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A typology of collaborative platform bypassers

Bertrand, D., Nguyen, S. & Llosa, S.

INTRODUCTION

The marketing of services has focused on customer satisfaction because it is the driver of sought after behaviors such as intention to repurchase and loyalty. Alternatively, research has also looked at the causes of non-satisfaction and service failure to develop service recovery tactics. Our research addresses another aspect of consumer behavior in services: consumers who, after getting access to the service, seek not to pay for all or part of the service they have obtained. Digital platforms (i.e., collaborative platforms) are mainly concerned with this behavior because the dissociation of the virtual part, upstream of the physical realization of the service, offers a favorable context to the bypass of the payment.

In face-to-face services, refusal of the payment after obtaining the service is rare because professionals instead put in place collaborative strategies to conclude the service in its entirety. However, automated interactions are present in the context of collaborative platforms such as Airbnb and Blablacar, and, along with digital services and their relative anonymity, consumers can follow an interested calculation. In fact, according to Crozier & Friedberg (1977), consumers behave cooperatively only to the extent that it corresponds to their egocentric calculation of utility.

Peer-to-peer platform act as intermediaries in exchanges between individual buyers and sellers and most of them have a commission-based business model, and their revenue depends on the number and amounts of transactions made on the platform. As such, they have implemented procedures to prohibit direct transactions between users. Despite several practitioner reports examining "platform leakage" (Samaipata, 2016; Upbin, 2010), the number of academic studies on this topic is small likely due to the difficulty of observing and measuring these offline exchanges directly between peers (Gu & Zhu, 2020).

To address this gap, the present research presented aims to explore instances where peers bypass the platform by skipping the payment step via the platform, engaging in tactics to exchange directly between peers. More specifically, leveraging a cluster analysis, we hope to provide a better understanding of the different types of users susceptible to bypass behaviors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While some research briefly mentions the bypassing of platforms, other articles have identified and described these practices. This is the case of Gonzalez et al. (2018) who propose a typology of shoppers on Groupon: among the different types of users identified, some bypass Groupon and get in touch directly with the providers. The authors call it a form of "ordinary deviance" (p. 91). Bailly & Boudot-Antoine (2018) meanwhile notice bypassing practices and describe an empowerment phenomenon, resulting in a balance between, sometimes using the intermediation platform, and other times, distancing oneself from the platform, especially in situations considered the safest. This empowerment allows users to set their own rules, and thus to free themselves from the constraints and authority of the platform. A few papers focus specifically on bypass to better understand the phenomenon and identify the factors (mainly utilitarian antecedents) that influence it. Their results show that perceived risk exerts a negative influence on bypass intention. In contrast, their results

differ for economic benefits: for Bellotti et al. (2017 and Ladd (2021), they are a key determinant of bypassing; Wang & Heng (2017) support the opposite, and Nguyen & Llosa (2021) shows that economic benefits significantly influence bypassing, but only for participants who use multiple platforms. The results regarding relational and social motivations raise an interesting paradox: the more satisfying the experience, the higher the trust in the platform and in peers, and the lower the perceived risk of bypassing, which in turn leads users to bypass (Gu & Zhu, 2020). The research presented here aims to explore users' tactics to bypass payment on the Airbnb platform and to exchange directly with each other. It also aims to draw up a typology of these bypassers, to better understand their characteristics, their motivations and the factors that positively and negatively influence their bypass behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is still in progress. At this stage, a first survey by questionnaire has been carried out with a panel of university students which allows us to validate the scales used. In the next step, a survey using the same questionnaire will be conducted among a panel of people representative of the English population. This questionnaire explores users' bypassing practices as well as their attitudes, motivations, and feelings about bypassing.

A cluster analysis will be conducted to identify homogeneous groups of users based on their bypassing practices. Following the recommendations of Punj & Stewart (1983), two complementary classification methods will be successively implemented: an ascending hierarchical analysis and a non-hierarchical k-means analysis.

RESULTS

At this stage, only the results of the first survey are available. They show that 29% of respondents have already bypassed Airbnb when booking an accommodation while 71% of Airbnb users claim to have never bypassed. Of the by-passers, 59% have directly re-rented the same accommodation by agreeing with the host to pay directly, 45% have paid the host directly without using Airbnb's online payment service, 41% have paid a small part of the transaction via the platform, and only 24% have preferred to finalize using another site. Their motivations are mainly financial. The typological analysis on the non-bypassers reveals three distinct groups: consumers who are very favourable to bypassing in any form (18%), those who are somewhat favourable (53%) and those who are not at all favourable (29%). The first two groups are mainly motivated by financial aspects (not paying Airbnb's commission allows them to reduce their expenses for example); but also, by the desire to do a favour for the host. On the other hand, the last group is held back by the fear of losing money and that the service may not be consistent with the ads. The results of the final survey conducted on a larger and more diverse population should be available for the conference, making it possible to establish a typology of bypassers and to refine the description of the bypassers and non-bypassers' groups. 3

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