

Article

Making sense of the Sharing Economy: a category formation approach

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Abstract: The Sharing Economy (SE) has dawn great attention from several stakeholders in society in the last five years. While business actors are interested in financial opportunities to meet consumer needs, new business models, the academia and governmental organizations are concerned with potential unintended effects on the society and environment. In the process of making a clearer comprehension of the SE phenomenon, researchers have identified that, despite its notable global growth, there still persists a lack of a more solid ground in understanding its origins and respective mechanisms under which it has been evolving over time as a category. In this research, we address the problematics of the origins and ascendancy of the SE by examining the process by which the SE is arising as a new category, searching for conceptual clarification and pinpointing the legitimacy granted by key stakeholders. Our guiding research questions are: (1) how the SE was formed and evolved as a market category; and (2), as a market category, is the SE legitimate? Additionally, we attempt to identify the nature of the SE as a category. To answer these questions, we conducted an historical analysis of the expression SE and its equivalents. This paper deepens the discussion about the nature of the SE by providing evidence that (i) the SE has predominantly been formed by emergence processes, comprising social movement, similarity clustering and truce components. It is the combination of all these aforementioned processes that renders the SE a special case of market category formation, which, in turn, has been allowing communication, entrepreneurship, regulation and research about what really is the SE, and despite the evident lack of agreements regarding both the label and its content; (ii) there is a generalized legitimacy granted to the SE by a vast number of stakeholders, even though still lacking on the consolidation of socio-political legitimation, and (iii) the nature of the SE seems to fall in a metaphorical approach, particularly, the notion of radial categories.

Keywords: Sharing Economy; Category Formation; Emergence; Social Movement; Similarity Clustering; Truce; Radial Category; Identity Legitimation; Stakeholders; Business Models.

1. Introduction

The sharing economy (SE) is growing at an impressive rate across the globe [1]. It involves the use of information technologies to link different stakeholders with the goal of using surplus resources in the creation of valuable products and services. As a new reality, there is lack of common understanding of the nature of the SE and its underlying mechanisms [2], as well as empirical research concerning the increasing diversity of SE business models and the implications for business growth, community development, sustainability and public policy [3].

Despite the increased awareness of the SE, its nature and establishment as a legitimate category are not well understood. Some companies are often classified as SE exemplars and, at the same time, lack the required legitimacy to operate in specific markets. Uber is one of such cases. In Korea [4], for example, Uber was confronted with strong objections from taxi unions and, as a consequence, many of the company's services were banned by the Korean government. Identically, several European countries, namely, France, Germany, Spain and the UK, were faced with prominent protests from

taxi driver associations against the company, giving rise to concerns that government regulators may favour those associations in detriment of Uber. In this respect, the Court of Justice of the European Union has recently emphasized the need to resolve this issue:

Therefore, the Court finds that that intermediation service must be regarded as forming an integral part of an overall service whose main component is a transport service and, accordingly, must be classified not as ‘an information society service’ but as ‘a service in the field of transport’ [5].

The approach given by the Court with the explicit use of the expression “must be classified” reveals how important market categories are. To clarify how one should label and categorize the company has profound consequences both on the operation of Uber and on the substitutes of this company (taxis). In this case, the two competing categories are an information society service versus a transport service. Being classified in one of these categories -information society or transport- makes a decisive difference. In the same vein, the Portuguese Federation of Taxis has also expressed the urgency in finding the right “label” of Uber in order to clearly identify its belonging to an accurate category: “Today, Uber has written on its forehead: company of transportation” [6]. Oddly, during this all controversy, and to the best of our knowledge, Uber has never presented itself as a SE company, but rather as a platform. This is a very interesting way to make use of membership in a category in a purely strategic way, and not as a self-definition, as it would be predicted by the social actor view of organizational identity [7]. SE seems to be a label used by some actors but not others, and it is not clear how this category was formed.

In this research, we shed light on identifying the categorization mechanisms around the SE, giving body to how different audiences are giving legitimacy to the SE as a category overtime. By doing this, we join Cheng’s [8] and Parente et al.’s [9] calls for setting up relevant future research agenda and broaden current theories by exploring why, when, and how SE commercial platforms expand into societies. We also address the call of Cohen and Kietzmann [1] for the urgency in studying the phenomenon and Knote and Blohm’s [2] concern for finding a common understanding of the SE and its underlying mechanisms. In this paper, we analyse how the meaning of the SE evolved and, by doing this, we examine the process by which the SE is arising as a new category, searching for conceptual clarification and pinpointing the legitimacy granted by key stakeholders. Our guiding research questions are, thus: (RQ1) how the SE was formed and evolved as a market category; and, (RQ2) as a market category, is the SE legitimate? Additionally, we attempt to identify the nature of the SE as a category.

By interpreting key words, concepts and patterns of discourse used by an array of stakeholders in construing the dimensions associated with the formation of the category of SE and its evolution through time, we construed a timeline that ranges from year 2002 to year 2019, comprising three main phases – “revelation phase”, “clairvoyance phase” and “knowledge proliferation phase”, each one comprising distinct formation processes and different actors playing prominent roles. The SE has been formed mainly by *emergence* processes [10] in which social activists, through a process of *social movement* [11], have claimed its value as a mean for achieving a more sustainable world, what was followed by a process of *similarity clustering* [11] significantly benchmarked by an appropriation of the field by the scientific community, striving to give sense and clarify the nature of this emergent reality what allowed the achievement of a *truce* momentum [12], thus allowing communication, entrepreneurship, regulation and research about what really is the SE, despite the evident lack of agreements regarding both the label and its content. Complementarily, we suggest that the SE is a category that is more closed to a radial category [13] [14] than to a more conventional prototype category [15,16,17]. In our view, is the combination of all the aforementioned processes that renders the SE a special case of market category formation.

This article is organized as follows. We begin by presenting a theoretical framework including a brief review of the idea of SE followed by a discussion of what categories are and how new categories are formed and legitimacy is construed. After describing the processes of data collection, we present an historical analysis of how the category of SE has been formed and evolved, by portraying an analysis of each of the milestone events, shedding light to key dimensions associated with a process

of formation of a legitimate category. After that, we discuss the study's limitations and avenues for further research. Finally, under the conclusion section, we provide a summary of the main findings.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Conceptualizing the SE

Sharing is as old as humankind. Although it's an old phenomenon in that people have often shared assets with one another, the SE is a relatively new phenomenon by way of technology standards [18], born of the Internet age [19], and in which you are not helping a friend for free or reciprocity expectations, but rather providing SE services to a stranger for money [14]. Sharing and collaborative consumption are growing in popularity today and the current growth of these practices is generating a debate around the implications for businesses still using traditional models of sales and ownership [19]. It is believed that the term *SE* has been used since at least 2007, when a law professor named Lawrence Lessig at Harvard Law School used the term in a New York Times story about the Internet's effect on work, followed by a publication in 2008 of a book called *Remix: Making art and commerce thrive in the hybrid economy*. He explained:

The traditional company is one that's just making money selling widgets or iTunes (...) The Internet exploded a *sharing economy* with things like Wikipedia where people are doing work that creates a lot of value, not for money but just because it's their hobby. We've seen a pattern of hybrid companies like this trying to figure out ways to leverage that for a profit. [20].

These hybrid companies referred by Lessig may also be perceived as what Cohen and Kietzmann [1] call as *commercial sharing services* that allow people to share resources in creative new ways. Malhotra and Van Alstyne [21], on the other hand, advocate that, thanks to these SE sharing services, people can have access to rooms – Airbnb, Roomorama –, cars and bicycles – Relay Rides, Wheelz –, and taxi services – Uber, Lyft. These creative business models have put in the spotlight the SE and its massive growth, by sources ranging from Fortune Magazine to President Barack Obama [22]. Further, the SE was nominated as one of '10 ideas that will change the world' [23] and its size was estimated at \$26 billion value in 2013 [24,25], while projected to grow to \$335 billion in 2025 [26].

Attempts to label this emergent phenomenon have appeared. In a report issued in June 2016, the Economics and Statistics Administration (ESA) of the U.S. Commerce Department attempted to define and map out the contours of this emerging business sector, labelling its participants as *digital matching firms*. The report defines this sector through four main characteristics [27]: (a) they use information technology (IT systems), typically available via web-based platforms, such as mobile "apps" on Internet-enabled devices, to facilitate peer-to-peer transactions; (b) they rely on user-based rating systems for quality control, ensuring a level of trust between consumers and service providers who have not previously met; (c) they offer the workers who provide services via digital matching platforms flexibility in deciding their typical working hours; (d) to the extent that tools and assets are necessary to provide a service, digital matching firms rely on the workers using their own.

But the term SE itself raised major concerns. A PwC report [28] on assessing the SE used the label broadly to define the emergent ecosystem that is upending mature business models across the globe. Having spoken with industry specialists, the report has concluded that no single label can neatly encapsulate this movement, as for some the word "sharing" was a misnomer, a savvy-but-disingenuous spin on an industry they felt was more about monetary opportunism than altruism. We believe that this duality, involving the selfish exploitation of an opportunity and some sort of contributing to others' welfare, goals that usually don't go together, are a key cornerstone for grasping the nature of this movement.

Further, evidence about ambiguity surrounding the SE abounds. To name a few, such new related business and consumption practices have been described as *sharing* [29], *collaborative consumption* [30], *the mesh* [31], *commercial sharing systems* [32], *co-production* [33], *co-creation* [34,35],

prosumption [36,37], *product-service systems* [38], *access-based consumption* [39], *consumer participation* [40], and *online volunteering* [41].

Moreover, others argue that the SE seems to be of a paradoxical nature [42]. Tensions and uncertainties regarding its real boundaries, effects and logics are highlighted in SE [43], where some perceive it as an alternative to market capitalism, but, at the same time, it also might instigate capitalism [44], even if it defends and promotes “more sustainable consumption and production practices”, it also might “reinforce the current unsustainable economic paradigm” in turn [45] (p. 159).

The paradoxical features associated to the SE converge to the dual nature of this emergent process. However, this context of ambiguity is not inhibiting further efforts in construing a much solid common ground in broaching the SE. For example, Frenken and Schor [46] (pp. 4–5) have defined the SE as a phenomenon where “consumers grant each other temporary access to under-utilized physical assets (‘idle capacity’), possibly for money”, where prototypical “goods that are currently being shared are cars and homes”. Further, SE platforms should be defined in alliance with the notion of *sharing* as a historical practice, in the sense that people were already incurring in practices of lending, renting and, particularly, sharing goods due to well-trusted social contacts, way before the arising of Internet platforms [46]. Having that as a premise, Frenken and Schor [46] argue that what is novel, today, is that people lend goods to other people they don’t know due to the simple fact that the arrival of the Internet brought it with an enormously decrease in transaction costs. Today, because of Internet platforms, we have the possibility of lowering the costs of the search and contract. Based on this definition, the authors advocate that the SE can be distinguished from three other types of platforms pre-dating the Internet: (1) *second-hand economy* (consumers selling goods to each other); (2) *product-service economy* (renting goods from a company rather than from another consumer); and (3) *on-demand economy* (peer-to-peer service delivery instead of peer-to-peer good sharing).

In the light of all the complexity and uncertainties associated to the SE, representing absence of common understanding about both the label and the content of the SE, we can observe further attempts in construing more consistent building blocks on what the SE really is and what are its constituent activities. This follows below.

2.2. SE as a complex category: organizing the diversity under an ambiguous umbrella

In the face of the diversity of new business akin to be categorised as SE, some researchers have developed typologies anchored in very different dimensions [47-49]. The duality comprising an individual benefits maximization and a collective orientation seems to be one of the main sources of discussion, divergence and unsettled discourse among the academic community. In an attempt to organize the wide range of nonownership forms of consumption practices, Habibi et al. [49] suggest the sharing-exchange continuum as a fundamental dimension against which all those forms can be mapped, thus, helping distinguish the degree to which actual sharing (from “pure sharing” to “pure exchange”) is being offered by a SE practice (named as a SBP – Sharing-Based Program). The continuum uses a rating given to a SBP in measuring its sharing scores (in a 5-point scale), which is based on a number of sharing and exchange-related characteristics that are drawn out of Belk’s work [50,29]. Habibi et al.’s [51] results reveal that (1) Zipcar SBP was rated as being in the “pure exchange” end of the continuum, (2) Couchsurfing SBP was rated as being in the “pure sharing” end of the continuum, and (3) Airbnb SBP was rated as being a “hybrid” practice, having mix “pure exchange” and “pure sharing” characteristics, thus, falling into the middle of the continuum.

Other authors attempted to organize the diversity of business forms using more than one dimension. For instance, Schor [47] proposes market orientation (for-profit vs. non-profit) and market structure (peer-to-peer vs. business-to-peer) as useful dimensions to highlight differences and similarities between SE elements. In Schor’s account, these dimensions shape the activities’ business models, logics of exchange and potential for disrupting conventional businesses. The author pinpoints SE activities according to the shared sameness with other category members and the individual distinctiveness from other members. Although the for-profit or not for profit orientation seems to mirror the sharing-exchange fundamental motivation of the service provider, as suggested

by Habibi et al. [49], thus highlighting the fundamental duality of self-interest versus others interest that seems to cross the discussion of the nature of the SE, Schor [47] typology also include the level of formalization of one of the exchange relationship element: is a business involved or not? This is relevant because, typically, business type stakeholders tend to be exclusively concerned with making profits, thus stressing the individual interest part of the duality. Thus, Schor's typology can also be mapped into just one dimension.

As an attempt to give meaning to SE, other dimensions have been added. For instance, Constantiou et al. [48], suggest to combine the level of control applied by the platform owner over platform participants (loose vs. tight) and the magnitude of rivalry among the platform participants adopted by the platform owner (low vs. high). In this approach, what differentiates SE platforms from more traditional marketplaces, supplier networks, third-party intermediaries and service integrators is the way they combine organizational and market mechanisms to coordinate platform participation and engender value. According to Constantiou et al. [48], there are four distinct combinations (or models), which they call Franchiser, Principal, Chaperone and Gardener, according to the combination of the control and rivalry dimensions: control is governed by extending organizational coordination mechanisms into the platform's user base, whereas rivalry is governed by the market coordination mechanism designed by the platform owner.

In short, scholars have used variety in the understanding the nature of the SE. Some attempts have been made to categorize the field, thus, recognizing intra-category diversity, and SE has been perceived as a sort of an umbrella concept. Moreover, different dimensions were used to describe the field, but the self-others interest seems to be the most relevant. Finally, most authors do not raise the question of the of legitimacy of specific business models, with the exception of Uber, which lead to a terminological ambiguity surrounding the SE [52]. In our view, this happens, because, even though there already are some studies (e.g. [53]) which bring forward a special attention to the dynamics of the SE in terms of how markets for sharing resources emerge and change, and the intended and unintended consequences of resource sharing, research analyzing its actual roots highlighting where does it come from and how the conceptualization of it has been evolving overtime is lacking.

Interestingly, this lack of consensus in best contouring the SE, whit disagreement of both the label and the content of the category, did not prevent the SE growth, both as a dynamic economic activity and as an object receiving the attention of a growing number of researchers. We joint this discussion by exploring how categories are formed and evolve. We believe that this literature can shed light into the dynamics of the SE and can be another step to reduce the ambiguity associated with the SE. Reducing diversity and ambiguity is exactly the main function of categories, both at the individual and collective levels. In order to assess whether the SE is a legitimate new category, it becomes essential, therefore, to firstly understand how new categories emerge and legitimacy is construed. This follows below.

2.3. How new categories emerge and legitimacy is construed

2.3.1. Categories

Categories are essential for human daily functioning. They help humans to deal with the huge diversity of objects, events and ideas that surround them, thus performing basic sensemaking and communication functions. In fact, it is almost impossible to perceive, think or talk without resorting to some sort of kind of thing, or a category [13]. Additionally, shared categories enable effective communication. Categorization happens automatically and unconsciously. Every time we wake up, we organize our physical world into categories including kinds of people, animals, and physical objects. But we also categorize almost our entire abstract world, like events, emotions, social relationships, governments, or theories [13]. Curiously, the first thing people want to know about us before we were born, is the classic categorical question used to be heard by pregnant women: is going to be a boy or a girl? In ordering a beer, to know whether it is artisanal or made by a large producer can be decisive to some consumers.

At the individual level, the function of categories is to reduce uncertainty, allow thinking and inter-acting in a reasonably cognitive productive manner. The economy sphere is not exception to this human tendency to reduce variability and increase predictability: countries classify their enterprises based on comprehensive sets of categories that describe the core activities of organizations. Other more complex categories cross different types of activity and place the organizations in public, private or nonprofit sectors, in accordance with a mixture of ownership and purpose. In its most basic sense, the meaning of categorization is simple: members of a category are similar to each other and different from members of another category. Based on this sense of belonging, the members of a category can define themselves according to what resembles them and what differentiates them. As categories are eminently social, external elements can look at an entity as a member of a category and, based on this, build expectations about the actions of that entity, without the need to undertake a great deal of individualized information processing.

Metaphorically, categories are conceptualized as containers of similar objects clearly separating those that are in from those that are out [13]. This is also the dominant perspective about categories shared by lay people. But this view was challenged by at least two perspectives, namely the prototype approach [15] and the metaphorical approach [13]. These two alternative views of categories posit that members of categories don't need to share the properties in order to be perceived as belonging to that category, and that category boundaries are not necessarily definite, thus threatening the very meaning of what is a category.

Following of a rich array of experiments, the prototype view of categories [16,17] established that subjects perceive some sub-category or category members as best representatives than others, becoming more prototypical members. For example, a robin is a more prototypical member of the bird category than a chicken. Members of a category can be rated as more or less prototypical. So, categories have a prototypical structure and these prototypes play an important role in making inferences about category members, thus acting as cognitive reference points. Reference points are especially relevant in categories without rigid boundaries, like SUV as a vehicle category, in which prototype effects result from the degree of category membership.

Like the prototypical view, the metaphoric approach to categories [13] suggests that categories are not homogeneous sets of elements, but it proposes different structural properties in some categories, named radial categories. Using a combination of a container and a centre-periphery metaphors, according to which humans view concepts as containers of something (meaning) and everything that is important is perceived as being located in the centre [14], this approach describes radial categories as including central subcategories and non-central sub-categories whose characteristics can't be inferred from the central members. Non-central members of the category belong to the category, because there are conventions that render them variations from the central members and must be learned with a specific culture. Non-central sub-categories are not created from the central ones following general rules and are seen as variations of the central sub-categories extended according to conventions. The central subcategory determines the possibilities for extensions and establishes the relationships between a central model and the others [13]. Thus, radial categories are characterised by the existence of a conventionalised centre, a number of usually metaphoric extension principles describing what links central and less central categories, and specific conventional extensions that can't be predicted from the centre and have to be understood and learned as separate independent elements [13]. For example, in respect to the category of mother, the central subcategory is defined by the convergence of the cognitive models of birth, nurturance, etc., whereas the noncentral extensions are all possible variations of the mothering condition – adoptive mother, birth mother, foster mother, surrogate mother, etc. In other words, the non-central extensions are understood via their relationship to the central model. In short, radial categories are important not only because they equip us with the vocabulary required for characterising relationships between subcategories, but also because they don't prescribe limits for inclusion, what permit the extension of the category. In this sense, radial categories give us a more flexible cognitive tool enabling to accommodate novelty, a property not theorised within the prototype perspective.

A more flexible approach to categories can stress that, beyond prototypical gradients, categories can be formed based on the existence of similar goals or the existence of an identical causal

relationship in actors [54]. In markets, the belonging to categories is of vital importance to the strategic and symbolic action of organizations, as categories provide essential labels for an organization to stand out in its field [55]. For example, when creating a new organization, entrepreneurs can use the membership of the new venture to an established category to gain immediate legitimacy from external audiences through rituals of compliance with regulators. Then, this same organization can counterbalance this pressure for isomorphism by strategically developing a differentiated value proposition that captures customers, suppliers or investors [55]. But how are, actually, market categories born and formed? This follows below.

2.3.2. The formation of market categories

When used as lenses to look at markets and organizations, “categories provide a cognitive infrastructure that enables evaluations of organizations and their products, drives expectations, and leads to material and symbolic exchanges” [54] (p. 1102). Categories are, thus, fundamental cognitive devices required for actors to navigate in complex realities like markets. In line with other domains, market categories include grouped entities under a label, and the process of formation of these features is largely socially constructed by relevant actors in a specific field or ecosystem.

As Hannan et al. [56] (p. 47) point out, the process of assigning explicit labels or names to sets of entities means that it “crystallize(s) the sense that (individuals) have identified communality”. In the same vein, Galperin and Sorenson [57] suggest that a label representing a category tends to emphasize similarities between entities, facilitates the communication about the whole of entities and smooths the cognitive process of storing and transferring information about the attributes of specific category members. Thus, to study the emergence of a label, and the evolution of the meaning attached to it, can inform us about the origins and change of a category. In this regard, a fundamental question arises: how categories are formed?

In recent years, scholars have addressed questions about the origins of market categories and how do new ones emerge [58,59,55,60]. In a recent review, Durand and Khaire [10] suggest that the formation of a category, which demands the rearrangement, reinterpretation, and reassessment of existing elements and features, is a process that defies the status ordering of actors in an ecosystem. In describing the process of category formation, the authors propose a clear distinction in category formation process, distinguishing category emergence from category creation. Emergence occurs when it “crosses over categorical systems and hierarchies and results in the existence of new actors and organizational forms” [10] (p. 89), whereas creation “contributes to the rejuvenation of existing category systems but preserves the social structuration of markets” [10] (p. 89). According to Durand and Khaire [10], there are seven key dimensions through which one may assess whether we are in the presence of one or the other: nature of the novelty, origin, organizational agency, mechanism for distinction, basis of discourse, legitimacy acquired through, and outcome. According to this framework, category emergence happens when the formation of the category arises from elements extraneous to an existing market. Complementarily, category creation is said to occur when there is a redesigning of cognitive boundaries around a subset of elements within a pre-existing category system [10].

Emergence and creation are not the only processes explaining how categories are formed. In assessing the literature akin to explain the emergence of the Tex-Mex food category, Wheaton and Carroll [11] noted the existence of two theoretical streams explaining how categories emerge, namely the social-movement and the similarity-clustering approaches. The social-movement account highlights the role of activists who attempt to articulate a “theory” of the nascent category and attempt to persuade others about the value of the category. Often, very well identified activists tend to use the label as much as they can and attempt to present a persuasive and positive story about the label in order to influence the acceptance of the category by their audiences. Rao et al.’s [61] explanation of the emergence of the nouvelle cuisine is an example of this perspective.

The similarity-clustering approach shares with the social-movement perspective the key role attached to activists, but instead of attempting to promote the nascent category, these actors are portrayed as aiming to cluster entities, mostly organizations, accordingly to similar characteristics

[11]. In early stages of category formation, different enthusiasts engage in similarity judgements but do not achieve consensus [56], and the process of comparison between new entities and between those and existing ones continues until individuals achieve consistent groupings of entities and a label is assigned. Unlike the social-movement account, these individuals are truly interested in the meaning of the category and are not necessarily motivated to sell the label and the content to others. After this refined labelling process of clusters, including alike entities, actors usually develop more general frameworks that allow observers to decide if an entity can be included in a particular cluster and receive the label. The process of assigning the label entails expectations toward specific entities, and when enough agreement is achieved between different stakeholders, the category is said to emerge [11].

Also using a process approach, Rhee et al. [12] theorised the existence of four types of categories' initial formation, namely proof, consensus, fiat, and truce. These four processes result from the combination of two underlying dimensions describing the degree of agreement about the meaning of a category between different constituencies (high or low) and the level of authority granted to specific actors to establish new categories (centralized or decentralized). Categories are said to be formed by consensus, when both audiences and constituents of an emergent category agree about the meaning of a new category and category legitimacy doesn't need official endorsement from authorities. Categories are formed by proof when an established authority, or existing powerful experts or actors, uses institutionalised rules to establish a new category and other actors concur and accept its meaning. Sometimes, centralised authorities establish new categories and use its power to impose the category upon actors who don't recognize or want them, a process named fiat. Finally, a category might be set up by truce, a mechanism representing the lack of agreement about the meaning of a category between relevant actors, but the power relationships prevents the possibility of one actor to impose the meaning of a category upon others, which leads to the existence of categories largely controversial or, at least, evidencing large variability in both label and content.

According to Rhee et al. [12], to understand these key mechanisms explaining categories' initial formation is important, because their prevalence has effects upon subsequent category's evolution. This evolutionary perspective is relevant to understand the category formation process, because, as categories evolve, both the label and the practices or features represented can change or, according to Kennedy et al. [62], can be subject to redefinition, subsumption, or recombination. Some categories are more stable than others, and the key mechanism involved in their emergence can be imprinted in subsequent category evolution.

In summary, the process of formation of market categories is not a straightforward one by no means. It is contoured by multifaceted mechanisms through which newcomer entities, namely new arising entrepreneurial organizations or businesses must pass. And, along such process of screening and evolution, there is an element that is granted by a vast spectrum of external audiences and whose role becomes absolutely crucial in conferring meaning, appropriateness and viability to the new entities and, with that, in finding a fit for them in societal pre-established, conventions, conformities, norms or, in a nutshell, legitimacy.

2.3.3. New market categories and entrepreneurship: the central role of legitimacy

Entrepreneurial ventures require legitimacy to succeed, and categories can grant this valuable resource [63]. Even though entrepreneurs put a lot of effort in seeking success and gaining a legitimate stand in the market [64], that could not be enough as there may be cases where the establishment of new market categories may flop if they do not gain legitimacy [55], cultural recognition [65] or understanding from consumers or investors they seek to influence [66]. Legitimacy, thus, is a precondition to survival.

According to Suchman [67] (p. 574) legitimacy it is originated from the perception that a venture is "desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions". Moreover, it is often achieved through isomorphism, in other words, conformity to institutionalized preferences [68], which means that entrepreneurial ventures must face established constraints [69]. This conformity is, however, very opposite to the true nature of

entrepreneurship, which is more associated to novelty, distinctiveness, and nonconformity [70]. Entrepreneurship legitimacy must then coexist with its own contradiction and implies a sort of interchange between the emancipating aspects of entrepreneuring and the accommodation of constraints needed to acquire resources [69]. A legitimately distinctive entrepreneurial identity has paradoxical features as it embeds both conformity and deviation – circumscribing identity elements that are contradictory or oppositional [70].

The appearance of new markets, in other words, “business environments in an early stage of formation” [60] (p. 644), brings along new opportunity spaces for entrepreneurial ventures and, despite of their attraction, they also are filled with a heavy weight of uncertainty as technologies, products, or processes are experimental and only partly understood [71], product definitions are unclear or unknown [72], and the nascent category is characteristically ambiguous or ill-structured [73]. Further, this uncertainty becomes more condensed when the entrepreneurial firms entering in the new market space are also new [55]. Because new ventures are often incompletely formed, deficient in resources, and lacking clear or coherent identities, the achievement of legitimacy can be a particularly critical challenge for new ventures operating in new market categories [55]. Reflecting this in a SE context, the category of SE, could, therefore, be an important resource for new uprising organizations to anchor its identity claims, especially new ventures.

The legitimation of a new category results from the interaction of actors internal to the category, i.e., the strategic and symbolic actions of entrepreneurial organizations, and actors external to the category, i.e., the interested audiences who judge its feasibility, credibility and appropriateness [55]. Moreover, a new category exists when two or more products or services are perceived to be of the same type or close substitutes for each other in satisfying market demand. The organizations producing or supplying these related products or services are grouped together as members of the same category [55]. However, although all members share the collective identity of the category, not all members are equivalent in the category. Such collective and organizational identities lend meaning to a category, but they also pose an identity challenge: member organizations need to navigate between their shared sameness with other category members and their individual distinctiveness from other members [55]. Resolving the dilemma of sameness and difference in identity becomes critical, because identities are consequential for legitimacy [74,70].

Besides sameness and distinctiveness, the construction of legitimacy also requires cognitive and socio-political processes. Cognitive legitimation comes from the spread of knowledge about a new venture, while socio-political legitimation the extent to which key stakeholders, the general public, key opinion leaders, or governmental officials accept a venture as appropriate and right, given existing norms and laws [63]. The first may be assessed by measuring the level of public knowledge about a new activity – the highest form of cognitive legitimation is achieved when a new product, process, or service is taken for granted –, whereas the second may be measured by assessing the public acceptance of an industry, government subsidies to the industry, or the public prestige of its leaders [63].

In the case of the SE, however, the processes that led to establish it as a legitimate category are not deeply understood. In this context, an historical examination of the evolution of the category, as portrayed by several stakeholders, can allow the possibility of identifying these formation processes. This is the focus of our analysis.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data collection

In order to make an historical analysis, that is, to establish when, how and by whom, the category of the SE was formed, we compiled data from several publicly available sources, namely scientific community, analysts, governmental organizations, international organizations, and other interested audiences. To look at different stakeholders is important because they can play different roles in the

formation of the category and grant different types of legitimacy. The primary source we used was Sundararajan's [75] book "The Sharing Economy: the end of employment and the rise of crowd-based capitalism". This source is relevant because the author reveals some possible historical roots that lead to the use of today's SE. This specific source was our primary cornerstone from which we then progressively searched for other complementarily publicly available sources. We searched contributions from diverse stakeholders, such as, scientific community (Benkler, 2002 [76]; Bauwens, 2005 [77]; Lessig, 2007/2008 [78]; Botsman & Rogers, 2010 [30]; Gansky, 2010 [31]; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012 [39]; Owyang, 2013 [79]; Belk, 2014 [19]; Dubois et al., 2014 [80]; Schor, 2014, 2015 [47,81]; Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015 [82]; Schor et al., 2014 [83]; Frenken et al., 2015 [84]; Meelen & Frenken, 2015 [85]; Hamari et al., 2015 [86]; Chase, 2015 [87]; McLaren & Agyeman, 2015 [88]; Sundararajan, 2016 [75]; Stone, 2016 [89]; Muñoz & Cohen, 2017 [3]; Frenken & Schor, 2017 [46]; Habibi et al., 2017 [49]; Constantiou et al., 2017 [48]; Ryu et al., 2018 [90]; and Curtis & Lehner, 2019 [91]), analysts (Swawell & Issa 2015 [92]; PwC – PricewaterhouseCoopers consulting 2015 [28]), governmental organizations (FTC – Federal Trade Commission 2015 [93-95]), international organizations and organisms (OECD – The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2015 [96-97]; European Commission 2016 [98]), and other interested audiences (Oxford Dictionary, 2015 [99]). A gross total of 31 sources were collected and 2347 pages read.

We started by distilling and depicting 27 key ideas and conceptualizations of the SE and related labels, chronologically ordered, in order to grasp how the meaning evolved. Although this time-based ordering is essential to our analysis, we are aware that publication dates don't correspond exactly to the time of the thought expressed by authors. Moreover, close dates can largely overlap, inhibiting the detection of a clear shift in the evolution. Despite these limitations, we believe that a chronological display is the best approach in attempting to answer to the question of knowing how the SE as a category has been formed and evolved. This timeline also enabled us to become aware to the approximate moment in which different stakeholders played an important role, since the beginning of using the SE term, until its institutionalization in common accepted language, an important event represented by its inclusion on the Oxford Dictionary in 2015. This analysis also enabled us to list the SE related terms, or competitive labels, like collaborative consumption, access-based consumption, or connected consumption.

3.2. Data analysis and interpretation

Once the timeline was established and considering that the main purpose of the study was to analyse the process underlying the formation of a new market category, we interpreted all definitions and related meaning provided by authors. We fine-tuned our interpretation by reading the entire documents and searching for complementary meanings that helps to contextualize the formation of the SE. We undertook an interactive process by the data reported in the documents and the literature describing the several processes of category formation. Thus, in attaching meaning to SE, we used several theoretical sources, namely Durand and Khaire's [10] distinction between category formation by creation or emergence, the dominant processes of emergence of social-movement or similarity clustering as suggested by Wheaton and Carroll [11], the influence of authority and agreement between actors, generating the processes of proof, consensus, fiat and truce (Rhee et al. [12]), the legitimacy granting processes of sameness or close substitution and distinctiveness (Navis & Glynn's [55]) and cognitive and sociopolitical (Aldrich & Fiol's [63]). In searching for evidence about these different processes describing category formation, we attempted to identify the existence of an evolution pattern in which different actors and different processes played distinct roles in the formation of the SE category. Finally, we used prototype and metaphorical approaches (Rosch [15,16], Mervis & Rosch [17] and Lakoff [13], Lakoff & Johnson [14]) to categories in an attempt to grasp the type of the SE as a nascent category.

4. Results

The gross overall results (Table 1) demonstrate that it can be traced a timeline ranging from the year 2002 to 2019. Moreover, it may also be identified a pattern in the evolution of the

conceptualization of the SE with some key cornerstones. The first main of these represents the year of 2002, where it may be traced the first time someone broached the theme in the Era of the Internet (Benkler’s [76] contribution with the introduction of the concept “commons-based peer production”). Regarding the second main one, we spot it in the year of 2014, which is the year where there was a rise of multiple SE practices together with the first substantial discussions on the SE (represented by Belk’s [19] contribution in criticizing Botsman’s & Rogers’s [30] book “What’s mine is yours: The rise of the Collaborative Consumption”). This main second cornerstone may be dissected into one sub-cornerstone: in the year 2015, which is the year we believe to be the beginning of intense debates around regulation of the SE represented by Swawell and Issa’s [92] launch of The Congressional Sharing Economy Caucus. A third cornerstone may be identified in the year 2017, which is the year benchmarking a new phase (ranging from 2017 to 2019) characterized by a booming of an unprecedented number of scientific articles on the SE, whose main common trends of thinking were around finding a settling discourse around the SE (represented by some examples: Muñoz & Cohen [3]; Frenken & Schor [46]; Ryu et al. [90]; and Curtis & Lehner [91]).

Although these cornerstones are indicative, in the sense that they do not meant to represent specific dates, they are informative as supporting an attempt to identify phases in the processes of the formation of the SE. Moreover, the phases we identify are not completely discrete, in the sense that the same processes can operate in different stages, but with different emphases.

Table 1. Gross overall results – key ideas, chronologically ordered, from different actors in establishing the SE as a legitimate category.

Date/Actor	Key ideas	Main category formation processes
2002/Benkler	Introduction of the concept <i>commons-based peer production</i> : “It is a socio-economic system of production that is emerging in the digitally networked environment.” (Benkler, 2002).	<div>Formation: mainly emergence, including new organizations, new products, new enabling technologies and new consumer motives (non-ownership and collaborative aims); some evidence of creation.</div> <div>Dominant process: a social movement in its early stages, described as having transformative power toward an alternative world.</div> <div>Authority/agreement: absence of both authority influence and agreement regarding the category</div> <div>Legitimacy: early signs of the cognitive factor.</div> <div>Type of category: identification of possible category label and members, but in early stages.</div> <div>Key actors: academics and analysts voicing a new possibility.</div>
2005/Bauwens	Publication of an essay <i>The Political Economy of Peer Production</i> – Introduction of concept <i>peer to peer (P2P)</i> : “As political, economic, and social systems transform themselves into distributed networks, a new human dynamic is emerging: P2P” (Bauwens, 2005).	
2007/2008/Lessig	Introduction of the term <i>Sharing Economy (SE)</i> : “The Internet exploded a sharing economy with things like Wikipedia where people are doing work that creates a lot of value, not for money but just because it’s their hobby. We’ve seen a pattern of hybrid companies like this trying to figure out ways to leverage that for a profit” (Lessig, cited in New York Times, 2007).	
2010/Botsman & Rogers	Introduction of the term <i>collaborative consumption (CC)</i> : “Hyper consumption is defined by ownership, collaborative consumption by shared access” (Botsman & Rogers, 2010).	
2010/Gansky	Introduction of the term <i>Mesh</i> : “The Mesh is a type of network that allows any node to link in any direction with any other node in the system” (Gansky, 2010).	
2012/Bardhi & Eckhardt	Introduction of the expression <i>access-based consumption</i> : “Transactions that can be market mediated but where no transfer of ownership takes place and differ from both ownership and sharing” (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012).	
2013/Owyang	Introduction of the concept <i>Collaborative Economy (CE)</i> : “An economic model where commonly available technologies enable people to get what they need from each other” (Owyang, 2013).	
2014/Belk	The author criticizes Botsman’s & Rogers’ approach by defining CC as “people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation” (Belk, 2014).	

2014/2015/Dubois et al. (2014) ; Schor (2014, 2015) ; Schor & Fitzmaurice (2015) ; Schor et al. (2014)	Introduction of the expression <i>connected consumption</i> : "Digitally connected economic activities including the following possible categories: recirculation of goods; increased utilization of durable assets; exchange of services; sharing of productive assets; and building of social connections" (Dubois et al., 2014; Schor, 2014, 2015; Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015; Schor et al., 2014).	
2015/Oxford Dictionary	Definition of SE: "An economic system in which assets or services are shared between private individuals, either for free or for a fee, typically by means of the Internet" (cited in Liftshare, 2015).	
2015/Frenken et al.; Meelen & Frenken	Definition of SE: "Consumers (or firms) granting each other temporary access to their under-utilized physical assets ('idle capacity'), possibly for money" (Frenken et al., 2015; Meelen & Frenken, 2015).	Formation: emergence remains the main process; evidence of creation exists, but is residual.
2015/Hamari et al.	Definition of CC: "It's 'a peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services'" (Hamari et al., 2015).	Dominant process: the social activists establishes the idea of a possible better world, more collaborative and, based on internet, able to exploit underutilized resources; scholars start efforts to refine the concept what signals the beginning of the similarity-clustering operation.
2015/Chase	Definition of CE: "Enabled by new technology, a revolution is taking place inside capitalism as we reimagine the role of consumers, producers, and even ownership (...) What distinguishes these activities is that platforms connect, organize, aggregate, and empower the participating peers" (Chase, 2015).	Authority/Agreement: the absence of authority to establish the category and agreement about its nature becomes clear, thus giving raise to the truce process.
2015/McLaren & Agyeman	A new <i>sharing paradigm</i> : "a new sharing paradigm, which goes beyond the faddish sharing economy – seen in ventures as Uber and TaskRabbit – to envision models of sharing that are not always commercial but also communal, encouraging trust and collaboration" (McLaren & Agyeman, 2015).	Legitimacy: cognitive, distinctiveness, and sameness factors are clear; evidence of lack of socio-political legitimacy.
2015/Swawell & Issa	Definition of SE: "Americans increasingly rely on the sorts of innovative services the Internet has made possible – services that bring Americans together while providing a new measure of convenience by providing opportunities to conduct business in more efficient ways" (Swawell & Issa, 2015).	Type of category: reduced ambiguity of both label and category content leads to signs of fragmented radial construction.
2015/FTC (Federal Trade Commission)	Definition of SE: "P2P platforms, which enable suppliers and consumers to connect and do business, have led to the emergence of new business models in industries that have been subject to regulation" (FTC, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c).	Key actors: scholars start attempting to refine the concept; official agencies recognize ambiguity inherent to this novelty; both actors recognize the ambiguity of the concept, but the convergence toward the label starts.
2015/OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development)	Definition of SE: "a variety of online platforms specialized in matching demand and supply in specific markets, enabling peer-to-peer (P2P) sales and rentals" (OECD, 2015a, 2015b).	
2015/PwC (Pricewaterhouse Coopers)	Definition of SE: "An emergent ecosystem that is upending mature business models across the globe". It allows individuals and groups to make money from underused assets (PwC, 2015).	
2016/Sundararajan	Definition of SE or as the author calls <i>crowd-based capitalism</i> : It's a transaction "in which you are not helping a friend for free but rather providing SE services to a stranger for money" (Sundararajan, 2016).	
2016/Stone	Definition of SE or as the author calls <i>Trust Economy</i> : "Airbnb and Uber didn't spawn the <i>sharing economy</i> , the <i>on-demand economy</i> , or the <i>one-tap economy</i> so much as usher in a new trust economy, helping regular folks to negotiate transportation and accommodations in the age of ubiquitous internet access" (Stone, 2016).	
2016/EC (European Commission)	Definition of SE: "There is no consensual definition and the overwhelming majority of the available definitions are 'ostensive' rather than 'intentional'" (EC, 2016).	
2017/Muñoz & Cohen	Definition of SE: There are "seven distinct dimensions of sharing business models. 1) platforms for collaboration 2) under-utilized resources, 3) peer-to-peer interactions, 4) collaborative governance, 5) mission driven, 6) alternative funding, and 7) technology reliance" (Muñoz & Cohen, 2017).	Formation: the emergence establishes as the main formation process; evidence of creation almost disappears.
2017/Frenken & Schor	Definition of SE: "Consumers granting each other temporary access to under-utilized physical assets ('idle capacity'), possibly for money" (Frenken & Schor, 2017).	Dominant process: the social movement loses strength, although the idea of a better world remains, often implicitly; the similarity-clustering process becomes the main emergence process.
2017/Habibi et al.	Definition of SE: It "has grown to become an umbrella term for a wide range of nonownership forms of consumption activities such as swapping, bartering, trading, renting, sharing, and exchanging (...) we argue that each practice is a hybrid of sharing and exchange, and provides several recommendations based on the nature of each practice's offering (...)" (Habibi et al., 2017).	Authority: the absence authority to establish the category and agreement about its nature continues and the truce process is established.
2017/Constantiou et al.	Definition of SE: "platforms combine organizational and market mechanisms in innovative ways to gain competitive advantages over incumbents. These mechanisms are combined on two key dimensions: tight or loose control over participants, and high or low rivalry between participants. We call the resulting four sharing economy models Franchiser, Principal, Chaperone and Gardener" (Constantiou et al., 2017).	Legitimacy: cognitive, distinctiveness, and sameness factors continue to operate; evidence of lack of socio-political legitimacy is becoming weaker.
2018/Ryu et al.	Definition of SE: "With the advance of ICT, the realm of sharing has expanded drastically, which has led to the evolution of the 'sharing paradigm'. In spite of the increasing attention on the new sharing phenomenon and its potential contribution to a sustainable and resilient society, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of varied sharing practices in the context of sustainability and resilience. The sharing of manufactured goods and accommodations, and access-based sharing with monetary compensation via intermediaries such as online platforms are predominant" (Ryu et al., 2018).	Type of category: a radial category is established, while the establishment of more central elements and conventions for other memberships.
2019/Curtis & Lehner	Definition of SE: It "has emerged as a phenomenon widely described by academic literature to promote more sustainable consumption practices such as access over ownership. We propose the following characteristics, or semantic properties, of the SE for sustainability: ICT-mediated, non-pecuniary motivation for ownership, temporary access, rivalrous and tangible goods. If we, as academics, fail to be critical of the SE and its current implementation due to continued semantic confusion, we suggest the sustainability potential of the SE may never be realized." (Curtis & Lehner, 2019).	Key actors: scientific community continue to elaborate the concept, reaching the phase of widespread empirical research; other key actors are playing secondary roles.

Phase 1. The revelation: activists disclose the possibility of a better world

The very first overall observation derived from our analysis is that it may identified clear main phases in the formation and evolution of the SE as a category. Although it can be extended until 2016, the 1st main phase can be located and mainly concentrated between 2002 and 2013. This phase can be named the "Revelation". Key actors are academics or analysts expressing themselves using books, usually akin to a more relaxed peer review process than scholar journals, thus allowing the articulation of more speculative and creative propositions. In the first place, because they refer to the very early stages of a new phenomenon, there is no consensus about both the label and the aspects

of the reality being covered. For instance, while Benkler [76] (year 2002) and Bauwens [77] (year 2005) use different labels (commons-base peer production and peer to peer production, respectively) to describe a similar novel economic system in which people can exchange outside the common capitalist system. It is, at the same time, the reconnaissance of a new reality, but also a suggestion of an alternative better future, in which people can share resources and experiences in a wealthier way, sometimes without searching to maximize individual profits, as noted by Lessig [78] (year 2007/2008), author to whom the SE label is attributed. Labels can become subcategories of broader overarching categories, like the suggestion of the “collaborative economy”, a new economic model that can include the newly popularized term “shared economy”, as pointed out by Owyang [79] (year 2013). Illustration quotes are:

“It is a socio-economic system of production that is emerging in the digitally networked environment. Facilitated by the technical infrastructure of the Internet, the hallmark of this socio-technical system is collaboration among large groups of individuals, sometimes in the order of tens or even hundreds of thousands, who cooperate effectively to provide information, knowledge or cultural goods without relying on either market pricing or managerial hierarchies to coordinate their common enterprise” [100] (p. 394); and “As political, economic, and social systems transform themselves into distributed networks, a new human dynamic is emerging: P2P”. This new dynamic is giving rise to “a third mode of production, a third mode of governance, and a third mode of property” and, ultimately, “it is poised to overhaul our political economy in unprecedented ways” [77] (p. 33).

This new world is made possible by the Internet 2.0, a technology that enables the evolution to a more tied global community (Botsman and Rogers [30] – year 2010), and opening new exchange possibilities including business, as highlighted by Gansky [31] (year 2010). In this new world, classical external constraints like advertising, market price or managerial hierarchies can now be replaced by active consumers pursuing their own motivations. Consumption and ownership can be separated in people who don’t define themselves by their possessions but by the possibility to share access to consumptions. Various labelled, this new reality encompasses a vast array of elements, like individual consumers, hybrid companies, entire economic systems, or peer-to-peer projects.

Phase 2. The clairvoyance: scientific community searches for clarification while official organizations seek peace

Some proposals made by authors included in the “Revelation” phase faced serious challenges from new actors. Therefore, a new (2nd) main phase took place, here named the “Clairvoyance” phase. Although there are clear overlaps in terms of dates, we believe that from 2014 to 2016 occurred major events that represent a qualitative shift in the SE formation. Two key actors, each one owning its power base, played important complementary roles in this move: scholars attempted to discuss and refine the concept, while official agencies recognized the ambiguities but, nevertheless, assumed the label. Contributions made by Schor [47] (year 2014), Schor and Fitzmaurice [82] (year 2015) and Schor et al. [83] (year 2014) are good exemplars of the conceptual refinement process initiated during this period. An illustration quote is:

“Digitally connected economic activities including the following possible categories: recirculation of goods (i.e. Craigslist, eBay); increased utilization of durable assets (i.e. Zipcar, Relay Rides, Uber, CouchSurfing, Airbnb); exchange of services (i.e. Time banking, TaskRabbit, Zazzy); sharing of productive assets; and building of social connections (i.e. Mama Bake, Soup Sharing, and EatWithMe)”. The key distinguishing elements are: “a) the ability of facilitating exchange among strangers rather than among kin or within community; b) the strong reliance on technology that may also favor offline activities; and c) the participation of high cultural capital consumers rather than being limited to a survival mechanisms among the most disadvantaged (as was mostly the case for older forms of sharing and collaborative consumption), as it remains for some socially oriented

current not for profit initiatives" (Dubois et al., Schor, Schor & Fitzmaurice, and Schor et al. cited in [98], p. 6).

Schor [47] (year 2014) not only questions the motivations of people involved in SE activities, but also raises an important categorization question when stating that most commercial platforms included do not belong there. In line with the process of category meaning refinement, authors engage in the discussion of what types of activities and organizations should be included, like those that re-circulate goods that increase the utilization of durable assets, as well as the key dimensions that can be used as bases for further classificatory activities, like the ability to facilitate exchange among strangers or the participation of high cultural capital consumers. Frenken et al.'s [84] (year 2015) and Meelen and Frenken's [85] (year 2015) definition, although shorter, also entails the effort to identify key defining elements, despite the purpose underlying the exchange activity, namely for profit or not. The search for good exemplars of what is the SE is a core element characterising this phase. It seems that the label is being widely shared, but the discussion about the elements remain.

This "Clairvoyance" phase includes a specific feature, namely the raise of controversy and debate on regulation and how true sharing is the SE. This dispute involves the role of official agencies in stabilizing the label, despite recognition of several ambiguities regarding its elements and criteria for inclusion. Concerned with competition, consumer protection, and other economic issues raised by the SE, in year 2015, the US Federal Trade Commission [93-95] refers to "P2P platforms which enable suppliers and consumers to connect and to do business, have led to the emergence of new business models and industries that have been subject to regulation". In the same year, OECD [96-97] doesn't present a specific definition, but refers to "a variety of online platforms specialized in matching demand and supply in specific markets, enabling peer-to-peer sales and rentals". The label seems to be assumed, but the inclusion requirements are left open enough to avoid entering in the discussion. During the same period, the European Commission [98] (year 2016) issued a comprehensive report, based in a scope review recognizing that there are "ambiguous answers to some of the fundamental questions about the sharing economy", and that the field requires policy attention, especially regarding regulatory, consumer protection, and unfair competition issues. Illustration quotes are:

"No single label can neatly encapsulate the movement, as for some the word 'sharing' was a misnomer, a savvy-but-disingenuous spin on an industry they felt was more about monetary opportunism than altruism, while for others, more appropriate titles included the Trust Economy, Collaborative Consumption, the On-Demand or Peer-to-Peer Economy" [22] (p. 14); "Together, these companies have come to embody a new business code that has forced local governments to question their faithfulness to the regulatory regimes of the past" [89] (p. 10); and "there still are ambiguous answers to some of the fundamental questions about the 'sharing economy' (...) (a) there is no consensual definition and (b) the overwhelming majority of the available definitions are 'ostensive' rather than 'intentional'" [98] (pp. 3-7).

The result of this convergence process can be observed in the inscription of the SE in the common official lexicon by the Oxford Dictionary [99] (year 2015), according to which SE refers to "an economic system in which assets or services are shared between private individuals, either for free or for a fee, typically by means of the Internet". As it happened, for example, with the OECD approach, the label is coined, but the definition is left open enough to accommodate a high variability regarding the category's members and their motives.

It is important to notice that some key ideas included in the "Revelation" phase can be also observed in the "Clairvoyance" phase, with several author issuing books calling people's attention to a new world being constructed. This is the case of McLaren and Agyeman [88] (year 2015) propositions of a new, broader and more inclusive framing for the SE, named "sharing paradigm", Sundararajan's [75] (year 2016) book about the end of employment and the raise of crowd-based capitalism, and Stone's [89] (year 2016) book about how Uber, Airbnb, and killer companies of the New Silicon Valley are changing the world.

Phase 3. Knowledge proliferation: scientific community takes over and sharing economy becomes a research object

In our view, the period from 2017 to 2019 represents also a clear shift in the SE formation – a new 3rd main phase. In this phase, we see the label of SE being globally adopted, and original proponents of related terms as labels for a new world losing prominence, the same happening with official agencies, and a clear take over from the academia. We call this the “Knowledge Proliferation phase”. An illustration quote is:

“Sharing of resources, goods, services, experiences and knowledge is one of the fundamental practices that has been widely embedded in human nature. With the advance of information and communication technology, the realm of sharing has expanded drastically, which has led to the evolution of the ‘sharing paradigm’. In spite of the increasing attention on the new sharing phenomenon and its potential contribution to a sustainable and resilient society, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of varied sharing practices in the context of sustainability and resilience. This study maps out the academic landscape of sharing studies and examines what and how we share by a systematic literature review. We discuss research gaps in sharing paradigm studies and the potential contribution of sharing to building sustainable and resilient societies. Our results show regional and sectoral imbalances in the sharing studies. The findings also illustrate that sharing of manufactured goods and accommodations, and access-based sharing with monetary compensation via intermediaries such as online platforms are predominant. Our evaluation provides a bird’s-eye view of existing sharing studies and practices, enabling the discovery of new opportunities for sustainable and resilient societies (...) Beyond sharing businesses, we need to have a closer look at how our nature of sharing is linked to sustainability and resilience of our societies” [90] (p. 515).

In year 2017, Muñoz and Cohen [3] published a paper mapping out the SE with a special attention to existing business models. Frenken and Schor [46] (year 2017) provided an overview of the concept, refining its nature, and also discussing future possibilities. Other scientific articles, progressively, came to light, whose main focus was to contribute in helping to settle the discourse around the SE, particularly (i) identifying and arranging its main activities, practices and businesses, (ii) explaining its implications, impacts and effects, as well as, (iii) bringing the theme into the sustainability field. Examples of this trend are Habibi, et al. [49] (year 2017); Constantiou, et al. [48] (year 2017); Ryu, et al. [90] (year 2018); Curtis & Lehner [90] (year 2019). Today, academia has mostly been focusing in contributing in making further theoretical and empirical refinement to current literature. The profusion of research has led to comprehensive review work, like the one presented by Laurenti, et al. [101] (year 2019).

5. Discussion

The overriding goal of this research was to investigate how the SE was formed and evolved as a legitimate market category. Our analysis reveals a sequential category construction process involving three phases: the revelation, the clairvoyance, and the knowledge proliferation. Initiated as a social movement with a subsequent take over by a similarity clustering process, with different actors playing distinct roles with a rapid adoption and institutionalization by official entities and a fast integration by the academic community as a new subject that deserves attention, all this despite the lack of consensus between actors and the questionable awareness of the category by the members themselves and the general public. Key actors are aware of the ambiguity around membership to the SE, but this possible divide did not prevent the widespread use of the label. As a category, the SE is performing the basic functions of these cognitive fundamental devices: it allows humans to deal with the huge diversity of initiatives, events and ideas that characterize this new reality, thus assuring basic collective sensemaking and communication functions, while maintaining cognitive flexibility enough to accommodate novelty and not prevent development [15,16,17,13,14]. As a market category in

formation, the SE is a unique cognitive framework guiding how different stakeholders evaluate new organizations and their products, determines expectations regarding organizational actions and enables both material and symbolic exchanges [54].

In a first instance, regarding how the SE has been forming and evolving as a market category through time, we note timeline ranges from year 2002 to year 2019. We suggest that this evolution may be split into three distinct main phases representing different formation processes. Figure 1 summarizes our proposition.

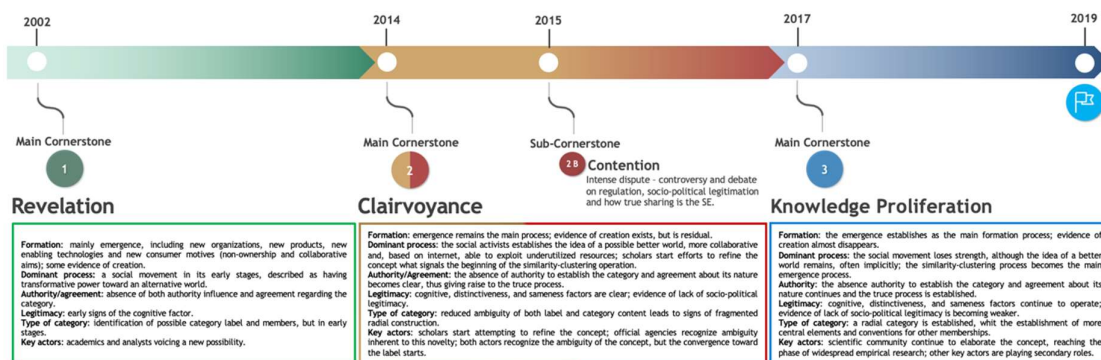


Figure 1. Timeline evolution of the formation of the SE as a market category.

The 1st main phase – Revelation- is the primordium period of conceptualization and cognition. It's a phase mainly characterized for being full of great dazzle, appeal and fascination, revealing that we were in the presence of a new reality totally disruptive with the precedent status-quo, as if it had finally arrived the announcement of the solution to heal the world and turn it into a fairer, wiser, equable, rational, well-balanced and more sustainable one – a solution defending the interests of what Lindenberg and Foss [102] call a “supra-individual entity” with collectivistic, normative and altruistic concerns towards more communal causes; in other words, a solution with a goal orientated around the “We”, “a collective self, oriented toward acting appropriately in an exemplary fashion in terms of what is good for the collective goals” [102] (p. 505).

The key formation process of this phase is emergence, although some signs of creation are present [10]. This emergence of a new reality was led by activists, indicating a social movement process [11]. As a very early stage, no actor emerged as having authority to impose the category, as the lack of consensus among actors regarding both the label and the content was evident, paving the way for future truce processes [12].

The 2nd main phase, the clairvoyance, represents a clear shift in the formation of the SE. This is a period where there is a consolidation of cognition penetration and diffusion into society. It's a phase mainly characterized and benchmarked by the emergence of a critical discussion in questioning SE's true nature and the identification of various prototypical activities. It's a more skeptical, less glamorous and more grounded phase, as if the so-announced solution to heal the world was a mere illusion and some analysts and scholars began to come to terms with the harsh reality, become more discerned and realize that such new SE disruptive paradigm had brought with it way more layers other than just being a noble service of the well-being of a supra-individual entity. The SE seems to be a mere pretext for a vast spectrum of individualistic and opportunistic stakeholders (i.e. incumbents, start-ups, various types of businesses, customers, etc.) to come into play and get advantages, benefits from getting involved in it (selfish exploitation of an opportunity without any kind of collectivist concerns that they are contributing to others' welfare and/or participating in something that is for the good of society and/or community as a whole). The various agents, particularly businesses and customers/users participate in the SE because their goal orientation is around the I, either with hedonic or gain purposes discarding normative or collective oriented motivations [102].

This second phase includes contention elements, representing controversy and debate on regulation and socio-political legitimation and how true sharing is the SE. In this phase, we notice

the increase of the number of stakeholders involved in the discussion, mainly with official organizations entering the scene, together with activists and scholars. Altogether, the clairvoyance phase represents a period dominated by a discussion on the content but while the label SE tend to stabilize. The key formation process is emergence [10], with the social movement explanation starting to lose its prominent role, as it had happened in the revelation phase, due to the arrival of more academic scrutiny, indicating a shift to a similarity-clustering process [12]. In the absence of authority from specific key actors to impose the category and the presence of profound disagreement about the nature of the category, the truce process [12] enables the accommodation of ambiguity without preventing development.

The 3rd main phase, the knowledge proliferation, is mainly characterized by a production of a high number of scientific articles, whose main focus is to contribute in helping to settle the discourse around the SE, particularly identifying and arranging its main activities, practices and businesses. This is the effect of the predominant role of the scientific community. In this phase, the SE becomes a research object, and activists and official agencies clearly became secondary players in understanding and communicating what is the SE. The main category formation process is emergence [10], and, perhaps due to the prominent role of researchers, evidence of creation is now absent. Thus, similarity clustering becomes the dominant process of emergence. As observed in the clairvoyance phase, the truce process allows key actors to continue to talk about the SE, although the lack of consensus regarding the meaning and the content of this new trend remains evident.

Complementarily, we foresee the possibility for the formation of a new phase that may currently well be under construction (from the year 2020 onwards) and which may consubstantiate further developments in clarifying and settling all the contention discourse initiated in 2015.

Altogether, what our analysis reveals and, in fact, contributes to existent literature about the formation of categories is that the SE is a case that does not fall in just a singular, very narrowed process. Rather, we are in the presence of a case featured by multiple processes of diverse natures that are intertwined with each other, and which each one of them is dominant in distinct phases.

Regarding whether the SE is a new legitimate market category, the data we used provide support for a generalized legitimacy granted to the SE. Several products and services are perceived to be of the same type in satisfying market demand that may be grouped together as members of that same market category, thus satisfying the sameness requirement for legitimacy [55]. On the other hand, within the category, not all members are equal corresponding to the distinctiveness requirement [55]. Signs of public knowledge about this new activity and its products and services abound [28], what supports the cognitive requirement for legitimacy [63]. The debate around the appropriateness of some organizations usually included in the SE, namely Uber, is far for being closed, what is an indication that the socio-political legitimation is currently under construction.

The nature of the SE seems to fall in the metaphorical approach of how categories are structured, particularly the notion of radial categories [13,57]. This type of categories includes central and less central members whose features can't be inferred from the characteristics of the central ones. The characteristics of non-central elements have to be determined, usually metaphorically, by convention, or the institutionalized agreements agreement between relevant actors. Thus, in a consistent way with the truce process previously highlighted [12], as a radial category, the SE gives us a cognitive infrastructure to understand this new reality, but it doesn't prescribe limits for inclusion, what allows the extension and change of the category by succeed process of collective sense making and entrepreneurship.

5.1. Limitations and future research directions

This study is not without limitations. First, the literature we used to map the evolution of the SE didn't came from a systematic search of both academic and non-academic sources, what can limit the scope of our analysis, by letting important constitutions out of the corpus. On the other hand, our findings do not reveal clear finite separated periods. We believe that a definite establishment of these milestone events will be impossible to ascertain. This is the same to say that, as the consolidation of the SE as a category shows signs of still being a continuous process of evolution, it is more than

predictable that there may come to light new milestone events in SE's evolution chain. Finally, entrepreneurs of the several forms of SE projects were left out of the analysis, what impoverishes the understanding of the category formation process. However, we suspect that in early stages of a market category formation with the characteristics we identify in the SE, the label itself is not an feature for those who are involved in launching new ventures. Certainly, this will not be the case of starting new ventures in well-established market categories, such as, private versus non-profit organizations, in which entrepreneurs can claim a category membership to base the identity of their organizations. In the same way, customers of several types of offers made by SE organizations weren't analyzed, as the motivations underlying consumption decisions, especially when compared to substitutes from non-SE, could be subject to study. Besides addressing these issues, future research could shed light into the interaction processes by which different stakeholders crafted a category based on *truce*, considering that actors engage in reciprocal influence processes.

6. Conclusion

Having in mind our research questions – (RQ1) how the SE was formed and evolved as a market category; and (RQ2), as a market category, is the SE legitimate? – our findings unveil that the SE is arising (largely associated to emergence formation processes, comprising *social movement*, *similarity clustering* and *truce* components) as a new legitimate market category, even though it still lacks a degree of *socio-political legitimation*.

Moreover, from a perspective of how categories are structured, our result reveal that the nature of the SE seems to fall in a metaphorical approach, particularly the notion of radial categories, where there is a growing *truce* in conventionally agreeing to use the metaphor “sharing economy” to refer to a wide range of apparent divergent, contradictory, paradoxical, opposite categories and subcategories. This is why we have been witnessing to huge, sometimes, inconclusive discussions, interpretations amongst diverse stakeholders about what the SE really is (how should it be addressed) – such unsettled discourse has, therefore, been contributing for the arising of an increasing number of stakeholders interested in this discussion, as well as, affecting and changing the way those stakeholders have been communicating amongst each other.

In short, this study offers an additional layer in making sense of the SE from a category formation standpoint. It contributes in highlighting how the category of the SE was formed, evolved and its legitimacy gained. It can serve as another important benchmark in grasping the reasons for the impressive growth of the SE in recent years across the globe.

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