predictability (Gefen and Straub, 2004; Hawlitschek et al., 2016). Trust is also the main factor in the sharing economy and platform operators' success (Strader & Ramaswami, 2002; Ter Huurne et al., 2017). This is because the notion of sharing expects or assumes trust between individuals and platform operators (Belk, 2010; Möhlmann and Geissinger, 2018; Phua, 2019), where "trust is an important factor in overcoming uncertainty and mitigating risk in the sharing economy accommodations" (Cheng et al., 2019, p. 365).

In addition to trust, Palmatier et al. (2009) argued that gratitude needs to be considered when investigating relationship outcomes. Gratitude is defined as an emotion triggered by the perception that others have voluntarily and intentionally carried out good deeds toward oneself (McCullough et al., 2001). Gratitude is important in relationship marketing because consumers exhibit gratitude-related reciprocal behaviors. For example, in traditional transactional relationships, this might be buying other products/services from the seller (Palmatier et al., 2009). Further, gratitude elicits attention and motivation towards building strong relationships with others, and engaging in helping behaviors (Paramita et al., 2020a,b, Bartlett and DeSteno, 2006). In the sharing economy, the reciprocal dimension of gratitude may lead platform actors to become prosumers. Research has suggested that feeling grateful drives individuals to expand their consideration of others (Grant and Gino, 2012), and this can occur via third-party organizations (e.g., Airbnb) (Paramita et al., 2020a,b). For example, the feeling of gratitude as a guest may motivate users to become hosts, thus becoming a prosumer. In a labor-managed economy, wherein the labor holds capital in the production of goods or services (Olivier et al., 1987) similar to the sharing economy where providers and users can be one and the same, this becomes even more important. Consequently, this study examines whether trust and gratitude in the platform operator (e.g., Airbnb) influence consumers and providers' intention to add a second platform role and become prosumers on that platform.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature regarding the sharing economy in general, the roles of providers and consumers, and outlines research covering trust and gratitude as influential factors in the sharing economy. Section 3 describes the survey method employed in this paper, Section 4 presents the results before Section 5 discusses their wider implications.

2. Literature review

2.1. The sharing economy

The sharing economy consists of a wide variety of actors, initiatives and platforms and researchers are increasingly turning towards classifying and structuring this complex phenomenon (Fernandes et al., 2020; Lim, 2020; Sands et al., 2020). In the sharing economy, triadic interactions occur between a platform operator, a peer service provider and a consumer, rather than the traditional dyadic firm-to-consumer interactions (Benoit et al., 2017). Early adopters of the sharing economy usually facilitated their own consumer-to-consumer interactions (i.e., exchanging services, products) which were fostered among private, like-minded individuals with no facilitating third party (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012; Billows and McNeill, 2018). However, more commercialized platforms have emerged where a third party or online platform facilitates interaction (i.e., market-mediated) (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). For example, the world's largest sharing economy platforms, such as Airbnb and Uber, are commercial. Consequently, users typically do not perform the role of platform operator (e.g., Airbnb) (Bajaj et al., 2020) but perform as one-sided users as either providers or consumers.

One of the most popular platforms of the sharing economy is Airbnb. Airbnb provides users the ability to rent short-term, privately owned accommodation (i.e., shared spaces, rooms, houses) through an online community marketplace (Zervas et al., 2017). For consumers, this usually provides more options, at lower prices, and at unique spaces or locations as well as the opportunity to interact with the local community (Guttentag, 2015), while for providers this provides an economic opportunity to leverage underutilized space. Despite the size and growth of the sharing economy, no research thus far has empirically examined why one-sided users (e.g., Airbnb guests and Airbnb hosts) would become prosumers and how their impression of the platform operator (e.g., Airbnb) influences this process.

2.2. Consumers and providers in the sharing economy

Most research in the consumer domain of the sharing economy has examined the motivations for participating in the sharing economy as a consumer (e.g., Böcker and Meelen, 2017; Edbring et al., 2016; Hamari et al., 2016; Neunhoeffer and Teubner, 2018; Ozanne and Ballantine, 2010) or provider (Hawlitschek et al., 2016; Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2016; Schreiner et al., 2018), with the former attracting more attention (Sung et al., 2018). The motivations for both providers and consumers revolve around economic and social reasons, such as cost-saving, profit earning, convenience, availability, sustainability, social interaction and support (Guttentag et al., 2018; Hamari et al., 2016; Ozanne and Ozanne, 2020). Research has found that motivations spurring participation in the sharing economy may be different for consumers and providers (Böcker and Meelen, 2017). For example, providers are motivated to create a better community and increase sustainability, while consumers focus on value and convenience (Bellotti et al., 2015). Yet, individuals also perceive potential

risks, such as privacy and security risk, which have inhibited consumers from participating in the sharing economy (Lee et al., 2018). Research found that effort expectancy, lack of trust, undesired social interaction, and performance, physical, privacy and process risks are some of the main barriers to engaging in the sharing economy (Spindeldreher et al., 2018). However, while understanding motivations and barriers to joining a sharing economy platform such as Airbnb, is essential to attracting new providers and consumers, converting one-sided users into prosumers is central to the success of the sharing economy. However, no studies thus far have investigated why one-sided users would consider becoming prosumers. This is the gap that this paper addresses.

The sharing economy is characterized as providing 'consumers' the opportunity to be both consumers and providers of a resource or experience, and thus, "induces a two-sided consumer role, which goes beyond the notion of consumer" (Ertz et al., 2019, p. 29). Therefore, examining the intentions of one-sided users who are only consumers or providers is not a complete strategy and requires "analysis through a unified model" (Sung et al., 2018, p. 2), especially pertinent because of the nature of the exchange.

As stated earlier, research suggests that the motivations for being a consumer or provider in the sharing economy vary (Böcker and Meelen, 2017). Thus, it is important to consider that motivations may differ for providers who also consider becoming consumers and consumers who also consider becoming providers. In a similar vein, while some research has examined the sharing economy from the perspectives of consumers and providers, little research has investigated simultaneously both providers and consumers (Hellwig et al., 2015; Sung et al., 2018) and no studies thus far have investigated why one-sided users (e.g., Airbnb providers and consumers) would consider becoming prosumers. To address this important research gap, we adopt a relationship marketing approach, with a focus on two of its central components: trust and gratitude (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Palmatier et al., 2009; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

2.3. Trust and gratitude in the sharing economy

Trust is a critical dimension of marketing relationships (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002) and has been applied to a myriad of contexts and relationship outcomes. Trust has many different definitions and is applied in various disciplines from psychology to philosophy to business (Blomqvist, 1997). Commonly, trust is defined as "an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon" (Rotter, 1967, p. 651).

Trust is critical in sharing economy business models (Ert et al., 2016, Ter Huurne et al., 2017, Tussyadiah and Park, 2018) as they are not centered on a particular product or service, but rather on facilitating interactions (or a relationship) between two or more parties (Constantiou et al., 2017). Thus, trust has a significant role within the sharing economy, given its basis of social connection (Delhey et al., 2011), a fundamental concept upon which the sharing economy depends (Böcker & Meelen, 2017; Hamari et al., 2016). The importance of trust within the sharing economy has been recognized, with the dynamics of consumer-provider and consumer–platform trust commonly examined (e.g., Chen et al., 2009; Hong and Cho, 2011; Lu et al., 2010; Tussyadiah and Park, 2018). Despite this, little is known regarding the role of trust specifically related to users' roll-adding intentions within the sharing economy (i.e., from one-sided users to prosumers).

A lack of trust has also been identified as one of the main barriers to not participating in the sharing economy (Spindeldreher et al., 2018). This lack of trust exists because sharing economy marketplaces involve asymmetric information and economic risk. Platform operators seek to mitigate this by providing guarantees, reviews and photos (Aiken et al., 2004; Ert et al., 2016; Six, 2007), which are important signals to build trust (Hardin 2002). Trust plays an essential function in the formation of interactions and relationships in the sharing economy (Hawlitschek et al., 2018). For example, when renting a room, Airbnb requires hosts to trust potential guests to behave but also to trust in Airbnb's platform ability (i.e., booking and payment processes) and in turn, the guests to trust the accommodation providers (i.e., safety, cleanliness) (Hawlitschek et al., 2018). Therefore, trusting beliefs are usually towards the seller, the buyer, and the platform (Ter Huurne et al., 2017). Here, signaling plays a key role in gaining trust (Spence, 2002). Indeed, signaling theory emerged due to information asymmetry in the marketplace (Kirmani and Rao, 2000). Signals assure consumers of a providers' credibility and integrity and may occur in relation to a provider's character (e.g., competence, credibility, trustworthiness), practices (e.g., their reliability, efficiency), or output (i.e., level of quality or service, service characteristics) (Mackoy and Osland, 2004). Thus, the signals performed by the service platform, as well as the providers on the sharing economy platform, play an important role in choosing to participate in the sharing economy as well as in becoming a prosumer.

Becoming a prosumer will involve interactions with the platform operator (e.g., Airbnb) but in an additional role. That is, consumers will now also interact with the platform as providers and vice versa, providers will now also interact with the platform as consumers. Therefore, our first research question focuses on whether one-sided users' impression of the platform operator influence their decision to become prosumers on the platform:

RQ1: Does users' trust in Airbnb influence their intention to become prosumers on the platform?

Palmatier et al. (2009) argued that not only trust but also gratitude plays a central role in relationship marketing outcomes. Gratitude is defined as the emotional appreciation for benefits received, accompanied by a desire to reciprocate (Palmatier et al., 2009). More specifically, gratitude is an emotional response when one receives benevolence from another, thus feeling grateful, thankful or appreciative, and motivating the recipient to reward and comply with any subsequent requests (McCullough et al., 2001; Mishra, 2016). However, the recipient must feel that the actions of the other (i.e., seller/provider) are motivated by desire and belief, and thus intentional (Bonnie and de Waal, 2004; McAdams a Bauer, 2004). Therefore, when individuals feel gratitude, consumers seek to repay the seller or provider by engaging in gratitude-based reciprocal behaviors (Mishra, 2016), such as changing their purchase behavior (Dahl et al., 2005). Thus, it is this reciprocal dimension of gratitude that may lead one-sided platform users to become prosumers in the sharing economy.

However, Palmatier et al. (2009) argue that trust is still central to the relationship between gratitude and performance outcomes. Further, research has indicated that emotions, such as gratitude, can influence prosocial behaviors (McCullough et al., 2001; Michie, 2009; Tracy and Robins, 2004), such as helping, sharing, co-operating, volunteering (Brief and Motowidlo, 1986), and donating (Paramita et al., 2020a,b). Gratitude has also been found to drive individuals to expand their consideration of others and to empathize with others (Bartlett and DeSteno, 2006; Grant and Gino, 2010; McCullough et al., 2002; Michie, 2009). Therefore, it is expected that individuals within the sharing economy who experience

gratitude will be more likely to add another role on the platform and become prosumers (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). For example, an Airbnb guest may experience gratitude for their experience or, in this case, their stay, and thus become a host, thus adding a role within the sharing economy. This is especially prudent to investigate because consumers' ability to expand their role and be a prosumer has been highlighted as one of the defining characteristics of the sharing economy (Eckhardt et al., 2019). Thus, the ability to be both a provider and a consumer means that gratitude may play a role in contributing to becoming a prosumer in the sharing economy. Importantly, gratitude has not been explicitly investigated in a sharing economy context thus far. Consequently, the second research question asks:

RQ2: Does users' gratitude towards Airbnb influence their intention to add a second role on the platform?

Traditional relationship marketing explains and examines the dyadic relationship between a firm and its customers (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Webster and Morrison, 2004). Yet, platform business models involve a triangular set of relationships, where providers transact with consumers across the platform (Benoit et al., 2017; Eisenmann et al., 2007). Therefore, it is still uncertain how the addition of another actor in the relationship, and the shift from dyadic to triadic interaction, will impact relationship outcomes. Thus, this research also examines how providers and consumers differ with regard to the influence of trust and gratitude on their intention to become prosumers. Hence, the third research question is:

RQ3: Do providers and consumers differ with regard to the influence of trust and gratitude on their intention to become prosumers on the platform?

3. Methodology

This study investigates the relationships between trust, gratitude and one-sided users' willingness to become prosumers on a sharing economy platform. To investigate these relationships, we surveyed sharing economy platform users.

3.1. Platform selection

In line with previous research (Guyader, 2018; Sung et al., 2018), data for this study was collected from users of one sharing economy platform, rather than a variety of platforms. This was seen as most appropriate because prior research has shown that consumer behavior varies across different types of sharing through platforms (Hellwig et al., 2015) and recent research investigating reactions to different platform roles has also focused on one platform (Paramita et al., 2020a,b). Therefore, the present study focuses on a single platform which is more likely to result in more meaningful estimates of the core constructs.

Past research suggests that long service encounters are likely to lead to open bound relationships and greater interaction between service provider and consumer (Price et al., 1995). Hosting strangers in one's accommodation and, vice versa, seeking accommodation a in stranger's accommodation are among the best examples of such long service encounters, and the fact that such encounters are facilitated through the sharing economy platform are therefore likely to require and lead to meaningful levels of gratitude and trust. This is in line with literature which has shown that trust is an important construct for accommodation in general (Cheng et al., 2019) and for Airbnb users in particular (Neunhoeffer and

Teubner, 2018; So et al., 2018). For these reasons, data for this study was collected from Airbnb users.

3.2. Respondent selection and recruitment

Data for this study was collected from Airbnb users. The survey was administered through the online panel of a global leader in market research: Dynata (formerly Research Now, Survey Sampling International).

Survey participants were eligible to participate if they: 1) were aged 18 years or older; 2); were members of the Dynata online panel 3) were able to read English; 4) resided in New Zealand, and 5) had used Airbnb at least once in the past twelve months. Respondents were categorized as either Airbnb guests (consumers) or Airbnb hosts (providers) at the beginning of the survey through two screening questions. Firstly, respondents were presented with a list of well-known sharing economy platforms and asked which of these platforms they used the most. Respondents who selected "Airbnb" were then asked a second screening question to determine which role they play on the Airbnb platform. This question had three options: 1) "As a guest, staying in someone else's property"; 2) "As a host, providing accommodation in a property"; and a third option for respondents who perform both roles. Respondents who selected option one or two were categorized as either Airbnb guests (consumers) or Airbnb hosts (service providers). Respondents who selected the third option were very rare and could therefore not be utilized for this study. This procedure was employed until the minimum sample sizes for each of the two groups (N = 100) had been met. This resulted in a sample size of 305 (102 Airbnb hosts and 203 Airbnb guests).

3.3. Measures

The core constructs measured in this study are trust, gratitude and consumers' intention to add a second platform role and thus become prosumers. All three constructs were measured with established multi-item scales (Appendix 1). Trust was measured with a three item scale based on previous scales (Fletcher et al., 2000) and gratitude was also measured with a three item scale based on existing scales (McCullough et al., 2002; Palmatier et al., 2009). Both constructs were measured on 9-point scales ranging from 1 (Completely disagree) to 9 (Completely agree). To measure consumers' intentions to add a second role and become prosumers, we adapted an established three item measure of behavioral intentions (White et al., 2011). This adaptation ensured that the scale was suitable for the sharing economy context of the present study. Again, items were measured on 9-point scales with higher values indicating greater willingness to become prosumers. In addition to these three core constructs, other variables, including age, gender, personal income and level of education were also measured.

4. Results

This section provides an overview of the samples, reliability levels of the three core scales (trust, gratitude, and intention to become prosumers), basic descriptive statistics and results relating to the three research questions.

4.1. Scale reliability and descriptive statistics

The sample of 305 respondents consisted of 203 consumers and 102 service providers. The consumer and provider samples were well distributed across the demographic variables and they were similar in terms of age (mean age for consumer and provider samples 45 and 44 years), gender (57% and 63% female, respectively), income (39% and 33% medium income, respectively), and education (54% and 47% respectively had completed an apprenticeship, trade, or undergraduate qualification).

All scales performed reliably with trust (0.91 and 0.87), gratitude (0.94 and 0.91) and intention to become prosumers (0.93 and 0.85) achieving Cronbach's alphas above 0.7 across the consumer and provider samples. These reliability levels are very similar to those from previous studies (Palmatier et al., 2009; Thomson, 2006; White et al., 2011).

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the *trust, gratitude,* and *intention to become a prosumer* scales. It shows that across both samples, levels of trust and gratitude were fairly high and that consumers and providers were similar in their levels of trust and gratitude. In contrast, the intention to become prosumers was lower across both groups and was markedly different between the two groups, with consumers having far lower intentions to become prosumers compared to providers.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for trust, gratitude, and intention to become prosumers

Variable	Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation Values (*p*-value, one-tailed)		
				Trust	Gratitude	Intention to become prosumers
Trust	Consumers	6.23	2.13	–	0.73**	0.27**
	Providers	6.17	2.35	–	0.70**	0.48**
Gratitude	Consumers	6.40	1.89	0.73**	–	0.31**
	Providers	6.55	2.04	0.70**	–	0.62**
Intention to become prosumers	Consumers	3.69	2.48	0.27**	0.31**	–
	Providers	6.52	2.10	0.48**	0.62**	–

**

Significant at a 1% level of significance

Finally, as 9-point Likert scales were used to measure all the variables, a single sample (source) was used, and all questions were positively worded, we had to test for Common Method Variance in the data (Tehseen et al., 2017). Harman's Single Factor test was used (Chang et al., 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003) and showed that common method variance was not present in the data.

4.2. Results concerning research questions

The following sections discuss results concerning the three research questions.

4.2.1. The relationship between trust, gratitude, and intention to become prosumers

Research questions one and two aimed to establish whether there was a relationship between trust, gratitude and consumers' and providers' intentions to become prosumers. The skewness and kurtosis of all three variables fell within the required range (skewness -1,1, kurtosis -2,2) and therefore the Pearson's correlation coefficient (and its associated significance, 1-tailed) was used to investigate the relationship between the key constructs (Table 1).

Table 1 shows that trust and gratitude had strong positive relationships with intention to become a prosumer. This was particularly pronounced for providers' gratitude and their intention to become prosumers (correlation coefficient = 0.62). Across the consumer and provider samples, all three constructs were positively related at a 1% level of significance.

4.2.2. Differences between platform consumers and providers

After establishing that trust and gratitude influenced the intention to become prosumers, the third research question aimed to investigate how providers and consumers differed in this relationship. In particular, *do providers and platform consumers differ with regard to the influence of trust and gratitude on their intention to become prosumers on the platform?*

To test this research question, we first established whether intention to become prosumers differed across different levels of trust and gratitude. To achieve this, we created four groups (see Fig. 1) to contrast high and low levels of both trust and gratitude, using a mean split (Antonius, 2003). While this method has been criticized (Osborne, 2013), it was deemed appropriate in this context as significance tests were not used to test the difference between each quadrant generated by the mean split. Instead, this method was used only to create the groups and illustrate the overall difference between consumers and providers. In addition, the third research question concerns a variable that was not included in the creation of the groups (i.e., used in the mean split). Therefore, the possibility that the dichotomization of the scales inflated the difference/effect tested (Osborne, 2013) is not relevant in this case. This resulted in a gratitude-trust matrix with four quadrants. One-way ANOVA was used to ascertain whether groups in these four quadrants indeed differed in their intention to become prosumers (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Means of high-low trust and gratitude groups and their intention to become prosumers

Upon investigating the average intention to become prosumers in each quadrant, it is clear that the high trust-high gratitude quadrant had the highest intention to become prosumers (mean = 5.46), followed by the high-gratitude low-trust (mean = 4.86), high-trust low-gratitude (mean = 4.15) and low-trust low-gratitude quadrants (mean = 3.61). These four

quadrants differ significantly with regard to their intention to become prosumers (Table 2). The likelihood of a type 1 error in this test was reduced through the use of the Bonferroni correction in the post-hoc test.

Table 2. Differences between high-low trust and gratitude groups and their intention to become prosumers

Group		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Overall Group	Between Groups	205.702	3	68.567	10.162	.000
	Within Groups	2044.546	303	6.748		
	Total	2250.248	306			
Consumers	Between Groups	97.924	3	32.641	5.656	.001
	Within Groups	1165.716	202	5.771		
	Total	1263.640	205			
Providers	Between Groups	138.118	3	46.039	14.960	.000
	Within Groups	298.516	97	3.077		
	Total	436.634	100			

In addition, there is a difference between providers' and consumers' average intentions to become prosumers in each quadrant, with providers' averages being much higher in each quadrant. The variance between providers' and consumers' intentions to become prosumers in each quadrant causes the overall mean to average out.

A one-way ANOVA confirmed that not only does the overall sample's average intention to become a prosumer differ between these groups ($F = 10.16$, $p < 0.01$), but so too do consumers ($F = 5.66$, $p < 0.01$) and providers ($F = 14.96$, $p < 0.01$) differ in their intention to become prosumers in these four quadrants. Additionally, the mechanisms of how trust and gratitude influence providers' and consumers' intentions to become prosumers differed markedly, as illustrated in Figs. 2 and 3 below.
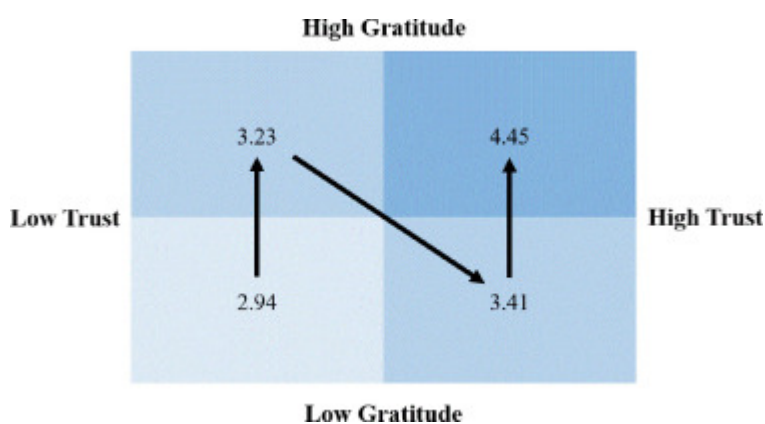

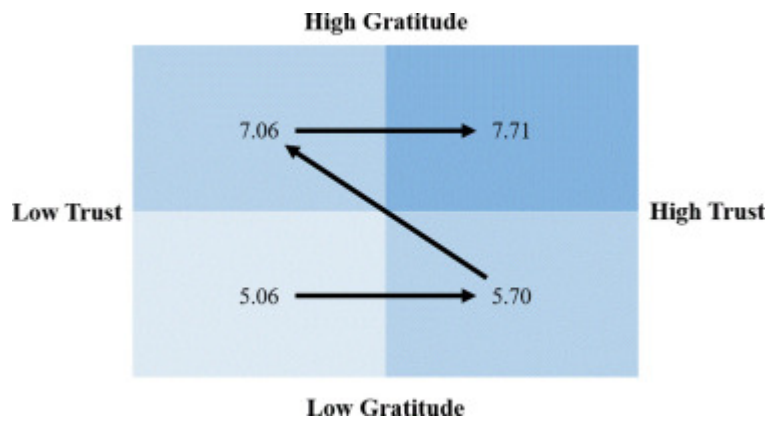Fig. 2. Consumers' intention to become prosumers

Fig. 3. Providers' intention to become prosumers

Figs. 2 and 3 show that both consumers and service providers had the highest intention to become prosumers in the high-trust and high-gratitude quadrant, and the lowest intention to become prosumers in the low-trust low-gratitude quadrant. However, consumers and providers differed in how trust and gratitude impacted their intention to become prosumers in the remaining two quadrants. Specifically, gratitude had a greater influence on providers' intentions to become prosumers, with the mean difference between the high-gratitude low-trust and low-gratitude high-trust quadrants 1.36 points (7.06–5.70 = 1.36). Where consumers differed only slightly in these quadrants (3.41–3.23 = 0.18), with trust having a greater influence on intention to become prosumers than gratitude. This contradicts the current understanding of the role of trust and gratitude in relationship marketing. These findings are further discussed in the following section.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the relationships between trust, gratitude and sharing economy users' intentions to become prosumers by being a provider and a consumer at the same time. Growing the number of prosumers is important to leverage the power of the network that underlies the sharing economy. Importantly, no research to date has addressed this pressing phenomenon.

Conceptually, this study contributes towards the literature by recognizing the importance of studying both types of one-sided users: consumers and providers. While previous studies have focused on consumers (e.g., Böcker and Meelen, 2017; Edbring et al., 2016; Neunhoeffer and Teubner, 2018) or providers (e.g., Hawlitschek et al., 2016; Karlsson and Dolnicar, 2016; Schreiner et al., 2018), very few studies have investigated both groups simultaneously (e.g., Böcker and Meelen, 2017; Sung et al., 2018) and this is the first study to investigate why one-sided users consider becoming prosumers. The focus on both types of users within our study highlights the potential for platforms to create prosumers from both pools of one-sided users. Transitioning to prosumers means that users become a manifestation of the sharing economy and its potential. In other words, the power to grow the sharing economy not only lies in increasing the overall population of providers and consumers, but also in the ability of platforms to convert one to the other by leveraging trust and gratitude. In this sense, this paper offers both theoretical contributions as well as strong practical implications. These are discussed in the following sections.

5.1. Contribution to theory

The first contribution to theory pertains to the empirical support it lends for Palmatier et al.'s (2009) seminal work on the important role of gratitude as a key force that influences relationship marketing effectiveness. Secondly, the study extends Palmatier et al.'s (2009) relationship marketing model by showing that both trust and gratitude are important ingredients for creating prosumers in the sharing economy. Importantly, this is the first study to show the importance of gratitude in a sharing economy context, thus broadening the applicability and our understanding of gratitude in particular. Thirdly, the present study further builds on work by Bartlett and DeSteno (2006), Palmatier et al. (2009), and Mishra (2016) regarding how gratitude serves as a catalyst to build relationships with consequential network effects on different user groups. The results empirically demonstrate that trust and gratitude have differential impacts on user groups (i.e., consumers and providers) even when they are on the same platform. Specifically, gratitude had a greater impact than trust on providers' intentions to become prosumers. This finding directly contributes to the relationship marketing literature where typically trust is seen as the central component (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002).

The study also makes methodological contributions. The behavioral intention scale used in this study had been previously used to measure intention to volunteer, intention to recycle, and product purchase intentions (Peloza et al., 2013; White et al., 2011; White and Peloza, 2009). The present study adapted the scale and proved its suitability to measure a different type of intention (to become a prosumer) within a different context (sharing economy). To our knowledge, this is the first study to empirically measure users' intentions to become prosumers in the sharing economy. Given the importance of the sharing economy and the importance of prosumers (Eckhardt et al., 2019; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), we hope that this scale will be useful for future research in this area.

5.2. Contribution to practice

Two implications to practice emerge as a result of the findings. Firstly, to leverage the power of the sharing economy, it is crucial to release the immense potential of the network by transitioning actors within the network from one-sided users to prosumers. Specifically, if platform operators such as Airbnb actively target their current network of one-sided users, they can transition the most promising network nodes into prosumers. This study helps to achieve the nuanced transition potential for the two roles by showing that providers were far more likely to become prosumers compared to consumers. Therefore, providers, as a group, appear to have the highest likelihood to become prosumers and thus should be prioritized to leverage the power of the network. Secondly, this study highlights the importance of trust and gratitude in becoming prosumers and the different levels of importance of trust and gratitude required for providers and consumers. Therefore, sharing economy platforms may wish to cultivate and emphasize these two emotions when recruiting users and in appealing to users to become prosumers. Marketing communications and designing platforms that provide signals, which help to build trust and gratitude, are two key tactics to help achieve such goals.

6. Limitations and recommendations for future research

Despite these contributions, this study has limitations, which provide avenues for further research. Some of the results of this study may be limited to the Airbnb platform. For

example, this study found that the intention to become prosumers was consistently higher for providers (Airbnb hosts) than for consumers (Airbnb guests). In many countries, becoming an Airbnb host (provider) requires home ownership, rather than just renting a home. Such home ownership legislation is likely to suppress the intention to become prosumers for Airbnb guests who wish to become Airbnb hosts. In short, it is likely more difficult for Airbnb consumers to become prosumers compared to consumers on other platforms, such as Lyft and Uber, which only require access to, not ownership of, a car. Secondly, the literature on barriers to participation in the sharing economy remains somewhat scarce and warrants further investigation. Whilst some studies have investigated barriers to participating in the sharing economy (Hawlitschek et al., 2016; Tussyadiah, 2015), we still lack in our understanding of barriers to becoming prosumers across multiple platforms. Future research may wish to investigate the gratitude-trust matrix across multiple platforms to ascertain whether there are generalizable sharing economy effects or whether such effects are largely dependent on the platform.

The success, and power, of the sharing economy is reliant on its ability to generate network effects and to stimulate ongoing collaborative consumption through triadic interactions between platform operators, peer service providers, and consumers (Benoit et al., 2017). This is similar to the importance of reciprocity in other online networks (Starr et al., 2020). By understanding how one-sided users can transition to prosumers, sharing economy platforms can continue to thrive through the mobilization of the virtuous cycle as described by Eisenmann et al. (2016). By having a better understanding of the relationships between trust, gratitude, and sharing economy users' intentions to become prosumers we hope that this study will inspire future research in this increasingly important area and allow users and platform operators to leverage the power of the sharing economy.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

Funding statement

Appendix 1

Scale items

Construct	Source	Items
Trust	Fletcher et al. (2000)	I can count on Airbnb I can trust Airbnb Airbnb is dependable
Gratitude	McCullough et al. (2002) and Palmatier et al. (2009)	I feel grateful for Airbnb I feel thankful for Airbnb I feel appreciative for Airbnb
Intention to become a prosumer	White et al. (2011)	I am likely to become an Airbnb [host/guest] I am inclined to become an Airbnb [host/guest] I am willing to become an Airbnb [host/guest]

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