



Will Sharing Economy Work in the Public Sector? Exploring Government-Initiated and Facebook-Enabled Use Case from the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the concept of sharing economy, a domain predominantly investigated in the private sector, and extends its applicability to the realm of digital government. Despite its potential alignment with digital government principles such as co-creation and citizen participation, literature on sharing economy within digital government remains limited. Moreover, this study also highlights the untapped potential of the sharing economy model during crises presenting an avenue for enhanced government responsiveness. Recognizing Facebook's prevalence in digital government initiatives through the years, this study investigates its suitability as a platform for fostering sharing economy in government contexts. Specifically, this paper aims to shed light on how governments and the public sector can take advantage of social media platforms like Facebook in implementing the sharing economy model effectively. Through a two-pronged approach, a comprehensive review of related literature and a focused case study from one city government in the Philippines were conducted. This country was selected for its high sharing attitudes, social media usage, and e-participation providing valuable insights especially for governments sharing similar socio-technological contexts such as those from the Global South and developing economies. Considerations for future policies and future research pathways were also presented.

CCS CONCEPTS

• Human-centered computing; • Collaborative and social computing; • Collaborative and social computing theory, concepts and paradigms; • Social media;

KEYWORDS

sharing economy, government-initiated sharing economy, Facebook-enabled sharing economy, sharing cities, Philippines

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1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of sharing economy continues to garner substantial attention in recent years predominantly within the private sector led by international brands like Uber and Airbnb. While its definition is still debated due to its continuous evolution, in essence, sharing economy involves people sharing items or services either for profit or non-profit purposes [1]. Multiple definitions also highlight the pivotal role of information and communications technology in enabling sharing among participants [2]; [3]; [4]. With the influence of this concept, it also generated scholarly attention mostly from the Global North who also dominated the market [5]; [6]. However, its exploration within the context of digital government remains relatively uncharted territory. This oversight is noteworthy given the inherent alignment of sharing economy principles with co-creation and citizen participation which are important principles behind governance and digital governance. Research on government-initiated sharing economy is still scarce. Chasin and Scholta [7] sought to operationalize the convergence of sharing economy with e-government, identifying four roles for the government. Firstly, governments can leverage citizen trust to encourage participation and act as platform moderators. Second, they can address regulatory loopholes by exerting better control over sharing economy platforms. Third, existing infrastructure and technology can be repurposed for government-initiated sharing economy initiatives. Lastly, governments can reduce entry barriers, a deficiency often observed in private platforms, by establishing sharing platforms.

Some studies also focused on a case study approach. One study discussed the case of the sharing city initiative enabled by the Seoul Metropolitan Government in South Korea underscoring the importance of government intervention, particularly at the local level [8]. McLaren and Agyeman's book [9] deep dived into several city cases such as in Bengaluru, Medellín, and Copenhagen also showing the role of local governments in facilitating the sharing economy in cities. However, these cases mostly demonstrated the role of governments as a facilitator of a sharing economy ecosystem rather than as an initiator or moderator of a sharing platform.

Global South and developing countries have already embraced sharing economy inspired by more advanced counterparts and they also offer unique insights to expanding the sharing economy literature. In particular, these countries exhibit a higher inclination

toward sharing embedded in their cultures, however, the challenge lies in these countries' inadequate digital infrastructure [8].

Notably, amidst the challenges posed by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the sharing economy model emerges as a potential resilient model for government agencies to foster collaboration and resource optimization. Social media platforms like Facebook can be utilized alongside the concept of sharing economy. Facebook's widespread reach and communication capabilities enabled governments to effectively engage citizens for years enhancing co-creation, and its Groups feature also enabled a real-time yet interactive communications especially helpful in times of crises [10]. An interesting emerging phenomenon called Facebook commerce or F-commerce is gaining momentum showcasing how the platform facilitates social commerce, allowing members to engage in business transactions [11]. Most existing F-commerce groups are typically administered by private individuals, but an exceptional example from the Philippines stands out as it was started and managed by a city government. Hence, this paper aims to address the research question: can sharing economy work in the public sector? To address this, a review of literature and a focused case study was conducted, leveraging on the experience of one Philippine local government. The insights gained from this paper are particularly valuable for governments facing similar social, technological, and political contexts.

The next sections will first explain the methodology. This will be followed by a literature review covering the pros and cons of the sharing economy concept, the distinction between private and public sector implementations of sharing economy, and up to the potential of Facebook as a pivotal platform for catalyzing the sharing economy model within the public sector. Then, the succeeding section will draw upon a detailed case study from the Philippines highlighting practical applications and challenges. Then, the last section will synthesize the paper outlining relevant conclusions and avenues for future research in sharing economy and digital government.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a two-fold qualitative approach. First, a review of related literature was conducted to establish a foundational understanding of existing theories and practices in sharing economy and their relevance in digital governance. Second, a focused case study centered on the case of the Carmona BEST Tambayan Facebook Group was adopted. The said Facebook Group was initiated and maintained by the City Government of Carmona, a local government consistently recognized by the national government for its outstanding ICT innovations. To understand deeper Carmona's case, three key informants were interviewed in August 2021, a year after the Facebook Group's launch. These interviews, conducted via Zoom video conferencing, involved the department head of Carmona's IT department and two designated citizen moderators. Open-ended questions were strategically formulated to elicit insights into the Facebook Group's motivation and implementation with an emphasis on the successes and challenges. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated, and interpreted for comprehensive insights for analysis.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The Debate behind Sharing Economy's Benefits and Risks in Recent Years

Navigating how sharing economy can be integrated into digital government initiatives requires a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing debates surrounding the advantages and challenges behind the concept learned from the private sector implementation. This is essential for governments to leverage the sharing economy model effectively allowing them to understand potential challenges while capitalizing on the benefits of the model for their target stakeholders.

Economic benefits but for who? Sharing economy has experienced a notable surge, driven largely by its perceived economic benefits. Sharing platforms have a cost-effective appeal where users can either save or make money [4]. Supplying participants often turn to sharing economy for supplementary income by lending their services or goods, while consuming participants can save money by only using resources when needed [12]; [1]. Platforms like Uber and Airbnb were testaments to the economic impact of sharing economy demonstrating around 20,000 monthly jobs generated and around 4 million hosts globally [13]; [14]. However, these benefits are also questioned by some sharing economy scholars. For instance, Frenken and Schor [15] argue that while profits have been reaped, wealth distribution remains unequal, favoring platform creators over participants. Exploitative working conditions, underpayment of freelancers, and discrimination on platforms further underscore drawbacks of sharing economy [16]; [17]; [18].

Is sharing economy really sustainable? Beyond the financial benefits, the environmental impact serves as a significant motivator for engagement in sharing platforms, reflecting a cultural shift towards reduced ownership and a consequent decrease in individual's carbon footprints [19]. Saarijärvi et al. [20] discovered distinct user personas on Facebook commerce, highlighting "salvagers" who prioritized eco-friendliness over price, thus signifying the perceived symbolic value of environmentally conscious choices. Uber, in its vision for 2040, also aims to become "zero-emission mobility platform" through supporting its participating drivers' transition to electric vehicles [21]. However, Schor [22] challenges the sustainability claims of sharing economy citing instances where the purported benefits may be undermined by increased car ownership among participants. Botsman and Rogers [4] posit that true sustainability depends on both platform creators and participants fulfilling their roles, often emerging as an unintended result of sharing platform use.

Building or breaking communities? Sharing platforms not only facilitate economic transactions but also foster robust social networks among participants. ResearchGate, a knowledge-sharing platform, exemplifies this by connecting over 12 million experts that enable interactions and collaborations [2]. Sharing platforms also assist in disaster management through connecting people with urgently needed resources [23]. This interconnectedness cultivates a culture of trust and a shift from individualism to collective well-being within the sharing economy [19]. However, relevant stakeholders in the sharing economy ecosystem also expressed discontent that puts the "community" concept behind sharing economy

Table 1: Private vs. Government-Initiated Sharing Economy (by Authors)

Type of Sharing Economy	Peer	Platform	Moderator
Private (Companies)	<u>Supplier</u> : Peers that offer (free or paid) products or on-demand services	Companies create their platforms with algorithms matching the supplying and consuming peers. They also establish a clear framework for facilitating payments or accountability within the system.	Companies with their designated employees or algorithms moderate and facilitate the transactions in the platform.
Public (Governments)	<u>Consumer</u> : Peers that are looking for (free or paid) products or on-demand services	Governments can establish their own platform through in-house or outsourced service providers, but more often (such as the case study featured in this paper), they utilize existing technologies such as social media platforms that is more cost-effective.	Governments usually utilize their existing manpower to moderate their sharing platform, or if needed (such as the case study in the latter part) they may designate outsourced manpower.

questionable. First, traditional industries like taxi companies observed a decline in recent years as seen in the stories of Uber in New York and Grab in Thailand [24]; [25]. From the perspective of home-sharing services, locals, renters, and landlords in Airbnb populated cities globally such as in Mallorca, New York, and Kyoto have reported concerns on gentrification, noise complaints, and rent hikes [26]; [27]; [28].

3.2 Private vs. Government-Initiated Sharing Economy

Understanding the elements behind the sharing economy is vital to identify the differences and similarities between the sharing economy models of the private and public sectors. First, Görög [29] characterizes sharing economy as a peer-driven phenomenon, involving economic activities among supplying and consuming peers. Second, the sharing experiences and matching between participating peers are facilitated in ICT-enabled platforms [30]. Third, the crucial role of a moderator in managing these platforms stands as the primary distinction between private and public sector-led sharing economies. As the name implies, the former is moderated or facilitated by profit-driven companies, while the latter is by the public sector such as governments.

The service provision in private and government-initiated sharing economies share a common framework. Moderators, whether governmental or corporate entities, oversee the platform’s functioning, matching supplying peers with consuming peers. Transactions may conclude with a direct exchange of goods or services, but more often involve payments. Notably, in private-driven sharing models like Airbnb, payment is customary, whereas platforms like Couchsurfing operate on a free yet trust-based basis [31]. Private sector platforms often charge service fees, with Airbnb at 3% and Uber at 25% respectively, justified as platform maintenance or payment processing fees [32]; [33]. In contrast, government-initiated sharing platforms often operate without payment, or when present, they do not usually involve commissions, such as the chosen case for this study.

3.3 Facebook as a Platform for Sharing Economy

Facebook has been an instrumental tool in digital governance, aiding governments primarily in information dissemination. Scholars have delineated this social media function for government communications since the advent of social media platforms like Facebook often citing its purpose to broadcast announcements, market the government activities or projects, and monitor citizen sentiments [34]; [35]. It is noteworthy that citizens, especially those in low-income categories, also favor using this platform to access news and updates rather than visiting government websites, citing Facebook’s popularity and user-friendliness [36]. While its utility in this regard is already well-established, there exists a largely untapped potential within Facebook for fostering co-creation and citizen participation, especially in the context of supporting economic growth. Moon [37] also noted that most government pages on social media frequently fall short in eliciting significant citizen engagement as information sharing tends to only share content from their official websites.

Many Facebook features offer a variety of tools that can be conducive to co-creation and citizen participation. For instance, Facebook Groups can serve as a venue for like-minded individuals to discuss, share ideas, and collaborate [10]. These interactive and collaborative functions also allowed Facebook Groups to be helpful in disaster risk management [38], volunteering [39], and political campaigns [40]. Merging these collaborative capabilities of Facebook with the concept of sharing economy was already tested in non-governmental contexts. For example, one Facebook group in Utrecht, the Netherlands was utilized for freecycling or the act of giving away things for free [41]. Another case in North Macedonia showed how Facebook Groups was used to facilitate ride-sharing activities [42].

Besides the non-profit potentials of Facebook and borrowing insights from the private sector, a phenomenon relevant to sharing economy called Facebook commerce (or F-commerce) is already growing momentum which makes use of the platform’s ability to engage peers in interactions, fostering a social web where users can share experiences, write reviews, and actively contribute to

the growth of their communities [43]. This feature to engage directly with peers also makes it more attractive compared to most e-commerce platforms dominating the market [44]. At the same time, participating peers can maximize the free and readily available Facebook platform without investing to build the infrastructure to facilitate sharing and commerce activities [45]. These insights from the private sector align with the ideals behind digital governance particularly in terms of citizen participation and co-creation. While the idea behind Facebook's use for this purpose in digital governance is not entirely new as its Groups feature was already utilized for real-time vetted information sharing such as during disasters, the economic lens is still relatively unexplored.

Importantly, trust plays a pivotal role in unlocking Facebook's potential as a thriving hub for the sharing economy and F-commerce models. One Jordanian case underscored this critical role where trust interplays with social presence, information seeking behavior, and familiarity with Facebook as a platform, demonstrating their positive influence on purchase intentions [46]. By strategically capitalizing on these trust-building elements, governments can position Facebook as a reliable platform for citizens to engage in collaborative initiatives, ultimately leveraging the sharing economy for the benefit of society at large. In doing so, governments have the unique opportunity to harness Facebook's expansive reach and user base to foster co-creation and citizen participation.

4 CASE STUDY

4.1 Overview of Sharing Economy and Government-Initiated Sharing Economy in the Philippines

During the early years of the sharing economy concept, the Asia-Pacific region was leading in terms of the willingness to engage in sharing initiatives where the Philippines placed fourth and was also considered as one of the early adopters in Southeast Asia [47]; [48]. The Philippines' sharing roots can be traced back to its historical practices, notably the barter trade, where communities exchanged goods for mutual economic and social benefits [49]; [50]. Early Filipino communities such as the Tinguianes, engaged in cross-regional exchanges for subsistence [51]. Beyond the barter trade, sharing is deeply embedded in the Filipino psychology and values, epitomized through the concept of *kapwa* or "shared identity", which advocates treating others as equals [52]. Socializing is also important when it comes to sharing and the Filipino hospitality and friendliness was also globally recognized for years where in 2022, the country ranked tenth based on Condé Nast Traveler's 2022 Readers' Choice Awards [53].

Sharing and e-commerce platforms have a high penetration and usage in the country which also encouraged the development of locally founded platforms mainly for logistics and transportation purposes [54]. National government agencies in the Philippines soon embraced these models from the private sector. As summarized in their report, Serafica and Oren [55] cited five noteworthy initiatives from three national government agencies. The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) launched the OneStore and OneExpert platforms in 2015 and 2016 respectively to connect micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) with consumers for the former, and to enable citizen consultation with DOST experts

for the latter. The Department of Trade and Industry also launched two e-commerce platforms namely the GoLokal-Shopinas in 2016 which promoted the products of MSMEs to potential consumers, and the Deliver-e in 2020 in partnership with the Department of Agriculture (DA) which connected farmers with consumers. The DA also had another similar platform with a similar purpose called eKadiwa which was implemented in the same year.

4.2 Carmona as a Sharing City through Carmona BEST Tambayan Facebook Group

4.2.1 Motivations in creating the Carmona BEST Tambayan Facebook Group. Amidst the ongoing discourse surrounding the regulation of sharing platforms at the country level, certain cities have taken advantage of Facebook Groups and the sharing economy model catalyzing the local economy especially during COVID-19. The City Government of Carmona, a city near Manila, launched the Carmona BEST Tambayan Facebook Group through its IT department. Originally conceptualized as a website, the Carmona BEST Tambayan faced delays in its 2020 launch due to pandemic-related limitations. On the other hand, recognizing the prevalent use of Facebook among residents, the city government opted for a Facebook Group version, aiming for it to be a *tambayan* or a hanging out hub for citizens seeking and sharing opportunities for businesses, employment, skills, and training, hence the acronym. "We're aware that there are already a lot of buy-and-sell Groups on Facebook, but this one differs from the rest since we're also including the sharing of employment, skills, and training opportunities, and it's the local government handling it," the IT department head shared.

Launched on May 19, 2020, the Facebook Group amassed more than 33,000 members after its launching year. However, the Facebook Group faced multiple removals from the platform with its first termination dating back to May 15, 2021, for violating Facebook's intellectual property rights community rule. In response, Carmona's IT department continuously recreates the Facebook Group reiterating the moderation rules to its members. As of January 2024, the Facebook Group consists of more than 27,000 members with daily activities within the Group ranging from 1,000 to 2,000 posts. The Facebook Group's timeline is summarized in Figure 1.

Before the establishment of the Facebook Group, the city government already had a history of ICT innovations that were acknowledged with accolades by the national government such as the e-Readiness Leadership Award from the Department of Information and Communications Technology in 2017 and the DigiBayani Award for Digital Inclusion from the Department of Science and Technology in 2015. During the COVID-19 pandemic alone, Carmona implemented several ICT-enabled initiatives. Like the Carmona BEST Tambayan, Facebook was also used by the local government's health department for hosting virtual Zumba sessions. The said department also utilized Zoom for conducting telehealth and telerehabilitation services. Meanwhile, the IT department also developed its own contact tracing app and participated as one of the pilot cities of the national government's COVID-19 chatbot.

4.2.2 Implementation Successes and Challenges. The IT department head underscored trust as the cornerstone of the implementation of the Facebook Group. Due to the IT department's inability to comprehensively monitor the transactions within the Group alongside

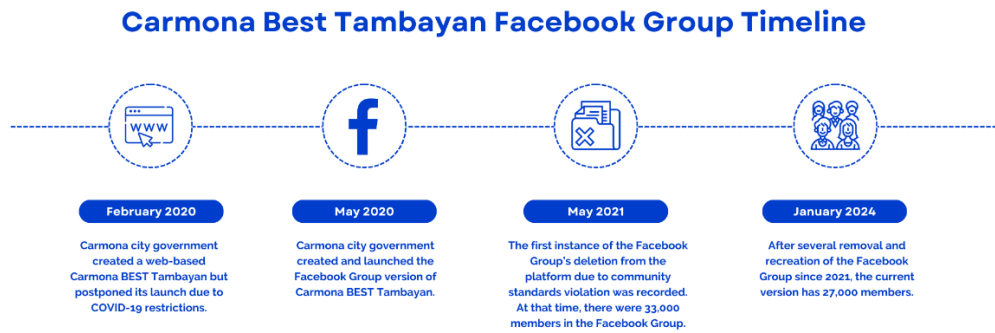


Figure 1: Carmona BEST Tambayan Facebook Group timeline (by Authors)

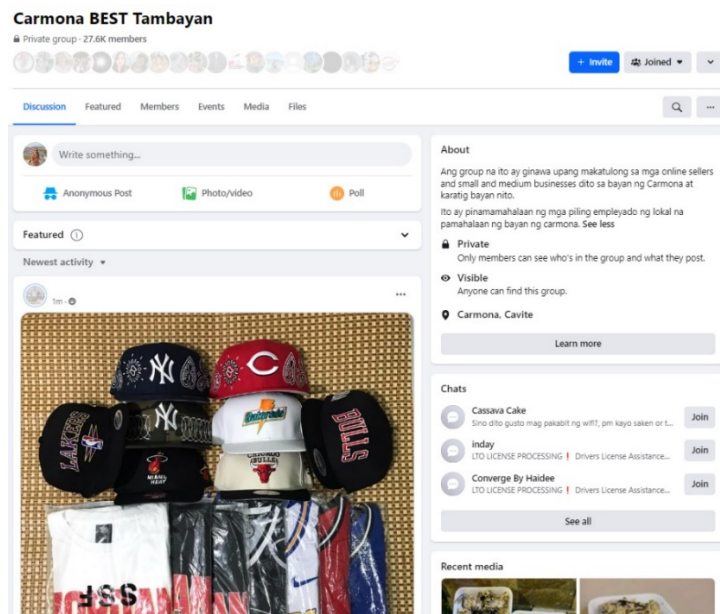


Figure 2: A screenshot of Carmona BEST Tambayan Facebook Group homepage as of January 2024. (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/986851395579914>)

other governmental IT projects, citizen moderators were appointed by the IT department head. The selection criteria for these moderators were based on personal acquaintance and past collaborations, reflecting a foundation of trust. Besides being residents and citizens of Carmona, these moderators possess previous experience in overseeing Facebook Groups. One of them handles a homeowner’s association Facebook Group while the other handles an LGBTQ+ community and photographers’ association Facebook Groups. Besides the trust-based designation of the citizen moderators, they were doing the moderation task voluntarily. “I know that there’s no payment for this task, but I’m getting a sense of fulfillment that we’re somehow helping fellow Carmona residents. . . They can earn extra income,” one citizen moderator imparted.

As of 2021, the predominant demographic in the Facebook Group comprises of 71% female members primarily aged between 25 and

34 years old. In terms of the most common transactions in the Facebook Group, the IT department head mentioned, “it’s usually food, but there are also transactions involving household goods, gadgets. For services, the most common ones are household and appliance repairs.” The IT department head also explained how the payment system works among the participating peers in the Facebook Group. “Most of the time, they’re using COD (cash on delivery) or mobile banking apps like Gcash. There are also instances where sellers allow some buyers to ‘buy now, pay later’, but only when trust is already established between them based on previous transactions,” he added. A sample transaction in the Facebook Group is shown on Figure 2.

The moderation process includes open membership, and while initial screening questions like residence details were previously implemented, they have been suspended indefinitely. Moderators now focus on screening posts to align with Facebook’s community

standards, emphasizing areas such as intellectual property, safety, and violence. Additional safeguards were also introduced during the pandemic, including restrictions on the sale of medical masks and related items. At the same time, the city government reinforced the Republic Act No. 7581 or the Price Act, mandating businesses to transparently disclose their product or service prices to avoid any abuse [56]. Furthermore, moderators were directed to evaluate post relevance, addressing issues such as fake news or spam posts while also filtering out repetitive and live-selling contents to ensure equitable exposure for platform users.

Despite these compliance strategies in moderating the Facebook Group, the citizen moderators and the IT department still faced challenges such as the multiple removal of the Group from the platform. The IT department head explains that controlling the quality of content in the Group remains as a challenge and “during our first removal, it was because of an intellectual property rights violation where one group member was selling a brand that was not his/hers. There were also members who are selling COVID-related items like face masks which was prohibited by the Facebook policy.”

Several member-related issues also emerged such as the existence of some scammers and those who keep on changing their prices. One citizen moderator shared that “there were instances where some service providers weren’t able to finish their tasks and some members also complained about sellers who have questionable pricing.” To address concerns within the Facebook Group, moderators typically request the involved parties to explain the issue and create a private group chat. The preference is to resolve issues virtually, but if escalation occurs, matters are referred to the barangay or village hall of the concerned peers. In cases of fraud, where skilled workers or sellers are accused by multiple members, moderators assess the complaints, issuing warnings for proven cases, and subsequently removing and banning the individual from the group if the issue recurs.

When asked about the future plans for the Facebook Group, the IT department head shared that the Facebook Group version will still be continued onwards, but they will revisit and reassess the suitability of launching the original web version in the future. The citizen moderators also foresee the continuation of the Group moving forward for various reasons. One of them explained, “I think it will continue further since online transactions are part of the new normal.” The other citizen moderator also added that, “maybe it’s also a factor that it’s the local government moderating this Group, and the members have trust in the local government.”

5 CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

Through this study, insights on the potential of government-initiated sharing economy were discussed. Results of the literature review and the case study unveiled that indeed, the sharing economy model can work in the public sector setting such as in governments and existing platforms like Facebook and other social media sites can be utilized in the implementation. Using Facebook offers cost-cutting benefits for governments as the platform provides a pre-established platform that is already widely familiar to users. However, the risks associated with the platform’s community standards, such as the removal and recreation of Facebook

Groups that was evident in the case of Carmona, pose challenges for a sharing economy project’s sustainability.

In terms of sustainability, the role of moderators is indeed important. The Carmona BEST Tambayan Facebook Group showed how its IT department alongside designated citizen moderators were proactive in facilitating the information sharing within the Group and even in the recreation of the Groups ensuring that membership is still maintained despite the challenge posed by removal in the platform. It is noteworthy that the moderators in the Carmona case were doing these tasks voluntarily, however, the same success cannot be guaranteed in all government-initiated sharing economy implementation. It is recommended for governments that are planning to adopt the sharing economy model for their initiatives to consider incentivizing moderators especially the designated citizens. As the moderating role is vital in the upkeep of the Facebook Group, it is also important to establish clear guidelines on the tasks that a moderator is expected to do such as filtering content and memberships, educating participating peers about the mechanics of the Group, and resolving peer conflicts.

As established in the sharing economy and digital government literature, trust also plays an important role in the sustainability of any initiative. The Carmona case highlighted the high trust of the local government with its citizens even appointing them as designated moderators in the Group, and the citizens also showed their trust to the government and the platform through the continuous support to the Carmona BEST Tambayan Facebook Group despite multiple removals and recreated versions of the Group. While this study’s chosen case is informative, it is also necessary to investigate further how sharing economy will pan out in low trust societies, whether it will not succeed or perhaps help in rebuilding trust among its users.

While this study provided valuable insights especially from the perspective of the government and designated citizen moderators, an extension of this study using a quantitative approach through a survey and statistical analysis will investigate further on the government-initiated sharing economy phenomenon through delving into the motivations of citizens to participate backed by relevant theories and models (e.g., perceived benefits, trust in Facebook as a platform, trust in government as a moderator, trust in participating peers), and how their motivations affect their satisfaction and intention to reuse the platform. Understanding the citizen perspective for future research can further enrich the growing literature of government-initiated sharing economy, co-creation, and citizen participation. At the same time, this additional perspective can also be utilized for developing the existing project or for future related platforms. Moreover, it is also recommended to explore other use cases of public sector or government-initiated sharing economy to further contribute empirical evidence to this growing field.

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