The Relationship between Access Practices and Economic Systems

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ABSTRACT The access economy is rising in importance in the marketplace. In this conceptual article, we chronicle access practices in market and nonmarket economies. In nonmarket economic systems, access is gained via social exchange and primarily takes the form of sharing. That is, sharing is non-market-mediated access. In the contemporary market economy, economic exchange practices, such as renting, dominate access practices, explaining why the so-called sharing economy is not about sharing. Further, we propose that culture and social class moderate this relationship by creating contexts where social exchange (e.g., sharing) can provide access to resources in market economies. We demonstrate that access and sharing should not be essentialized, as their nature is dependent on the social system in which they are embedded. Thus, future research can focus on parsing out the nuances of how, when, and why access practices are utilized in particular societies and communities.

During the last decade, we have observed the emergence of the access economy (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2015), also known as the sharing, or peer-to-peer, economy, estimated to have an economic value of $15 billion in 2013 (Price Waterhouse Cooper 2013). The access economy provides temporary access to consumption resources for a fee or for free without a transfer of ownership (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Consumers are accessing consumption recourses either via renting for temporary usage from companies (e.g., car sharing via Zipcar), from each other via marketplaces (e.g., apartment renting via Airbnb), or via sharing and borrowing of resources outside the marketplace (e.g., among family members) as viable alternatives to ownership (Belk 2010; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Nielsen Company 2014; Rifkin 2014). The access economy is enabling a flexible consumer lifestyle, as one can temporarily and interchangeably participate in lifestyle spaces that they could not otherwise afford. It also facilitates fluidity between identity positions, as consumers now have easy short-term access to resources that used to be deemed long-term investments, such as luxury cars or fashion (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2015). Digital technology and the access economy are making it easier for individual consumers to rent out, barter, share, or lend private property, skills, and resources to/with strangers.

The access economy is championed as one of the major trends of the past decade and is disrupting well-established industries, such as the hospitality and car rental industries (*Economist* 2013; Botsman 2015; Eckhardt and Bardhi 2015), although we note the recent slowdown of this sector (Kessler 2015). While the recent boom of the access economy via digital technology is considered new and groundbreaking, we note that access practices have been foundational to society and the marketplace over many years (cf. Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Belk 2013; Arnould and Rose 2015), yet we have not to date seen a dimensionalizing and historicizing of these practices. Through a literature review from a variety of disciplines, we locate access practices as contextual, depending on the economic system in which they are embedded. The aim is to dimensionalize and historicize access practices, identifying structures that shape access—and identifying sociocultural conditions where access-based exchange and consumption has increased in importance and value—and those which make access less important.

This is a conceptual article based on a review of a body of research on market and nonmarket exchange. We first de-

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lineate varying access practices, with the goal of reducing some of the confusion surrounding terms, such as sharing. As our focus is on access practices, the scope of our review does not cover other exchange practices that lead to a transfer of ownership, such as gift giving, buying, or bartering. We then explore how the nature of the economic system, whether marketized or nonmarketized, structures access-based distribution practices. Finally, we explore other key factors, such as culture and social class, that shape the relationship between economic systems and access practices. This allows us to dimensionalize and historicize access practices, highlighting how access practices can shape societal structures. In particular, we conceptualize sharing as a form of access. Thus, we challenge the dominant framing of the sharing economy in the popular and academic discourse as being about sharing and social exchange by demonstrating that in today's marketized economy, value lies in gaining access via economic exchange.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Access-Based Exchange Practices

Consumer researchers have started to explore the recent developments in the access economy especially with regard to consumer motivations and behavior (Hennig-Thurau, Henning, and Sattler 2007; Ozanne and Ballantine 2010; Lamberton and Rose 2012), consumer value and desire (Chen 2009), and associated resource distribution practices (Giesler 2006; Belk 2007, 2010; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Jenkins et al. 2014; Arnould and Rose 2015). This line of research distinguishes access as a particular mode of resource distribution and consumption. For example, Chen (2009) equates access with the experience of consumption and in contrast to possession. In her study of art visitors and collectors, she identifies access as a more temporal and circumstantial consumption mode where self-identification with the object is lacking. This is in contrast to ownership, which represents a long-term and intimate relationship and where consumers desire uniqueness and to extend the self (Chen 2009). Papier et al. (2011) find similar results in a study of music consumption comparing ownership (e.g., buying digital music files via iTunes) and access modes of consumption (e.g., Spotify music streaming).

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) build on this comparison by conceptualizing access-based consumption as transactions that do not lead to transfer of ownership but provide temporary access to consumption resources. In their study of market-mediated access, involving a company-owned car-sharing program, they find that lack of identification, dominance of use value, and negative reciprocity characterize access-based consumption when market-mediated. Lamberton and Rose (2012) also position market-mediated access services, such as car- and bike-sharing programs, cell-phone minute sharing and frequent-flyer-miles sharing, in opposition to ownership, and find that lower cost benefits, low scarcity risk perceptions, and lack of trust characterize these services. Henning-Thurau et al. (2007), in their study of access via the practice of motion-picture file sharing, suggest that high possession utility reduces engagement with access practices and vice versa. They find that consumption of movies via file sharing increasingly leads to less movie consumption via ownership (e.g., DVD ownership) or cinema attendance (Henning-Thurau et al. 2007). Their findings also add two other features of access-based consumption, that of high consumer involvement and high experiential variety seeing behavior. In sum, these studies have focused on examining a variety of business services and models that provide consumers with temporary access to consumption resources in exchange for a fee (rental-based services) or personal information (ad-based services). The findings highlight that a market logic and related contractual relationships and norms underline access-based transactions via the market.

Another line of research has embarked in understanding the distribution and consumption of resources outside the market (non-market-mediated), such as via intrafamily or community sharing. This work is championed by the seminal work of Belk (2007, 2010, 2014) on the concept of sharing. Belk (2007) identifies sharing as an alternative form of distribution to commodity exchange and gift giving and defines it as "the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act or process of receiving or taking something from others for our use" (126). Focusing mainly on the context of intrafamilial sharing, Belk (2010) argues that sharing tends to be a communal act that fosters solidarity and bonding, involves caring and love, is nonreciprocal, and involves joint possessions/ownership. Others build on this research outside the context of the family, such as that of a community library, to find that sharing models outside the marketplace fosters stewardship behaviors toward common objects as well as a sense of community among participants (Ozanne and Ballantine 2010). Jenkins et al. (2014) also examine sharing and borrowing of resources among friends and conceptualize the practice of borrowing as non-market-mediated access that "involves a temporary transfer of possession, in which the borrower does not become the legal owner" (131). While borrowing is similar to sharing in representing access from social sources (e.g., relationships) rather than the marketplace, they identify it as distinct from sharing because it implies a temporal, de facto transfer of ownership. These studies highlight sharing and borrowing as displaying characteristics of social forms of exchange. In contrast to market-mediated access, these findings suggest that sharing and borrowing are embedded in social and communal relationships and governed by nonmarket, social logics (Bardhi, Dalli, and Corciolani 2014).

Overall, we derive three key takeaways from this review and synthesis of the literature. First, prior research argues that access is positioned in the marketing literature in opposition to ownership. It constitutes transactions that can be market-mediated but where no transfer of ownership takes place (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Second, access-based consumption is enabled by a variety of practices. In their review and critique of the field, Bardhi et al. (2014) identify three different access-based practices: renting (including occasional and peer-to-peer renting), sharing, and borrowing/lending with distinct implications and consumption outcomes. Consistently, we also see sharing as another access-based practice that provides consumers temporary access to resources outside the marketplace rather than distinct from it, as assumed in the original conceptualization (Belk 2010). Third, access-based practices can be economic or social exchange practices (Bardhi et al. 2014). When access takes place via short-term renting, as in the case of car sharing, consumption is guided by market norms of reciprocity, and it constitutes a form of economic exchange (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). However, when access is enabled outside the market via sharing and borrowing from friends, it is embedded in social relationships and ruled by social norms of reciprocity rather than the market (Belk 2013; Fournier, Eckhardt, and Bardhi 2013; Jenkins et al. 2014). As such, we treat market-mediated access as a form of economic exchange and non-market-mediated access (sharing) as a form of social exchange (Bardhi et al. 2014).

This emerging field of research has so far been focused on unpacking the nature of consumption during market-mediated access (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2007; Papier et al. 2011; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Lamberton and Rose 2012), or intra-family/friend sharing and borrowing (Belk 2010; Belk and Llamas 2011; Jenkins et al. 2014). Prior research has also predominantly studied Western consumer culture contexts, especially in North America, and we know very little about resource distribution practices and related consumption consequences in other sociocultural contexts. This is important because, as Ribot and Peluso (2003) note, "people and institutions are positioned differently in relation to resources at various historical moments and geographical scales" (154). Thus, social, institutional, and economic arrangements of people and institutions should affect access and ownership practices. The nature and value of access-based consumption may change across different cultural contexts and at various times in history. Dimensionalizing and historicizing access practices, both market-mediated and non-market-mediated, will enable us to further conceptualize the role of these practices in today's contemporary market economy as well as identify conditions under which access practices emerge. As the nature of exchange is structured by the social and institutional organization of the economy (Granovetter 1985), we aim to examine access practices in distinct economic systems as well as within various cultural contexts.

Economic Systems

Modes of exchange are closely linked to the discussion of economic systems, the broad economic approaches society has developed to circulate and manage its resources (Arndt 1981; Granovetter 1985; Scaraboto 2015). A foundational work in conceptualizing economic systems is the historical institutional analysis of Polanyi (1944/2001), which established the notion of the modern market economy (cf. Giesler and Veresiu 2014). While there have been decades of scholarship across multiple disciplines on economic systems, our aim here is to introduce the main conceptual foundations, as defined by Polanyi. Polanyi examined the social organization of the economy, in other words, the "set of social institutions, political constraints, and other circumstances constituting the context of individual economic behavior" (Cangiani 2011, 178) identified by the term "economic system." He identifies two prototypical economic systems: (*a*) the nonmarket economic systems that correspond to premodern societies, and (*b*) the market-based economies associated with modern society and the capitalist system. In his analysis, Polanyi (1944/2001) identifies the levels of embeddedness/disembeddedness of the economy in social life as a distinguishing characteristic of these two economic systems. He marked the institutional change that came with modernity and capitalism as the "great transformation" of society into a market economy. Economic transactions (i.e., production, exchange, and consumption), which are the interest of our analysis, are a by-product of the economic system.

In premodern, premarket societies, also known as *nonmarket economies*, economic behavior is embedded in social relations. Economic activity is guided by social norms, traditions, and kinship obligations. "The embeddedness argument stresses the role of concrete personal relations and structures (or networks) of such relations in generating trust and discouraging malfeasance" (Granovetter 1985, 490). Nonmarket economies exist in contexts where society and culture, rather than the economy, arrange and facilitate the transfer of material resources. Economic transactions are often ordered in much the way interpersonal relationships are structured (Harder and Wenzel 2012). Material goods are valued as means to serve social functions: "Man does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets" (Polanyi 1944/2001, 40). Economic behavior and exchange are not linked to specific economic interests attached to the possession of goods. Examples of such economic systems include redistribution societies, where a central tribal leader or lord redistributes to members of their society, and those societies are based on reciprocal exchange (Polanyi 1944/2001). Price (1975) adds to these cases intimate economies (e.g., family, small community, groups of hunters), a social system personal and small in scale where the members know each other, frequent face-to-face interactions take place, and interpersonal sentiments have developed (4). These forms of economic organizations are based around the social aspects of the society in which they operate and are explicitly tied to social relationships. Polanyi argues that these economic forms depend on the social principles of the societal structure (e.g., central figure of tribal leader as organizing the resource distribution), symmetry, and self-sufficiency.

In the *market economy*, the market becomes the specific institution through which the economy is organized, with exchange becoming the prevalent form of integration (Polanyi 1944/2001; Cangiani 2011, 179). Market economy implies a self-regulating system of markets; the market serves as the ultimate regulator of prices and economic life. The control of the economic activity by the market also permeates social institutions and relations that surround these activities, where the running of society becomes an adjunct to the market. "Instead of the economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system" (Polanyi 1944/2001, 60). Polanyi identifies the emergence of the market economy with the Industrial Revolution and with the capitalist system, where things like labor (human beings) and land (natural surroundings) became commodities. Slater (1999) also identifies this time period as the beginning of modern consumer culture. Polanyi sees the emergence of the modern nation-state as a response to deal with the issues of the common and social problems associated with the free market. While economic activity has always been a part of any society, Polanyi (1944/2001) argues, "no economy has ever existed that, even in principle, was controlled by markets" (43). He identifies this as a clear break with premodern societies; in market economies the autonomous institutionalization of the economy gives it the dominant position in society (Cangiani 2011). In addition, the emergence of the market economy shaped a particular kind of subjectivity, *Homo economicus*, in which humans act as rational utility maximizers.

This evolutionary perspective on the distinction of market versus nonmarket systems has been challenged by various scholars (e.g., Appadurai 1986; Weinberger and Walledorf 2012; Scaraboto 2015). These scholars argue that all forms of economic systems continue to coexist side by side, with most societies having a mixed economic system rather than pure forms of these systems. That is, hybrid forms of economies between nonmarket and market can exist. An example would be intracommunity gifts, where corporations "gift" a parade to a community via sponsorship (Weinberger and Wallendorf 2012), or when a software developer gives away software for free (freeware), but consumers choose to pay for it in the guise of a donation, to enable upkeep and upgrades of the software (Scaraboto 2015). These studies articulate the view that various spheres of exchange can coexist without much conflict between market and nonmarket logics (Parry and Bloch 1989). While we use the prototypes of market and nonmarket economic systems as conceptual devices useful to our analysis of access-based exchange (Appadurai 1986; Belk 2010), we also consider such hybrid spheres that emerge especially because of cultural and social class differences.

In addition to these hybrid forms, a command/planned economic system, where the government controls the economy, can also represent a hybrid form of social and market systems, such as the socialist economies that emerged post–World War II in Eastern Europe and Asia. In these systems, the state decides how to distribute and use resources, regulates prices, and may determine the type of education and job that people perform. No private property is allowed; public property dominates (Cova, Maclaran, and Bradshaw 2013). Drakulic (1987) notes that in communist economies, there is a complicated mix of gift giving, sharing, bartering, hoarding, and government-controlled market exchanges. However, it should be noted that the communist form of economic exchange failed, and although China still retains elements of a government-controlled economy, most economic exchange there is marketized. However, the social fabric of ex-communist societies continues to be shaped by a culture of distrust of strangers and institutions, and interdependence among peers that is characteristic of communist economies. In a situation of extreme lack of generalized and institutional trust, kinship-based tribes have reemerged as the main organizing structure of economic activity in many of these countries (e.g., Bardhi and Kapllani 2012). For reasons of brevity and focus, while we acknowledge its existence, we do not consider a command system in our analysis.

With the end of most socialist systems, and the global dominance of capitalist, free-market ideology, the consensus among scholars post-twentieth-century is that the Western world is increasingly living in a neoliberal market economy (Bauman 2000; Harvey 2007). The market logic of instrumental rationality has become the dominant order as the determining role of the economy gains the status of a superstructure (Bauman 2000; Varman and Vikas 2007). This has been characterized as the age of liquid modernity, where social structures are changing shape rapidly, and the deterritorialization of the economy from its traditional political, ethnic, and cultural entanglements highlighted by Polanyi (1944/2001) has increased (Bauman 2007). The process of liquidification of social structures is reducing the impact of the past, traditions, loyalties, and obligations—ethical or familial—that constrained the rational calculation of effects, leading to a privatized and increasingly disembedded version of modernity (Bauman 2000, 2007). The instrumentality that underlines the market and economic exchange has come to shape social exchange and personal relationships (Bauman 2003). Contemporary society is also associated with an extreme process of individualization, where identity is transformed from a given into a task where one has the obligation to perform and be responsible for the consequences of their performance (Bauman 2000, 2013; Giesler and Veresiu 2014). This has occurred hand in hand with the devolution of the state powers to individual interests and a self-regulating market (Harvey 2007). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2015) argue that these characteristics in combination with the digital economy lead to a dematerialization of our lives (cf. Belk 2013), whereby consumers value access to ownership and possession, and that use value rather than identity or linking value (Cova 1997) drives consumption.

These features of the neoliberal market economy in liquid modernity represent an interesting context to examine how they might shape exchange. First, however, we focus on contextualizing the nature of access practices in nonmarket economic systems, then follow with the marketized systems to delineate how these practices are tied to the political economy in which they are manifested.

ACCESS PRACTICES IN NONMARKET ECONOMIES

As we highlight above, Polanyi (1944/2001) characterizes nonmarket economies by the social embeddedness of market transactions in social structures and networks of relationships. Existing relationships and trust are often considered important for transactions to take place. Anthropological research on exchange within nonmarket economies shows that social exchange dominates the resource distribution practices in hunter-gatherer and tribal societies. The focus of this research has mainly been on sharing, and the nature of exchange in nonmarket economies is similar to Belk's (2010) notion of sharing in contemporary economies. In contemporary market economies, sharing happens primarily in an intrafamilial context or other alternative nonmarket economies that coexist within the market economy, as consumers are embedded in a marketized economy. However, in nonmarket economies, it occurs community-wide.

The nature of economic relationships has implications for the nature of ownership in nonmarket economies. A distinction from marketized economies is that ownership is not at the individual level, but rather organized around the unit of the society, be it that of kinship or community (e.g., Hawkes, Connell, and Jones 2001; Harder and Wenzel 2012). This is the case even when the individual hunted or created the object being shared, which would be considered individual property and part of the extended self in contemporary consumer culture (Belk 1988; Rochat et al. 2014). Distribution of resources is guided not by individual ownership but by shared ownership principles and the practice of communal sharing, where access is available to everyone within the social circle (Nettle et al. 2011). Such a distributive arrangement is essential as it is psychologically and morally binding, and thus acted out normatively in these societies. We can see this in contemporary Aboriginal culture in Australia as well, where sharing among the entire community is the norm. Although Aborigines have been introduced to contemporary consumer culture and want to own objects individually, when someone brings an object into the community, there is no need to ask to borrow or share it; the object is simply assumed to be owned by all members of the community (Ostergaard, Belk, and Groves 2000).

Sharing is defined as "the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act or process of receiving or taking something from others for our use" (Belk 2007, 126). In the anthropological literature, sharing is distinct from reciprocity as a transactional mode in its own right, related to a particular form of thinking about property and of organizing the social life typical of social economies (Widlok 2013). Sharing is prosocial because it extends the circle of people who can enjoy the benefits of the resource (Belk 2010). Thus, sharing is highly valued as a practice in providing shared access and usage of limited resources, such as food, as well as collective resources, such as water or energy.

As a form of social exchange, sharing is a complex phenomenon, as it builds on other practices and social interactions that are combined in a particular social environment (Widlok 2013). In hunter-gatherer societies, where sharing of resources is the focus, it begins—before the final transfer of the hunt and the shared meal—with the mutual swapping or borrowing of arrows for the hunt. This enables the arrow maker to participate in the hunt indirectly and secure resources. Then, the sharing practices continue as the hunters share primarily at the killing site, secondarily upon returning to camp, and again after the food has been prepared and is shared mainly by the women rather than the male hunters (Widlok 2013). Thus, sharing is a collaborative consumption act as one or more people engage in joint activity with others either before or during the hunt or as the consumption of the meal takes place after the hunt (Felson and Spaeth 1978). In this way, the anthropological research in nonmarket economies outlines the origin behind our contemporary thinking and conceptualization of sharing as a form of "collaborative consumption" (e.g., Botsman and Rogers 2010). Further, it emphasizes the fact that sharing is an exchange practice that is intertwined into other everyday social practices as well as interpersonal relationships. Sharing requires temporal and task coordination with others.

Another characteristic of sharing is that it follows the social structure of the community but at the same time is essential to maintaining this order. Kinship emerges as the main organizing structure of sharing practices among the intimate economies studied in anthropological research, as it forms their primary economic unit. While sharing dominates within the kin and community boundaries, market exchange practices of selling and buying occur outside kinship boundaries, with, for example, dog owners or outsiders. For instance, Harder and Wenzel (2012), in their study of contemporary Inuit economic resource sharing, which predominantly focuses on food, money, and equipment, find that sharing of resources is structured very similarly to the local interpersonal relationships. Among the Inuit tribes, food sharing follows the structure of obedience and respect, where food moves from the young to the old. Gender is also a factor, as women are seen as subordinate to men in the sharing of resources. Women focus on meal preparation and thus tertiary sharing rather than resource accumulation and distribution, which are carried out by the male hunters. In this way, resource sharing reinforces the age and gender structure of these societies. Food is also shared along the lines of affective closeness, that is, between parent-child as well as siblings. Finally, events and community rituals also punctuate sharing practices in these economies. For example, extended family sharing takes place when a boy's maturity is celebrated after his first hunt (Harder and Wenzel 2012).

Another important point of discussion relates to the motivations behind sharing at the individual level. Sharing has predominantly been thought of as altruistic because one is sharing his or her own property, creation, or hunts with others and incurs the costs of that act (Hawkes et al. 2001; Belk 2010). However, anthropologists have highlighted other, more individual factors that drive sharing among traditional economies, such as risk reduction/insurance and status enhancement in the community. Risk reduction is guaranteed via sharing practices, as sharing the prey that one kills with others in the community will ensure that his household will also be taken care of in the future when he is unsuccessful in the hunt. Sharing of collective resources also serves as an insurance against natural fluctuation, especially among societies that obtain their provisioning directly from wild natural sources (Bird-David 1990). Status gains among men and the community/village are another motivation for engaging in sharing exchanges in tribal communities. Hawkes et al. (2001), in their study of meat sharing in a Hadza community of hunter-gatherers, find that men were highly motivated to hunt large animals or compete in being successful in hunting because the more one shared from the prey, the higher was his status in the community (e.g., as a good neighbor). Similar to gift giving, sharing also creates obligations to share with each other and others in the community. Thus, status inferences were made from such obligations in the community.

The research on nonmarket economies highlights the social role of sharing in ensuring social and community wellbeing. Culturally embedded sharing facilitates access to resources, to ensure everyone within a particular social group has access to food, money, and equipment, albeit distributed according to their social role. In other words, women who did not hunt, for example, but provided cooking skills, received their share of the hunt from the men (Harder and Wenzel 2012). In this way, society well-being becomes a shared responsibility. Sharing is also preferred to fighting for resources because it incurs fewer conflicts (Hawkes et al. 2001). Governance structures are also embedded in the social structure of such economies. Besley (1995) emphasizes that nonmarket institutions are more effective than contractual or formal financial institutions in guarding against risk and credit sharing in intimate economies. Most social structures already have mechanisms of social control in place to limit antisocial behavior, which include peer pressure and community shaming. One example is peer monitoring (Arnott and Stiglitz 1990), where individuals are perceived as having a greater ability to monitor and guard each other's behaviors because of the personal history with each other.

We note that the Inuit sharing described above, as well as the Aboriginal conceptualization practices of sharing, are in contemporary times, demonstrating that social forms of exchange can still occur. But this is in contrast to the findings of intrafamily sharing in Western consumer culture where the unit of sharing is that of the immediate family (Belk 2010; Belk and Llamas 2011) rather than kinship groups. In sum, when we examine access in nonmarket economies, we see that it is socially based rather than market-mediated, which means it takes the form of sharing. Yet, this sharing is not necessarily done out of the modern, Western conception of the individual self, sharing personal properties with known or unknown others. Rather, sharing is conceptualized and enacted at the kinship or community level and provides the basis for a social structure to emerge that allows for efficient resource distribution among the population. Thus, the construct of sharing is contextually dependent on how a society or community engages in resource distribution.

ACCESS IN CONTEMPORARY MARKET ECONOMIES

The market economic system represents an economy where the market supply and demand regulates the economy without much government intervention, and resources are owned by individuals (Polanyi 1944/2001). Consumption resources are acquired via buying in the marketplace, and the dominant mode is that of private ownership. Private, individual ownership provides owners with the exclusive right to regulate or deny access to others; to use, sell, and retain any profits yielded from the object's use; and to transform its structure (Snare 1972, 200). Sole ownership enables freedom and responsibility toward the object, with clear boundaries between the self and others. Until recently, private ownership has been and continues to remain the dominant normative ideal, as capitalist societies are proclaimed ownership societies. Access historically is seen as an inferior consumption mode in market economies (Ronald 2008; Walsh 2011), limited mainly to traditional long-term rental (e.g., car or apartment rentals), which was either structured as episodic, for example during business travels or associated with youth consumption (student rental apartments), or for consumers who cannot afford to be owners (Durgee and O'Conner 1995; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Research has indicated that renters were socially framed as "flawed consumers" when compared to owners because they were perceived as wasteful, precarious, and limited in individual freedom (Cheshire, Walters, and Rosenblatt 2010).

Recently, with the emergence of the access economy, a shift of the sign value associated with access has occurred, with access practices experienced by consumers as cool, smart, and resource efficient, and framed by marketers as sustainable and prosocial (Belk 2010; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Access to objects—especially durable goods and housing, which constitute the core of individual property—is starting to become ubiquitous in urban areas, global cities, and among the millennial generation. Cheshire et al. (2010) note that the costs of acquiring and maintaining ownership over time, the instability in social relationships, and uncertainties in the labor markets have rendered ownership a less attainable and more precarious consumption mode than it once was, especially for the young generation (cf. Ulver and Ostberg 2014). As a result, we are seeing a decrease in ownership of once desirable product categories. For example, the *New York Times* notes a reduction in young adult car buying: they now buy just 27% of all new vehicles sold in America, down from 38% in 1985 (Weisman 2012). And levels of homeowners are falling drastically: by 2025, over 40% of people under 40 in urban cities will be renters rather than owners, due to their inability to afford the rising housing prices (Osbourne 2015). Similarly, there has been a marked decline in the once mighty jewelry industry: "Those diamond earrings are a classic, but a future purchase may not hold up in the same way. An eternity band isn't like an iPhone—there's no trade-in plan after every two years. . . . Millennials are spending more money than ever on tech and travel. A diamond may be forever, but in a generation that values impermanence, the one-time slogan of the century is looking more and more like an outdated mantra"

(Shah 2015). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2015) argue that this shift from permanent, material objects to impermanent, more ephemeral, and lighter consumption represents a shift from solid consumption to liquid consumption. “Lighter” consumers and lifestyles increasingly facilitated via digital and access-based consumption make for more flexible and mobile human resources, which are in high demand in the contemporary globalized market economy (cf. Tomlinson 2007). However, it is important to note that access has not transformed the individualized private nature of ownership; rather, access to resources via the market from companies or other users is increasingly becoming a viable alternative to acquisition.

The rise of access has also gone hand in hand with the emergence and pervasiveness of digital technology and consumption, which facilitate and provide the infrastructure that supports access-based services (Botsman and Rogers 2010; Belk 2013). Via websites and apps, consumers can access things like short-term car rides (Uber), peer-to-peer money transfer (Transferwise), and temporary use of designer dresses and handbags (RentTheRunway). These marketplaces are characterized by individualized, short-term, immediate, and episodic transactions, where cost-efficient exchanges are motivated by self-interest and profit making, all features of economic exchanges. Such autonomous transactions do not necessarily foster a long-term relationship to the object being consumed, the brand, or other consumers. For example, in the study of Zipcar consumption, the world’s largest car-sharing company, consumers can access a variety of car brands on a short-term basis in return for hourly fees, without much integration with other users or company employees but rather completely via technology (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). While in this model, consumers are engaging in occasional renting and are accessing cars from the company, in the Airbnb model, consumers pay a fee via the company’s website or app to stay at someone’s occupied or unoccupied home (*Economist* 2013; Bardhi et al. 2014). In this later case, consumers are accessing each other’s homes via a market-mediated system to access a variety of places to stay that often provide better economic value and location than hotels. In this case, hotels and Airbnb constitute an example of competitive alternatives within the access economy.

While the term “sharing” is often used in conjunction with these companies, John (2013) notes that the concept of sharing becomes fuzzier in a Web 2.0 milieu, where user-generated content and social media are dominant. Consumers are constantly asked to “share” their status, share others’ content, and share their opinions in peer-to-peer reviews; thus, “sharing” becomes the word that describes our overall participation in Web 2.0. Prosumers, who are both producers and consumers, are asked to share content, which is unpaid; Wikipedia as an example of this model. In the so-called sharing economy of consumption, John (2013) notes that no one is sharing with each other, but an object is being shared, like a Zipcar for example. John (2013) argues that because consumers are so used to sharing in an online context, this is what is driving the current sharing economy in an offline context. Indeed, John (2012) notes that the term “sharing” has taken on mythological properties in Web 2.0, with companies such as Facebook exhorting us to “share our lives,” and companies like Google talking about sharing our information rather than selling our information to other interested parties.

Access-based practices are also characterized by high individual consumer involvement, where logics of production, consumption, and entrepreneurship coexist without a clear boundary separation, known as the process of *prosumption* (Ritzer 2015). Dominated by an infrastructure of self-service technologies, access-based consumption has transformed the role of the consumer from a passive user to an active participant in value co-creation and popularized the sharing of content and personal information (Jenkins 2006; Belk 2013, 2014; Ramaswamy and Kerimcan 2014; Ritzer 2014). In access services, production of the market offerings as well as services are often outsourced to the user-consumer. For example, the consumer is producing the car rental online when reserving a car on Zipcar’s app as well as providing the service delivery, by cleaning up the car, filling up the gas, and returning it on time for the next user (Frei 2005; Ritzer 2015). Owners are embracing the new digital marketplaces to rent out their own possessions with strangers for profit, thus becoming micro-entrepreneurs. With cars, we can see car owners becoming Uber drivers, and with houses, we can see the rising popularity of renting out one’s spare room to guests via Airbnb. Thus, in light of today’s society being market-dominated in almost all aspects of life and increasingly individualized (Bauman 2000), the resource circulation practices that dominate the access economy constitute forms of economic exchange rather than social exchange (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012).

While the supporters of the access economy have framed it as an anticonsumerist revolution that will lead to the end of market capitalism via social collectives and sharing (e.g., Botsman and Rogers 2010; Rifkin 2014), others disagree.

Interrogating the nature of the capitalist marketplace populated by prosumers, Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) have concluded that these practices are reinforcing rather than ending the capitalist market economy; they are producing another form of capitalism where "control and exploitation take on a different character . . . : unpaid rather than paid labor and offering products at no cost" in a system dominated by abundance rather than scarcity (13; see also Ritzer 2014; 2015). Such practices prioritize the exploitation of largely uncommodified prosumers who are generally unpaid and lack long-term benefits (Ritzer 2015). The responsibility of the individual consumer as value creator in the marketplace is another aspect of the neoliberal responsibility of the consumer who is accountable for being sustainable, healthy, and financially responsible (Giesler and Veresiu 2014). Thus, the micro-entrepreneur consumers of the access economy represent another level of the neoliberal philosophy of today's market economy.

As people are increasingly engaging with each other for profit-making reasons rather than for simply social reasons, the market logic of instrumental rationality is permeating social and intimate aspects of life (Bauman 2007). Consumer behavior research also supports this by highlighting the lack of communities in access-based services as well as the contagion effects when product usage is shared (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). While the access economy has been touted as facilitating community, we have not seen this to date. It is very difficult for consumers to be attached to access rather than ownership brands; they do not feel connected to their fellow users and do not want to form communities with the brand or with each other (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Living in liquid modernity, consumers do not value these attachments and connections, but rather value freedom from others and flexibility to change affiliations often (Bauman 2000; Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt 2015). In addition, the access economy facilitates a mentality of seeing other people as sources of income: an acceleration of the commodification of time and space. For example, Youshaei (2015) chronicles how an Uber driver not only sees others as potential customers who will pay him to take them from point A to point B, but he also operates his jewelry design business out of his Uber car, using it as a showroom.

There are also trust issues involved when consumers "share" with other consumers that they do not know. Hardin (1968) has identified the lack of trust among strangers "sharing" communal property as the tragedy of the commons. That is, consumers do not trust others to act in the interest of all, but rather only in their own interest, and thus they act also only in their own interest, and the object being shared is taken care of by no one. This type of lack of trust has been referred to by Sahlins (1972) as negative reciprocity: goods and services are exchanged, but typically only one side benefits from the exchange. Indeed, Schaefers et al. (2015) note that customer misbehavior is the norm when goods are communally accessed rather than owned. That is, customers do not care about the objects they access or each other, and become contagious within a community of people who are accessing the same goods (like cars via Zipcar, for example, in Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). The misbehavior contagion became stronger the more anonymous the other users were (Schaefers et. al. 2015).

There have been many suggested solutions for managing the commons, a resource shared by or affecting a community, and reducing negative reciprocity. In the access economy, typically this takes the shape of trying to create the social obligations that come from being a part of a community. However, creating community as a normative governance mechanism that characterizes social exchange in nonmarket economies has not been successful in market economies (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Other more regulatory and instrumental market systems (e.g., penalties) tend to work better to regulate the lack of trust in access, such as surveillance and ratings systems.

Thus, what is popularly termed the *sharing economy* can be more accurately called the *access economy*. Skageby (2015) notes that sharing has become a conflated concept; it has "been effectively co-opted to produce the foundation for the 'sharing economy'—a kind of short-term individualist money exchange under the guise of collective resource sharing. Essentially 'sharing' as an economic concept in the digital age moved from being about virtual and digital gifting and public goods toward being a business model focusing on material commodities exchanged for a price in the market." In the access economy (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2015), consumers are interested in the use, not the product (Matzler, Veider, and Kathan 2015). Ownership is a burden, consumers want to be able to resell easily, consumers want flexibility and variety in how and when they access, and they want someone else to deal with maintenance and upkeep (Matzler et al. 2015).

Others have highlighted how the access economy has become a mechanism of neoliberalism. For example, Henwood (2015) points out that Airbnb greases the wheels of gentrification, as being able to Airbnb spare rooms takes those spare rooms off the rental market. This leads to fewer local residents in a neighborhood being able to find rental properties and facilitates outsiders moving in en masse, as they can afford rising rental costs by Airbnb-ing their spare rooms. Also, while access economy companies typically have communitarian rhetoric in their branding messages, they tend to have low wages (e.g., Uber drivers). As Henwood (2015) notes, "The sharing economy is a nice way for rapacious capitalists to monetize the desperation of people in the postcrisis economy while sounding generous, and to evoke a fantasy of community in an atomized population. The sharing economy looks like a classically neoliberal response to neoliberalism: individualized and market driven, it sees us all as micro-entrepreneurs fending for ourselves in a hostile world."

In sum, the nature and role of access have mutated fairly substantially from nonmarket economies to the contemporary neoliberal market economy. Access is achieved mainly via participation in the marketplace and tends to be motivated by self-interest, instrumentality, and profit making, and governed by market reciprocity. Yet, the contemporary phenomenon we are describing has largely been researched and written about in a Western context and, more specifically, a North American context. While, along with Bauman (2000, 2007), we see all contemporary economies as being dominated by market concerns, which means that there will be a preponderance of market-mediated exchange, there will still be spheres of non-market-mediated exchange as well. We saw some examples previously of tribes who maintain non-market-exchange logics, such as the Aboriginals in Australia and the Inuits at the North Pole. We also see the relevance of some moderating factors in the relationship between economic structure and the nature of access. That is, even within a marketized economy, culture and social class can foster a different relationship to exchange and access.

CULTURE AND ACCESS

Although contemporary access practices, especially in the context of the sharing economy, have primarily been studied in a Western context, we could expect them to differ across various cultural contexts. The self as depicted in the theoretical notion of sharing (Belk 2010) is a Western, individualistic self (Arnould and Rose 2015). Thus, in other parts of the world, where the sense of self is more interdependent, the dominant access practices may take the form of sharing. For example, Joy (2001) describes how an interdependent self, dominant in China, leads to reciprocity being discouraged and thus no need to build relationships through reciprocal exchange, as strong relationships with others is the norm, rather than something that needs reciprocal exchanges to establish. Similarly, in Korea, there are wider exchange networks, compared to North America, and more social pressure to reciprocate exchanges (Park 1998). That is, there are more people who are not necessarily close, with whom sharing is not a choice but rather a social obligation one must attend to. Thus, we can see how an interdependent sense of self can lead to different practices of sharing.

Another important issue that is raised when consumers are engaged in market-mediated access, as alluded to earlier, is trust (Botsman 2015). How much will strangers trust each other, and what mechanisms will be acceptable to engender trust among strangers? In a North American context, engaging in market-mediated access-based consumption with strangers tends to be thought of as a "risk-reward relationship" (Bisby 2015). Consumers frame their experience in the sharing economy as taking on risks, such as having strangers in their house (Airbnb) or in their car (Lyft), in return for monetary rewards (Bisby 2015), rather than thinking about the access economy in a participatory, community-building way (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). As Botsman (2015) notes, consumers do have some level of trust in each other, in the sense that they rely on peer reviews to make choices on Airbnb or Uber, but they fall back on institutions, rather than each other, when peer trust fails. For example, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) have noted a preference for Big Brother–style surveillance of other consumers to ensure the system runs smoothly. In addition, trust based on peer review can engender obligations for forced intimacy. Streitfield (2015) notes that because Uber drivers rate passengers, in addition to the other way around, if a passenger wants to use the time in the car to do work, or otherwise not interact with the driver, they feel like they must apologize for this lack of social interaction or else risk a bad rating, which can result in not being picked up by other Uber drivers in the future.

This risk-and-reward view of access can vary culturally, though. For example, in the Chinese context, trust-based relationships—*guanxi*—strongly influence what is shared and why (Shin et al. 2007). That is, the stronger one's *guanxi* is, the more likely one is to share with others. Shin et al. (2007) note that the reason why *guanxi* networks have such a strong effect on how much people share with each other is because strong networks engender trust. In addition, Rochat et al. (2014) demonstrate that among children across cultures, attribution of ownership was universally derived from creation, rather than first contact or equity. That is, children ascribed ownership based on who created an object, rather than who played with it first, or what the fairest distribution of ownership might be. However, there was a higher propensity to divide an object in half, to share it, among Chinese children, compared to other cultures. The authors note that sharing with others is a cardinal rule at the communist-run day care where the study was conducted, and thus this value had become internalized in the Chinese children in a way it had not with children from other cultural contexts. As we noted earlier, a command economic system shapes societal values and norms strongly, and thus we see this higher propensity to share, typical of the interdependence fostered in command economies. In sum, we can see that cultural context is integral to understanding how sharing does or does not become natural to people based on their upbringing.

SOCIAL CLASS AND ACCESS

Can access practices also vary based on social class? It has been demonstrated that lower socioeconomic groups are more prosocial (Piff et al. 2010). Piff et al. (2010) attribute this to an increased commitment to egalitarian values as well as stronger feelings of compassion, compared to higher social classes. This implies that lower social classes would be more open to sharing with others. So far, access economy companies have been targeting middle-class consumers and upward, as they are the ones who can utilize the technology that most sharing economy companies are based on (Badger 2015). Yet, from a sociocultural perspective, perhaps the working class would not be as resistant to the sharing ideology as the middle classes are (e.g., see how middle-class consumers don't trust or want to interact with each other when using Zipcar: Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Indeed, Fraiberger and Sundararajan (2015) show that low-income consumers stand to gain the most from the sharing economy: low-income consumers can use it to afford and experience things that would normally be out of reach. Further, sharing resources or shared ownership is efficient when resources are scarce. There is some evidence that suggests low-income consumers can indeed gain much from the sharing economy. In a non-Western context, Smythe et. al. (2010) chronicle how Indian consumers manage to share entertainment content with each other via their mobile phones despite numerous technological barriers to doing so, as entertainment is such a valued commodity in rural India, and the opportunity to share digital files greatly enhances their quality of life.

Bauman (2007) suggests that in a liquid modern society, there will be failed consumers, who cannot muster the resources to deal with the uncertainty inherent in everyday life. We can look at downwardly mobile consumers as examples of these failed consumers and see how they are utilizing access practices to stay afloat. For example, in their study of poor single mothers in Australia, Henry and Bardhi (2013) find that collective resource accumulation and distribution of basic necessities such as food, entertainment, and services helped these mothers to cope with downward economic mobility post-divorce. They found that lower income single mothers will organize small collectives to buy and accumulate resources in bulk and then share them as needed. We can also look to sharing practices in Greece, where much of the middle class has become downwardly mobile since 2009 due to the financial crisis, to see how moving class positions has affected sharing and access practices. Chatzidakis (2014) describes how, in the period between 2009 and 2014, consumers set up collectives where others could get a variety of goods for free, trading and bartering in communal areas such as parks and parking lots. But post-2014, when the crisis got even worse, many of these consumer collectives were abandoned, and people began moving back in with extended families. There was no longer the luxury of trying to share with and help anonymous others. That is, sharing practices returned to being located within the home (Belk 2010) as downward mobility increased. Indeed, Karenika and Hogg (2015) describe how Greek parents readily share whatever they have—cars, homes, food, clothes—with their unemployed children who have moved back in with them. Yet both the parents as well as the adult children have internal conflicts about this sharing: the children feel guilt and shame while the parents lament lost opportunities. Thus, when economic conditions are worsening in a society, and we see a surfeit of failed consumers (Bauman 2007), as in Greece, sharing practices can change their nature as well as their meaning.

Despite the potential benefit for lower income groups to engage in sharing more often, we see very low numbers in terms of lower income groups' participation in the anonymous, market-mediated access economy, such as utilizing bike sharing (Badger 2015). One explanation may be because the lower socioeconomic classes have a lower degree of social trust compared to higher income groups (Pew Research Center 2010). That is, while lower income groups have stronger egalitarian values and higher levels of demonstrated compassion (Piff et al. 2010), they also demonstrate lower levels of trust toward strangers, a key component for take-up in the sharing economy, as mentioned previously.

In sum, there is variation in how natural non-market-mediated access—sharing—is, how sharing is enacted, and how much consumers trust strangers across cultural contexts as well as across socioeconomic levels, even within a marketized political economy. This reinforces the need to not essentialize access practices. For future research, we can focus on obtaining a thorough understanding of how access can affect social relations, such as the various ways in which downwardly mobile, failed consumers may use sharing practices to survive in an individualized, market-based economy.

DISCUSSION

This article contributes to the emerging field of consumer research on nonownership consumption by dimensionalizing and historizing access. We contribute to the debate on conceptualization of consumption circulation practices (Bardhi et al. 2014; Arnould and Rose 2015). We highlight the distinction between market-mediated access practices, such as renting, and non-market-mediated access (i.e., sharing) practices. As we show elsewhere, market-mediated access is a form of economic exchange where consumers are primarily motivated by individual and utilitarian motives, avoid identification to the object being accessed and to the other consumers in market exchanges, and are governed by market norms of tit-for-tat or negative reciprocity (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). We distinguish sharing as a non-market-mediated form of access, as it is embedded in social relationships and governed by community norms (see also Bardhi et al. 2014). Non-market-mediated access is motivated by prosocial motives and helps sustain relationships rather than utilitarian individual motives (Belk 2010). Sharing is the allocation of economic goods and services without instrumentality within a group and is patterned by the structure of this group (Price 1975). While the nature of access-based practices as well as related consumption may vary depending on whether they are autonomous (e.g., renting) or social (e.g., peer-to-peer renting) (cf. Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012), or on whether one is accessing from and among strangers (Benkler 2004) or among friends (cf. Belk 2010), it is important to distinguish between market and nonmarket exchange. This distinction has implications for consumer motivations, relationships to accessed items and services, as well as relationships to other consumers and consumption. Importantly, we conceptualize sharing as a particular form of access rather than distinct from access, as sharing allows consumers to benefit temporarily from the use of products/services without a transfer of ownership outside the market.

Within consumer research, resource circulation practices such as those that enable access (reviewed here) have been examined primarily in a North American, middle-class context. To broaden our understanding of these constructs, we have explored how they developed in nonmarket economies. This analysis allows us to see how and when sharing can take place, and the close connection between the fabric of social and institutional arrangement of the economy and sharing. In contemporary times, we have increasingly moved away from nonmarket exchange and are living in a neoliberal market economy (Harvey 2007). In line with Bauman (2000, 2007), who describes the marketization and individualization of contemporary society, we demonstrate that today's mentality toward resource distribution is less about sharing and more about monetizing individually owned resources. That is, why leave my car parked in my garage when I can charge people to ride around in it? Why let my spare room lay empty when I don't have guests when I can monetize that space? Everything has become commodified, resulting in the rise of the access economy (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2015). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2015) identify this rise of the access economy as part of a larger trend toward liquid consumption, where the use value of objects, exchanges, and relationships becomes central, over and above identity or linking value, which tends to dominate the type of sharing that takes place in nonmarket exchange.

In comparing nonmarket economies to market-based economies, access practices in nonmarket economies take the form of sharing, and in market-based economies, access practices, such as renting from companies or among consumers via marketplaces (i.e., peer-to-peer renting) for temporal use of the items, dominate. This has implications for the nature and role of resource distribution practices. In nonmarket economies, sharing follows the social structure of the society and insures members of a community against risk and lack of resources, while at the same time strengthens these communities. In contrast, access via the market is driven by individual utilitarian motives and guarded by market norms of reciprocity without any prosocial benefits (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Lamberton and Rose 2012). It reinforces the market exchange and the individualization of the society, counter to the spirit of the so-called sharing economy (Eckhardt and Bardhi 2015). In this way, access practices are reinforcing the socioeconomic structure of society. This suggests that an analysis of contemporary access practices without taking into account the socioeconomic institutions and environment is myopic. Without these lenses, market exchange practices such as temporary renting are mistaken or masked as social exchange (sharing; Bardhi et al. 2014; Eckhardt and Bardhi 2015; Horning 2015).

This distinction has managerial implications. Typically, non-market-mediated access-based models, while popular, struggle to become sustainable without incorporating a market mechanism. For example, Couchsurfing, the social networking site that allows strangers to stay in each other's homes, is transforming from a nonprofit organization based on sharing practices to a for-profit business based on peer-to-peer renting as a way to become sustainable. This move may be at the cost of its core members and sense of community that have become characteristic of this system. Our argument here remains that when market transactions are incorporated into social exchange, it can change the nature of sharing or borrowing practices into economic exchange (cf. Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Some start-ups are fostering and guarding the social exchange nature of the system by keeping market transactions out of the resource distribution system. A good example of this is the dog-borrowing service Borrowmydoggy.com, where owners allow strangers to take care of their pets without any money exchanging hands. Members pay a membership fee that goes toward maintaining the community, not to individual members. However, such systems are rare. Indeed, many of the peer-to-peer exchange systems that do not include market mediation, and that tend to be nonprofits (e.g., Share Some Sugar), are no longer around due to lack of pick-up with consumers (Kessler 2015). That is, the ability to access rarely used items from neighbors, such as a drill, rather than buying a drill, is not of interest to most people (Kessler 2015). Thus, these types of sharing-enabling websites have largely turned out not to be as transformative as Botsman and Rodgers (2010) conceptualized them when they were first introduced. Our framework can help explain this, in that market-mediated exchange, rather than sharing, is what consumers in today's individualized, marketized economy are most comfortable with.

Yet there are other factors that also affect how sharing plays out in the marketplace, and we show how, with regard to culture, sense of self and trust will vary culturally, affecting access practices. Also, lower social classes may have an increased propensity to share, yet also have lower levels of social trust. Thus, an important contribution of our work is to demonstrate that access practices cannot be essentialized; they will vary based on a variety of factors, a few of which have been explored here. This nonessentialized view of access practices encourages future research in several areas relating to examining ownership and access across cultural and social contexts. As our analysis has demonstrated, resource distribution arrangements differ significantly across cultures based on research outside the current access economy. While individual ownership and property are assumed as the normative ideal institution in Western consumer cultures (Ronald 2008), collective or shared ownership may be more common and structure consumption in nonmarket economies (Price 1975), more interdependent consumer cultures or communities (Furby 1980), or among consumers in lower socioeconomic conditions. More research should be conducted to examine the foundational assumptions underlying consumer research of individual ownership and ownership itself in consumer research. It is especially important to examine the nature of ownership and access in developing countries in order to articulate the potential for the access economy in these contexts. We would suggest in particular that how trust is conceptualized would be an especially fruitful path in this regard, as well as how changes in economic conditions—getting better or worse—will affect access practices.

Research in access and sharing is in its infancy. More research is needed in many areas, including identifying the nature of shared ownership in contemporary contexts in and outside the marketplace as well as in the digital and face-to-face domains. In the digital world, a shared and communal sense of ownership is experienced toward digital materiality (Nasioulasa and Nikolaus 2011; Shaffer 2011; Wittel 2013). This raises questions regarding whether the distribution and consumption practices surrounding digital materiality constitute sharing (Belk 2014) or community gift giving (Giesler 2006). Indeed, Watkins, Denegri-Knott, and Molesworth (2016) suggest that digital virtual goods are not owned or accessed in their pure forms, but rather a new type of fragmented ownership emerges, which has elements of both ownership and access. Similarly, Hulland, Thompson, and Smith (2015) suggest that psychological ownership rather than legal ownership represents a hybrid notion of legal ownership and access, and will become increasingly important to understand in a digital context. Finally, the potential of the access economy among less advantaged consumers needs to be examined. The economic impact of the access economy is still in flux, and national governments and local municipalities are debating its role in their communities. The impact of the access economy in opening access to resources for consumers in poverty remains unexplored. An urgent area of inquiry could relate to examining the barriers that inhibit poor consumers to participate in the services of the access economy as well as the means for gaining the consumer literacy needed to do so.

In sum, in this article we historicize and dimensionalize access practices. We have demonstrated that these practices take on different natures and meanings depending on the economic system in which they operate as well as on the cultural context and the social class of the users. In particular, with regard to understanding current access economy companies and consumer behaviors, we need to understand the origins of sharing and accessing, and how they have and continue to shape social relations.

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