

Chapter 10

Uberization (or Uberification) of the Economy

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ABSTRACT

The global availability of the internet, along with innovations (innovation comes in a variety of products, services, and applications), explain certain aspects of the dynamics of the innovation process, the diffusion of technology, and the development of various platforms (product and service marketplace, social networking platform, content platform). Uber has been a driving force behind the emergence of new kinds of platform services connecting consumers and providers in real time and organizing information without any ownership of the products concerned. Uber has changed the rules of the economic game and its success has inspired the term “uberization.” Uberization exposes both traditional groups to direct competition with new entrants (especially peer-to-peer platforms operators). This fast-growing phenomenon is seen today as an important feature of economic transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The management of technological innovation is one of the most demanding challenges today (Dodgson et al., 2008). The external environment characterized by globalization, convergence, competitive/market uncertainty, time-to-market pressure, shortening product lifecycles is also based on knowledge, information, fast-changing technology and an innovative economy. In recent years a series of innovations and trends have changed the way people perceive technology. The global availability of the Internet, along with innovations (products, services and applications) explain certain aspects of the dynamics of the innovation process, the diffusion of technology and the development of various platforms (product and service marketplace, social networking platform, content platform).

The Uber taxi-booking smartphone app, matching those who have cars with people who need rides quickly, was created in 2009 in the US and has been progressively launched all around the world. Since this pioneering app, several other start-ups operating in various activities (transportation, flower and food delivery, events, home services, legal services) have adopted a Uber-like business model (BM) and more and more companies are looking to disrupt regulated industries, such as banking or healthcare.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7766-9.ch010

Uberization (or Uberification) of the Economy

Uber has been a driving force behind the emergence of a new kind of platform connecting consumers and providers in real time and organizing information without any ownership of the products concerned. Uber, based on trust (MacDonald, 2016), has changed the rules of the economic game and its success has inspired the term “uberization”.

The objective of this chapter is to gain a more precise understanding of uberization and in particular its theoretical scope. How would we combine uberization with other accepted and widely used concepts in economics and strategy, such as platforms, multi-sided markets, externalities and business ecosystems? Is uberization a relevant concept, an all-purpose word with a multitude of meanings or just a buzz word?

This chapter attempts to answer these questions and is structured as follows. This first section introduces the topic and key concepts and presents a brief overview of the evolution of the Uber phenomenon to a larger trend named uberization or uberification. The second section discusses the conceptual and theoretical framework to analyze the development of uberization. It develops a strategic and economic perspective. In section 3, several recommendations are proposed. Section 4 suggests directions for further research. Section 5 concludes.

BACKGROUND

From Uber to Uberization

Uber (the mobile application) is not uberization (Table 1). In recent years, a number of studies have been performed to gain further insight into the uberization phenomenon, notably empirical publications. The particular attention given to uberization (even in non-specialized press) shows how its importance has grown year by year since the end of the 2000s. The definitions given in the general and specialized press are generally broad or applied to a particular industry or activity.

Uberization should lead to a transformation of the entire economy. Uberization is a phenomenon based on on-demand services (enabled by the Internet and smartphones) and peer-to-peer platforms combining imitable features such as dynamic pricing sometimes called “surge” pricing (Horpedahl, 2015; Smith, 2016), mobile payment, rating systems, algorithmic and data management (Hall et al., 2015).

Table 1. From Uber to uberization

Uberization of Work - Employment	<p>“But of all the ways that Uber could change the world, the most far-reaching may be found closest at hand: your office. Uber, and more broadly the app-driven labor market it represents, is at the center of what could be a sea change in work, and in how people think about their jobs”. (Manjoo, 2015)</p> <p>“There has been a lot of debate about how online platforms have changed the nature of work. In some cases, on-demand companies have been harshly criticized for making employer like demands on workers but denying them basic benefits and protections”. (Bernard, 2016)</p>
Uberization of Finance and Banking	<p>“We are on the verge of the Uberization of finance, which will bring multiple new opportunities but also a range of new risks (...). Uber is a high-tech middleman that is making the intermediaries of the past obsolete. The financial world is one of the most mediated industries on the planet, and that is precisely what is about to change. (Karabell, 2015).</p>
Uberization of Business Schools	<p>“What could more surely come next is the appearance of low cost and/or no frills business schools, focusing on the essentials and offering options. That’s partially the idea of online business schools, with some success, but it never really diffused to brick-and-mortar or hybrid models. With the strong discussions on fees in many countries of the world, there is now room for the emergence of a new type of business schools.” (Therin, 2015).</p>

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