The war of the worlds: mutual evaluation systems and order building in market-organizations of the platform-economy

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Résumé:

The platform-economy is taking economic prominence and certain market-organizations succeed to gather millions of members (who are strangers to one another). The development of those entities is explained by their implementation of mutual evaluation systems on their digital infrastructure, the later providing users with security mechanisms. In the present article we adopt another perspective and investigate the role mutual evaluation systems play in the organizing process at stake in those particular configurations.

A large literature already explores the organizational role of evaluation systems both within and outside traditional organizational borders: they mostly discipline behaviors toward shared conceptions about what is of worth or constitute vehicles to build those shared common orders. But what happens in the very context constituted by off-line transactions of the platform-economy? Which conceptions of worth are to prevail?

By conducting a case-study on the French carpooling platform BlaBlaCar, we extant literature and uncover the process of order building at stake in those market-organizations. We pinpoint that effective evaluation system uses (or rejections of use) explain the order that finally prevails on the platform, the latter being thus the outcome of a complex interplay between both users' and organizers' decisions.

Keywords: evaluation system; platform-economy; peer to peer; partial organization; orders of worth; BlaBlaCar

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, peer-to-peer accommodation and peer-to-peer transportation revenues reached respectively 1.2 € bn and 1.6 € bn (Vaughan & Daverio, 2016). Several hundred entities from the platform-economy were active in Europe, and the French carpooling platform BlaBlaCar claimed between 30 and 40 million active users. How did those initiatives succeed to quickly gather so many users, whereas activities they organize used to be confined to local networks, where clan-based mechanisms (Acquier et al., 2017) operate ? Following early papers focused on marketplaces (Dellarocas, 2003, Zacharia et al., 2000, Resnick & Zeckhauser, 2002) which highlight the crucial role played by peer-to-peer evaluation systems in reducing uncertainty and reassuring users (who are strangers to one another), we propose in the present article to investigate the role the evaluation system plays in the organizing process.

According to Ahrne & Brunsson (2011), organizing processes are « *attempts to create a specific order* ». Creating on order requires notably to agree on what is of worth and what is worthless: if members of (partial) organizations don't share those distinctions, they face troubles to coordinate. Boltanski & Thévenot (2006) hence detail "orders of worth" at stake in six different "worlds", each of them valuing contrasted objects, actions or persons. But how people and organizations "*determine and assess 'worth' (of objects, actions or persons)*" also closely relates to evaluation processes (Cloutier et al. (2017)). An extensive literature thus already presents evaluation systems as vehicles of organizational phenomenon and guarantees of a shared order within formal organization (Ouchi, 1979), hybrid organizations (Amslem, 2013), or partial organizations (such as meta-organizations of a given organizational field (Espeland & Sauder, 2007)).

Literature explains that evaluation system mechanisms help maintaining taken-for-granted order notably by disciplining behaviors (of individuals and/or organizations) on the one hand, or, on the other hand, become tools for order building, as soon as multiple orders coexist in organizations or in organizational fields. In the latter contexts, the evaluation system either constitutes a starting point of critiques and justification iterative processes (Boltanski &

Thévenot, 2006) leading (or not) to transcend internal competing orders and to stabilize compromises within organizations (Annisette et al., 2017) or organization fields (Huault & Rainelli-Weiss, 2011), or embodies power struggles between entities competing to establish their own criteria of worth (Giamporcaro & Gond, 2016).

In the very context of the platform-economy, evaluation systems do constitute platforms organizers' main tool for organizing off-line transactions as they draw on three out of the five organizing pillars identified by Ahrne & Brunsson (2011). Evaluation systems implemented on those market-organizations, however, exhibit specific features that do not fit any of the models proposed by the literature: (1) there is no room seems left for building compromise through this evaluation system (2) the organizer does not perform the evaluation by itself (the users being in charge of the evaluation) and (3) neither the organizer nor the users seem able to solve power struggles generated by competing considerations about what is of worth and what is not. Yet, order that organizers and users subscribe to might differ (Acquier et al., 2017; Mair & Reischauer, 2017; Wilhelms et al. 2017): users that transact together can value different aspects of transactions, on the one hand; organizers can value aspects that users don't, on the other hand. In such context, which conceptions about what is of worth (and what is not) are to prevail in off-line transactions when users interact off-line and have to evaluate online ex post? The question remains underexplored.

In the present paper we precisely choose to investigate the use of the evaluation system by the users and the organizer of a market-organization from the platform-economy so as to understand its respective impact on order building in such configurations. Our final goal lies in explaining whether and how the mutual evaluation system at stake ensures business regularities and shared conceptions about what is of worth and what is not (the ones of whom?). By so doing we ambition to contribute to "*capture the dynamics of* [certain entities of] *the sharing economy*" (Mair & Reischauer, 2017).

Based on a single case study (of the French carpooling platform BlaBlaCar), we find that the conceptions of worth prevailing in off-line transactions originate from the complex interplay between orders that market-organizer and users subscribe to. The mutual evaluation system is allowing such an interplay and in fine, is creating favorable positions for certain users to impose their views of what is of worth in carpooling. The effective evaluation practices, or rejection of such practices, determine who wins. If we observe a pacific war of orders of worth, where the organizer chooses to limit its direct interference, the later however keeps an

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indirect (decisive) role in selecting the order that prevails in the long run, notably when designing the evaluation system provided on the platform (if any).

The remaining of the article is organized as follows. We start presenting the theoretical challenges raised by mutual evaluation systems when analyzing order building in market-organizations of the platform-economy. The methodology is then outlined, and the results detailed. We finally discuss our findings and conclude.

1. LITTERATURE REVIEW

1.1. UNPACKING THE ROLE OF MUTUAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS IN THE ORGANIZATION OF OFFLINE TRANSACTIONS

According to Acquier et al. (2017), entities of the platform-economy are "*initiatives that intermediate decentralized exchange among peers through digital platforms*"(p.5). Building on Ahrne et al. (2015) and Ahrne & Brunsson's (2011), we consider them as *market-organizations* characterized by the presence of a *market-organizer* - that can be either a private firm or a non-profit organization (Mair & Reischauer, 2017) - providing an ecosystem of users, all peers, with digital infrastructure (websites and/or phone apps). Using such infrastructure, peers start interacting online and then meet offline to perform various kinds of transaction (carpooling, home rental, etc.). As infrastructure providers, market-organizers do rely on several organizational pillars (Ahrne et al., 2015; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) to ensure that their users do not experience unpleasant transactions. First, some of them define *rules* by promulgating terms of service and conditions of use. Others decide over *membership* by enforcing members to apply for online registration. Organizers can also *monitor* compliance with *rules*, for instance *rules* of *membership*, by requiring ID certification. Ultimately, they *sanction* the ones that do not comply with the rules, for instance by excluding them from the ecosystem or by moving them down in search lists. Taken altogether, all those organizational pillars frame users' online interactions – that is when they use the infrastructure. However, users most often meet offline to perform intended transactions.

To regulate offline interactions, market-organizers set up "*outsourced*" quality enforcement systems (Hagiu, 2014) as part of their digital infrastructure. Those systems often combine two dimensions: a numerical rating (the typical "5 stars" evaluation) and a qualitative comment. Those digital evaluation systems encompass several organizational pillars: they reinforce *membership* (every ecosystem member is characterized by an evaluation-related metric and

every evaluation given is intended to describe behaviors of a specific user with a stable identity), they enable *monitoring* of users' behaviors during offline transactions (through it, every user can release a public assessment of an interlocutor's behavior) and allow positive and negative *sanction* - since received evaluations impact future transaction possibilities (Cabral & Hortaçsu, 2010; McDonald & Slawson, 2002; Resnick, et al. 2006). They finally play a crucial role in "reassuring" users by (1) reducing uncertainty (Dellarocas, 2003; Zacharia et al., 2000), (2) providing information allowing users to discriminate between users who performed "good" (i.e. valuable transactions) and the ones who don't, and (3) incentivizing/dis-incentivizing participation of users in consequence (Resnick & Zeckhauser, 2002). In fine, evaluation systems seem to instill more regularity and predictability, by excluding users that do not behave well enough according to the criteria that define what is of worth. Thus, they contribute to (partially)-organize (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) offline transactions of the platform-economy.

The next step tries to understand how evaluation systems participate in organizers' attempts to "*achieve special orders that differ from already existing ones*"(Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011)*,* an order being defined as shared conceptions about what is of worth and what is worthless, according to Boltanski & Thévenot (2006)'s theoretical framework[1].

1.2. UNDERSTANDING HOW EVALUATION SYSTEMS CONTRIBUTE TO ORDER BUILDING: POWER STRUGGLES AND/OR COMPROMISES

When performed internally (i.e. within formal organizations) evaluation systems are historically associated to control mechanisms (Eisenhardt, 1985; Ouchi, 1979). They constitute features used to maintain what is postulated to be the only order organizers could subscribe to (the "iron-cage" of rational order, namely the *industrial order* in Boltanski & Thévenot (2006)'s typology, the one valuing efficiency and productivity). But evaluation systems may also contribute to meta- and partial organizations by "disciplining" (Chelli & Gendron, 2013) formal organization's behaviors within a given organizational field. For instance, looking at business schools rankings, Espeland & Sauder (2007) find that external evaluation systems and their related metrics operate as isomorphic mechanisms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In such configurations, entities who implemented evaluation systems use them

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[1] The six world identified by Boltanski & Thévenot (2006) are the following : market world (which values market value) industrial world (which values productivity and efficiency) civic world (which values representativeness) domestic world (which values caring), inspired world (which values innovativeness) and fame world (which values the fact of being recognized)

to run tests of "*state of worth*" (Dansou & Langley, 2013) that is to monitor, "*to measure and estimate how well the members perform their tasks*" (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011 p.4) according to the criteria that define what is of worth and what is worthless.

However, evaluation systems - and the criteria they incorporate - also organize to that extent that they contribute "*establish[ing] certainty about what counts as success*" (Brandtner, 2017, p. 210), in case actors test "*order of worth*" (Dansou & Langley, 2013), i.e. when they question which order is appropriate in the situation they live. Evaluation systems are thus useful in organizers' "*attempts to achieve special orders*" (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011) even in organizational contexts, where, initially, what counts as success is not certain and can still be debated.

Indeed, in organizational fields where multiple orders compete (Greenwood et al., 2011) i.e. where conceptions about what is of worth (and what is not) are not shared (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Brandtner, 2017) evaluation systems constitute tools that institutional entrepreneurs (organizers) can rely on to make a new industry appear (Déjean, et al. 2004). Those evaluation systems and the criteria they incorporate to assess worth may host (and be the outcome of) power struggles between organizations (seeking to organize, and consequently competing to establish the specific evaluation criteria they desire to) within an institutionalizing field (Giamporcaro & Gond, 2016). Decisions over evaluation metrics in such configurations can also result from *compromises* (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Huault & Rainelli-Weiss, 2011), i.e. from repeated processes of critique and justification (Cloutier et al., 2017; Dansou & Langley, 2013).

But multiple orders are not restricted to organization fields. They can permeate formal organizations' boundaries (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Pache & Santos, 2010). The resulting order in such configurations thus depends on internal power structure (Pache & Santos, 2010) or on the possibility to elaborate a "*common identity that strikes a balance between the logics [organizations] combine*"(Battilana & Dorado, 2010, p.1)*,* i.e. the possibility to reach a compromise. Recently, Amslem (2013) and Annisette et al., (2017) pinpoint the role of formalized internal evaluation systems in attempts, by different internal stakeholders, to build a specific order in hybrid organizations. They explain that members rely on those systems as a starting point to criticize and then advocate for "what should matter". Evaluation systems enable such organizations to build a "homogeneous organizational identity" by combining criteria of worth that stem from several orders, creating a "common" object (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), the latter transcending competing orders (Amslem, 2013), and stabilizing

compromises that incorporate competing views (Annisette et al., 2017). However, nothing is said on evaluation systems and order building in the very context of market-organizations of the platform-economy, despite the latter specific features.

1.3. HIGHLIGHTING SPECIFICITIES OF EVALUATION SYSTEMS AND ORDER BUILDING IN MARKET-ORGANIZATIONS OF THE PLATFORM-ECONOMY

Recent papers suggest that market-organizations of the platform-economy host multiple conceptions of what is of worth and what is not. On the one hand, users that transact together and that fill evaluation systems value different (and potentially conflicting) aspects of the transaction: in the very case of a car-sharing market-organization, some member-users value ecological concerns or social perspectives, whereas others give value to more utilitarian dimensions (Wilhelms et al., 2017). On the other hand, market-organizers that implement evaluation systems may value aspects that users don't (Acquier et al., 2016).

Market-organizations of the platform-economy seem then to navigate a plurality of orders (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). They face institutional complexity (Mair & Reischauer, 2017) just as hybrid organizations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Pache & Santos, 2010) and certain organizational fields (Brandtner, 2017; Greenwood et al., 2011) do. Contrary to existing literature, in market-organizations ecosystem members (the users) do not seem to have the possibility to elaborate a compromise: they have no choice but to evaluate ex-post, with no room left to alternatively and repeatedly confront their individual viewpoints about what is of worth in the considered situation. They cannot run tests of "*order of worth*" (Dansou & Langley, 2013). A priori, they (only) use the evaluation systems to run tests of "*state of worth*", evaluating the transaction they experienced according to their own conceptions about what is of worth.

As a consequence, would certain users (which ones?) impose their views? All users are presented as peers, i.e. equal in status. None of them seems to be in position to impose a conception of worth. Neither seem organizers able to impose their own views: by the inherent nature of the decentralized peer-to-peer mutual evaluation system, they seem to have no possibility but to let users decide how to evaluate transactions they experienced.

In a pioneering work, Orlikowski & Scott (2013) explore the consequences of evaluations performed by a crowd (of users on hoteliers' behaviors) through TripAdvisor's rating system. They find that those evaluations do not influence hoteliers' behaviors in the same way as *"traditional valuation scheme of the long-standing Automobile Association"* does, notably

because it generates volatile and antagonist comments. Whereas "traditional" evaluation systems produce certainty about what counts (thanks to stable and clearly defined criteria of evaluation), evaluation by the crowd reduces the homogenizing effect: at the end, evaluation in users' hands "*produce organizations focused on and micromanaged by the constant flow of multiple and variable assessments*" (p. 884).

Contrary to TripAdvisor one-way evaluation configuration, market-organizers of the platform-economy mostly implement mutual evaluation systems. The question thus becomes: do some peers conform to other peers' demands, knowing that both of them can assess (and be assessed) by the others? At first glance, such conforming dynamics is not really effective. Indeed a couple of recent papers highlight the positive biases of evaluations systems on Airbnb (Fradkin et al., 2015; Zervas et al., 2015), showing that only very few users do complain (by giving negative ratings) in case of poor experience . On the contrary, the non-linear consequences of mutual evaluation systems (i.e. first few received evaluations having more impact on future transaction conditions than the following ones) suggests that some (more experienced) users may take advantage of the evaluation system(Livingston (2005)). Would they also impose their conceptions of what is a valuable transaction? And finally can the organizer influence the overall process at stake or does the resulting order turn out to be *«different from what organizers* […] *have decided*"(Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p.8)?

Existing literature is not complete enough to 1) help us foreseeing the order (i.e. the conceptions about what is of worth and what is worthless in peer-to-peer transactions) that would prevail within offline transactions and 2) understand the role the evaluation system plays in the emergence of this order. We thus propose to explore this question by running a case study on the French carpooling platform BlaBlaCar.

2. METHODOLOGY

We adopt a single case-study approach to investigate our research question. We collected qualitative data by interviewing BlaBlaCar users and BlaBlaCar managers. Such a qualitative research design is consistent with recent studies that investigate the interactions between users, objects, digital infrastructures and (1) organizations providing facilities for access-based consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012) (2) organizers of the on-demand economy (Lee et al., 2015) and (3) organizers providing digital peer-to-peer platforms (Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015).

2.1. CONTEXT OF STUDY: THE FRENCH PEER-TO-PEER CARPOOLING PLATFORM BLABLACAR

BlaBlaCar is a French organization dedicated to carpooling: it organizes transactions between drivers with empty seats and passengers looking for a ride. Building on our theoretical framework, BlaBlaCar is an organizer that provides BlaBlaCar members/users with a digital infrastructure, the BlaBlaCar app, the whole constituting BlaBlaCar market-organization. Drivers use the BlaBlaCar app to inform journeys they are planning to make and number of passengers they can pick up. Passengers can then find a driver with empty seats for the journey they intend to make. Unlike other market-organizations and related ecosystems that have been already studied, such as car-sharing ones (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), or peer-to-peer car-sharing ones (Wilhelms et al., 2017). Blablacar users proceed and travel together. Consequently, the users' perceived quality of the overall transaction seems dependent from their interlocutor's behavior and from the quality of their offline interactions. Moreover, more than other peer-to-peer platforms organizing transportation services and involving the simultaneous presence of the two users, such as Uber or Lyft (Lee et al., 2015) transacting via BlaBlaCar platform implies "an extensive involvement" (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012) as users share average journeys of 330 kilometers.

All BlaBlaCar users must register online and certify their telephone number to be granted a membership. Then, they are all provided with a profile page, filled with information such as the number of received ratings. They can add profile picture, edit short biography and display information about their habits (smoking in the car or not, talkative or not) etc. The "status" of each user is also algorithmically displayed (see Appendix 1). To release a carpooling add, BlaBlaCar drivers communicate their journey and the amount they ask for it on the app (but tariffs are framed). Proposals or reservations of journeys are only to be made online. Communication capabilities between users are restricted (strict moderation of all public queries, contact details not publicly displayed, etc.) before passengers book.

Two different types of reservations coexist: "automatic" booking mode "non-automatic" booking mode. With automatic booking mode, as soon a passenger makes a reservation online and pays related duties, both user and driver obtain personal contact details (personal phone numbers, etc.) and can then communicate - without any restriction. With "non-automatic booking mode", passengers have to book and pay online to apply for a seat. Drivers can then check profiles of applying passengers and then decide whether to accept them in their car or not. Drivers do not have to justify for their decision and no rejection rate metric appears in

their profiles. After driver's acceptance, both passengers and drivers obtain personal contact details and can then freely communicate. If passengers cancel less than 24 hours before the journey, they are reimbursed only 50% of what they paid, but get the whole amount if the cancellation comes from the driver. After completing the trip, drivers receive the money passengers paid (minus fees charged by BlaBlaCar).

Users are exempt from any direct control from the organizer during the journey: there is no GPS tracking for BlaBlaCar users as it is the case on Uber (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). Unlike other organizers that organize mobility-related peer-to-peer exchanges, BlaBlaCar does not regulate vehicles used (no restriction on age, quality standards, or kilometers limits, etc.) neither ask drivers to prove that they possess a valid driving license. There is no centralized quality certification about any of those features. After the trip, both drivers and passengers are asked to leave an evaluation about their experience through the evaluation system. Users can evaluate their interlocutor even if the latter does not evaluate them and vice versa. However, users will only be able to see received evaluation if they leave feedback in return or after a period of 14 days (and then, they cannot leave feedback anymore). Practically, users are invited to "assess their experience", indicating whether they consider it as "Perfect" (equivalent to 5 stars, ie 5/5), "Very Good" (4/5), "Good" (3/5), "Disappointing" (2/5), or "To Avoid" (1/5) and with a free comment. All given evaluations are aggregated and then incorporated into users' profiles.

BlaBlacar's ecosystem obviously achieved to reach a "critical mass" (Botsman & Rogers, 2011).The platform gathers indeed between 30 and 40 million active users with different socio-demographic characteristics. According to BlaBlaCar, students account for 14% of all drivers and 28% of passengers in 2015; 36% of users are between 18 and 25, 28% between 26 and 35 and 36% over 35 years old. The company has a monopoly on long distance carpooling in Europe, especially in France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

All those points motivated our choice of BlaBlaCar for this case study: this organizer provides ecosystem members with a digital platform, through which those members (strangers for one another) can proceed together during a durable period without any direct control from a third party and evaluate their experience afterwards.

2.2. METHOD

We started our data collection with nonparticipant observations by taking part to journeys of different types, so as to grasp the general scope of BlaBlaCar transactions and to understand

the ways users interact with one another and with the organizer and how they use the digital infrastructure. We thus participated to several BlaBlaCar journey as passengers. We built our interview guides based on those observations and on the literature review.

We ran 20 semi-structured interviews with BlaBlaCar users. We conducted them face-to-face or by phone between April 2016 and August 2017. Those interviews began with questions related to the recent BlaBlaCar trips of the users and to their general habits on the platform. Secondly, we questioned them about their uses of the evaluation system. Then questions aiming to understand how they behave, today and before, and why, were asked. To avoid circular reasoning, we remained relatively free when conducting those interviews to let practices which have not been identified by the literature so far to emerge.

As evaluations have non-linear consequences for platform users (Livingston, 2005), the number of evaluations already received could impact the way users rely on evaluation systems (and behave). Consequently, we selected BlaBlaCar users we interviewed by varying this dimension. Using the number of received evaluation as a proxy of the number of transactions completed might be biased (Livingston, 2005): we thus relied on the registration date and the number of adds released by drivers to complete this information and estimate users' experience on the platform. Second, as Wilhelms et al., (2017) explain that users of sharing economy platforms value different aspects of transactions - depending on whether they are service providers or service users-, we sampled according to their respective role on the BlaBlaCar platform. We triangulated our interview data by scanning each respondent's BlaBlaCar profile page and confronting their statements with what appears on their profile page. Table 1 details the profiles of the respondents.

We also interviewed 3 BlaBlaCar managers (one from the Corporate Strategy Department and two from Customer Support Department). We collected the data by phone between June 2017 and September 2017. Our interview guide was organized around three themes: BlaBlaCar users' attitudes toward carpooling (why they use it, what they value when they carpool, etc.), the effective use of evaluation system by those users, and the use of this evaluation system by the platform itself.

The purpose of this article was not to precisely identify which Thevenot & Boltanski's order(s) users and organizer rely to, but rather to understand how multiple orders interact in the specific organizational configurations of the sharing economy and the related role of the evaluation system, whereas outcomes of potential compromises or power struggles seem unclear at the first glance. Consequently, we first inductively identified the dominant

conceptions related to "what worth in carpooling" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and elaborated a list of semantic descriptors. In a second step, we conducted systematic coding of BlaBlaCar's users and employees' interviews.

Table 1. Overview of BlaBlaCar user's sample

Respondant	Sex	Age	Role	Total received evaluation (Negative)	Status	Adds published (as driver)	Registration date
AC1	F	24	Driver	77 (0)	Ambassador	75	May-13
G1(*)	M	28	Driver & passenger	n.s. (n.s.)	n.s.	ns.	n.s.
K1	M	31	Driver & passenger	22 (2)	Experienced	4	January-11
L1	F	21	Driver & passenger	13 (1)	Expert	3	October-12
M1	F	24	Driver	14(0)	Expert	13	September-12
P1(**)	F	21	passenger	n.s. (n.s.)	n.s.	0	n.s.
R1	M	32	Driver (mostly)	50 (0)	Ambassador	43	September-14
V1	M	23	Driver & passenger	125 (0)	Ambassador	125	September-12
M2	M	48	Driver	106 (0)	Ambassador	57	August-14
S1	F	23	passenger	1(0)	Experiencede	0	June-14
A1	M	26	Passenger, rarely driver	11(0)	Expert	2	January-08
O1	F	27	Driver	6(0)	Experiencede	8	April-13
C1	F	28	Driver, (mostly)	47(1)	Ambassador	65	August-12
J1	M	21	passenger, (mostly)	37(1)	Ambassador	16	August-13
S2	F	22	passenger	27(0)	Ambassador	0	September-13
N1	M	32	Driver & passenger	15(0)	Intermediate	4	December-12
O2	F	55	Driver	4(0)	Experienced	7	April-10
M3	M	31	Driver	117(0)	Intermediate	144	April-17
M4	F	31	passenger	1(0)	Newcome	0	May-17
G2	M	31	Driver & passenger	25(0)	Ambassador	7	October-10

(*) (**) G1 & P1's profiles metrics are not representative of their uses: G1 traveled with his wife's account , P1 with his boyfriend's one

3. RESULTS

3.1. BLABLACAR'S ROLE IN ORDER BUILDING AND HOW IT RELIES ON EVALUATION SYSTEM

BlaBlaCar mostly uses its evaluation system as an information system. This system enables BlaBlaCar to spot transactions that generated negative evaluations and to react in consequence after further investigations, by excluding (or not) spotted users, according to its own decision criteria. Moreover, when modifying the app features, BlaBlaCar also indirectly influences the distribution of orders that are present in its ecosystem. By excluding users in last resort or influencing the distribution of orders in its ecosystem of members, it appears that BlaBlaCar does play a role in order building.

3.1.1. Negative evaluations: a signal allowing BlaBlaCar's reaction and in fine BlaBlaCar's decision

BlaBlaCar can moderate every evaluation left on any profile. By the way, in case of negative evaluations, BlaBlaCar employees often call both driver and passenger to understand what concretely happened during the problematic journey. They may even call other passengers, who attended the journey but who did not leave or receive negative evaluations, to collect a

complementary testimony. To this extent, the mutual evaluation system constitutes an information system for BlaBlaCar, who can be signaled potential drifts. BlaBlaCar then adopts a customized answer to the situation at stake. BlaBlaCar may decide to exclude users from its ecosystem of members. BlaBlaCar, however, explains that the only reason for them to take such decision is when it appears that users violated the law (they drove without insurance, they drove and drank, or they demonstrated aggressive behaviors, etc.).

How users actually used the evaluation system led BlaBlaCar to upgrade the process. Indeed, they noticed that negative evaluations were almost never given and considered that it could be detrimental to the entire ecosystem as malicious users may prosper. BlaBlaCar chose thus to implement "simultaneous" evaluation. Today, users can evaluate their interlocutor even if the latter does not evaluate them, but users can see received evaluations only if they leave an evaluation in return or after a period of 14 days (period after which they cannot leave any feedback anymore). BlaBlaCar wants users to feel totally free when leaving their evaluations and to limit fear of retaliation that formerly deterred users to leave accurate evaluation.

3.1.2. BlaBlaCar's decisions indirectly influences distribution of orders in its ecosystem

Other (numerous) features of BlaBlaCar's app evolved since the very beginning: progressively, interactions became more and more framed. This general evolution contributed solving many coordination problems (drivers used to register to many bookings, passengers did not come, etc.) and to increase overall reliability of transactions organized via BlaBlaCar app. However, it also brings new types of users on board.

Early users value indeed "unexpected meetings", "surprising experiences" and "alternative way of organizing". They consider that the core value of carpooling lies in the unexpected meetings that this activity allows. They are not reluctant to accept hitchhikers on board or could have hitchhiked themselves in the past: they see BlaBlaCar as hitchhiking 2.0. They carpool first because they enjoy spending time with strangers they would never have met otherwise and escape from routine. They constitute the core of BlaBlaCar first users and claim to embody "BlaBlaCar spirit", a spirit made of caring and being welcoming. When carpooling, they consequently value exchanges and discussions, are arranging and expect each user to be arranging.

A second-type of users progressively joined the platform because they considered it as "practical" and "safe". Those users rather value utilitarian aspects. For them, the primary value of BlaBlaCar lies in material aspects: reducing costs of traveling and/or travel more

rapidly. Those users generally joined more recently: some of them are users who travel daily, or weekly (for instance when commuting between the city they work in and the city they live in). Those users (driver and users) can consider carpooling as a service and attach importance to "utilitarian rationality": they are not going to make a detour because they consider that it would bother the majority and can turn to train when tickets are cheaper than carpooling.

Incidentally, users who experienced successive tariff variations on BlaBlaCar's app (evolution of fees modalities, changes in the recommended prices for drivers, etc.) also explain that those price increases have contributed raising new users' expectations of service quality and attracted drivers desiring to reduce their driving costs.

3.2. BLABLACAR'S EVALUATION SYSTEM BUILDS A FAVORABLE POSITION FOR EXPERIENCED USERS TO IMPOSE THE ORDER THEY SUBSCRIBE TO

Interviews reveal that experienced and inexperienced users use the mutual evaluation system in different manners. This unequal use allows experienced users to be in a favorable position for imposing the order they consider as appropriate.

3.2.1. Ex-ante positive evaluations: a sine qua non condition for less-experimented users but a side issue for experienced users

Inexperienced users express their fear of meeting strangers: they are afraid of being involved in a transaction with a potentially harmful individual (for instance someone with poor driving skills, in a poorly maintained vehicle, or with malicious intents). They claim that they move beyond those fears thanks to the evaluation system. They consider that a dangerous user would already have been signaled via negative evaluations. Consequently, they check profiles out before entering a transaction and never engage in a transaction with someone with no evaluation, or very reluctantly, when they have no choice but to. Consequently, evaluations constitute a central element in decision-making for inexperienced users: they take time to carefully observe profiles and evaluation of each potential interlocutor before making a reservation.

While gaining experience, users pay less attention to potential interlocutors' evaluations: it does not constitute an important criterion in their decision-making. Even if they still look at evaluations, they do not use it anymore to discriminate between their potential interlocutors, but rather rely on other signals (type of vehicles, age, hours of journeys… but also geographical origins of the name, etc.). This dynamic is confirmed by the choice of most experienced drivers to use "automatic booking". If some of them turned to automatic booking

to maximize their chance of having passengers on board, or because "non-automatic" booking is too costly, many of them noticed that when using "non-automatic" booking mode, they did not check profiles out so that there was no use doing this way. The very experienced drivers who keep using "non-automatic" reservation mode, explain they do not so for checking profiles, but for more flexibility.

3.2.2. Ex post positive evaluations: above all the confirmation of a pleasant experience

Users leave two kinds of positive evaluations. First ones are voluntarily left when experience has been particularly friendly: users who felt particularly comfortable during a journey with another user are generally inclined to leave positive evaluations with detailed comments. They want to signal their interlocutors that they really enjoyed the moment, evoking the pleasure of giving a "wink" echoing their discussions. They rather release a lyrical public evaluation to thank their interlocutors than send a private grateful text. The second kind of positive evaluations are standard positive evaluations (such as "pleasant journey" or "nice person"), automatically given, for non-especially friendly or pleasant journeys, often received mechanically, without emotion.

Users with less experience are inclined to always leave an evaluation: they leave the first type of evaluation when they really enjoyed the trip, the second when the trip was "not bad". They can indeed try to collect positive evaluations in return of evaluations left. Some of them also take time to do it because they think it is the way of doing or do so because they received one. Users with more experience are less inclined to take time to leave evaluations: they only give the first type of positive evaluations, when they really enjoyed a trip. They do not need evaluations anymore, do not pay any attention to evaluations they receive and sometimes do not even read them. Thus, they do not take time to respond to the non-detailed evaluations.

When receiving the first kind of positive evaluations all users explain that it is pleasant to have their impressions confirmed with detailed evaluations: it constitutes a pleasant confirmation of the positive impression that users could have felt but with no possibility to be sure that "it was true". It reassures users on the veracity of what they have lived.

3.2.3. Ex-post negative evaluations: a rude and risky decision for inexperienced users vs. a fair judgment for experienced ones.

Several users have reported that they experienced unpleasant or even dangerous journeys with users who did not have even one negative evaluation left on their profile page (whereas everyone agrees that if someone drives badly or fast, he is likely to do it every time when

driving). Users are indeed generally reluctant to give negative evaluations even when they have experienced unpleasant journeys. They prefer not to leave any evaluation rather than give a negative one. Several reasons are invoked. First, users fear retaliation, even if BlaBlaCar has recently updated its evaluation system to promote simultaneity in evaluation. They generally avoid leaving negative evaluation when the experience was not pleasant (but not extreme) because either (1) they all want to give "the benefit of a doubt" to someone they only met once or (2) because they consider that their feelings can be subjective, and (3) because they often consider that each drawback (personal, or material) taken separately does not worth such a sanction. Generally, it seems for them unfair to risk marking users for life when they "only" experienced an unpleasant journey and since they are not sure that other users would have experienced unpleasant journey as well. "Positive" interpersonal aspects often prevail. In extreme cases (scams, of obviously harmful or threatening behaviors for instance) users can leave negative evaluations, but they often also contact BlaBlaCar in parallel because they want effective sanctions.

If inexperienced users mostly do not even consider leaving a negative evaluation (but consider leaving the platform), it changes with experience: some experienced users explain that now they would "less hesitate" to leave negative evaluation as they feel that they are able to distinguish between the ones who are "abusing" and the others.

The ones who never received negative evaluation consider that it would hurt them, because they consider that they behave properly and do not deserve it, that they henceforth "know how to behave". However, some of them affirm that if poor evaluation is constructive, they would be ready to change their manners, to think about how to behave.

3.2.4. Influence of evaluation on users' behavior: conforming for less experienced but anecdotical to experienced users

Inexperienced users are not confident into their ability to be accepted in future exchanges. They consequently fear receiving a negative evaluation as they are newcomers. Describing a particularly unpleasant (even dangerous) experience, a passenger reported that she both avoided making a comment to the driver during the journey (she considered asking for driving slow) and avoided leaving a negative evaluation on his profile, because she feared to receive a poor evaluation in return. A driver related that during his first journeys, he faced "abusing" passengers (asking for consequent detours, waiting to be given her suitcase) but did not dare to refuse. More generally, less-experienced users wonder how to behave, sometimes do more

than expected (more experienced users often point out that users realizing their first trips tend to be "very enthusiastic", sometimes bringing food to share, etc.).

Accordingly, while gaining experience, they pay little attention to evaluations they may receive from others. First, experienced users seem to consider that they have already received enough positive evaluations to offset any negative evaluation that they could potentially receive. They consider that they do not "need" to receive additional positive evaluations and that a negative one would not impact their conditions of transaction in the future. Second, they also consider that "they know how to behave" so they do not worry about the possibility of receiving a negative evaluation. Third, as soon as they gain experience on BlaBlaCar, most users also assert that they have noticed a positive bias of this evaluation system and they no longer fear the threat of the negative evaluation, since they consider that they are unlikely to receive one.

3.3. EXPERIENCED USERS: HOW THEY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR FAVORABLE POSITIONS DEPEND ON THE ORDER THEY SUBSCRIBE TO

It has been explained that evolution of BlaBlaCar's app features and pricings contributed bringing new types of users on board. Interviews confirm that BlaBlaCar ecosystem hosts experienced-users who value different aspects of carpooling and that what is valued influences the way users behave and how they take advantage of the evaluation system (when they gain experience).

3.3.1. Users valuing utilitarian aspect of carpooling reinforce their position through their use of the evaluation system

Users valuing utilitarian aspects of transactions recognize that they may have adapted their behaviors after gaining experience, and/or after noticing the biases of the system: some of them confided that they worry less if they are late, allow themselves to be more rigid on their proper conditions of traveling: for instance, drivers do not accept detours anymore whereas passengers ask for more. Users in general make fewer efforts to enhance conversations (or no more effort at all).

Experienced users valuing utilitarian aspects of carpooling also declare to use back-door tactics to discriminate among their potential interlocutors. Indeed, some experienced drivers mention that they would prefer to set "non-automatic" booking mode but they do not do so because passengers prefer drivers with automatic booking (and they want, as far as possible, fill their car). Nevertheless, they continue checking profiles out after passengers booked and

can cancel their planned travel on the app (and publish a new one) if they come to know that a passenger with poor comments has booked.

3.3.2. Users valuing socialaspect of carpooling abandon their position by turning away from the evaluation system

The more they gain experience, the more users valuing social aspects of carpooling refuse to discriminate among potential interlocutors. They would be incapable to do so, because they like to be surprised by remarkable individuals. Observing that most of their interlocutors behave differently than what they consider themselves as the "carpooling spirit", they tend to do less trips with the platform. They rather travel with competing platforms or even alone in their car, by train or by bus. Indeed, a significant portion of early BlaBlaCar users turned to competing platforms, free of charge. They can also have adapted their efforts (they can make fewer detours, are less arranging for luggage, etc.) in consequence. They self-exclude from BlaBlaCar app rather than sanction behaviors that they judge not to be in conformity with their idea of caring and sharing, i.e. their idea of the "BlaBlaCar spirit".

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study provides first evidence of how different actors interface with mutual evaluation systems in the production of order in a partial-organization of the platform-economy, namely BlaBlaCar. Our results highlight that the shared conceptions of what is of worth and what is worthless which are to prevail in the long run in the related off-line transactions is the outcome of a complex interplay between decisions of the organizer and decisions of users, the mutual evaluation system being the connecting medium between all actors.

We indeed first find that the organizer uses the mutual evaluation system to detect potential drifts and to conform deviant users to a minimal order. Its interference in the ecosystem of users remains limited and decisions to exclude users contingent and scarce (as compared to choices made by Uber for instance (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016). But the ability of the organizer to ensure users behave in the way that it considers as being appropriate and to conform users to those considerations depends upon users' willingness to leave negative evaluations (if the latter don't, organizers have no signal so no possibility to act). Despite the organizer sets up explicit rules and terms of use for off-line transactions (according to which it decides to exclude or not contraveners), the only way for it to be informed of any drift is through the evaluation system. We thus confirm that the mutual evaluation system (even when decentralized) is required to organize the related ecosystem in the way that seems appropriate

to the organizer i.e. to implement its organizational work (to use Ahrne & Brunsson's (2011) terminology). It is a necessary condition for the dynamics of conformation (traditionally observed in the literature when the organizer impose its unique order to organizational members) to operate.

At the same time, paradoxically, by playing on some parts of its digital infrastructure (modifying the pricing or booking policies for instance) the organizer progressively attracts or repels users who have competing views toward the order that should prevail during off-line transactions. This, in turn, increases diversity of orders and changes the distribution of users in the ecosystem. Hence, the continuous development of the digital infrastructure provided by BlaBlaCar brought on board users coming up with new ideas about what is valuable or appropriate (those "newcomers" exhibiting more utilitarian considerations, such as arriving on time). The order to prevail in the long run may then change, due to this change in the respective weight of each order among users. If the organization does not acknowledge any voluntary action to influence the type of order at stake on its platform (except compliance with law), it however indirectly transforms the prevalent order, yet without any modification of the evaluation system provided.

Third, users play a decisive a role in the production of order within considered ecosystems and this role cannot be understood without understanding their actual uses of the mutual evaluation system. We find indeed that mutual evaluation systems create favorable positions for experienced users to establish the order they subscribe to. Since they never (or almost never) receive negative evaluations, experienced users consider that they know which behavior is appropriate and which is not. They behave as they desire to and do not question their behaviors anymore, because they have transacted many times and nobody (or almost) never complained. Conversely, inexperienced do not dare to impose their conceptions of what is appropriate in carpooling, because they are afraid of receiving a negative evaluation and because they are not certain of what is valued in such configurations. Indeed there is no standard of quality expressed on the platform, and the service is not provided by professionals what might at the same time make people more indulgent and/or less confident in their respective opinion. Users face difficulty to disentangle "state of worth" from "order of worth" when experiencing a disappointing transaction: did their peer really perform a poor transaction or did they expect something inappropriate from this transaction?

When assessing their transactions, on-line and ex-post, users cannot confront their respective (and potentially diverging) points of view to ensure the reality of what they are going through

(Arendt, 1958), nor build compromises (for instance either the driver did a detour or not, there is no other alternative). Users thus excessively rely on their personal experience (rather than on other points of view or any external expertise) to make sense of the situation they experienced. This mechanism participates to create favorable positions for experienced users to impose their considerations about what is appropriate i.e. to impose their order. But how experienced users take advantage of this seemingly favorable position depends on the order they respectively subscribe to.

Our case study pinpoint that (experienced) users with utilitarian motives do use the evaluation system to leave negative evaluations and signal inappropriate behaviors, since they feel legitimate to do so because they value those features. On the contrary, experimented users valuing social behaviors and unexpected meeting refuse to use the evaluation system as a negative sanction or information tool because they consider precisely that what they value when carpooling is to meet unexpected people. They neither value the fact of enhancing potential quality of service or efficiency. In a nutshell, what is valued in carpooling impacts the way users use evaluation system to discriminate ex-ante, their use of evaluation system ex-post, but also the way they behave during transactions. Consequently, and surprisingly to the literature, for BlaBlaCar market-organization, conceptions about what is of worth and what is not prevailing in the long run are not established and imposed by users that are a priori in favorable position to do so (Pache & Santos, 2010).

In this partial organization, the evaluation system (which is unique and imposed by the organizer) is not able to combine criteria of worth coming from the different orders of worth users subscribe to (Amslem, 2013; Annisette et al., 2017). The lack of compromise benefits to the order compatible with the model of evaluation provided on the platform. The evaluation system does neither become a common object (Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006), going beyond the different orders, nor a locus of struggles among users with different orders, but looks like a strategic silent and peaceful weapon serving the interests of one order among the plural ones at stake on the platform. The war of the worlds seems pre-settled by the designer of the evaluation system: no negotiation on orders does occur during transactions neither during evaluation processes, and users are doomed to try and bypass the system if they don't accept the logic behind it.Our results do not echo what has been found in hybrid organizations in the sense that early users do not manage to impose their conceptions of what is valuable in carpooling (Pache & Santos, 2010) neither users succeed in building on a common organizational identity (Battilana & Dorado, 2010) relying on compromises. And since a

plurality of evaluation systems cannot coexist (Brandtner, 2017) in such configurations, because evaluation system is part of the infrastructure provided by the organizer, the only solution left to users to cope with the presence of multiple order, is to flow to other ecosystems: in the case we analyzed, several early users turned to alternative platforms, non-profit oriented for instance, compatible with their order, and maybe without any evaluation systems or at least a different one. The order homogenization process does not occur through fighting and sanctioning, but rather through self-censorship of users from divergent orders: the effective evaluation practices (or rejection of such practices) determine who wins. The dynamics of order building in those partial organizations and the role played by evaluation systems in this dynamic sound idiosyncratic.

Those results raise several stimulating practical implications. First our results help platform organizers to clearly envision the consequences of the very design of the evaluation system they provide to their potential users, on the final order prevailing on their platform. The design of the evaluation system indeed constitutes a strategic decision for organizers when launching their platform. If the non-neutral dimension of instruments is already well documented in the literature (Orlikowski & Scott, 2013), we demonstrate in the present paper that even with a decentralized use of evaluations systems, the later still supports specific orders in partial organizations.

Second, the "dynamics of the sharing economy" (Mair & Reischauer, 2017) we observe create room for several carpooling platforms, each of them having to clearly posit the order it wants to defend among its members. The next question becomes: which evaluation system would properly reflect the order of worth the platform believes in?

This first evidence calls for additional work, to cope with some of the limitations of the present paper. A first avenue would consist in collecting longitudinal quantitative data to be able to observe effective changes in evaluation practices among users (and not only declarative ones, as it is the case in the present paper) coupled with qualitative data to account for potential changes of order of worth of and among users. Comparing the dynamics, we exhibit with the situation at stake in other countries the platform is active in, could also be promising, to help us envisioning whether or not multiple orders do solve in different ways in different cultures yet with the same evaluation system. Lastly the BlaBlaCar platform can be

considered as a mature platform. The role of evaluation systems in the ordering process could be investigated in newly installed platforms so as to check its contingency/robustness.

5. APPENDIX

Appendix1. BlaBlaCar's experience levels status

	Newcomer	Intermediate	Experienced	Expert	Ambassador
Verified email and phone		Both	Both	Both	Both
Preferences set		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Profile photo added				Yes	Yes
#of positive ratings received		1	3	6	12
% of positive ratings received		>60%	>70%	>80%	>90%
Seniority		1 month	3 months	6 months	12 months

Source : BlaBlaCar : https://www.blablacar.co.uk/experience-level

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