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RESEARCH LETTER



# Exploring the motives for entrepreneurship in the meal-sharing economy

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the popularity of entrepreneurship in tourism and hospitality and the increasing usage of meal-sharing economy platforms by locals, there is no research combining both in the extant literature. This research ascertains the main entrepreneurship motivations in the meal-sharing economy platforms. To attain our aim, a qualitative research approach was adopted, and thirteen interviews were conducted with service providers in the meal-sharing economy platforms. The data was examined through thematic analysis. As a result of the inspection, two main motives and eight sub-dimensions were determined: social and cultural motives (e.g. the gratification of hosting, altruism, source of cultural capital and, social interaction) and economic motives (e.g. monetary, facilitators, network, and independence). Theoretical implications were discussed as well as limitations and future research lines.

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## KEYWORDS

Meal-sharing economy; entrepreneurship; economic motives; social and cultural benefits

## Introduction

As a micro-entrepreneurship, the sharing economy platforms offer various goods and services including accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, and local guiding that are provided by service providers (i.e. locals) to international travellers visiting a destination (Guttentag, 2015). Among these, food services, which are rather new in the sharing economy has been receiving noteworthy attention by locals recently (Mhlanga, 2020) because this collaborative consumption area generates significant contributions for locals (gaining extra revenue, meeting new people and cultures, and learning different languages) (Gul, 2018). Despite its growing interest in the meal-sharing economy by locals, limited studies address this phenomenon in the extant literature (Dagevos & Veen, 2020; Ketter, 2019; Mhlanga, 2020; Veen & Dagevos, 2019; Zurek, 2016).

Indeed, meal-sharing economy platforms are high with expectations that will enlarge and grow further in the future. A recent comprehensive literature review emphasized that most existing studies addressing the sharing economy in tourism and hospitality were mainly concentrated on the impact (e.g. social, economic, and environmental) of sharing economy platforms on destinations and business or motivations of participants (Hossain, 2020). Among these studies, entrepreneurship in the sharing economy has received limited attention from scholars. As noted by Sigala (2018, p. 160), 'sharing economy entrepreneurs do something so un-traditional that is not yet defined and measured'. Although extant research is related to understanding entrepreneurship of sharing accommodation sector, namely, Airbnb (e.g. Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018), there is limited research on entrepreneurship aspects of other services such as food and beverage, transportation,

riding, and local guiding. Furthermore, Atsiz et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship of meal-sharing economy platforms in their research by proposing that future studies should ascertain the main motivations of the meal-sharing entrepreneurs. To address this research gap, the current study thus attempts to explore the motivations of the evolving micro-entrepreneurship in the meal-sharing economy.

## Literature review

The sharing economy is a disruptive business model that has occurred owing to internet development and particularly Web 2.0-progress (Hall & Williams, 2020). It is growing at a remarkable rate worldwide by offering a large number of services, including food and beverage, local guiding, and transportation, especially accommodation (Juil, 2017). These profit based-online models for the P2P sharing of goods and services enable different ways for locals to make income from their possessions (Heo, 2016). Moreover, as a key type of entrepreneurship 3.0, the sharing economy promotes job creation, and economic growth in the destination (Mauri et al., 2018; Richardson, 2015).

Entrepreneurship of the sharing economy platforms varies from the traditional one with some features. First, the initial capital for these services is less than traditional entrepreneurship since entrepreneurs of the sharing economy use their existing properties or assets to create income for themselves (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018). Second, there is no tax regulation and a strict rule when entering these sharing economy platforms (Altinay & Taheri, 2019). Third, technological proliferation in the sharing economy is faster than traditional entrepreneurship in the formal economy (Hamari et al., 2016). Fourth, these platforms offer a venue for international travellers to interact with locals deeply. For example, participants obtain knowledge about the destination, local culture, and trip tips when wandering the destination. So, a real authenticity occurs for participants by joining in locals' dining table or apartment (Hotrec, 2018).

Limited studies are particularly addressing motives for participation in the sharing economy literature (Andreotti et al., 2020). This narrow previous research on investigating the entrepreneurial aspect of sharing economy platforms mainly focused on accommodation and transportation

**Table 1.** Overview of the entrepreneurship motives in sharing economy.

The author (s)	Year	Service	Main motives
Lampinen & Cheshire	2016	Accommodation/Airbnb	i.e. meeting new people, learning different culture, and social interaction
Grybaite & Stankevičiene	2016	General (Sharing their items such as bike, cloth, apartments, foods, etc.)	i.e. making extra money, supporting individuals and other companies, meeting new people, seeking a novel experience
Rosenblat & Hwang	2016	Transportation/ Uber and Lyft	i.e. career transition, autonomy, flexibility, and independence, learning a new language, and supporting other small businesses
Karlsson & Dolnicar	2016	Accommodation	i.e. income, social interaction, and sharing
Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh	2018	Accommodation/Airbnb	i.e. economic benefits (generating income and escaping from unemployment) and cultural interaction meeting new people, low initial capital (no need to require huge initial capital and extra costs)
EL Fikri et al.	2019	Transportation/Uber	i.e. low cost, sustainable consumption, monetization, job opportunities, economic/ savings, altruism, social interaction, enjoyment, and community participation
Zhang et al.	2019	Accommodation/Airbnb	i.e. cultural learning, financial gains, social connections, personal growth, feeling of achievement
Andreotti et al.	2020	General	i.e. instrumental motives (economic or monetary reasons and functional purposes such as convenience), normative (sustainability and altruism), and social-hedonic motives (enjoyment and community or social reasons)

services, ignoring other services such as food and local guiding. The motives of entrepreneurs that are determined in few prior studies are depicted in [Table 1](#).

As shown in [Table 1](#), most studies dominate on understanding motives of main drivers of sharing economy from the view of accommodation and transportation services. A recent study by Kuhzady et al. (2021) emphasized that researchers should investigate other services of sharing economies such as food and local guiding. Atsiz et al. (2021) further emphasized the role of meal-sharing economy entrepreneurship and that future studies should be focused on these platforms' entrepreneurship aspect.

### ***Entrepreneurship in the meal-sharing economy***

The meal-sharing economy, which is also known as collaborative gastronomy, platforms have been becoming more popular among international visitors and intensively have been used by locals (Sotiriadis & Nduna, 2019). Investigating these platforms from different aspects has gained considerable attention from a few scholars as well. For instance, the existing studies are concentrated on uncovering the main components of food experience in the meal-sharing economy (Atsiz et al., 2021; Qian et al., 2020), the motivations of meal-sharing users (Ketter, 2019), and the effect of such platforms on restaurant performance (Mhlanga, 2020). These studies mostly cover the meal-sharing platforms from the demand perspective and limited knowledge is known from the perspective of suppliers. In particular, investigating these platforms in an entrepreneurship context is of utmost importance in the relevant literature and service providers since these platforms are considered as one of the most crucial micro-entrepreneurship and helping the sustainability of the local communities (Veen, 2019). In this line, recent research by Atsiz et al. (2021) highlighted the role of the growth and success factors of meal-sharing economies' service providers. Besides, they especially called for more studies in examining the meal-sharing economy entrepreneurship (Atsiz et al., 2021, p. 19).

The research into understanding motives for entrepreneurship in the sharing economy platforms is still largely lacking because every motive can differ among participation and sharing economy platforms. Most current studies only consider one form of the sharing economy (i.e. Airbnb, Lyft, and Uber) in the relevant literature. In the nascent literature on the meal-sharing economy, there is an increasing interest among scholars recently. Even though these previous studies are not related to understanding the entrepreneurship of the meal-sharing economy, this research encourages researchers to investigate the main drivers of service providers in the meal-sharing economy platforms. Getting insights concerning entrepreneurship motivations can be an essential instrumental for developing a better understanding of the service providers' decision-making processes that remain underemployed.

Sotiriadis and Nduna (2019) investigated these platforms from the perspective of collaborative gastronomy by comparing two meal-sharing platforms, namely VizEat and SurfingDinner. According to them, this business model offers a wide range of core services in their areas such as homemade meals, cooking classes, food tours, and cooking workshops. Thus, its foodservice offerings are various. In particular, these areas target domestic and international visitors who desire to taste and learn different cuisines. When considering these attributes, these meal-sharing platforms are considered profit-based platforms for locals or entrepreneurs.

In the literature, limited knowledge exists related to the entrepreneurship of the meal-sharing economy. Some researchers investigate in their master's thesis why hosts participated in the platforms. For example, Gul (2018) participated in meal-sharing activities by observing the guest and hosts and conducted an interview method on six service providers of the meal-sharing economy. According to him, four main categories of service providers toward why they selected these areas occurred, such as meeting new people, being the bows of the own business, gaining extra money, and cultural experience. In particular, one of the hosts strongly established a strong bond to this platform because she had worked in many businesses and was tired of such an area, thus devoted her time to organize the daily events at her home.

Another research by Koss and Müller (2019) investigating motivational factors of millennials to participate in meal-sharing economy platforms is conducted on two service providers of the meal-sharing platform. According to this study, components such as bringing people together, proud of the culture and food (social drivers), practicing cooks, and enjoy cooking were the most vital influential factors for entrepreneurship.

To the best of our knowledge, no other research examines the entrepreneurship of the meal-sharing economy in the current literature. Furthermore, the two-research above-mentioned are significant, however, not sufficient in terms of capturing the larger picture of the components determining motives in meal-sharing entrepreneurship. First, these studies were conducted on limited participants, 6 and 2 service providers, respectively. So, the limited sample cannot give us a comprehensive framework and these factors are destination and service providers specific. Second, these two studies conducted interviews on Eatwith, a meal-sharing platform. Thus, considering one meal-sharing platform cannot be sufficient for understanding the main growth and success factors of meal-sharing entrepreneurs.

## Research methodology

Considering the rapid growth of the meal-sharing economy and the very limited knowledge about the entrepreneurship motivations of individuals venturing in these online platforms, a qualitative study approach was applied with the theme analysis method for the current study. Due to the nature of the study, to have a better understanding of the entrepreneurship motivations in the meal-sharing economy, semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs participating in this informal economy were conducted via video calls. Authors searched to reach the potential participants through Eatwith, Withlocals, Airbnb, and Travelingspoon, which are popular and operating in Istanbul, Turkey by November 2020, and 29 hosts in Istanbul were listed in various meal-sharing experiences.

Istanbul is one of the most popular culinary destinations with its Turkish cuisine reflected in Turkish culture and heritage (Okumus & Cetin, 2018), and attracts approximately 15 million visitors from various countries (Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism, 2020). It is also regarded as the third most visited city in Europe following London and Paris (Yasmeen, 2019). Besides, entrepreneurship activities in the informal economy are more widespread in developing economies than in advanced economies (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018; Thai & Turkina, 2014). Given such aforementioned reasons, Istanbul was considered an appropriate destination for this study.

Since there was no personal communication information of hosts, a message was sent through the platforms, which was explaining the research objective and requesting their participation for an interview via video calls due to the COVID-19 measures. However, the fact that many entrepreneurs suspended their activities in this sector due to the COVID-19 outbreak and were less motivated to interview because their involvement in the informal economy limited access to participants. Thirteen participants were recruited for the data collection phase by drawing on the convenience sampling method. The following Guest et al. (2006) suggestion regarding the number of a sample among relatively homogeneous groups and data saturation level (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), after recruiting the thirteenth participant, the authors agreed to end the data collection phase, which means that any additional participants would probably share the formerly identified themes. The demographic (e.g. gender, age) and tripographic (e.g. experience, platforms) features of the participants are presented in Table 2.

To identify the main motives that influence the joining the meal-sharing economy, participants were asked several certain questions such as 'what are the factors that motivate you to participate in meal-sharing platforms?' The questions were involved in an expert panel with two academicians who have considerable background in the field to ensure face validity. The panel resulted that questions were well-structured for the study's objectives.

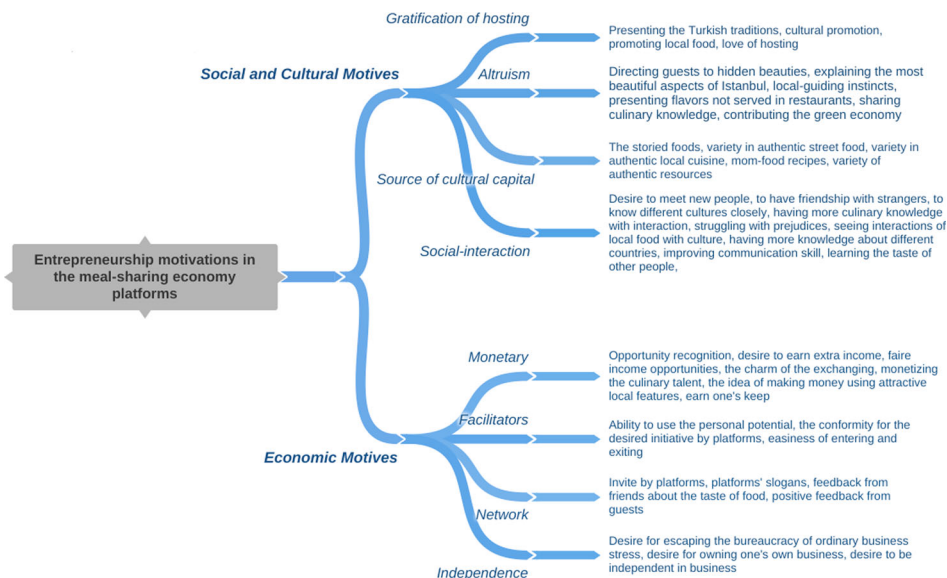
**Table 2.** Profile of participants.

	Gender	Age	Marital	Professional chiefdom or guiding experience	The years of experience	Hosting experiences	Platforms
P1	Female	31	Single	No	1	50+	Eatwith
P2	Male	40	Married	No	3	68+	Withlocals, Airbnb, Eatwith
P3	Female	46	Married	Yes	6	300+	Eatwith
P4	Male	34	Married	No	7	30+	Withlocals
P5	Female	65	Single	No	1	10+	Eatwith
P6	Female	33	Single	No	6	U.N	Eatwith
P7	Female	26	Single	Yes	2	200+	Withlocals
P8	Female	30	Single	No	6	50+	Travelling Spoon
P9	Female	60	Married	No	6	50+	Travelling Spoon
P10	Male	34	Single	No	2,5	130+	Withlocals, Airbnb, Eatwith
P11	Male	29	Single	Yes	3	200+	Withlocals, Airbnb
P12	Male	30	Single	No	2	22+	Eatwith
P13	Male	51	Married	No	2	200+	Withlocals

Based on the recommendations proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), authors read the data multiple times and theme-coding processes were performed independently by authors to contribute to the reliability of the findings (Sikolia et al., 2013). After that, authors come together to reach a consensus on the broader themes (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, to reinforce the reliability of the findings, some of the specific original comments in the coding process were shared in the study (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Based on the thematic analysis of data, an initial item pool with 69 items emerged by inspiration of inductive (i.e. categorization of themes) (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), and deductive analysis (i.e. literature) (Gummesson, 2000). The item pool was investigated for the similarities and differences of each theme. At the end of this process, 41 items were identified and further merged and conceptualized into two main themes, namely, social and cultural, and economic motives (Figure 1).

During data analysis, some themes emerged from data inductively (e.g. altruism, gratification), while some of them were sought by authors in order to deduce them from the data by considering



**Figure 1.** Conceptualization of themes.

the previous literature (e.g. monetary, independence). However, due to the nature of the methodology applied, the large volume of qualitative data, and word space constraints for this paper, it has not been possible to share detailed information on how the themes and categories on the empirical material were evaluated and grouped. However, the analysis process is shown with a representative selection of data and direct quotations in [Table 3](#).

## Research findings

### *Social and cultural motives*

The social and cultural motives consist of the combination of four sub-themes: gratification of hosting, altruism, source of cultural capital and, social interaction. The content of social and cultural motives was particularly being associated with an accurate interaction with different people, traditions, and cultures. For instance, **P12** explained the opportunity of interacting with others as a core motivation for himself to venturing into the meal-sharing sector as following: *'Actually, let me say metaphorically, without a passport I traveled the world frankly. Why would you say? In a way, you both learn about their culture and they learn cult'*. Another participant who had a professional guiding experience explained his motivation why he left the formal economy and joined the meal-sharing economy as follows:

You know different cultures closely. This is not just a one-sided experience. Maybe this is not happening in normal big tours, but since our tours [the tours in the meal-sharing economy] are a little more special, [...] in other words, they have a maximum of three people, so you get to know each other very closely. (**P11**)

The qualitative data also showed that entrepreneurs consider that naturally owned various cultural resources and the opportunity to gain extra-income while doing the things you love are among their main motivations to joining the meal-sharing sector. Concerning this aspect:

I loved hosting guests, and I loved foreigners and speaking English. I also loved the feeling of those cultures. My favorite things were already together, so I entered this sector to have extra income. (**P6**)

When asked whether the power of the local cuisine in motivating their venturing, all participants underscored the Turkish cuisine as the main element of the source of cultural capital. The interaction opportunity of food in terms of sharing is particularly associated as major indicators of their motivation to venturing into this sector. For instance, **P4** mentioned: *"Seeing interactions of local food with culture"*. and **P5** commented: *"Thanks to this platform, guests not only taste the food but also discover Turkish people's eating habits, behaviors, approaches to food and what they eat"*.

Participants were asked what their guests (i.e. tourists) benefit from their venturing into the meal-sharing sector. The participants' responses were very considerable because they emphasized altruism as a key theme in their entrepreneurship intrinsic. Most participants stated that contributing to the green economy while providing an authentic experience to their guests that cannot be obtained

**Table 3.** Example of extraction from data analysis process.

Sample of indicative quotations	Initial coding	Sub-theme	Main theme	Relevant concepts from literature
<i>'I am a very strong social person, but when I depend on someone to earn money at the same time I get stressed [...]'</i>	Desire for escaping the bureaucracy of ordinary business stress, desire for owning one's own business,	Independence	Economic Benefits	Perceived independence in business (Rosenblat & Hwang, 2016)
<i>'The bureaucracy of the job does not cause stress on me while fulfilling my responsibilities on my own job'.</i>	desire to be independent in business			
<i>'Doing my own business, at home, on my own [...]'</i>				

in an ordinary tourism activity is important in the augmentation of their entrepreneurship motivation. For instance, P2 noted:

Contribution to the green economy and reasonable earnings, a sharing concept that will reduce the long-term wear of neo-liberal competition [...], to support the benefits of our tradesmen, marketers, and peasants from tourism against the mono/oligopolies who gain the values they do not deserve.

### **Economic motives**

Participants were asked to describe their economic entrepreneurship motives and to account for the facilitators they encounter. The economic motives consist of a combination of four sub-themes: monetary, facilitators, network, and independence. Recognition of liquidity opportunity, easy access to the system through a network, and opportunity to use personal skills to gain income independently were underscored as economic key issues motivating the venturing of the meal-sharing sector. This is further evaluated by two participants as follows:

In fact, I am a very strong social person, but when I depend on someone to earn money at the same time, I get stressed. Furthermore, I cannot perform very well because of the bureaucracy. The stress of the bureaucracy is making me [...] nervous and psychologically it does not make me feel comfortable. That's why I have never had long work experiences in the formal economy. (P10)

I was wishing to do something related to street art and just then, I got an offer from Withlocals that ask me to do one of these food tours. I accepted too. I like the system very much because they [Meal-sharing platforms] do the pricing on a per-person basis. If we design the tour ourselves, the system offers us the opportunity to price as we want. (P11)

Another participant highlighted the opportunity of the meal-sharing sector in terms of gaining income as following:

For a while, I was unemployed, so I could make a living with what I earned here [in the meal-sharing sector]. In that sense, it saved my life, for example, it had a great financial contribution that I could not ignore. (P6)

## **Conclusion and discussion**

### **Theoretical implications**

The literature review has generally approached the sharing economy from the service providers' characteristics and the participants' demands or experiences (Melián-González et al., 2019). However, entrepreneurial motives are limitedly studied in the informal economy (Çakmak et al., 2018), especially food providers' motives are neglected and there is scant research in the literature. This research gap motivated us to explore the main entrepreneurial motives of meal-sharing providers. To address this research gap, interviews were conducted with thirteen service providers and two main motives occurred; social and cultural motives (gratification of hosting, altruism, source of cultural capital and, social-interaction) and economic motives (monetary, facilitators, network, and independence). The outcomes of this study will extend to a limitedly observed phenomenon by previous studies (e.g. Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018; Andreotti et al., 2020; EL Fikri et al., 2019; Karlsson & Dolnicar, 2016) regarding entrepreneurship in the meal-sharing economy. Through doing so, this study also responds to the call for Atsiz et al.'s (2021) research, which highlighted the necessity of conducting further empirical studies to explore the entrepreneurship motives of the meal-sharing economy.

Economic benefits are confirmed by all research as the vital motive of sharing economy providers. In similar, our study confirms that gaining extra revenue and being independent is the sine qua non for them. To sustain gaining money, service providers are giving importance to create a network with participants. There is strict competitiveness among service providers and they try giving the best service offerings to participants for taking positive feedback because it is obvious that customers



look at online reviews when choosing a service provider. Moreover, trust in such platforms is crucial since customers participate in locals' homes. Among sub-dimensions of economic motives, monetary and independence are consistent with other sharing economy research (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018; Andreotti et al., 2020; EL Fikri et al., 2019; Grybaite & Stankevičiene, 2016; Lampinen & Cheshire, 2016; Rosenblat & Hwang, 2016). Furthermore, this finding corroborates with other participation reasons of meal-sharing service providers (Gul, 2018; Koss & Müller, 2019). The 'facilitators' sub-dimension is confirmed by Alrawadieh and Alrawadieh (2018) as providers use these platforms due to its facilitators. Creating a network for making money did not occur as an entrepreneurial motive of providers. Thus, this sub-dimension will back to the extant literature.

Social and cultural reasons are seen as the secondary motives in some entrepreneurial research. Somewhat surprisingly, this motive is the most mentioned one by interviews. Especially, altruism and interacting with international travellers are viewed as the pivotal sub-dimensions of this motive because providers desire to learn different cultures and improve communication skills to direct travellers who visited the destination and help them give some trip tips. Altruism is confirmed only entrepreneurial study (EL Fikri et al., 2019) and social interaction was consistent with a few research (Alrawadieh & Alrawadieh, 2018; EL Fikri et al., 2019; Lampinen & Cheshire, 2016). The gratification of hosting when promoting their assets and evaluating cultural capital in such platforms are not explored and ascertained in prior studies.

### ***Practical implications***

The findings of this research provide a critical model for destination authorities in considering the appealing power of meal-sharing economy platforms and in affecting local chefs participating in the informal economy. Destination authorities should pay special attention to the motives of those locals and observe the reason for people who benefit from those initiatives; thereby it will enable them to better understand the promising value of the meal-sharing economy. By doing so, this research model will navigate them to new ways for them to legalize these entrepreneurship activities into the formal economy. Furthermore, the meal-sharing platforms are consistent with principles of sustainable tourism in terms of increasing locals' income and helping food waste (Veen, 2019). Thus, destination practitioners can promote these areas to locals who desire to invest their assets and knowledge for international visitors.

### ***Limitations and future research***

This research is not exempt from certain limitations. This qualitative study was conducted with only 13 interviews. The interview numbers are low because the limited-service providers are available in Istanbul. Furthermore, some providers do not make an interview with the authors due to COVID-19 or other reasons. Future studies can overcome this issue by interviewing more providers. The nature of such research does not generalize the findings of the overall population. Thus, when considering these motives are specific, future research can be conducted on different destinations and services offered in sharing economy such as local guiding. Finally, our findings should be verified by using quantitative methods concerning a large sample.

### ***Disclosure statement***

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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