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Consumer Hacks in the Sharing Economy

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Highlights

- We portray the heterogeneity of consumer misbehaviors by moving beyond the normative view.
- Consumer hacks are savvy misbehaviors that outmaneuver the company's policies and guidelines surrounding the consumer experience.
- Given access-based interconnections, consumer hacks can create but also destroy value for other consumers and the platform.
- Consumer hacks benefit the platform when value creation is aligned along three layers: egoistic, mutualistic, and corporate.
- In case of misalignment, consumer hacks damage the platform's value creation process and the consumer experience.

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Abstract

Access-based platforms are complex, interconnected, and dependent on all consumers, which creates significant opportunities for consumer hacks. Drawing from the study of a clothing rental platform, we investigate how consumer hacks impact value creation for the platform and other consumers. We contribute to the literature on access-based consumption and consumer misbehavior by introducing consumer hacks. We highlight the heterogeneity of misbehaving consumers' motivations, revealing that consumer hacks expand beyond dissatisfied consumers. Moreover, we stress how hacks' diffusion, particularly via social media, can increase their breadth, speed, and impact on value. Adopting a multi-layered perspective to value creation, we show that consumer hacks can both create and destroy value by inducing misalignments between egoistic, mutualistic, and corporate value outcomes. Finally, we evidence the dark side of customer engagement by introducing consumer hacks as a highly active customer engagement with value-destroying potential. Our results also have implications for managing access-based platforms.

Keywords: Consumer misbehavior; Sharing economy; Access-based consumption; Platform; Value creation; Value destruction

1. Introduction

Access-based platforms, through which consumers temporarily access products, have been spreading to many sectors from fashion to furniture to transportation, and are expected to reach \$335 billion in 2025 (Statista 2020). Managing platforms requires specific marketing tools as prior research has shown that providing access to products differs significantly from selling them (Eckhardt et al. 2019).

Access-based platforms have limited control over consumer experiences, which are highly complex, interconnected, and dependent on all consumers (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Trujillo-Torres et al. 2023). Platforms orchestrate the actions of heterogeneous consumers who are required to actively participate in value creation (Scaraboto and Figueiredo 2022). Indeed, consumers must accomplish many tasks that are necessary for the platform to create value and for other consumers to have positive experiences (Scaraboto and Figueiredo 2022; Trujillo-Torres et al. 2023). For instance, Gruen (2017) shows that car-sharing platforms' value creation process relies on the assumption that consumers will return the cars to specified locations, at designated hours, and in a flawless state so that the next consumers can instantly access them. Access-based platforms can successfully create value only if consumers accept these responsibilities and behave like competent partners. Because consumers may not have the will nor the competency to act in such a way (Trujillo-Torres et al. 2023), value creation remains unpredictable and challenging for platforms (Scaraboto and Figueiredo 2022).

The complex roles allocated to access-based consumers create extensive opportunities for consumers to misbehave (Schaefers et al. 2016). For instance, consumers can manage to keep products longer than expected by the platform. Likewise, they may not return products to the

location and moment delineated by the platform. Research has yet to document the impact of misbehaviors from access-based consumers on consumer experience and/or platform operations. As Eckhardt et al. (2019, 11) emphasized, “new theory is needed to identify the conditions under which the impact of other users may be negative (e.g., contamination, misbehavior) or positive (e.g., advice, social proof) in a sharing economy setting.”

Previous research investigates consumer misbehaviors that “violate the generally accepted norms of conduct in consumption situations, and thus disrupt the consumption order” and destroy value for other consumers (Schaefers et al. 2016; Eckhardt et al. 2019). For example, if a Zipcar consumer returns a dirty car, the experiences of the next consumer will be impaired (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Hazée et al. 2019). Zipcar would need to not only address the underlying consumer misbehavior (Fisk et al. 2010; Harris and Reynolds 2003) but also prevent misbehavior contagion (Harris and Reynolds 2003; Schaefers et al. 2016; Srivastava et al. 2022).

Because prior literature focuses on norm violation-based misbehaviors, it neglects the wide diversity of misbehaviors that exist in access-based consumption. Some consumers misbehave without violating social norms of conduct. Rather, they are simply creative about navigating access-based platforms and do not follow platform-sanctioned guidelines and defined customer journeys (Trujillo-Torres et al. 2023). We aim to extend the emerging research on consumer misbehavior by moving beyond the normative view of misbehavior. By exploring the heterogeneous nature of misbehavior, we can more adequately portray the complex topography of consumer misbehaviors and better understand why consumers misbehave and the impact of these practices on the platform and other consumers. This addresses the literature limitation of how consumer misbehavior impacts value creation in access-based platforms.

To do so, we introduce the concept of consumer hacks defined as savvy misbehaviors that outmaneuver the company's policies and guidelines surrounding the consumer experience. Given the interconnections among actors, tasks, and products in access-based platforms, consumer hacks can create but also destroy value for other consumers and the platform. We ask the following research question: How do consumer hacks in access-based consumption impact value for the platform and other consumers?

To study consumer misbehavior in access-based platforms, we carried out a longitudinal, multi-method study of Rent the Runway (RTR), a rental platform that provides short-term access to designer apparel and accessories. Platforms are a fruitful context to study consumer misbehaviors because they have a high potential to empower and give voice to consumers who learn to navigate and take ownership of their use (Kozinets, Ferreira, & Chimenti, 2021). Our dataset includes consumer and consumer-blogger interviews, consumer social media posts, RTR marketing materials, and news media articles.

We contribute to the literature on the sharing economy by emphasizing the complexity and heterogeneity of access-based consumers' misbehaviors. By introducing the concept of consumer hack, we highlight the diversity of consumer misbehavior, revealing that misbehavior is not restricted to the violation of social norms but also includes the outmaneuvering of company guidelines. We also move beyond the individualist view of consumer misbehavior as self-oriented by highlighting the collective motivations behind some consumer misbehaviors.

In addition, we show how the diffusion of consumer hacks among consumers in spaces they control such as social media, can increase their breadth, speed, and impact on value. By adopting a multi-layered perspective to access-based value creation, we further show that consumer hacks can both create and destroy value by inducing misalignments between egoistic

(i.e., for the self), mutualistic (i.e., for other consumers), and corporate (i.e., for the platform) value outcomes. Consumer hacks create egoistic value outcomes for the hacking consumers but their impact on other value creation processes is varied. For example, by sharing hacks, consumers educate other consumers thus creating mutualistic value, and often receive status benefits in exchange. In such cases, egoistic and mutualistic value outcomes are aligned. However, by implementing product-damaging hacks for instance, consumers are likely to destroy mutualistic and corporate value. In such cases, egoistic, mutualistic, and corporate value outcomes are misaligned.

Finally, we show the dark side of customer engagement by viewing consumer hacks as a type of highly active customer engagement with value-destroying potential. Our results also have implications for managers. Managing access-based platforms means knowing how to identify consumer hacks and learning from them to improve platform functionalities and operations.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Multi-layered value creation in access-based consumption

The term access-based describes a technologically enabled socioeconomic system with five key characteristics: (1) temporary access to market offerings (vs. permanent ownership), (2) transfer of economic value, (3) intermediation by an internet-based platform, (4) expanded role of consumers who assume some supply and demand roles, and (5) crowdsourced supply in archetypical entities (Eckhardt et al. 2019). To understand the specificities of access-based platforms' value creation, we need to focus on the consociality aspect (i.e., the “copresence of social actors in a network, which provides an opportunity for social interaction between them,”

Perren and Kozinets, 2018, p.23) of platform value-creation only which takes greater importance in access settings due to the characteristics 4 and 5 mentioned above.

In access-based contexts, value creation rests on the orchestrated interplays of the platform and multiple consumers, and multiple supply chain partners (e.g., transportation partners, and brands) (Kelleher et al. 2019; Scaraboto and Figueiredo 2022). In other words, value creation in an access-based model requires the platform to coordinate multidirectional relationships among the platform, its users, and resource owners (e.g., brands providing the shared products). As a result, access-based platforms entail multiple layers of value creation –for each individual consumer, for the platform itself, and for the platform consumers collectively– that can become mutually exclusive (e.g., maximizing individual consumer value creation conflicts with maximizing collective value creation). Building on prior literature on collective value creation (Scaraboto and Figueiredo 2022; Trujillo-Torres et al. 2023), we identify two dimensions that differentiate access-based platforms’ business models in contrast to ownership-based business models: interconnectedness and instrumental sociality. These dimensions shape access-based platforms’ multi-layered value creation processes.

First, access-based platforms’ value creation is dependent on the interconnected experiences of multiple consumers, with each consumer’s actions impacting other consumers’ experiences (Eckhardt et al. 2019; Dellaert 2019). Access-based consumers coproduce the platform’s offerings by accomplishing a number of tasks that impact all other consumers (e.g., returning products in proper condition, on time, and at the right place). This interconnection among consumers can be value-generating (e.g., sharing tips) but also value-destroying (e.g., returning a damaged product) for other consumers (Eckhardt et al. 2019; Trujillo-Torres et al.

2023). For example, the experience of a Zipcar consumer depends on the practices of previous consumers (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Hazée et al. 2019).

Interconnectedness stems from two crucial areas: shared quality and shared temporality. Shared quality encompasses issues related to product quality and taste preference. For example, consumers can break or stain products or impregnate them with food and drink residue, perfume, blood, and/or sweat, triggering a fear of contamination in other consumers (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Hazée et al. 2019) and, in extreme cases, preventing the products from being recirculated. Shared temporality includes delays in the circulation of products. For example, temporal interconnections (e.g., a consumer returned an item late) can affect the platform's fulfillment of orders, which can result in delivery delays of the same item or late notifications of unavailable products after consumers placed the order.

Shared temporality encompasses issues related to the pace of circulation of goods on the platform. With a rising volume of consumers and an increasing pace of circulation of shared resources, platforms are facing increasing complexity and risks of failure. When the interconnections among consumers are not properly orchestrated by the platform, they hinder consumer experience and satisfaction (Scaraboto and Figueiredo 2022).

Second, access-based consumption tends to be guided by instrumental sociality (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012; Miller 2008). Access-based consumption requires not only the orchestration of consumers' value co-creation (Kelleher et al. 2019; Scaraboto and Figueiredo 2022) but also a strong incentive toward mutuality, that is, a "generalized reciprocity [where] one may also give without the intent of receiving directly" (Arnould and Rose 2016, 76). Thanks to the logic of mutuality, consumers might be driven to proactively create value for other consumers and the platform, even when this might limit the value they achieve for themselves. Yet, instrumental

sociality limits the incentives for consumers to follow the mutualist logic, that is, to facilitate value creation for others beyond or at the detriment of their own benefit. In other words, instrumental sociality indicates that consumers might be driven toward egoistic (self-interested) value creation rather than mutualistic (pro-collective) value creation. This represents a significant challenge because access-based consumption relies on consumer cooperation to create value for all consumers and the platform (Figueiredo and Scaraboto 2016; Schaefers et al. 2016).

In summary, access-based platforms have limited control over consumer experiences and must often focus on managing quality control (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012). Access-based platforms are highly complex, interconnected, and dependent on all consumers who play a major role in value creation and destruction (Trujillo-Torres et al. 2023). To optimize value creation for all actors (including consumers and the platform itself), access-based platforms must overcome issues related to interconnections (i.e., shared quality and shared temporality) and provide alternative incentives to discourage egoistic value creation (i.e., individually oriented value creation that destroys value for other actors) driven by instrumental sociality.

2.2. Consumer hacks in access-based consumption

The complexity of value orchestration in access-based consumption creates opportunities for consumers to misbehave (Schaefers et al. 2016). For instance, consumers may not return products to the right location at the right moment in an undamaged condition. Research has yet to document the impact of consumers' misbehaviors on other consumers' experiences and the platform. Prior studies call for a better understanding of the implications of consumers' actions, both positive (e.g., advice) and negative (e.g., misbehavior) in the sharing economy (Eckhardt et al. 2019, 11).

Previous research has focused on consumer misbehaviors defined as behaviors that “violate the generally accepted norms of conduct in consumption situations, and thus disrupt the consumption order” (Fullerton and Punj 2004, 1239). This stream of literature has investigated the processes underlying consumer misbehavior (Fisk et al. 2010; Harris and Reynolds 2003) and misbehavior contagion (Harris and Reynolds 2003; Schaefer et al. 2016; Srivastava et al. 2022). For instance, drawing on criminology’s broken windows theory, Schaefer et al. (2016) study the contagious effects of indirect consumer misbehaviors –i.e., consumer misbehaviors in the absence of employees and other consumers that affect the resources necessary for service delivery. They provide empirical support for misbehavior contagion, identify perceived social norms as the mediator of contagion, and show that the strength of the accessed product’s brand as well as reduced anonymity of the accessed product’s owner attenuate contagion.

The literature on consumer misbehavior focuses on violations of accepted social norms of conduct in which misbehavior is morally condemned and denounced. We argue that this normative lens underestimates the wide diversity of misbehaviors. For instance, in access-based contexts, some consumers do not violate social norms of conduct but creatively trick and tweak platform-sanctioned guidelines. Consumers are being creative about navigating access-based platforms. Despite not explicitly breaking any rules or social norms, this type of misbehavior may have significant implications for the orchestration of value creation.

We call these behaviors “consumer hacks” and define them as savvy misbehaviors that outmaneuver the company’s policies and guidelines surrounding the consumer experience. We build here on the notion of hacking, often understood as finding a clever way to solve a problem by circumventing organizational rules and policies (Bloom & Śliwa, 2022). We propose that consumer hacks do not violate norms of conduct but circumvent, extend, or tweak company-

sanctioned guidelines in a way that is not anticipated by the platform. Moreover, given the interconnections among actors, tasks, and products in access-based platforms, consumer hacks can have a significant impact on value creation. Consumer hacks in access-based platforms can create, but also destroy, value for other consumers and the platform and potentially endanger the platform's activity.

In our analysis, we explore the diversity of motivations driving consumer hacks. Previous research, particularly in information science, has shown that a variety of motivations for hacking exist. Taking a historical viewpoint, some scholars argue that hackers were originally driven by values, such as democracy or freedom of speech, and aimed to offer technological solutions to societal problems (Coleman and Golub 2008). Ethical hacking is deemed an act of civil disobedience motivated by a cause or an altruistic act driven by the desire to improve cybersecurity by finding and reporting vulnerabilities in computer systems. Yet, economic incentives and gaining a profit have become the central hacking motivation in the past decade (Jaquet-Chiffelle and Loi 2020). Likewise, we expect consumer-hackers to be a heterogeneous group characterized by various motivations and ideologies and degrees of expertise in and commitment to hacking.

Following the emerging stream of research on the role of consumers in disrupting sharing business models, we aim to extend the understanding of consumer misbehavior. Therefore, our research question is: How do consumer hacks in access-based consumption impact value for the platform and other consumers? We build on the notion of hacking to consider both consumer hacks driven by egotistic value creation (for the self) and/or mutualistic value creation (for other consumers with the expectation of generalized reciprocity; Arnould and Rose 2016). Because these value creation orientations can diverge and, at times, conflict with value creation for the

platform, this allows us to understand the multiple layers at which value is created and/or destroyed by consumers' actions in access-based consumption settings.

3. Method

3.1. Context

We interrogate consumer hacks by studying RTR, a platform in the United States that offers access to designer apparel and home decor, with a longitudinal multi-method perspective. We chose RTR as a proper context given that it is an established and mature access-based platform, that significantly intermediates the flow of goods among consumers and provides various online and offline touchpoints to its consumers. Furthermore, RTR frequently changes its membership plans and affordances reminding its users that rules can be altered and occasionally defines its users as “smart” (RTR Shift, 2020), which can encourage its users to find their own smart ways of consuming RTR's services.

RTR was founded in 2009 and has been publicly traded since 2021 with a value of 1.7 billion (Nishant 2021). It offers designer apparel from 800 designer brands to 2.5 million lifetime consumers claiming to replace 1.3 million new garments since 2010 (Rent the Runway 2023a). Consumers can have access to products up to \$3,000 in value via a la carte rental and memberships, with which they can rent between 4-16 items paying between \$94 - \$235 monthly (Rent the Runway 2023a). Recently, RTR reported \$77.4 million in revenue and 134.2K active subscribers in Q3 2022 earnings (Rent the Runway 2023b).

The RTR platform enables consumers to rent items, informing them about items' delivery time, brand, and retail price as well as showing consumer comments and pictures. Consumers

receive their selected items (after being dry cleaned) in a reusable garment bag with a prepaid return label. Consumers could also select items in RTR stores before they were closed post-Covid. For a la carte rentals, if an item does not fit, consumers can request a replacement item. Depending on the rental mode (one-time or membership), consumers can return items right away or keep them for long-term (e.g., for a month or indefinitely as long as membership allows). Consumers can return items by sending back the garment bag directly to RTR or via drop-off locations at third-party retail stores. Consumers can also buy pre-loved and new RTR products via resale and retail options, such as ThredUp and Amazon.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

First, we conducted 18 semi-structured in-depth interviews with consumers and consumer-bloggers (13 consumer interviews, 5 consumer-bloggers interviews, see Table 1). Consumers were recruited via referral and snowball sampling as well as social media invitations. Consumer-bloggers were chosen and invited based on their blog content and popularity. All participants identified as a woman, which parallels RTR's consumer base, and their average age was 34. Most participants had an Unlimited membership, which was the most popular membership type at the time of the interviews allowing members to swap unlimited amounts of products. Participants talked about their apparel acquisition practices, RTR familiarity and use over time, motivations for being an RTR consumer, positive and negative consumption episodes, and resolving RTR problems. Consumer-bloggers were additionally asked to describe their decision to create RTR-related blog content and the feedback they received from followers.

Second, we collected secondary data from blogs and social media posted between 2012-2019. The goal was to provide additional insights into diverse consumer experiences, such as

Table 1. Interviewee Demographic Details

Pseudonym	User Type	Age	Occupation	Residence	RTR services used	User status
Alison	Blogger	35	Entrepreneur	Los Angeles	RTR Unlimited	Current
Angel	Consumer	32	Music technology professional	Los Angeles	RTR Unlimited	Previous
Anna	Consumer	29	Full-time graduate student	Los Angeles	RTR Unlimited	Paused
Clara (1st interview)	Blogger	37	Financial journalist	New York City	RTR Unlimited	Current
Clara (2nd Interview)	Blogger	39	Business owner	New York City	RTR Unlimited	Current
Courtney	Consumer	41	Software consultant and catering company owner	Chicago	RTR Unlimited	Previous
Emily	Consumer	34	Private equity investor	Chicago	RTR Reserve RTR Unlimited	Previous
Jackie	Consumer	24	Finance professional	New York City	RTR Unlimited	Paused
Katie	Consumer	33	Corporate professional	Northeast US	RTR Reserve RTR Unlimited	Current
Kylee	Blogger	31	Marketing and public relations professional	Baltimore	RTR Reserve RTR Unlimited RTR Update	Previous
Lisa	Consumer	35	Technology industry professional	San Francisco	RTR Reserve RTR Unlimited	Current
Luisa	Consumer	40	Attorney	Las Vegas	RTR Reserve	Previous
Madison	Consumer	35	Marketing manager	Chicago	RTR Reserve RTR Unlimited	Current
Mia	Consumer	35	Human resource professional	US	RTR Unlimited	Previous
Nicole	Blogger	34	Sales and marketing director	Jacksonville, FL	RTR Reserve RTR Unlimited	Current
Olivia	Consumer	33	Program manager at a technology company	Sacramento, CA	RTR Studio Services	Previous
Sophia	Consumer	40	Entertainment professional	US	RTR Unlimited	Current
Tiffany	Consumer	29	Marketing professional	Las Vegas	RTR Reserve	Previous

first-time renters, users of different memberships, loyal consumers, and online and offline users. A Google Blog Search with “Rent the Runway” and “blog” keywords allowed us to identify 39 consumer-bloggers, who differ in terms of popularity, RTR experience, and compensation / collaboration. Most of the bloggers’ general interest was in the fashion industry (i.e., RTR’s industry). These 39 bloggers generated 79 posts on RTR covering 745 single-spaced pages (including text, visuals, and comments). The bloggers on average had 165403 followers (min=34 and max=1 million) on Instagram and 26596 followers (min= 296 and max=149000) on Facebook.

In addition, we gathered 210 publicly available Instagram posts shared between 2016-2017 via online data collection platforms; scraped (via R program) 1,509 Twitter posts with the #renttherunway, #myrtr, #rtrrunlimited, and #rentherunwayunlimited hashtags shared from August to January 2019. We also scraped social media posts about other major fashion rental services (i.e., Le Tote, Gwynnie Bee, and The Black Tux) to expand our understanding of the industry. In total, all the social media posts and blogs (ranging between 3 and 3,000 words) consisted of 330 KB of data.

Third, we collected RTR’s marketing content to identify how RTR communicates its business model, the changing rental market in general as well as consumer motivations, practices, and problems. These data also helped us map how the RTR’s platform and offerings evolved between 2009-2020 through mission and narrative revisions and the introductions or updates of product categories, features, and services. These data cover 43 items of press releases, website content, award announcements, major news coverage, podcasts, and advertisements; transcriptions of seven secondary interviews of RTR co-founders (e.g., podcasts and YouTube videos of CNBC and The Wall Street Journal), lasting between five to 57 minutes.

Fourth, we assembled podcasts, videos, and articles from key circulation newspapers and magazines published between 2009-2020 to situate our phenomenon in a historical, cultural, and competitive context. This dataset contains 1,168 articles from major newspapers and magazines (e.g., *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Cosmopolitan*) and 528 articles from trade journals (e.g., *Advertising Age*, *Business of Fashion*, *Mergers and Acquisition*, *Financial Times*) covering the years of 2013-2020. We accessed these articles from the LexisNexis and ProQuest databases with the “Rent the Runway” keyword.

We utilize a hermeneutical analysis with an iterative approach between data and theory (Spiggle 1994; Thompson 1997). The inductive and repetitive nature of our analysis enabled us to have a deeper and more detailed examination of our target phenomenon. We interrogated our multiple types of primary and secondary data by manually coding and analyzing them to identify narrative patterns and meanings across different groups (e.g., consumers, consumer-bloggers, co-founders) and institutional values, actions, and regulations (e.g., company, industry, market, news media). All the researchers were involved in the data analysis. We divided the data into three datasets according to the source (i.e., consumer, blogger, RTR, media) and split these among the researchers so that two researchers analyzed each dataset. We all met regularly to discuss the coding process and integrate the learnings from the different datasets. When it appeared that the interview and blogger data would be central to our analysis, we also all coded this set of data as we refined and finalized our interpretation. Triangulation of various data types (private interview vs. public content) and perspectives (consumer, firm, media) enriched our emergent understanding (Spiggle 1994).

Our analysis aimed to explore the ways consumers identify and cope with the platform’s interconnections and pain points and utilize the affordances of RTR’s business model and

policies. Our coding process evolved over three rounds. The first round identified different stakeholders' learning as they attempt to navigate the platform. Building on this, the second round adopted a consumer experience lens to delineate pain points and consumer sentiments over different stages of their experience. The last round (Table 2) adopted a value creation lens and identified how deviations from the platform's guidelines (i.e., consumer hacks) let consumers avoid interconnection challenges and impact value creation.

Table 2. Final coding scheme

Interconnections	
Shared quality	Wear markers: meanings of “popular” for rental products, consequences of the volume of reviews, checking quality problems via store visits Wear consequences: understanding RTR policies about wear and tear, feeling less responsibility for rental items in terms of care and cleaning Quest for new items
Shared temporality	Realization: realizing that personal actions can impact other consumers' experiences and the supply chain in general Delays: experiencing delays in product circulation, complaining, solving, learning to prepare
Characteristics of consumer hacks	
Identifying/Using/Sharing loopholes in platform guidelines Identifying/Using/Sharing alternatives to platform processes Identifying/Using/Sharing ways to circumvent platform sanctions	
Consumer hack motivations	
Opportunity	Spontaneous and unplanned actions to improve one's momentary or long-term usage
Game	Competition with other users and with the platform Discovery and play mindset Experimentation
Access maximization	Getting the most of an investment attitude Maximizing financial, temporal, product quality, and social status gains Personal benefit at the expense of others' loss

Community	Sharing tips with social networks privately or publicly Social status-enhancing sharing
Multi-layered Value Outcomes	
Egoistic value outcome	Minimizing personal costs (e.g., wait times) Developing consumer expertise Maximizing self-benefit at the possible expense of others
Mutualistic value outcome	Informing other users Educating other users Sharing best practices Empowering other users
Corporate value outcome	Efficient circulation of products Product quality maintenance High consumer satisfaction

4. Findings

Our findings evidence what motivates consumers to engage in hacks and how these hacks impact value creation for other consumers and the platform.

4.1. Consumer Hack Motivations

Based on our data, we organize consumer motivations to implement hacks along two dimensions: the type of benefits sought (utilitarian vs. recreational) and the locus of benefits (individualistic vs. collective). First, consumers seek utilitarian benefits when they attempt to enhance the performance and efficiency of their experience through a hack. Consumers seek recreational benefits when they pursue pleasure, fun, and relaxation. Second, consumer motivation is individualistic when it serves purely to enhance the misbehaving consumer experience. It is collective when it also aims to benefit others, including one’s community. These considerations allow us to classify four types of motivations for consumer hacks: opportunity-,

game-, access maximization-, and community-driven. While a single motivation could lead to several types of hacks, we also find that consumers' motivations may change over time as they accumulate experience with access-based platforms.

4.1.1. Opportunity. The opportunity-driven motivation is individualistic and utilitarian. Opportunity-driven consumers tend to adopt consumer hacks spontaneously and without planning. They describe stumbling upon accidental, coincidental, and/or lucky circumstances that enable them to behave creatively. We find that consumer hacks associated with this motivation are non-systematic and easy to enact. These consumer hacks do not usually require any specific skills, competence, or much effort. Because of their unplanned nature, they depend on trial and error and trial and success. Thus, they can have an unexpected impact on RTR's supply chain and other consumers' experiences. For example, Anna details how she realized that she could keep ruining the quality of products without consequences. She took the lack of platform action toward her hack as an opportunity to continue engaging in such practices:

At first, I was worried when I sent back [clothing] messed up and it was always. But obviously [it was] an accident and sometimes I was like: "Was this messed up when it came or did I mess it up?" But then because I use [RTR] for almost like three years, I think that I realized that [RTR] didn't really do much... I wasn't like: "let me cut this shirt in half." But it was always kind of normal wear, and I try not to get things dirty, try not to mess things up. But as I mentioned, I'm spilling coffee on myself all the time. And also, there were definitely some [clothes] where like some seams were ripped or different stuff like that. So I didn't really feel too bad because I figured that [RTR], they like must build that into the plan especially. And there was definitely times where I was sort of worried about [it], especially at first being penalized for it, but then kind of after a while

when nothing bad happened, then they never rebuffed me being like: “Anna, why is there coffee on every piece of clothing?” (Anna, interview)

According to Anna, her actions (e.g., frequent coffee spills, ripped seams) were not intentional. She initially “worried” about repercussions, given RTR states that damaged products must be repaired, deep-cleaned, or removed from circulation and may result in a possible reduction of inventory and order fulfillment delays. However, over time, she learned that she was dodging penalties and that her actions might be considered normal wear and tear. In other words, the lack of penalties encouraged her to continue engaging in consumer hacks. Opportunity-driven consumer hacks, then, reflect consumers’ perception of a low likelihood of punishment and high utility value of misbehaviors (Young et al. 2007).

4.1.2. Game. Game-driven consumers aim for recreational benefits but can be encouraged by both collective and utilitarian motives. Consumers can be influenced by game-driven motivations to playfully compete with the platform and other consumers. Developing and adopting new consumer hacks to systematically overcome the limitations preventing a satisfying access-based experience adds a ludic and exciting dimension to it. In contrast with opportunity-driven consumer hacks, game-driven consumer hacks are effortful and require focus, intent, and perseverance. Said in another way, consumers demonstrate motivation and expertise to “crack the system.” They also engage in game-driven consumer hacks to satisfy their desire for discovery and experimentation. This approach often involves “leisure practice as well as a lifestyle—something pursued for reasons of pleasure, identity formation, and self-actualization” (Davies 2018, p. 184). For example, Kaitlin shares her technique to increase the number of products by playing with the subscription add-ons:

Over the years I've personally convinced dozens of people to join Rent the Runway Unlimited. And I've shared my best tips and tricks for playing the game - because oh, it is a game - with my closest friends... For \$159 a month, you get four styles, which you can swap at any time. And for an additional \$39, you can add another style [create a new slot], with no limit on how many slots [each for an additional \$39] you can open. If I'm being honest, I have 8 open, but you should know that that's highly aggressive and people probably think I'm insane. But am I really? You can always close the extra slots before the next billing cycle if you only need them for a brief period of time. For example, I'll open an extra slot if I'm going on vacation. There's no commitment required, and you can cancel your subscription at any time - so really, I'm kind of a genius. (Kaitlin, September 13, 2019, Blog Post)

Kaitlin suggests a smart way to circumvent the number of possible products she can rent from the four allowed up to eight potential choices. Devising such a technique can be financially risky if consumers do not react promptly but it guarantees expanded access to products. This provides a sense of fun and addresses the curiosity of consumers like Kaitlin in a system full of mysteries (i.e., a variety of products) that can be unraveled. Techniques such as this require effort and perseverance and can eventually induce users' expertise and competence in product selection, organization, and ordering. On the other hand, game-driven hacks such as this can decrease product availability for other consumers and play with the financial expectations of the platform. In a way, game-driven hacks not only provide affective value to consumers (i.e., hedonic) but also somatic value (Kelleher et al. 2019) in that they involve "embodied responses to practice participation, which are immediately, spontaneously, and physiologically felt."

4.1.3. Access maximization. Access maximization-driven consumers are motivated by an individualistic drive to optimize their utilitarian benefits. Consumers-hackers who are motivated by access maximization focus on the platform's instrumentality (i.e., as the means to an end) and are associated with systematic hacking practices. They are invested in getting as much value as possible out of their "investments" by extracting the greatest financial gain ("more for less"), time efficiency, product fit, social status, and/or pleasure out of their access experiences. Often, these consumers are long-term users and highly loyal to RTR. We find that the communal or social aspects are secondary to their highly individualistic aims. As a result, they are rarely concerned about the impact of their practices on RTR's supply chain and other consumers' experiences. For example, one loyal RTR consumer explains how she maximizes her RTR experience by reappropriating the purpose of reviews:

I would always sort by newest and then I would always check to see how many reviews an item has and then almost always rent items that had no reviews.... Unfortunately, lately I've noticed I don't know if they are wiping reviews but I still do that and [clothes] appear to be brand new and have no reviews but [are] heavily worn... that used to be a way to make sure you would get the highest quality...For me the top priority [is] wearing clothes that haven't been overworn. (Sophia, interview)

Sophia's desire to be efficient ("the top priority") and maximize her usage by avoiding heavily reviewed, and therefore worn-out, products drive her to avoid highly rated products. In this way, she outmaneuvers the platform which expects its consumers to rely on consumer-generated reviews and ratings to guide product choice. This practice creates significant egoistic value for Sophia who can minimize the other consumers' traces on the products she accesses.

This consumer hack also highlights a surprising but counter-effect of reviews, as a high number of reviews, even when positive, signal a highly circulated object that has lost its value-creating potential. This shows how tactical reviews can be beyond simply recommending an item. This counterintuitive finding contrasts with the current understanding of word of mouth (WOM), typically perceived as beneficial and informative to other consumers and the company's outcomes (Babić Rosario et al. 2016). In this case, a high volume of positive WOM, which usually increases sales, forewarns consumers who engage in consumer hacks about product sharing and circulating history and enables consumers' product devalorization. Consumers engaging in consumer hacks in access-based models, then, have different interpretations of quality from RTR and may paradoxically use other consumers' value-creating reviews as indicators of value destruction (i.e., poor product quality).

Access maximization-driven consumers like Sophia tend to adopt a variety of consumer hacks to extract value for themselves. This motivation most closely embodies the traditional image of misbehaving individuals characterized by “an impatience with limitations, whether imposed by the physical or biological world or by social conventions, and a refusal to accept them” (Davies 2018, p. 182).

4.1.4. Community. Community-driven consumers-hackers always strive for mutualistic value but can be aiming for both utilitarian and recreational benefits. Community-driven motivation inspires consumers to highlight their hacking expertise to the community. To some extent, consumer hacks motivated by community contrast with the individualism and lack of care for consequences to others of which misbehaving individuals are often accused (Coleman 2012). Community-driven motivations tend to provide social value for others (i.e., mutualistic) by

revealing consumer hacks to others so that they can find their way around the platform and optimize their experience. Admittedly, this motivation can also include an individualistic facet when it involves obtaining social benefits for the consumer sharing the hack (e.g., receiving social status, appreciation, fame, and/or social recognition). For example, a blog post exchange shows followers providing social appreciation to the blogger for sharing consumer hacks.

Comment from Taylor: Harper the shipping hack you mentioned is literally a game changer.

Reply from Harper: Right! I was literally in the process of canceling because I was tired of clothes in transit and I thought of it. I asked customer support and they said it is completely fine. Since then it's been another 3 months, they have added a 4th piece to unlimited and I easily can wear 16+ different pieces in a single month if I want to!

Comment from Mary: Okay – I'm going to try this hack because I have been very frustrated with all the time that clothes are spent in transit. I have had spotty luck w/r/t receiving damaged or too worn pieces as well as a bunch of sizing issues so have only been able to wear 7 pieces in 1.5 months of membership. (Harper, September 11, 2017, blog post comment)

Taylor and Mary recognize Harper's expertise and the value her consumer hack adds to their own experience (e.g., "game changer") by reducing the time between recurring consumer experiences. This type of social affirmation between an influencer and her followers provides evidence of community-enhancing hacks which create synergies in consumers' value creation practices. Yet, in contrast to Scaraboto and Figueiredo's (2022) findings, such synergies do not enhance the overall value orchestrated by the platform as it reinforces the tendency towards transactional behavior, at the detriment of mutuality (Arnould and Rose 2016). Indeed, while

beneficial to those who use the hack, this hack can be detrimental to other consumers and the platform by accelerating products' deterioration for instance. This type of interaction among consumer-experts who disseminate consumer hacks and follower-consumers also extends Hamilton and colleagues' findings (2021) by showing that distant social others not only influence specific experiences but also encourage engagement with a brand in between sequences of consumer experiences.

In addition, our findings show that consumer hacks' motivations can at times intersect. For example, Nicole, an "Unlimited" member of RTR since its launch and blogger, shares how she persists in developing her expertise:

I've gotten pretty good at figuring out, like, some, what I call life-hacks, like ways to, you know, figure out the best way to use them that I thought: I tell people about it all [the] time, I might as well write about it. (Nicole, interview)

Here, the community motivation interacts over time with access maximization and game-driven motivations, in that Nicole's hack is effortful and supports the development of hacking expertise.

In summary, our typology highlights the diversity of consumer hackers' motivations. While all consumer hacks can in part aim at egoistic value creation, community-driven hacks include an inherent mutualistic value component. Community-driven hacks articulate a generalized exchange where knowledge is offered to other consumers in exchange for other social commodities (e.g., status, likes) (Arnould and Rose 2016). We now discuss how consumer hacks impact value creation across the multiple layers involved in sharing economy platforms.

4.2. Impact of Consumer Hacks on Multi-layered Value Outcomes

We observe that consumer hacks become consequential for the platform when consumer hacks are adopted widely by consumers thanks to word-of-mouth. It is therefore hack diffusion among consumers that impacts value creation outcomes. When discussing diffusion, we consider how one consumer discussing a consumer hack with others might encourage them to misbehave in turn. This is a slightly different mechanism than misbehavior contagion which happens when misbehaviors spread by observing others misbehaving or the traces of their misbehavior (Jones and Jones 1992). Consumer hacks diffusion can have two far-reaching consequences. It can improve value creation outcomes for the platform by improving the value creation process (e.g., by slowing the deterioration of product quality). However, often, consumer hack diffusion can damage the value creation process (e.g., by accelerating the deterioration of product quality).

While platforms such as RTR may not require a high level of interaction and co-presence among consumers, we find that misbehaving practices spread widely, particularly in spaces controlled by consumers. For example, many consumers share their consumer hacks with relatives and friends and on social media (e.g., blogs, social networking sites).

My mother-in-law, I wanted her to try Rent the Runway. I thought she would really be into using it so when she signed up, I was happy to tell her [about] this tip. So certainly when I talk to other friends, if they do not know this tip already, I would tell them. (Sophia, interview)

As long as consumers like Sophia restrain their diffusion of consumer hacks to friends and relatives, the impact on the platform's overall value creation remains limited. It is when consumers share hacks on social media, especially to very large groups of followers, that consumer hacks can have a serious impact on the platform. Because consumer hacks create egoistic value, they have a high capacity to normalize self-interested practices that are not

envisioned or carry unforeseen effects. Relatedly, consumer hacks can also challenge the legitimacy of the platform as a source of knowledge and authority and shift consumer attention to lay experts, particularly in times of ambiguity. Consumer hacks, then, can become important epistemic practices that determine how consumers seek knowledge and experiment (Chimenti and Gieger 2022) with value creation.

On the positive side, the diffusion of consumer hacks can support the platform's overall strategy and increase value creation for other consumers and the platform. Consumer hacks in access-based settings are usually aimed at solving issues of shared quality and shared temporality. Diffusing consumer hacks can slow down the deterioration of product quality when the hack helps preserve shared quality (e.g., prevent items from being over-worn, repair damaged products so these remain functional). Diffusing hacks can also contribute to enhance shared temporality when it helps speed up product redistribution (e.g., sorting, cleaning, preparation) or circulation (e.g., delivery, return). For instance, a blogger shares advice on how to have products returned correctly and swap fewer clothes:

When you receive your first shipment you'll see that each item has a VERY TINY barcode hidden on the clothing label. That's what they use to scan the items in and associate them with your account and that's how they will know the item is returning from you. But I like to play it safe and make the employee's life easier so I provided my account number by way of screenshot with a handwritten note on it, never hurts to be friendly:) I shipped back via 2nd-day air and used UPS. You'll have the address for return on the pre-paid label from your blue shipping bag so just copy that down when you ship. ... You only have to ship it back one time to get an extra bag and then you'll be pretty set. And truthfully, the longer you use the service, the less you find yourself needing to swap as much. In part because

you learn what styles suit you so there is less selection error but also because you start to really LOVE the pieces and want to hold on to each for just a little longer. Hope that helps!

(Harper, September 11, 2017, blog post comment)

Harper outmaneuvers the platform's guidelines to gain extra resources that help create egoistic value. By increasing the ease of identification of her returns, communicating with RTR employees through handwritten notes, and getting extra delivery resources, she avoids pain points around the delivery and return of RTR products (i.e., egoistic value outcome). The public diffusion of Harper's consumer hacks further creates value for other consumers (i.e., mutualistic value outcome), who can adopt her hack and use RTR delivery guidelines and resources to their advantage. More broadly, the public diffusion of these hacks supports the platform's strategic efforts to accelerate product circulation, as they optimize consumer experiences (here, delivery, selection, and use), which in turn strengthens consumer satisfaction and loyalty and creates value for the platform (i.e., corporate value outcome). In this case, the multiple layers of access-based value creation are aligned. Consumer hacks such as this can be incorporated as legitimate and helpful offerings that are disseminated by the platform as they refine its orchestration of value creation (Scaraboto and Figueiredo 2022) over time. Thus, the diffusion of consumer hacks expands our understanding of customer engagement (Harmeling et al. 2017), as it shows that consumers can empower and motivate themselves and others to contribute to the platform's marketing functions without the deliberate encouragement of the firm. Implicitly, consumers also motivate the platform to undertake further customer engagement marketing.

On the negative side, the diffusion of consumer hacks can significantly impair the platform's overall strategy and value creation for consumers and the platform. For example, the diffusion of consumer hacks can accelerate the deterioration of products (i.e., lessen shared

quality) when they encourage neglecting (e.g., hinders the detection and/or replacement of worn-out parts) or ruining (e.g., hinders the identification and repair of damaged parts) products, which together affect product functionality. For example, in the above-mentioned quote by Sophia, the consumer avoids products with a high number of positive reviews because it demonstrates that the products have received much use. This consumer hack infused with egoistic value has the potential for value destruction if it diffuses, given that high demand for only new products increases the wear of such products (i.e., diminishes shared quality) and prevents other non-hacking consumers from accessing new products. As a result, new products may become scarcer, resulting in dissatisfaction among non-hacking consumers whose options may become limited to older, heavily reviewed products.

Consumer hack diffusion can also slow down product circulation (e.g., reduce the speed of shipping, delivery, and returns processing), thus impacting shared temporality and affecting the platform's functioning. For example, blogger Naomi shares a consumer hack with her followers with potentially negative implications:

Buy scentless Febreze to spray your clothes. Having scentless Febreze handy is always a good idea. Rent the Runway has everything dry cleaned, but sometimes certain smells just don't want to disappear. Having scentless Febreze around to spray over the clothes before you put it on is always a good idea. (Naomi, blog post)

Naomi explains to others how to enhance the cleaning procedures deployed by RTR to improve her experience with the products and remove any potential leftover traces of previous usage. This allows consumers to creatively rejuvenate products and give them a newer feel. This can be considered a consumer hack even if it is not driven by malicious intent and creates extra egoistic value for consumers. It is a deviation from the platform guideline as RTR explicitly attempts to

discourage additional cleaning of their clothes in their policy: “Am I able to wash or dry clean my items? No need to clean your items on your own—we take care of that for you! Our proprietary cleaning operation is the heart and soul of our business—and we take it very seriously. Our dedicated associates are true masters of their craft, ensuring that all our pieces stay in excellent condition” (RTR n.d.). Indeed, consumers’ lack of knowledge of the care of different fabrics leads to damage when they use ‘homemade’ cleaning products (e.g., Febreze, baking soda, vinegar). When conducted in isolation, the damage remains limited to a few products. Yet, when this hack is adopted by many consumers thanks to its diffusion, it can seriously destroy the value for the platform and other consumers. It can accelerate the deterioration of product quality given that the frequent addition of chemical scents to the products can increase wear and tear and/or irreversibly damage some fabrics (e.g., leather, suede, silk, or fabrics that may water-spot). This case evidences a misalignment across value outcomes: the consumers adopting this hack create egoistic value, the consumers sharing this hack may create mutualistic value, but altogether they significantly destroy value at the mutualistic level (for consumers receiving damaged products) and at the corporate level (by damaging part of the assortment).

The diffusion of consumer hacks, whether privately or publicly, reveals how consumers guide one another in outmaneuvering the platform’s guidelines in creative ways that can also destroy value for other consumers and the platforms. In such cases, egoistic value creation can be misaligned with mutualistic and corporate value creation. This supports the idea that even contented consumers can bring about major unexpected system changes (Dolbec and Fisher 2015) and further nuances the impact of customer engagement (here detrimental) on the firm’s marketing functions without the firm’s active encouragement.

In summary, the diffusion of consumer hacks can have both positive and negative implications depending on whether the multiple layers of access-based value creation are aligned or not (see Table 3). It can enhance consumer satisfaction and experience and the platform’s overall strategy but also significantly speed up and magnify the extent of hacks’ damage. Even if consumer hack diffusion is not due to concerted actions, the widespread diffusion of certain individual hacks can significantly impair the platform’s value creation process. In other words, one person cannot endanger the platform—it is the cumulative impact of consumer hack diffusion and adoption that threaten the platform operations.

Table 3. Impact of consumer hack diffusion

Diffusion impact on platform strategy	Diffusion impact on circulation activities	Diffusion impact on value creation
Improving the value creation process		
Slows deterioration of product quality	Maintaining products: Helps uncover and replace worn products/parts	Maintains value creation and product functionality
	Repairing products: Helps uncover and replace damaged products/parts	Restores damaged product to acceptable function
Accelerates product circulation	Redistributing products: Helps identification, cleaning, and dissemination of functioning product	Places products in circulation for consecutive uses
	Expediting circulation: Speeds up shipping and delivery, processing of returns and release of new orders, customer service remediation	Places products in consumer platform and creates value
Damaging the value creation process		
	Neglecting quality: Impairs uncovering and replacement of products/worn parts	Neglects product functionality and value

Accelerates deterioration of product quality		creation
	Ruining quality: Impairs damage detection and replacement of damaged products/parts	Destroys product functionality and value
Slows down product circulation	Stagnating products: Clogs the inspection, cleaning, and redistribution of a functioning product	Blocks products from circulation for consecutive uses
	Impairing circulation: Decelerates shipping and delivery, processing of returns and release of new orders, customer service remediation	Removes products from the platform and destroys value

5. Discussion

Drawing from an extensive study of an access-based platform, our analysis contributes to the literature on the sharing economy and access-based platforms by introducing consumer hacks and outlining their drivers and impacts. We also outline managerial practices to help access-based platforms orchestrate value creation by taking into account consumer hacks.

5.1. Theoretical contributions

We extend the understanding of consumer misbehaviors by introducing the concept of consumer hack as a type of consumer misbehavior (Daunt and Harris 2011; Fullerton and Punj 2004). This helps us emphasizing the diversity of consumer misbehaviors and misbehavior motivations. Table 4 compares consumer hacks and traditional misbehaviors. We now elaborate on the three following themes: the characteristics of consumer hacks, the diffusion of consumer hacks, and the relationship between consumer hacks and customer engagement strategies.

Table 4. Comparing consumer hacks and traditional consumer misbehaviors

	Traditional consumer misbehavior	Consumer hack
Motivation	Individualistic	Individualistic and/or collective
Type of transgression	Transgresses social norms	Outmaneuvers company's policies and guidelines
Value outcome for the misbehaving consumer	Positive	Positive
Value outcome for the company	Negative	Positive when egoistic, mutualistic, and corporate value creation layers are aligned
Examples	Breaking furniture in a restaurant (Harris and Reynolds 2003); damaging a rental bike (Srivastava et al. 2022); leaving smelly trash in a rental car (Schaefers et al. 2016)	Using own knowledge of postal service's schedule to extend a rental by a day; finding a loophole in the rental agreement to get extra free returns; altering delivery address when traveling.

5.1.1. Characteristics of Consumer Hacks. We define consumer hacks as savvy misbehaviors that outmaneuver the company's policies and guidelines surrounding the consumer experience. Consumer hacks emphasize the inventive, original, and creative agency of consumers trying to tweak a business concept or service design.

Consumer hacks have three characteristics. First, they do not violate norms of conduct but circumvent, extend, or tweak platform-sanctioned guidelines in a way that is not anticipated by the platform. Consumer hacks demonstrate the practices of creative consumers who mobilize their extensive market knowledge (e.g., knowledge of the technological affordances, logistical partners' schedules, pricing systems) to maximize the value they derive from their consumption experience and to cope with issues related to the interconnections that characterize access-based consumption. This extends the understanding of consumer misbehavior beyond the notion of social norm violations (Fullerton and Punj 2004; Fisk et al. 2010; Harris and Reynolds 2003; Schaefers et al. 2016; Srivastava et al. 2022).

Second, given the interconnections among actors, tasks, and products in access-based platforms (Scaraboto and Figueiredo 2022; Trujillo-Torres et al. 2023), consumer hacks can boost, but also impair value creation and potentially endanger the platform's activity. Thus, access-based platforms are sites of simultaneous value creation and destruction, that can be considered as a transformation continuum. Consumer hacks are particularly impactful in access-based consumption because access-based value creation is multilayered. Indeed, consumer hacks can disrupt the alignment between the multiple layers of value creation by benefiting the consumer-hacker (i.e., egoistic value outcome), but not necessarily other consumers (i.e., mutualistic value outcome) and/or the platform (i.e., corporate value outcome). These findings reveal the paradoxical nature of access-based value creation and highlight how creating more value for one stakeholder can negatively impact others. While we currently consider only consumers and platforms, adopting a more critical perspective would allow future research to investigate a broader set of stakeholders, such as the planet. For example, slowing down resource loops is a valuable circular economy principle (i.e., creates value for the planet) (Fehrer and Wieland 2021), while diffusing consumer hacks provides mutualistic value. Yet, from the platform's perspective, both are inappropriate and value destroying.

Third, consumer hacks are not restricted to dissatisfied or malicious consumers. We have shown that consumers who engage in consumer hacks are a heterogeneous group characterized by various motivations and degrees of expertise. This nuances the notion that consumer misbehavior is primarily driven by socio-demographic characteristics or consumer alienation (Daunt and Harris 2011). We highlight the diversity of consumer hack motivations (i.e., opportunity, game, access maximization, and community), and analyzed them along two dimensions (i.e., the type and locus of benefits sought).

Because prior literature often focuses on misbehaviors that destroy value for other consumers (Fisk et al. 2010; Harris and Reynolds 2003; Schaefers et al. 2016), scholars tend to consider misbehaving as a self-oriented behavior. By highlighting the collective motivations behind some consumer hacks, we move beyond the individual view of misbehavior. In particular, community-driven consumer hacks contrast with the individualism and lack of care for consequences to others of which misbehaving individuals are often accused (Coleman 2012). Community-driven hacks tend to provide mutualistic value by revealing consumer hacks to others so that they can find their way around the platform and optimize their experience.

5.1.2. Consumer Hack Diffusion. While consumer hack diffusion can be beneficial to value creation (e.g., slowing product deterioration, accelerating product circulation) in some cases, we also show how consumer hack diffusion through social media can dramatically affect the platform. In doing so, we underscore the role of social media in the diffusion of consumer hacks and the potential increase of consumer misbehavior breadth (i.e., the various misbehavior consumers can adopt), speed (i.e., how fast consumer hacks spread), and impact (i.e., how much damage they cause).

Interestingly, consumer hacks have a double-edged sword effect as they can simultaneously create and destroy value. This contrasts with previous findings on productive consumption which focus mainly on forms of consumption that enlist consumer labor that either create or destroy value (for a review see, Moisio, Arnould and Gentry 2013) or previous research on misbehavior that investigate how consumer misbehavior disrupt the consumption order and destroy mutualistic and corporate value (Fisk et al. 2010; Harris and Reynolds 2003; Schaefers et al. 20152016; Eckhardt et al. 2019). We also emphasize that consumer hack diffusion is not the

result of a coordinated collaboration but rather unconcerted actions among consumers who have learned to trust one another just enough to learn a new consumer hack. Our findings contrast with Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) view of access-based consumers who distrust each other and do not seek connectivity with one another or the brand. Consistent with Scaraboto and Figueiredo's (2022) findings, consumers in our case have learned how to trust one another to reduce risks stemming from interconnections in access-based platforms. Yet, in contrast to Scaraboto and Figueiredo's (2022) findings, the synergies and trust emerging among consumers are not necessarily beneficial to the platform's value creation. This means that the platform's orchestration role must discriminately foster the 'right' synergies and trust among its consumers to protect its value creation process. Our findings also enhance the understanding of brand publics (Arvidsson and Caliandro 2016) by highlighting how expertise sharing among a brand public can affect value creation beyond publicity value. Monitoring the brand public is thus evermore crucial, not only to assess the brand reputation and harness potential innovations (Arvidsson and Caliandro 2016) but also to detect value-threatening consumer hacks.

5.1.3. Consumer Hacks and Customer Engagement. Finally, our findings emphasize the dark side of value creation in customer engagement marketing, defined as efforts to "motivate, empower and measure customer contributions to marketing functions" (Harmeling et al. 2017, p. 312). With consumer hack diffusion, consumers collectively disseminate their expertise to individual consumers on how to extract value. Consumer hacks can thus be considered a type of highly active customer engagement with the potential to amplify systemic value destruction. This can potentially occur in other access-based models. For example, if a few Uber consumers learn

how to get priority access to rides, their effort comes at the expense of potentially hundreds of other consumers who are waiting for the service to become available.

The applicability of consumer hack also extends beyond access-based consumption, as it qualifies the value-creating potential of customer engagement across different types of businesses, in particular those combining online and offline channels that consumers are often encouraged to interweave. In other words, our work suggests that some customer engagement efforts (even by long-standing and profitable consumers) should be curbed when they have a detrimental impact on the collective, as in the case of consumer hacks that impair value.

Adopting a customer engagement approach to consumer hacks requires motivating consumers to develop the right kind of consumer hacks (i.e., those beneficial to other consumers and the overall system). In that way, marketers can create excitement and a sense of empowerment by enabling consumers to effectively cope with the limitations of the system rather than exiting it to fully avoid these limitations. In doing so, a customer engagement approach to consumer hacks can lead to higher satisfaction and loyalty.

5.2. Managing access-based platforms

Managing access-based platforms means identifying consumer hacks, anticipating their impact, and changing platform policies to avoid consumer experience impairment or stimulate its improvement. Based on our findings, we have identified six recommendations.

Avoiding negative misbehaviors. Platforms could take action to avoid negative misbehaviors they have identified by adjusting operations, memberships, and platform policies and thus avoid the development of inefficiencies. For instance, RTR started varying the time and

day of the week that it releases new items as expert consumers had developed the consumer hack of visiting the platform promptly at the time of new releases to only access pristine products.

Rewarding positive misbehaviors. Platforms can implement reward policies to encourage consumers' good citizenship. Such policies must account for differentiated patterns of product quality deterioration and speed of product circulation. For example, platforms could provide extra benefits for good citizenship behaviors. In RTR's case, this could involve providing one-time discounts or an extra swap to reward repeated good citizenship behaviors (e.g., helping detect worn or damaged parts, returning products earlier).

Considering consumer hacks as an improvement and innovation opportunity. Platforms could draw on the analysis of misbehavior to identify additional services and improve their offerings and policies. For example, RTR started to collaborate with hotels and developed 'hotel rental closets' after realizing that customers were using hotels as delivery and return points when traveling to limit the size of their luggage. Furthermore, given that members like to have more rental spots than their membership plan allows, RTR started to allow all members to add an extra item to each of their shipments without any additional charge, aiming to increase membership value and elevate the membership experience.

Engaging consumers in innovation workshops and activities. Platforms could recruit consumers to participate in innovation workshops such as crowdfunded challenges or hackathons to identify innovative implementation and use of potential consumer hacks such as reduce of product quality deterioration or methods to accelerate product circulation. This would be perfectly aligned with the collaborative and co-creative consumption mindset. This in turn enhances customers' empowerment and sense of involvement. For instance, to enhance

consumer empowerment, RTR started an ambassador program with “super renters” and collaborated with them to showcase how RTR can be used daily.

Limiting opportunities for value-destroying consumer hacks. Platforms must make sure that they provide limited opportunities to misbehave and thus proactively avoid the development of negative misbehaviors and inefficiencies. For instance, limiting the number of profiles and accounts that can be opened using the same IDs or from the same phone number would discourage consumer hacks based on leveraging multiple accounts.

Monitoring the diffusion of consumer hacks. Platforms must also monitor the diffusion of consumer hacks on social media to avoid them spreading and generating massive disruption. By identifying patterns from social media chatter, AI could reveal the emergence of new consumer hacks with potential negative and positive impacts before they become widely circulated across the consumer base. For instance, platforms could develop tools to identify and flag social media or blog posts that actively and explicitly advocate outmaneuvering business policies. This would allow the preemptive updating of policies and rules to prevent consumer hacks before they are widely diffused. More broadly, platforms must join the conversation around their brand. For example, to further discourage negative consumer hacks, platforms could launch social media campaigns focused on the benefits of following policies, not only for individual customers but also for the community.

We note that some of these recommendations, especially those related to the management of delivery and return and the detection of consumer hacks, have relevance for any firm that allows consumer returns (e.g., most business-to-consumer companies and retailers), especially those whose business models rely on home consumer trials (e.g., Amazon Prime Wardrobe).

5.3. Future research avenues

We provide an emergent understanding of consumer hacks, their diffusion, and their motivations. Because of the multiple and complex roles allocated to consumers in access-based consumption, we have shown that this provides a very favorable context for consumer hacks. Nonetheless, one obvious extension is further examining the role of consumer hacks in other contexts, particularly when different degrees of platform intermediation are provided (i.e., high vs. low) (Perren and Kozinets 2018), and within consumer-consumer supply chains (Figueiredo and Scaraboto 2016), in which consumers themselves manage shared quality and temporality. For example, future research could investigate consumer hacks on access-based consumption platforms with a limited platform role, such as those in which products transit mostly among consumers (e.g., scooter and bicycle sharing).

Future research could investigate compromises consumers make during multi-layered value creation. How do they reconcile incompatible or conflicting instrumental social norms? How do they navigate between egoistic, reciprocal or mutual exchanges? This could contribute to prior works on hybrid logics in the sharing economy (Scaraboto and Figueiredo, 2022).

Another relevant direction is exploring how to manage consumer hacks in diverse non-platform contexts in which the brand's capacities and control mechanisms vary. We show that consumer hacks can be analyzed as a form of customer engagement and, as such, can contribute to satisfaction and loyalty. Considering the risks associated with consumer hack diffusion, we encourage future research to examine these relationships further.

Finally, the role of AI in improving access-based platforms generates possible avenues for future research. Crucially, future research could determine if AI's potential to predict and

identify inefficiencies and efficiencies can also be outmaneuvered by consumers or will help platforms manage and enhance the consumer experience.

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