BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES

Doctoral School of Economic Studies

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

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Title of the doctoral thesis:

COLLABORATIVE ECONOMY AND MARKETING STRATEGY

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CONCLUSIONS

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Summary of the Thesis

The present work provides a systematic analysis of the interaction between the collaborative economy and marketing strategies, with the main objective of identifying the specific features and trends associated with the marketing mix in the C2C model. Starting with a theoretical foundation and continuing with an applied research component, the thesis sought to understand how collaborative platforms configure their marketing mix, as well as how users perceive its effectiveness.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured into three main parts:

- **Theoretical approach of the collaborative economy and marketing strategy**
- **Applied research on user behavior and C2C marketing strategies**
- **Development of a conceptual model for the marketing strategy in the collaborative economy**

Part I – Theoretical Approach regarding the Collaborative Economy and Marketing Strategy

In the first part of the work, it was highlighted that the collaborative economy represents a structural transformation in the way goods and services are produced, accessed, and distributed. Thus, a theoretical approach to the concept of the collaborative economy was undertaken, emphasizing its characteristics, operating mechanisms, and main areas of applicability, as well as the advantages and limitations of this model. Consumer behaviors in this context were also analyzed, along with the implications of the collaborative economy for the competitive environment.

Afterward, the focus shifted to marketing strategies adapted to the specifics of the collaborative economy. In this regard, the discussion covered the concepts of segmentation, targeting, positioning, and the four classic components of the marketing mix – product, price, distribution, and promotion – in correlation with the dynamics of C2C relationships. Analysis of the marketing strategies applied in the C2C collaborative economy showed that adapting the four mix components – product, price, placement (distribution), and promotion – is essential for the success of the platforms.

The contributions of the work are reflected both at the theoretical level – through the conceptual clarification of the collaborative economy and its associated marketing

strategies – and at the practical level – through the analysis of consumer perceptions and the formulation of a model applicable in practice.

The research limitations are mainly related to the sample size used in the quantitative phase and the exclusive focus on the C2C model.

In this regard, future research directions may include a comparative analysis of other models (B2C, B2B), extending the sample, and an in depth exploration of the role of artificial intelligence in marketing strategy.

This work's central objective was to investigate how the collaborative economy, with an emphasis on the C2C (consumer-to-consumer) model, influences and redefines the marketing strategies applied by digital platforms. To achieve this objective, the research was structured in two main stages: an in-depth theoretical analysis and a mixed empirical study – qualitative and quantitative.

Based on the conceptual framework of the marketing mix (the 4Ps – product, price, placement/distribution, promotion), the thesis analyzed the necessary adaptations in the specific context of collaborative platforms. Thus, it was demonstrated that traditional marketing strategies are insufficient without a focus on user experience, feedback mechanisms, service personalization, and the integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Based on these results, a conceptual model of the marketing strategy in the C2C collaborative economy was formulated, which integrates the traditional components of the marketing mix with new dimensions specific to this environment: digital reputation, customer experience, artificial intelligence, and community involvement.

Modern consumption is shifting from ownership to access: consumers are developing expectations centered on convenience, flexibility, and personalized experiences, while also playing an active role in value creation (through feedback, reviews, and recommendations).

Thus, consumer behavior in the collaborative economy is characterized by a high level of trust in peer-to-peer evaluations, a predisposition toward social cohesion (a sense of community), and sensitivity to ethical and ecological aspects (e.g., choosing ridesharing or car-sharing services to reduce environmental impact).

Consequently, marketing strategy must be recalibrated to these new realities. The theoretical work emphasizes that the traditional marketing mix (product, price, distribution,

promotion) takes on distinct characteristics in the collaborative context: the product often becomes a platform service facilitating user interaction, price needs to reflect market dynamics and perceptions of reciprocal value (including transparent pricing mechanisms and revenue-sharing models with providers), distribution is essentially digital (online platforms act as a global intermediation infrastructure), and promotion relies predominantly on viral marketing and community recommendations instead of traditional advertising.

Innovations in marketing – from reputation systems and personalization of the customer experience, to the use of artificial intelligence for optimizing the matching of demand with supply and for filtering fake content – have been identified as key elements in the success of collaborative platforms.

In summary, the theoretical part highlighted that adapting marketing strategies to the principles of the collaborative economy (consumer–prosumer orientation, building trust and community, flexibility and co-creation of value) is an essential condition for the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of both new platforms and traditional companies that interact with this ecosystem.

Part II – Research on the Marketing Mix Strategy for Developing the C2C Collaborative Economy Model

The second part of the work was devoted to applied research, which aimed to analyze the marketing mix strategies implemented by collaborative platforms and users' perceptions of these strategies. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the research provides a detailed perspective on the behavior and expectations of users in both roles – providers and buyers – in the collaborative economy.

Based on the structure of the work, the research objectives are as follows:

- **Analysis of the collaborative economy and its defining characteristics;**
- **Identification of how marketing strategies are developed and applied in the C2C model;**
- **Comparison of marketing strategies in the collaborative economy with those in the traditional economy;**
- **Investigation of users' perception of the effectiveness of the marketing mix applied by collaborative platforms;**

- **Proposal of a conceptual model for developing an effective marketing strategy in the collaborative economy.**

The applied study in Part II of the thesis involved a complex research design, comprising both qualitative and quantitative methods, with the aim of deeply analyzing how collaborative platforms develop and implement their marketing strategies, as well as how these strategies are perceived by platform users (providers   service providers or sellers on platforms – and consumers/buyers). This dual approach, carried out by investigating the perspectives of the providers (service providers or sellers on platforms) and the buyers/consumers, allowed for a deep understanding of marketing mechanisms in a C2C environment.

From the perspective of the providers, it emerged that their long-term success depends on the platform's credibility, on the degree to which it manages to attract a sufficient number of consumers, and on maintaining transparency in its policies (for example, fair fees, protection against fraud, and efficient operational support). Many interviewed providers emphasized that they feel motivated to remain loyal to a platform when it invests in fostering the loyalty of its users (both those who offer and those who purchase) and when they feel that they are part of a trustworthy collaborative ecosystem.

On the other hand, consumers indicated that the main criteria which attract them to a platform and keep them there are convenience and value (quick access to services/goods, advantageous prices or overall lower costs compared to traditional alternatives), along with transaction safety. Thus, elements such as the quality of the user experience (a user-friendly interface, fast response times, flexible payment and delivery options), the platform's reputation (a brand built around reliability and customer care), and recommendations from other users (positive ratings and reviews) have proven to have a major impact on consumers' perceptions.

From the analysis of the quantitative data, trends emerged that confirm these observations: for example, an overwhelming proportion of respondents stated that they place great importance on reviews left by other community members before purchasing a service/product on the platform, which indicates that promotion based on digital word-of-mouth is much more influential than traditional advertising in this context.

Thus, the conclusions of Part II highlight that marketing in the collaborative sphere can only be effective by integrating the perspectives of both involved parties (providers and consumers) and continuously adapting based on feedback and data on actual user behavior.

Part III – Proposal of the Conceptual Model

The final part of the work proposed an original conceptual model for formulating a marketing strategy in the context of the C2C collaborative economy – a model that synthesizes the theoretical elements and the empirical evidence discovered. This model integrates consumer behavior specific to the collaborative environment with an adapted marketing mix, providing a unified framework for understanding how platforms should orient their marketing decisions.

In essence, the model starts from the determinant factors of user behavior identified in the research – for example, trust in the platform and in transaction partners, social motivations (the need for community belonging, the desire for collaboration and reciprocity), perceived value (the perceived cost–benefit ratio of access via the platform), and the level of familiarity with technology. These factors in purchasing and participation behavior are then correlated in the model with strategic marketing decisions: product/service development (the platform's features and value proposition, which must meet users' expectations regarding safety and ease of use), pricing policies (commissions and fees fairly adjusted to perceptions of equity and providing incentives for both parties of the transaction), distribution channels (expanding and optimizing digital access, including ergonomic mobile applications, omnichannel support, and local partnerships for delivery or logistical support where applicable), and promotion strategies (focused on transparent communication, community-centric storytelling, loyalty programs, and advocacy by existing users).

The model highlights the interdependence of these elements. For example, increasing user trust (through safety and reputation mechanisms) has a direct effect on reducing price sensitivity and on the efficacy of recommendation-based promotion. Similarly, improving the user experience (the digital "product" component) leads to increased participation from both sides, expanding the community base and enhancing the platform's attractiveness.

Implications of the model:

- **First**, it offers managers of collaborative platforms a diagnostic and planning tool: by evaluating the platform's current position on each dimension (product, price, distribution, promotion) relative to the degree of fulfillment of key behavioral factors (trust, perceived value, community engagement, etc.), the strengths and vulnerabilities of the marketing strategy can be identified. If managers focus on creating an environment of safety and transparency (such as implementing security measures for online transactions and clear communication regarding GDPR compliance) for the platform's users, the users' response will be positive—resulting in their loyalty in making purchases through the platform and in avoiding migration to other collaborative platforms that might offer greater safety.
- **Second**, the model reflects the adoption of a co-creational approach in marketing: thus, the platform's users are no longer merely passive recipients of impersonal marketing messages, but become active partners.
- **Third**, the empirical model obtained also has implications in the realm of brand building: to highlight the essential role of community, collaborative platforms should shape their brand around core values of collaboration, trust, and innovation, actively communicating these values in all marketing activities. By applying these recommendations derived from the model, collaborative platforms can achieve sustainable competitive advantages, because they optimally align their marketing strategies with the expectations and actual behavior of their users.

The study's limitations derive from its scope of applicability: the empirical research focused predominantly on platforms and users in urban environments and within a specific geographic area, which means that generalizing the results to all forms of collaborative economy or to other markets must be done cautiously. Given these limitations, the work also opens up numerous directions for future research.

A first direction would be to extend the validation of the model to other sectors of the collaborative economy and other cultural contexts. For example, the model could be tested on peer-to-peer lending platforms, coworking platforms, or sharing-economy systems in industry (equipment sharing, space sharing, etc.), as well as in emerging markets or countries with different socio-economic characteristics, to see whether the relationships identified hold or manifest differently.

A second direction could consist of longitudinal studies that track the evolution of collaborative platforms and user behavior over time, thus evaluating the long-term impact of different marketing strategies on user loyalty and platform growth.

A third research direction targets the integration of new technological and social trends into the model: for instance, examining how artificial intelligence can deeply personalize user experience or improve reputation management, or how blockchain technologies might provide trustworthy solutions (without requiring blind trust in the platform) – aspects that would reshape certain components of the marketing mix. Furthermore, it would be useful to explore more deeply the ethical and sustainability implications: how marketing strategies can include and communicate the platforms' commitments to equitable (fair-share) practices or to reducing ecological impact, and what effect this has on the platform's attractiveness for future generations of users.

Last but not least, a natural continuation of the research would be to investigate how traditional companies can integrate elements of the collaborative economy into their own marketing strategies (hybridization of business models), given the increasing interdependence between the traditional economy and the platform-based economy.

By pursuing these directions, the academic community and practitioners can deepen their understanding of how the potential of the collaborative economy can be harnessed in marketing and how emerging challenges can be overcome, thus ensuring the sustainable evolution of this economic and social phenomenon. This work provides an applicable and theoretically valid contribution to the field of digital marketing, particularly in the realm of collaborative platforms, and can serve as a foundation for developing tools and strategic policies that respond to the dynamic realities of digital consumption and flexible work.

In conclusion, the collaborative economy is no longer just a marginal trend; it now serves as a catalyst for profound changes in modern marketing. Understanding and adapting marketing strategies to this new type of economy have become essential conditions for the success of collaborative platforms and for meeting the needs of users in their roles as providers and/or consumers, in an economic environment that has become extremely dynamic, digital, and sufficiently decentralized.