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“Collective sharing, while a still-growing trend, may also have a broader economic impact“, says Rob Atkinson, an economist and president of The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation. Collective sharing refers to a group of people that are motivated to exchange goods or content for a mutual gain (Yu). This trend has been seen recently with the rise of the participatory culture. According to the textbook Net Smart by Howard Rheingold, a participatory culture is a philosophy in which People act as contributors or producers rather than just consumers to an environment, in this case the internet driven digital environment (Rheingold, 18). Users are motivated to participate online generally by creating content for individual use or for the environment. This shift in online user behavior may appear insignificant, but on an economic level the impact over the recent years has been colossal.

Notably, Airbnb.com a simple platform for people to list, find, and rent lodging; has created a multi-billion dollar architecture driven by a participatory culture. The concept of architectures of participation is seen in websites world-wide where user-generated content is driven by the participation of users, Airbnb is exemplary of this. Its audience or content generators consist of hosts and travelers or guests. Hosts are people who own lodging such as a house, an entire apartment, or even a spare room and are interested in sharing it to a guest for a profit. Guests are typically people who are traveling individually or in a group such as a family. Guests interact with hosts and rent out the different housing for a certain period of time and for a cost. Following is an analysis of how this company was able to create a digital environment where people are motivated to share or rent out lodging they own for personal, monetary or no benefit, how they are able to communicate and build enough trust between users to produce a mutually beneficial opportunity, and the constraints of the environment.

“Content will become more important than navigation. Content is the ‘there’ of navigation. It is the reason people go on the Net” (Jake Winebaum, Chairman, Disney’s Buena Vista Internet Group). Users daily navigate to websites or digital environments

because they are motivated in some way to search or create content. On Airbnb, hosts are motivated to participate and create content because they can generate a monetary profit on a property that they may not use all of the time or if at all. Meanwhile, guests get to live in a host's property as locals in an area that they may not have experienced before. Therefore both users benefit mutually in different manners. In some cases the hosts even offer up their properties for free. One instance occurred during hurricane Sandy in which 1,400 hosts on Airbnb offered free housing after the storm devastated the Caribbean and the Eastern Seaboard of the United States that left thousands of people without a home or resources. It is because of this tragic event that Airbnb formed a disaster response page and says it will "waive all service fees and provide a simple way for hosts to offer their lodgings for free" ("Airbnb Disaster Response"). Therefore they have created an environment where people can share collectively in a variety of situations.

Airbnb's environment motivates these situations in exchange of a small monetary cut of the transaction between host and guest. The company and its affiliates attract people to participate in the environment by spreading the word about the environment, improving the user experience and by creating feeling of trust and safety for users. Airbnb attracts people to the digital environment by setting a budget in the millions of dollars for their marketing and advertising to reach the markets where hosts and

travelers are likely to meet. Such advertisements can be seen on television reaching a very large audience and on banners and billboards in places with high traffic such as airports, trains, etc. The platform has been so successful at marketing that, “Airbnb and its clones have created a dent in the hotel industry” (“Platform Thinking”). From my own personal experience, Airbnb has caught my attention. I found on my trip to New York City in May of 2015, almost every subway station I stopped at displayed at least one amusing advertisement for Airbnb. Viewers who see these ads are motivated to view Airbnb’s platform via desktop or mobile in which they can navigate easily, enjoyably and most importantly in a secure manner.

Furthermore, on a yearly basis Airbnb spends extensive amounts of resources to create a unique and exciting user experience for both hosts and travelers. User experience design, according to the NNG UX Research Group, “is the process of enhancing user satisfaction by improving the usability, accessibility, and pleasure provided in the interaction between the user and a product or platform.” The environment’s platform evokes user’s emotions to create a user experience from the

first moment a user looks at the environment. To illustrate, at first glance a traveler is “Welcomed Home” with easily readable bold contrasting font, and several remarkable images of people enjoying a travel experience as it animates the background. The images act as gateways to users, by bringing back memories and enabling the user’s imagination, in hopes of making them believe they can or will feel a similar experience if they use the environment in the future. Travelers then have the choice to learn how the environment works or search for a destination they are interested in going to.

On the other hand, users are invited at second glance to become a host, sign up or login to the environment, they also have a choice to see what they can earn by becoming a host. Based off of user testing and through market research the environment has learned to approach the host second because they know that travelers are the majority of their audience and they have learned where each user tends to look first. Another notable feature of the environment is how it takes note of a user’s location and by use of cookies it updates the environment’s map automatically to the user’s location upon request or at the next time the user visits the page. A cookie in this tense,

is a piece of data that a browser stores for a website to remember information about a user. The architecture's interface also subliminally works as a medium to shape communication and trust between users and the environment.

Online architectures of participation create an environment of trust and motivation driving users to create content for free. Airbnb understanding this concept has developed many different features to their website to help build this trust and a feeling of safety between users. Unlike one of Airbnb's competitors, Craigslist, they've taken various measures to protect, validate and rate users. The most evident are user profiles, where hosts and travelers are required to create an account to use the environment.

When creating an account there is a verification process, where Airbnb links your profile with either a government issued ID or a social website such as Facebook, Google or LinkedIn. In addition, Airbnb uses strength in numbers with host's profile reviews. For example after a traveler has used the host's property they have the opportunity to leave a review on the host's property listing, detailing their experience. Hosts that have a lot of positive profile reviews can give a new traveler a sense of comfort and security knowing

that since a lot of other people had a great and safe experience so can they. At the same time, if a host has a lot of negative reviews the guest can assume their experience with that listing may not be the one they are looking for. Once a guest has found a potential listing, they have the ability to message the host and privately communicate their needs and desires. This exchange of communication as well as the structure of the information overall creates a feeling of trust between traveler and host and both users at their own discretion can decide whether or not to continue with renting the listing.

In contrast, Airbnb can have its downsides. Just as any other digital environment there may be times when users may not be able to access the environment because of constraints to the technologies involved. For example in times of disaster users in a certain area may not be able to access the platform because of power or cellular network outages. In addition, the environment has a constraint with the way images are communicated between hosts and travelers. Pictures or thumbnails of lodging at times may appear misleading or even blurry to users. For instance, some hosts only post one

picture of their property listing, therefore the consumer is often misled because they are not able to get a good understanding of what they are intending to rent. Another downfall of the platform is that the majority of hosts and guests are strangers to each other until they meet. To make up for this constraint, as mentioned earlier the platform added a feature for users to connect to their social environments and see which friends use Airbnb and have places for rent ("Airbnb Social Connections"). Overall, Airbnb.com has done a great job at building a feeling of trust and safety between users.

In conclusion, Airbnb over the past 7 years has been able to build a multi-billion dollar architecture of participation, which has allowed users to mutually benefit by collective sharing. People daily are motivated to share or rent out lodging they own for personal, monetary or no benefit to the environment. The environment focuses on attracting people to contribute by advertising, improving the user experience, by creating a strong feeling of trust and safety for users, and reducing constraints. So next time you are planning to go to your dream travel destination, be sure to compare Airbnb's rates to the local hotel rates for the best deal and experience.

Works Cited

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