Strategic Agility in the B2B Sharing Economy Ecosystem of Emerging Economies: Empirical Insights from the Middle East

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Abstract

Strategic agility plays a critical role in enhancing business competitiveness. However, research on how business-to-business (B2B) organizations develop and implement strategic agility within the sharing economy ecosystem remains limited. This study, based on semi-structured interviews with 27 business owners and service/product providers from Egypt who engage in B2B interactions on sharing platforms, identifies two key dimensions of agility that strengthen brand identity and image in emerging markets: (1) the establishment and stabilization of payment frameworks between platforms and providers, and (2) the reinforcement of regulatory measures to ensure a stable working environment. Additionally, the paper examines business activities that facilitate rapid adaptation to external changes, enabling swift responses in B2B exchanges of goods, services, or resources. These findings enhance our understanding of the impact of strategic agility on B2B firms in the sharing economy of emerging markets and offer valuable implications for both research and practice.

Keywords: Sharing economy; Strategic Agility; Brand Identity; Emerging Economies Egypt; Middle East

1 Introduction

The global sharing economy has experienced remarkable growth, with major players such as Uber and Airbnb reshaping the business landscape (Danatzis, Möller-Herm, & Herm, 2024). This growth has been accompanied by increased innovation and sector diversification (Belezas & Daniel, 2023; Ko et al., 2021). Projections indicate that the industry will grow by an extraordinary 2,233%, reaching a value of $335 billion by 2025 (Statista.com, 2021). In response, companies are significantly investing in technological infrastructure and forming strategic partnerships to bolster their competitiveness in both developed and emerging markets (De Rivera et al., 2017; Zeng et al., 2021). The sharing economy presents significant opportunities for individuals and businesses to engage in collaborative consumption, facilitating the utilization of underused resources and enabling the monetization of assets for value creation and capture (Gerwe & Silva, 2020; Laczko et al., 2019). While it brings substantial economic benefits to governments and businesses through strong direct and indirect network effects (Davlembayeva & Papagiannidis, 2023; Katz & Shapiro, 1994), many organizations struggle to fully leverage these advantages across different markets, particularly in emerging economies (Räisänen et al., 2021). This challenge is further exacerbated by the emergence of a "winner-takes-all" phenomenon, which intensifies competition (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003; Katz & Shapiro, 1994).

The evolution of the sharing economy has profoundly affected economic dynamics and consumer behavior (Abdalla et al., 2024; Gupta, Gupta, & Kumar, 2024). Facilitated through online platforms, the modern sharing economy enables peer-to-peer exchanges of underutilized goods and services (Gerwe & Silva, 2020; Ritter & Schanz, 2019). However, as traditional business models are disrupted, the sharing economy demands that firms adapt swiftly to market changes. This involves the rapid reconfiguration of business models, operations, and services in response to shifts in demand, emerging technologies, and evolving consumer preferences (Aulkemeier et al., 2019; Khan, 2021).

In this context, agility refers to firms' ability to adapt quickly and effectively to external changes, which is crucial for maintaining competitiveness in business-to-business (B2B) exchanges. Agility is particularly vital for sharing economy firms, which rely on flexible platforms connecting customers and suppliers across the globe (cf. Li et al., 2024). These activities encompass digital transformation, agile supply chain management, and real-time collaboration (Boojihawon et al., 2021; Tarba et al., 2023). Such agile strategies enable firms to respond promptly to market changes, enhance operational efficiency, and develop customer-centric solutions (Khan, 2021; Narayanan et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2023).

Emerging markets pose unique challenges, making strategic agility an even more critical factor for survival and competitive advantage (cf. Boojihawon et al., 2021; Doz & Kosonen, 2008, 2010; Khan, 2021; Weber & Tarba, 2014; Tarba et al., 2023). These markets are often characterized by weak infrastructure, political instability, rapidly shifting consumer behavior, and unpredictable regulatory environments (Khanna & Paleupu, 1997). In these contexts, firms' ability to respond quickly to change, adapt their services, and form local partnerships often determines success or failure. For example, ride-sharing companies operating in emerging markets such as India must adjust their pricing models, service offerings, and payment systems to meet local regulations and customer needs. Uber's ability to navigate regulatory changes swiftly and localize its services in sub-Saharan Africa illustrates how agility—through operational flexibility, collaboration with local businesses, and responsiveness to political shifts—can provide a competitive advantage in emerging markets (Khalek & Chakraborty, 2023). These examples underscore the strategic importance of agility for firms operating in markets with volatile and weak institutional frameworks.

Furthermore, the flexibility afforded by agility is central to supporting innovation in the sharing economy. By embracing agility, companies can introduce new services, integrate emerging technologies, and enhance the customer experience, thereby maintaining a competitive edge (Sadiq et al., 2023). Agility also supports the development of a global brand identity by enabling firms to respond quickly to user feedback, build trust, and strengthen their reputation (Melwar et al., 2017; Foroudi et al., 2020; Pankov et al., 2023).

Despite the growing recognition of agility's importance in the sharing economy, there remains a notable gap in understanding how firms develop and implement agility in the weak institutional settings of emerging markets. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how B2B organizations within the sharing economy cultivate agility in such environments. While much of the existing research on agility focuses on developed markets, emerging markets present a unique set of challenges that warrant further exploration, particularly in the B2B context. Against this backdrop, the study aims to answer the following research question: How do B2B organizations operating in the sharing economy develop agility in emerging markets characterized by weak institutional frameworks?

The study makes significant contributions to the literature on industrial marketing and agility. First, it enhances understanding by demonstrating how B2B organizations in emerging markets develop agility in response to weak institutional structures. The study provides valuable insights into the mechanisms through which these firms navigate challenges such as regulatory changes, infrastructure limitations, and market volatility. By focusing on businesses operating within the sharing economy, it deepens comprehension of how these firms develop competitive advantages through agility, collaboration, and innovation. Second, the study integrates insights from institutional theory and dynamic capability theory, emphasizing that organizational agility cannot be fully understood without considering the broader institutional context in which it operates. It reexamines institutional theory's traditional emphasis on legitimacy, often at the expense of adaptability, and suggests a need for reconceptualization to account for the dynamic tension between conformity and flexibility. This integration demonstrates how agility enables firms to comply with institutional pressures while maintaining the flexibility necessary to respond to evolving market demands.

Third, building on prior research on strategic agility (Girod, Birkinshaw, & Prange, 2023; Nyamrunda & Freeman, 2021; Tan, Tan, Wang, & Sedera, 2017), the study explores how B2B organizations cultivate agility in weak institutional environments, specifically within the sharing economy. Agility is particularly critical for firms operating in these contexts, as they must rapidly sense and seize market opportunities to create and capture value (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Zeng et al., 2021). Fourth, existing research has predominantly focused on agility within traditional business models, leaving a significant gap in understanding how these dynamics function in the sharing economy, particularly for B2B organizations. Furthermore, the literature often neglects the complexities of fostering agility in emerging economies, where institutional weaknesses exacerbate adaptability challenges. This study addresses this gap by integrating insights from the sharing economy literature (Belezas & Daniel, 2023; Khalek & Chakraborty, 2023) and the strategic agility literature (Girod, Birkinshaw, & Prange, 2023). In doing so, it identifies the conditions that impede the development of agile B2B organizations within the sharing economy model. Finally, by focusing on strategic agility in B2B contexts within the sharing economy, the study addresses a critical gap in the literature, which has largely concentrated on consumer-centric models. It offers valuable insights into how strategic agility influences not only individual businesses but also the broader ecosystem. The study demonstrates how B2B firms generate value through collaboration with key actors, such as platform owners, service providers, and institutional stakeholders, in both developed and emerging markets.

2 Theoretical Background

B2B organizations operating in emerging markets are often situated within contexts shaped by significant institutional pressures, which influence their ability to remain agile and responsive to environmental changes (Khurana et al., 2022; Volberda et al., 2021). Agility, as a dynamic capability, is crucial for organizations seeking to maintain competitiveness in volatile markets. However, its development is frequently constrained by the institutional frameworks within which these organizations operate (Sultana et al., 2022). This study critically examines the interplay between institutional pressures and organizational agility, drawing on insights from institutional theory and dynamic capability theory to elucidate how these forces interact to shape organizational outcomes (Bag et al., 2023; Fainshmidt et al., 2016; Wilden et al., 2016).

Institutional theory provides a lens through which these pressures can be understood. Institutions, defined as the "rules of the game," encompass formal structures such as laws and regulations, as well as informal features such as beliefs, norms, and local traditions (North, 1990; Peng, 2002). According to institutional theory, organizations often adopt certain behaviors, practices, and structures to align with institutional pressures, which include coercive, normative, and mimetic forces (Scott, 1995). Coercive pressures, stemming from regulatory mandates and government interventions, often impose rigid structures that hinder innovation and flexibility (Aragòn-Correa et al., 2020). Mimetic pressures, driven by competitive uncertainties, may push organizations toward imitative behaviors, potentially undermining their capacity to innovate and adapt uniquely to market needs (Struckell et al., 2022). Normative pressures, rooted in professional norms and cultural expectations, may further entrench established practices, thereby complicating efforts to enhance organizational agility (Lui et al., 2021).

While institutional theory emphasizes legitimacy-driven practices, these often conflict with the requirements of agility, leading to dysfunctional outcomes for organizations operating in dynamic and uncertain environments (Santangelo & Verbeke, 2022; Migliorati, 2020). This misalignment between internal organizational processes and external environmental demands creates a paradox: the pursuit of legitimacy through conformity can ultimately hinder the dynamic capabilities required for sustained competitiveness (Risi et al., 2023; Santa-Maria et al., 2022). Prior research has shown that institutional pressures often compel organizations to allocate resources to environmentally friendly practices, primarily to appease key stakeholders (Bag, Srivastava, Gupta, Zhang, & Kamble, 2023). In the context of emerging economies, these institutional conditions are frequently characterized by limited access to institutional support, weak legal enforcement mechanisms, and inefficient regulatory frameworks (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2019; Khanna & Palepu, 1997, 2005). These factors, in turn, can either facilitate or hinder firms' ability to develop strategic agility.

Dynamic capability theory posits that an organization's ability to sense, seize, and transform opportunities and threats is fundamental to its survival in dynamic environments (Seo et al., 2021; Mikalef et al., 2021; Teece, 2007; Teece & Leih, 2016). Agility, as a manifestation of dynamic capabilities, involves not merely reactive adaptation but also the proactive reshaping of organizational processes and strategies to align with evolving market conditions (Khan, 2021; Liljenberg, 2022; Teece et al., 2016). For B2B organizations, particularly those in emerging markets, institutional pressures often complicate this process (Du & Kim, 2021; Huq & Stevenson, 2020). This study contributes to the integration of institutional theory and dynamic capability theory by demonstrating that organizational agility cannot be fully understood without considering the broader institutional context in which it operates. It critiques institutional theory's focus on legitimacy at the expense of adaptability, calling for a reconceptualization that better accounts for the dynamic tension between conformity and flexibility.

3 Conceptual Background: Agility and Sharing Economy Firms

Past research has extensively examined the importance of agility in business, emphasizing its critical role in enhancing the competitiveness of firms (cf. Boojihawon et al., 2021; Khan, 2021; Tarba et al., 2023; Weber & Tarba, 2014; Junni et al., 2015). Within this context, "agility" refers to an organization's ability to adapt rapidly and respond effectively to changing or uncertain business environments (e.g., Goldman et al., 1995; Weber & Tarba, 2014; Junni et al., 2015; Teece et al., 2016). Failure to act swiftly and adapt to market shifts can erode a firm's competitiveness (Goldman et al., 1995). Consequently, agility enables firms within the sharing economy to navigate dynamic conditions, fostering the development of reputation and global brand identity.

Adaptability is particularly crucial in emerging markets, where firms often contend with dynamic and uncertain economic landscapes, compounded by weak and evolving institutions (Jin et al., 2018). Agility empowers sharing economy firms to respond effectively to fluctuations in consumer demand, regulatory changes, and technological advancements (Pankov et al., 2021). Specifically, agility enables these firms to reconfigure their operations, pivot business models, and swiftly adapt offerings to meet evolving market demands (Weng et al., 2024). For instance, in response to changing consumer expectations, agile firms can rapidly modify service features, adjust pricing strategies, and alter delivery mechanisms, thereby ensuring continued customer engagement and satisfaction in a competitive environment.

Moreover, agility allows firms to remain adaptable in the face of regulatory shifts, adjusting compliance practices and operational protocols with minimal disruption (Fasnacht & Proba, 2024). This flexibility is particularly critical in the sharing economy, where regulatory frameworks are often fluid and unpredictable. Agility, therefore, acts as a buffer against the risks associated with regulatory changes, enabling firms to continue delivering value to users (Rong & Luo, 2023). Regarding technological advancements, agility enables sharing economy firms to integrate emerging technologies rapidly, enhancing both operational efficiency and user experience. By adopting new digital tools, firms can optimize matchmaking algorithms, streamline transaction processes, and introduce innovative features that improve service delivery (Weng et al., 2024). Technological agility ensures that sharing economy firms remain at the forefront of industry trends, leveraging emerging technologies to maintain competitive advantages.

Furthermore, agility plays a pivotal role in personalizing user experiences. Agile firms can quickly collect and analyze user data to tailor services, offering customized solutions aligned with individual preferences and needs (Irfan et al., 2020). This personalized approach drives user engagement and loyalty, enhancing the long-term success of these platforms. Agility also supports brand identity and reputation management. As noted by Um (2017), agile firms can promptly address customer feedback, resolve complaints, and implement service improvements, thereby strengthening brand reputation and reinforcing consumer trust. This proactive approach is essential in the sharing economy, where consumer trust and long-term relationships are vital for business success. In such contexts, agility is not merely a reactive tool but a strategic enabler that helps sharing economy firms adapt to market volatility, customize services, and maintain strong brand identities (Tarba et al., 2023; Zeng et al., 2021). This multifaceted role underscores its critical importance in fostering resilience and long-term success within the sharing economy.

The optimization of resources emerges as a fundamental value driver in the existing literature (Pankov et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2022; Carissimi & Creazza, 2022). Agility plays a crucial role in optimizing resource utilization, which is a key value driver in the sharing economy. In resource-constrained environments, particularly in emerging markets, agility enables firms to reallocate assets and capacities swiftly in response to demand fluctuations (Bouncken et al., 2020; Boojihawon et al., 2021; Khan, 2021). Grinevich et al. (2019) assert that agility facilitates the efficient use of resources, accelerating market cycles and minimizing inefficiencies. Hesselberg (2018) further argues that agility maximizes resource utilization, thereby contributing to faster market cycles (Zhang et al., 2018; Zahoor et al., 2023). For new ventures and startups in the sharing economy, agility offers a competitive edge, allowing them to expedite market entry and secure a foothold in rapidly evolving markets (Akter et al., 2022; Sherehiy et al., 2007).

Researchers have highlighted agility's role in supporting innovation and experimentation within the sharing economy (Jerdea, 2023). Agility serves as a catalyst for innovation (Liu et al., 2023), providing businesses with the flexibility to explore new ideas, services, or business models without being hindered by bureaucratic constraints (Cha & Park, 2023). This fosters the creation of a more dynamic and innovative ecosystem, enhancing the global brand identity of sharing economy firms (Cuo et al., 2023). Additionally, agility contributes to business renewal and resilience, enabling firms to recover swiftly from adverse situations and adapt to shifting market conditions (Al Doghan & Sundram, 2023; Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Teece et al., 2016). In emerging markets, sharing economy firms face numerous challenges, including infrastructure limitations, political instability, and economic volatility, which require effective resource orchestration strategies (Aslam et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2021). Agility strengthens resilience, enabling firms to recover effectively from disruptions (Borg et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2023; Zeng et al., 2021). It allows firms to mitigate risks and adapt quickly to changing environments, ensuring sustained growth and success in dynamic contexts (Maginn et al., 2018; Zeng et al., 2021).

Agility is crucial in B2B exchanges within the sharing economy, supporting sustainability and competitiveness. In the dynamic environment of collaborative consumption and resource optimization, agility allows organizations to adapt quickly to shifts in demand, technological innovations, and evolving consumer preferences. This adaptability is essential for making swift adjustments to business models, operations, and strategies. Moreover, agility facilitates efficient resource utilization by enabling businesses to allocate resources effectively in response to demand fluctuations or changes in available assets. This optimization reduces waste and maximizes utility, contributing to the efficient use of resources within the sharing economy.

Agility also supports a customer-centric approach in B2B exchanges, allowing organizations to respond swiftly to customer feedback, preferences, and emerging trends (Chuang, 2020). Additionally, agility is crucial for driving innovation and maintaining a competitive edge in rapidly evolving environments. In the sharing economy, where innovation is central, businesses that quickly innovate, introduce new services, and integrate emerging technologies enjoy significant advantages. Furthermore, agility enhances collaborative partnerships, which are integral to the sharing economy. It enables firms to rapidly form and manage partnerships, fostering mutually beneficial B2B collaborations that contribute to the broader growth of the sharing economy ecosystem. Agility promotes collaboration and partnerships among sharing economy players, facilitating the development of collaborative networks through joint efforts (Shi et al., 2023). As Noran (2023) affirms, this collaborative environment allows sharing economy firms to pool resources, share knowledge, and collectively address challenges, thus creating a more interconnected and supportive ecosystem. Furthermore, agility facilitates a user-centric approach (Wicaksono et al., 2023). Agile sharing economy platforms can quickly respond to user feedback and preferences (Zhang et al., 2023), enhancing customer relationships and loyalty, which in turn strengthens their global reputation and brand image. These strong customer bonds are critical for ensuring sustainable growth (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2023).

Ultimately, agility supports the sustainable growth of the sharing economy in developing countries (Sadiq et al., 2023). By embracing adaptability and innovation (Tu et al., 2023; Tarba et al., 2023), these businesses can more effectively navigate local market complexities, contributing to the socio-economic development of their communities (Abdulrahman & Yuvaraj, 2023). Agility is highly valued in the sharing economy, particularly in emerging markets, as it enables businesses to adapt, innovate, and respond quickly to shifting market conditions (Khan, 2020). This adaptability includes adjusting operations to meet fluctuating demand, such as scaling services or modifying pricing strategies (Ahmed et al., 2022). Market agility, for instance, is evident when firms swiftly enter new markets or pivot to new customer segments. Innovation agility involves the rapid development and deployment of new products or services in response to emerging trends (Osei et al., 2019). Additionally, collaborative agility refers to the ability to form and adjust partnerships to enhance offerings and leverage external resources. Technological agility, on the other hand, involves integrating new technologies to optimize business operations or improve customer experiences in these rapidly evolving markets (Nyamrunda & Freeman, 2021).

In summary, while existing literature acknowledges the importance of agility, there remains a lack of comprehensive insights into the factors that influence its utilization within the sharing economy. This gap is particularly evident in how adaptability and flexibility—critical drivers for enhancing global brand identity—are vital for sharing economy firms facing substantial challenges when operating in diverse markets (Khan et al., 2023). These values empower firms to thrive, enabling them to address ever-changing market demands while simultaneously building a strong brand identity. By embracing these values, sharing economy firms can proactively respond to external changes, disruptions, and evolving customer preferences, positioning themselves for sustained growth and success. The integration of these values enhances the resilience and competitiveness of sharing economy firms, equipping them to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of their environments through effective resource orchestration (Zeng et al., 2021). As the sharing economy continues to evolve, understanding and incorporating these values into business strategies will be crucial for fostering innovation, enhancing reputation, optimizing resource utilization, and delivering superior user experiences on a global scale.

4 Context and Methods

4.1 Research context

This study focuses on B2B firms in Egypt that are part of the sharing economy ecosystem. The selection of Egypt as the research context is based on several key factors. As a prominent African nation, Egypt provides valuable insights into the broader spectrum of African countries. Additionally, its strategic location as a transcontinental bridge between Africa and the Middle East enables it to serve as a representative case for both African and Middle Eastern nations (El-Attar et al., 2022). Moreover, Egypt’s classification as a Mediterranean Arab country adds another layer of diversity, making it an ideal setting for examining regional dynamics (Breisinger et al., 2024). Furthermore, Egypt's central geographical position, situated between Asia and Africa, reinforces its role as a critical bridge between the two continents, enhancing its relevance as a representative of both Arab and African regions (Chaudhury, 2023). This unique positioning underscores the appropriateness of selecting Egypt as the sample country for this study, as it offers a rich context with distinct cultural, economic, and political characteristics that reflect broader trends within both the Arab and African regions (Siniver & Tsourapas, 2023).

Egypt hosts a significant presence of sharing economy platforms across various sectors, including Uber in transportation (Elnadi & Gheith, 2022), the Egyptian Food Bank in food distribution (El Enany, 2022), and Airbnb in hospitality (Abdelhady & Ameen, 2022). These platforms present valuable opportunities to explore and understand the dynamics of the sharing economy within the country, as local businesses offering products and services integrate into this ecosystem. Egypt's status as an emerging market further enhances its suitability for examining the unique challenges and characteristics of business environments in such contexts (Hossain & Mozahem, 2022). The country's extensive informal sector, highlighted by Rizk (2017), adds to the complexity and diversity of the labor market, making it an ideal setting for this study. The selection of sharing economy firms from Egypt aligns with the principle of theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003), ensuring a rich and diverse range of data crucial to the study. Notably, sharing economy platforms such as Uber began operations in Egypt as early as 2014, demonstrating that the market for such platforms is relatively well-established in the country (Rizk, 2017).

4.2 Research method

To investigate the specific activities of sharing economy firms and their agility—particularly their ability to adapt and respond effectively in B2B exchanges involving goods, services, or resources to enhance brand identity and image—we adopted a qualitative research approach (Siggelkow, 2007; Birkinshaw et al., 2011). Recognizing the strength of insights gained from multiple cases, as highlighted by Gartner and Birley (2002) and Yin (2009), the study leverages the robustness of a qualitative approach, which is well-suited for the exploratory nature of this research. Previous studies emphasize the advantages of employing multiple case studies, particularly when exploring sensitive and underexplored topics such as agility within the B2B sharing economy ecosystem.

For this study, we conducted a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with key managers and decision-makers from small and medium-sized platform firms operating in digital sectors across various fields within Egypt's sharing economy. Several factors motivated the focus on agility within the B2B sharing economy ecosystem in the Middle East, with a particular emphasis on Egypt as a representative country in the region. The motivations for this research were twofold. First, the proliferation of sharing economy platforms across diverse sectors—such as transportation (e.g., Uber), food services (e.g., Food Bank), and hospitality (e.g., Airbnb)—has been remarkable. The emergence of these platforms, particularly Uber, which began operations in 2014, has experienced rapid growth, making it compelling to explore how these firms create and capture value while responding to external challenges.

Second, Egypt, as an emerging market, offers a unique context that encapsulates the various challenges inherent in the broader business environment. This makes it a particularly interesting setting for studying agility in B2B sharing economy firms. To explore this, we conducted interviews with 22 managers of B2B firms that are part of the sharing economy in Egypt. Additionally, five interviews were conducted with freelance providers from various industries to gain a broader perspective. The research project spanned from August 2021 to January 2022 and included a pilot study designed to understand the economic dynamics of the market and identify potential issues that could emerge during the data analysis phase.

To ensure the effectiveness of the main interviews, three entrepreneurs were initially interviewed during the pilot phase. These interviews helped refine the interview questions, ensuring their relevance and efficacy for the main data collection. The interviews were conducted online, facilitating efficient data collection and analysis. Managers, business owners, and entrepreneurs of B2B sharing economy firms in Egypt were interviewed, with a focus on understanding their experiences with the sharing economy, business dynamics, and the implications of hybrid business models and agility for these firms.

To establish connections with well-informed and influential individuals within the sharing economy, including business founders, co-founders, high-ranking bureaucrats, and freelancers, the researchers employed the snowball sampling technique. This approach began by identifying and reaching out to a few key individuals who were well-connected in the industry. These initial contacts assisted in referring the researchers to other relevant and influential figures, thereby creating a network that provided access to diverse perspectives and insights within the sharing economy. By leveraging existing connections within a pre-established network, the researchers successfully introduced the research topic and questions to key players and secured interviews with all relevant stakeholders in the sharing economy.

The research design followed a well-structured and systematic approach, incorporating a qualitative element through the semi-structured nature of the interviews. The study aimed to provide comprehensive insights into the perspectives and experiences of managers working for small and medium-sized businesses, as well as freelance professionals, operating within the sharing economy. To ensure confidentiality and create a comfortable environment for business owners, emails were sent to each interviewee addressing privacy concerns and assuring them that their Zoom interviews would be recorded. The research focused on conducting interviews with two distinct groups: mediators (including founders, co-founders, and employees) and product/service providers. Each interview session typically lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. After conducting interviews with various entrepreneurs and multiple stakeholders, the researchers reached a saturation point where further interviews no longer provided new insights. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse set of cases from sharing economy enterprises in Egypt.

Crafting appropriate interview questions was crucial for gathering data relevant to the research theme and generating meaningful insights. For instance, some questions aimed to gauge participants' understanding of the commercial landscape: *“How would you articulate the landscape of sharing economy businesses in Egypt?”* Other inquiries were designed to gather information about both the internal and external business environment, including characteristics and challenges. For example, participants were asked, *“What attributes contribute to the success of sharing economy businesses in Egypt? Can you provide an example if your business possesses any of these qualities?”* These questions were rigorously tested during pilot interviews, and the insights gathered guided their refinement for inclusion in the main interviews.

After several iterations, it was determined that data saturation had been reached, as subsequent interviews no longer yielded new topics or information. This marked the conclusion of the primary data collection process. Data from 27 business owners and product/service providers in B2B sharing economy firms were included in the study. Participants were grouped based on whether their business operations focused on selling services or products, as detailed in Table 1. Of the total participants, 22 were classified as mediators, and 5 as providers. Among the mediators, 17 were engaged in service-based businesses, while 5 focused on selling products. For the providers, 4 were primarily involved in offering services, and 1 in providing products.

Insert Table 1 about here

To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena explored in this research, the identified themes will be discussed in detail and supported by relevant quotes extracted from the interview transcripts. For clarity and simplicity, all interviews conducted with mediators were coded as "M" and sequentially numbered from 1 to 22, as shown in Table 2. Similarly, interviews with product and service providers were coded as "P" and sequentially numbered from 1 to 5, as indicated in Table 2. The data for this research were meticulously transcribed and prepared for analysis. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the interviews, several strategies were implemented. First, a pilot study was conducted to validate and refine the approach, enabling necessary adjustments before the main data collection. During the primary data collection phase, a semi-structured interview guide was employed, which allowed the researchers to explore the relevant topics in greater depth. Before each interview session, individual debriefing sessions were held with the business owners. This step was crucial in ensuring that the interviewees felt comfortable and fully understood the purpose and objectives of the study, thus fostering an environment conducive to candid and insightful responses.

Insert Table 2 about here

4.3 Data Analysis

The study employs the analytical approach developed by Gioia and colleagues (Gioia, 2021; Magnani & Gioia, 2023; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013), which facilitates the identification of first-order codes, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions. This structured method offers a systematic way to uncover and articulate the challenges that directly impact companies operating within the sharing economy.

Insert Table 3 about here

The analysis unfolds in three phases, as depicted in Figure 1, employing a thematic approach that prioritizes firm-specific issues and strategic responses, rather than broader environmental factors. In the first phase, NVivo 12 was used to generate initial codes closely aligned with the research objectives, specifically addressing the challenges faced by business founders and management teams in the sharing economy (Table 3 provides a detailed outline of the coding procedure). Following the guidelines of Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019), a careful approach was adopted to ensure precision by starting with a manageable set of codes directly relevant to the firms' operations. Initial codes were derived from key themes such as the establishment of digital businesses and the strategic advantages and challenges encountered within the sharing economy (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These codes highlighted operational obstacles faced by firms, including scaling digital infrastructures, navigating competitive pressures, and addressing regulatory ambiguities. These first-order categories acted as checkpoints, guiding the analysis towards the most relevant issues concerning company operations, allowing for real-time adjustments and ensuring the analysis remained focused on business-level challenges.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The second phase involved organizing the first-order codes into second-order themes that reflect strategic responses to firm-specific challenges. This phase specifically focused on how companies adapt to issues such as regulatory constraints, market saturation, and technological disruptions. By systematically analyzing interview transcripts and linking relevant sections of text to emerging themes, the analysis identified patterns in how firms strategize to maintain agility and competitiveness within the sharing economy (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The second-order themes included adaptive business strategies, resilience in market positioning, and technology adoption as a response mechanism to market volatility. For example, firms demonstrated varying levels of agility when adjusting their business models in response to shifting legal requirements and technological advancements. These insights provide a direct examination of how agility is implemented within firms, shifting from a descriptive analysis to critical assessment of the effectiveness of these strategies in real-world contexts.

The final phase synthesized the second-order themes into aggregate dimensions that capture the core strategic challenges and responses of firms. Two main aggregate dimensions emerged: **Regulatory Adaptation Strategies** and **Technological Agility**, which highlight how companies actively engage with and respond to external pressures within the sharing economy. These dimensions directly address how a company's ability to adapt and pivot is often hindered by regulatory complexities and the need for continuous technological upgrades, particularly in emerging and developing economies. This phase provides a critical review of how firms manage these pressures, drawing on existing literature to support the findings. For example, North (1990) emphasizes the significant impact of regulatory environments on firm behavior, while Miller et al. (2013) stress the importance of agility in overcoming institutional barriers.

By engaging with these theoretical perspectives, the analysis integrates institutional theory and agility, offering a nuanced understanding of how firms navigate complex environments (Yuan et al., 2022). Institutional theory highlights the influence of formal and informal rules, norms, and institutional pressures on organizational behavior, while agility underscores a firm's capacity to adapt, respond, and innovate in dynamic conditions (Ahmed et al., 2022; Teece et al., 2016). This integration enriches the discussion around the strategic manoeuvres firms must employ to sustain their agility, particularly in contexts marked by institutional voids and uncertainties, such as the sharing economy in developing markets (Liang et al., 2017). This integration enriches the discussion around the strategic maneuvers firms must employ to sustain their agility, particularly in contexts marked by institutional voids and uncertainties, such as the sharing economy in developing markets (cf. Khanna & Palepu, 1997; Liang et al., 2017). It is also important to note that, due to the significant uncertainties and challenges faced by firms in emerging markets, agility—the ability to detect and respond to market changes, adapt quickly, and reorganize resources—is essential for business survival and sustaining a competitive advantage (cf. Doz & Kosonen, 2008; Weber & Tarba, 2014). The insights derived from this study provide valuable implications for managers in sharing economy firms, highlighting that agility is not just about quick reaction but also involves strategic foresight and structured adaptation in a complex, evolving market. The study makes a significant contribution to the literature by not only identifying the barriers but also critically assessing effectiveness of current strategic approaches. This deeper, problem-oriented analysis bridges the gap between descriptive findings and actionable, theory-driven insights, reinforcing the study's contribution to the literature on strategic agility within the sharing economy.

5 Findings

The findings, as illustrated in Figure 1, reveal two dimensions. The first dimension, termed "Establishing and stabilizing the payment framework between platforms and providers," explores activities that undermine agility in the relationships between mediators and product/service providers, particularly for start-ups that exploit providers' vulnerabilities, such as capitalizing on their reluctance to pay. This includes instances of altered payment decisions or non-payment. Additionally, this dimension addresses unethical practices, such as selling developers' work to other companies without consent. The second dimension focuses on "Strengthening regulatory measures to enhance the stability of the work environment." It highlights the absence of established regulations, leading to the promotion of unqualified employees, an unfavorable business environment, and insufficient information disclosure.. Moreover, it underscores how the lack of government regulation can contribute to tax evasion, further exacerbating counterproductive working conditions. The analysis offers insights into activities that hinder agility efforts within businesses operating in the sharing economy. In these businesses, mediators act as intermediaries, facilitating communication between providers and customers, while providers deliver products and services with the support of these mediators.

These two dimensions highlight the complexities and challenges that hinder the smooth operation and agility of businesses within the sharing economy, particularly in developing countries. They also carry significant implications for business image and brand identity. Our findings align with existing research, emphasizing that agility in the sharing economy is shaped by multiple factors, with government regulation emerging as a critical element. This is consistent with previous studies that underline the substantial impact of regulatory frameworks on operational efficiency and adaptability. Furthermore, our study expands the current understanding by demonstrating that additional factors—such as platform reliability, service quality, and provider accountability— are equally vital to the successful implementation of agility. These findings address gaps in the literature regarding the role of these elements in enhancing agility among both providers and intermediaries.

Credibility, a multifaceted issue, is influenced by a variety of factors, underscoring the importance of government collaboration with all stakeholders, including providers and intermediaries, in developing countries. Such collaboration is crucial for establishing a sustainable and trustworthy sharing ecosystem within the sharing economy. Our study tackles the existing challenges in the sharing economy by offering insights into how these elements interact and impact overall agility. In doing so, it provides a more nuanced understanding of how to improve both effectiveness and sustainability in this dynamic sector. The following discussion examines the two key dimensions of agility within sharing economy firms, positioning our findings within the broader landscape of existing research and exploring the practical implications for stakeholders.

5.1 Establishing and stabilizing the payment framework between platforms and the product/service providers

The data indicates the issue of concealing the root causes of significant inequalities within sharing economy businesses. This complex problem is shaped by various factors, such as platform reliability, job security, fair compensation, and regulatory frameworks, all of which can influence the image and reputation of sharing economy firms. Ensuring platform stability is critical for instilling provider confidence and improving service or product quality. Achieving this requires the flexibility to adapt and respond effectively within the dynamic context of sharing economy. The respondents shared their perspectives as follows:

> *"We promise our customers insurance or a warranty: if you receive something you don't like, you consume it. Then, you ask us to bring you a replacement, and you handle it in this manner. It's very costly if you don't have the right people doing the right thing. Additionally, having them as full-time jobs is expensive. Thus, we have a few hundred people. Depending on the workload, we invite them to work, considering seasonality as well. This presents one kind of challenge for having a shared economy." (1M)*

Additionally, aligning job specifications with providers' needs fosters a sense of assurance and satisfaction. Equitable compensation for providers' work, along with protective measures against exploitation, is essential. Transparency in payment systems and clear compensation guidelines are crucial role in achieving these objectives. A service provider within the B2B sharing economy captured these concerns in the following manner:

> *"So, this is something you need to be cautious about at all times. Another issue, in my opinion, with platforms, but I believe it's a common concern in freelance work in general, is that the work isn't very stable. If the platform decides to reduce the number of leads for any reason, it can impact your job security and other related aspects." (4P)*

The findings further underscore that the working conditions within the digital economy significantly hinder productivity. Start-ups in this sector struggle with instability, largely due to bottlenecks created by inadequate regulations, which lead to additional overhead costs for businesses. Addressing these regulatory gaps and implementing appropriate measures is crucial to creating an environment that support the growth of sharing economy ventures while ensuring fair and secure working conditions for providers. One of the product/service providers, part of the B2B sharing economy, summed up these issues as follows::

> *" There is clear progress that we can see, but it is not enough to sustain that type of digital economy. Also, we see a lot of improvement in the structure and regulations, including the legal framework. Yet, we hope to see more support from the government, more regulations towards the overall ecosystem enablement." (1P).*

Three entrepreneurs shared their observations regarding the lack of transparent information about sharing economy activities and financial transactions. This absence of clarity hindered the flexibility of their business models and created significant challenges in planning for scalability. In response, they were motivated to establish offshore companies as a strategic measure to mitigate concerns related to the lengthy registration process and high costs. Online services played a key role in their decision-making, prompting four business owners to discuss their experiences exploring laws and tax havens abroad. While considering offshore options, business owners recognized certain drawbacks, such as potential tax avoidance, vulnerability to fake customer reviews, and non-payment for services. One product provider within the B2B sharing economy elaborated on these challenges as follows:

> *"The buyer returns, stating that the received product does not match the ordered one. The lack of transparency, particularly regarding product details, has been misleading customers. Customer reviews are significantly impacting the business's sales." (5P)*

Despite these concerns, entrepreneurs viewed offshore opportunities as a way to operate in unregulated countries and explore capital ventures within an alternative context. Their rationale for establishing offshore entities was to position themselves in more regulated environments. Surprisingly, these markets provided greater flexibility in accessing venture capitalists, who could support and facilitate business growth, enabling the adoption of innovative business models. These perspectives were shared by the respondents in a following manner:

> *"Most start-ups and investors do not like having the start-up incorporated. So normally, what you see, what I would say, 85% of the start-ups that have raised funds, and mature funds" (9M).*

A significant concern stems from the poor work environment, which is negatively impacting service providers. Mediators are not fully utilizing online services, leading to frequent changes of mind and refusals to pay. Furthermore, relying solely on social media platforms as the primary communication channel poses risks and fails to provide adequate means of gaining customer trust. The study garnered insights from six interviewees, all of whom confirmed this finding, underscoring the urgency of the issue. Notably, a successful co-founder provided valuable additional perspectives on the matter. The co-founder's input further illuminates the challenges and implications resulting from the poor work environment within sharing economy platforms, emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues to ensure a more reliable and trustworthy platform for both service providers and mediators.

> *"They were blocking the business, sometimes even competing with the business in a very, very non-productive manner and a very disruptive manner." (22M)*

The negative impact of unfavorable work conditions has led to a noticeable decline in performance, triggering a chain reaction that significantly affects the quality of products and services. This, in turn, can damage the image and brand identity of sharing economy firms. As a result, the ability to achieve agility within the sharing economy business model has been compromised. This detrimental trend is clearly illustrated in **Figure 2**, which outlines the first dimension of the framework. It shows how poor work conditions have cascaded into lower performance levels, ultimately undermining the overall agility of the sharing economy.

5.2 Strengthening regulatory measures to enhance the stability of the work environment

The data reveals the growing challenges faced by government in regulating and managing the sharing economy marketplace, primarily due to the prevalence of unregistered businesses and tax evasion. This situation has cast doubt on the government's ability to meet its digital transformation objectives by 2030. Regulatory and tax requirements have hindered entrepreneurial growth and strained financial capabilities, prompting some entrepreneurs to seek more flexible business environments by registering their companies in foreign countries while maintaining a focus on local operations. One mediators within the B2B sharing economy captured these issues as follows:

> *"I don't mind paying taxes, especially if we're making a profit. However, if we're receiving funds from external sources solely for sustaining and expanding the business, it doesn't seem reasonable to incur significant tax burdens for that purpose."(12M)*

Furthermore, the lack of government support for providers has led to their exclusion from official plans. Interestingly, while the providers expressed satisfaction with their current situation and did not actively seek government assistance, they voiced concerns about the mediators' commitment to their payments, without any oversight or influence from government employment regulations. This underscores the need for a balanced approach that addresses the concerns of all stakeholders involved in the sharing economy business in developing countries. Swift and comprehensive responses are crucial to help the sharing economy recover from the impact of these significant challenges. Moreover, to prevent further damage, it is essential for the government to update its strategy and effectively engage both mediators and providers, ensuring the proper implementation of regulations and support mechanisms. As highlighted by a co-founder of several B2B entities in the sharing economy:

> *"Most of the time, innovation precedes regulation. You're constantly in a battle with regulators, who attempt to impose rules on you. Waiting for regulatory permission is a recipe for failure for any startup. Essentially, our approach is not to seek permission*

but to seek forgiveness. As you grow, seeking forgiveness becomes more manageable."(19M)

Importantly, founders of digital companies emphasize the critical need for decisive government action to address the economic crisis and foster greater agility within sharing economy platforms. An interviewee who owns multiple applications in the market underscored the urgency of such measures to effectively navigate the challenging economic landscape. The research highlights the importance of collaboration between sharing economy business owners and proactive government strategies to build resilience and enhance agility in response to the ongoing crises. As one interviewee remarked:

"Suppose the process is easier for legalizing those micro and small businesses in a way that is so simple that it does not turn them off" (16M).

The data collected from stakeholders within the sharing economy, including mediators and providers, reveals a significant deficiency in the ability to rapidly adjust, respond, and innovate within the sharing economy context. This limitation is illustrated through the identification of two aggregated dimensions, as shown in Figure 1. These dimensions highlight the specific areas and factors within the sharing economy that contribute to the lack of agility observed in the operations and interactions among mediators and providers. One critical factor is the regulatory environment in many developing countries, where regulations may be unclear or outdated, presenting challenges for B2B organizations. Collaborative efforts between B2B organizations, government entities, and stakeholders are essential to overcoming these barriers. This underscore the crucial role of developing partnering/collaborative agility among sharing economy firms. Creating an enabling environment through supportive policies, infrastructure development, and education initiatives is vital for enhancing agility, flexibility, and resilience in sharing economy businesses, particularly in developing countries. As explained by one of the founders of a business operating in the sharing economy:

> *"So, there is support, though it's not very clear. There are regulations in place to support startups, and concurrently, there are regulations that seem to impede their progress. There is a need for synergy. As mentioned earlier, various ministries are grappling with internal conflicts. For instance, the Ministry of Planning faces challenges in coordinating with the Ministry of Trade and Manufacturing, as both claim credit for being the largest supporter of the ecosystem."(1M)*

Trust and security concerns also play a significant role in the success of sharing economy platforms. Buildinh trust among users can be particularly challenging in developing countries, where safety, privacy, and security concerns are prevalent. To foster trust, B2B organizations must invest in robust verification processes, user reviews, and dispute resolution mechanisms within their platforms. Additionally, the adoption of sharing economy services may be hindered by skill gaps and limited digital literacy among the population, acting as barriers to the widespread acceptance of sharing economy platforms. Furthermore, the adoption of such platforms is often closely tied to local cultural norms and behaviors. As a result, B2B organizations operating within the sharing economy must tailor their strategies to align with the unique cultural landscapes of specific regions. This requires a deep understanding of local cultures and the integration of culturally sensitive approaches to maximize the effectiveness of sharing economy services. As explained by a mediator in the sharing economy:

> *"As a company begins to scale, recruitment becomes an immensely challenging aspect of the scalability equation. To delve further into the tech ecosystem, for instance, a significant number of highly skilled developers predominantly work for companies in the US and Europe, often in remote capacities, demanding substantial salaries. Currently, obtaining easy access to tech talents is a formidable hurdle, constituting the first challenge." (7M)*

The limited physical and digital infrastructure in developing countries, including issues with internet connectivity, transportation networks, and power supply, can significantly impede the efficient operation and scalability of sharing economy platforms. Furthermore, restricted access to financial services, such as bank accounts and digital payment systems, presents additional challenges for B2B organizations. As highlighted by one of the service providers in the sharing economy:

> *"I believe that, at this point, we are still in the second option where the ecosystem is attempting to progress faster than the government. Consequently, there are some struggles or, let's say, slowdowns. As you mentioned, I want to reiterate that, while there have been notable improvements in laws and regulations, particularly in terms of physical infrastructure, there is still a need for significant, solid investment in the digital ecosystem, which remains one of the major challenges." (1P)*

Addressing financial inclusion is crucial for enabling businesses to participate in the sharing economy, thereby promoting overall development of ecosystem t. Socioeconomic inequality also remains a significant concern, as developing countries often experience substantial disparities in income and access to resources. B2B organizations must account for these disparities to ensure their services are inclusive and accessible to a wider population. As articulated by one of the co-founders of a B2B entity in the sharing economy:

> *"We have been able to assist the central bank and various banks in comprehending the significance of this, which they may not fully appreciate today but are likely to recognize in the next year or two. As we progress towards becoming a more financially inclusive country, there is a growing need for infrastructure that can support this transformation. Overcoming the initial hurdle involved conveying the understanding of the importance of such infrastructure." (13M)*

Implementing training programs and educational initiatives can help bridge skill gaps and enhance digital literacy among users in developing countries, making sharing economy services more accessible and beneficial to a broader audience.

6 Discussion and Implications

This study explores how business-to-business (B2B) firms within the sharing economy ecosystem develop and implement agility in weak institutional settings. Specifically, it examines the exchange of goods, services, and resources among sharing economy-based firms operating in the dynamic environments of emerging economies. A key objective is to identify factors that hinder the expected benefits of integrating agility into the operational models of sharing economy businesses. The findings reveal two overarching dimensions. The first dimension, "Establishing and Stabilizing the Payment Framework between Platforms and Providers," highlights the complex working conditions prevalent in the digital economy of emerging markets. It addresses situations where product or service providers strategically exploit mediators by leveraging their reluctance to fulfill payment obligations through tactics such as sudden changes of intent or outright non-payment. Additionally, it examines instances in which businesses within the sharing economy appropriate intellectual property from developers and subsequently sell it to other entities for profit.

The second dimension, "Strengthening Regulatory Measures to Enhance the Stability of the Work Environment," focuses on the challenges faced by mediators and product/service providers within the sharing economy. It underscores issues such as the limited influence of government entities, widespread tax evasion, and the absence of comprehensive regulatory frameworks governing sharing economy firms. Dimension 1 acts as a precursor to Dimension 2, with its specific focus on mediators and providers, highlighting the detrimental business environment and the frequent failure to disclose essential information. Notably, the absence of well-established regulations fosters conditions in which underqualified employees are promoted, thereby contributing to counterproductive work environments.

By examining these dimensions, the research provides a nuanced understanding of agility within sharing economy businesses—an area where studies remain limited. The study sheds light on the specific challenges faced by mediators and providers operating in the precarious institutional environments of developing and emerging economies. By exploring these underexamined aspects, it goes beyond merely presenting results, addressing the strategic implications for mediators and providers in weak institutional settings. Specifically, it highlights the significant barriers these firms encounter, such as the difficulty of maintaining a responsive operational structure in the absence of regulatory support. The findings suggest that, to mitigate the effects of external regulatory deficiencies on their agility, these firms should invest in strengthening internal governance mechanisms, including comprehensive training and skill development programs.

The study further underscores that emerging markets differ from developed markets in several critical dimensions, including economic development, technological infrastructure, regulatory environments, and cultural dynamics. These differences significantly shape how the sharing economy operates in B2B contexts. Emerging markets derive advantages such as cost efficiency, resource optimization, and the capacity to bypass traditional business models. The sharing economy in these regions enables businesses to access resources without substantial capital investments, optimize limited resources, and innovate more rapidly. By emphasizing trust, targeting niche market needs, and focusing on sustainability and social impact, emerging markets possess the potential to transform the sharing economy into a unique and valuable asset. Nevertheless, the findings reveal that firms in emerging markets tend to prioritize incremental innovations over radical ones due to resource constraints. Their agility is strongly influenced by institutional volatility and cultural factors, in contrast to developed markets where stable institutions and abundant resources foster experimentation and the pursuit of long-term strategies. By examining how the conditions of emerging markets reshape the implementation of strategic agility, the study addresses a critical gap in understanding how these dynamics operate in resource-constrained environments. Consequently, this research makes valuable contributions to both theory and practice.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study makes several significant contributions to the literature on strategic agility, institutional theory, and the sharing economy, particularly in the context of emerging economies. First, the study extends the strategic agility literature (Doz & Kosonen, 2008, 2010; Weber & Tarba, 2014; Teece et al., 2016) by examining how firms in emerging markets utilize agility not just as an internal capability, but also as a strategic response to external institutional challenges, particularly weak regulatory environments. While existing research has emphasized internal processes and capabilities that enable agility, such as decision-making flexibility and adaptive leadership (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016; Doz & Kosonen, 2008, 2010; Nyamrunda et al., 2021), this study advances the understanding by demonstrating how external institutional voids—such as inadequate regulatory frameworks, weak enforcement, and underdeveloped market infrastructures—necessitate the development of agile capabilities as a means of survival and value creation. This challenges the conventional notion of agility as an exclusively internal process, showing that in weak institutional settings, firms cultivate agility to navigate the uncertainties, risks, and regulatory unpredictability inherent in such environments.

Second, the study provides new insights into the institutional challenges that hinder or facilitate the development of agility in the sharing economy. While institutional theory (North, 1990; Khanna & Palepu, 1997, 2005) traditionally emphasizes the role of formal institutions—such as legal systems and regulatory frameworks—in shaping firm behavior (Scott, 1995), this study extends institutional theory by illustrating how firms, in the absence of strong formal institutions, develop internal governance mechanisms to maintain operational flexibility. The study shows how B2B sharing economy firms engage in agile practices, such as pivoting business models, leveraging technology, and forming strategic alliances to mitigate challenges arising from weak institutional environments. This extension of institutional theory highlights how firms can thrive despite institutional voids, developing internal agility practices that enable them to respond to market opportunities and challenges more effectively than less agile competitors.

Third, the study integrates sharing economy literature (Belezas & Daniel, 2023; Khan et al., 2023; Khalek & Chakraborty, 2023) with strategic agility theory (Doz & Kosonen, 2008, 2010; Girod et al., 2023; Weber & Tarba, 2014), providing insights into the unique dynamics of B2B platforms operating within the sharing economy. It highlights how firms leverage agility in response to dynamic regulatory environments and demonstrates how the sharing economy context shapes firms' strategic responses. The findings reveal that agility in the sharing economy is not just about optimizing business models, but also about developing adaptive strategies to navigate regulatory shifts, technological innovations, and competitive pressures. This contribution clarifies how agility, combined with institutional resilience, allows firms to create and capture value in environments marked by high uncertainty, institutional inefficiency, and market volatility.

Fourth, a significant theoretical contribution of this study is its exploration of cultural resistance to sharing-based business models in emerging economies (Long et al., 2024). While much of the existing literature has focused on the economic and technological factors influencing the adoption of sharing economy platforms (Abdalla et al., 2023; Belezas & Daniel, 2023), this study introduces cultural agility (cf. Caligiuri & Tarique, 2016; Goncalves et al., 2020) as a key factor in the scalability and acceptance of sharing economy businesses. In many emerging markets, societal resistance to trust-based exchanges and collaborative consumption presents significant obstacles. The study demonstrates how B2B sharing economy firms must adapt their strategies to overcome cultural resistance by aligning service offerings with local expectations, emphasizing transparency, and engaging in community-building initiatives to foster trust. This cultural agility enables firms to enhance market acceptance, increase customer engagement, and drive platform scalability despite resistance to sharing-based models. This contribution broadens the current understanding of agility in the sharing economy by emphasizing that agility involves not only technological adaptability, but also sensitivity to local cultural norms.

Lastly, the study offers empirical evidence of the detrimental effects of a lack of agility in B2B sharing economy firms. The findings show that firms unable to adapt to regulatory shifts, technological changes, and market dynamics often struggle to maintain competitive positioning and may face challenges in adapting to new circumstances. This inability to remain agile undermines a firm's brand identity and long-term sustainability. This contribution underscores the importance of internal agility mechanisms, including leadership adaptability and organizational flexibility, to maintain competitive advantage and ensure long-term performance in dynamic, uncertain environments. Taken together, these contributions offer a deeper understanding of how B2B sharing economy firms develop and deploy agility in volatile, resource-constrained environments, while addressing the complex interplay of external institutional challenges and internal capabilities in shaping their strategic responses.

6.2 Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, understanding the challenges related to the lack of agility and the development of sharing economy enterprises is crucial for managers seeking to shape their business strategies. As sharing economy platforms continue to emerge as significant business models, particularly in emerging and developing countries, the ability to identify and address agility-related barriers can help managers refine their strategic direction and improve operational outcomes. Emerging markets, characterized by political instability, corruption, and frequent shifts in government priorities (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2024), present unique challenges for firms in the sharing economy. Navigating these challenges requires an adaptive approach to agility, enabling firms to remain resilient amid such uncertainties.

Political instability and rapid policy changes can disrupt business environments, often hindering the growth and scalability of B2B organizations within the sharing economy. In response, firms must adopt proactive environmental scanning to better understand and anticipate market dynamics. By doing so, businesses can enhance their competitiveness, enabling quicker and more effective responses to emerging challenges. Understanding how sharing economy firms navigate the digital landscape—particularly their capacity to adapt and respond swiftly to new regulatory, market, and technological developments—is essential for evaluating the long-term impact of this economic model on both local and global markets.

The research underscores the importance of adaptive market and non-market strategies for sharing economy managers (Khan et al., 2023). Market strategies involve responding directly to competitive pressures, while non-market strategies require engagement with external stakeholders, including regulators, policymakers, and local communities. For firms in dynamic and uncertain environments, especially in emerging markets, it is crucial to strike a balance between these strategies. Maintaining compliance with frequently changing regulations while continuing to innovate in service delivery and customer experience can provide firms with a strategic edge over competitors.

To successfully navigate these complexities, managers must cultivate organizational agility that extends beyond operational flexibility. This includes fostering a corporate culture that prioritizes continuous learning, encourages experimentation, and supports strategic pivots when necessary. By embedding agility in the organization's DNA, managers can better align business direction with evolving market demands, regulatory requirements, and consumer preferences. This proactive mindset allows firms to remain competitive and responsive to both opportunities and threats in the ever-changing landscape of the sharing economy. Additionally, fostering strong collaboration with local stakeholders and engaging in policy dialogues can help firms influence the regulatory landscape in ways that favor their business models. Rather than being passive recipients of external changes, firms can leverage such collaborations to advocate for more favorable policies and regulations that enable the growth of sharing economy platforms.

The research also highlights the importance of resilience-building strategies, such as diversifying revenue streams and exploring new market opportunities within the sharing economy. For example, forming partnerships with local businesses or expanding into adjacent service areas can mitigate risks associated with market saturation, regulatory hurdles, and supply chain disruptions. These approaches not only strengthen market positions but also enhance the firm's capacity to adjust to future uncertainties. Ultimately, the practical implications of this study emphasize the need for sharing economy firms to continuously adapt and adjust their strategies in response to the dynamic environments in which they operate. By focusing on enhancing agility through proactive environmental scanning, strategic adaptation, and stakeholder engagement, managers can successfully navigate the complexities of the sharing economy. This approach will contribute to the sustainable growth of their organizations and the broader influence of the sharing economy on global markets. Therefore, understanding and responding to the intricate challenges inherent in these environments is essential for shaping the future of sharing economy firms and their contributions to economic development.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

Regarding limitations, firms in the sharing economy operating in emerging and developing countries often encounter intricate and constantly evolving regulatory environments (cf. Khan et al., 2023). As a result, there is a need for further research on the multifaceted aspects of agility in the digital economy, particularly regarding how firms can maintain agility while scaling operations in fast-evolving market landscapes. Future studies could explore the strategic responses of firms to digital disruptions, including the adoption of new technologies, restructuring of business models, and implementation of agile management practices. Research in this area would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how firms in the digital economy can sustain agility amidst rapid technological shifts and increasing competition.

While this study provides foundational insights into the challenges and strategies associated with agility in sharing economy firms, it also underscores the need for a deeper exploration of the internal and external factors that influence this agility. Future research could focus on organizational capabilities that enhance agility, such as digital literacy, innovation capacity, and the role of leadership in fostering an agile culture. Additionally, examining external pressures—such as consumer expectations, technological disruptions, and market volatility—that drive firms toward agility could provide a holistic view of the agility landscape within the sharing economy.

The limitations identified in this study point to several avenues for future research. First, a more nuanced exploration of the regulatory, cultural, and contextual determinants of agility, alongside an in-depth analysis of the digital economy's influence on agility, is needed. This would provide valuable insights for both academics and practitioners. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing strategies that enable sharing economy firms to thrive in complex, rapidly changing environments, ultimately enhancing their competitive positioning and sustainability in the global market.

Second, one important area for future research lies in the cultural resistance to sharing economy business models in emerging markets (cf. Long et al., 2024). The study highlighted that traditional business practices and societal norms often conflict with the principles of the sharing economy, such as trust-based exchanges and collaborative consumption. Future research could explore how cultural factors—such as community values, trust levels, and local business practices—affect the ability of firms to implement and sustain agility (cf. Caligiuri & Tarique, 2016; Goncalves et al., 2020). This line of inquiry could provide valuable insights into how sharing economy firms can develop more culturally adaptive strategies that enhance market acceptance and scalability while overcoming cultural barriers. Furthermore, understanding how different cultures shape entrepreneurial behavior and organizational agility within sharing economy firms in emerging markets will offer important insights into agility in different institutional settings.

Lastly, there is also scope for future studies to examine the role of institutional voids—such as weak legal enforcement, underdeveloped infrastructure, and insufficient regulatory frameworks—in shaping the agility of firms in the sharing economy. This study suggests that firms in emerging markets often cultivate internal capabilities to compensate for external deficiencies. Future research could investigate the concept of institutional voids in greater depth, focusing specifically on how these gaps influence firms' strategic agility in uncertain environments (cf. Khanna & Palepu, 1997). This could include examining how firms navigate these voids through informal networks, ad hoc governance structures, or non-market strategies, such as partnerships with local influencers or engagement in community-building efforts (cf. Khan et al., 2023).

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Figure 1: *Data Structure and Aggregate Dimension*

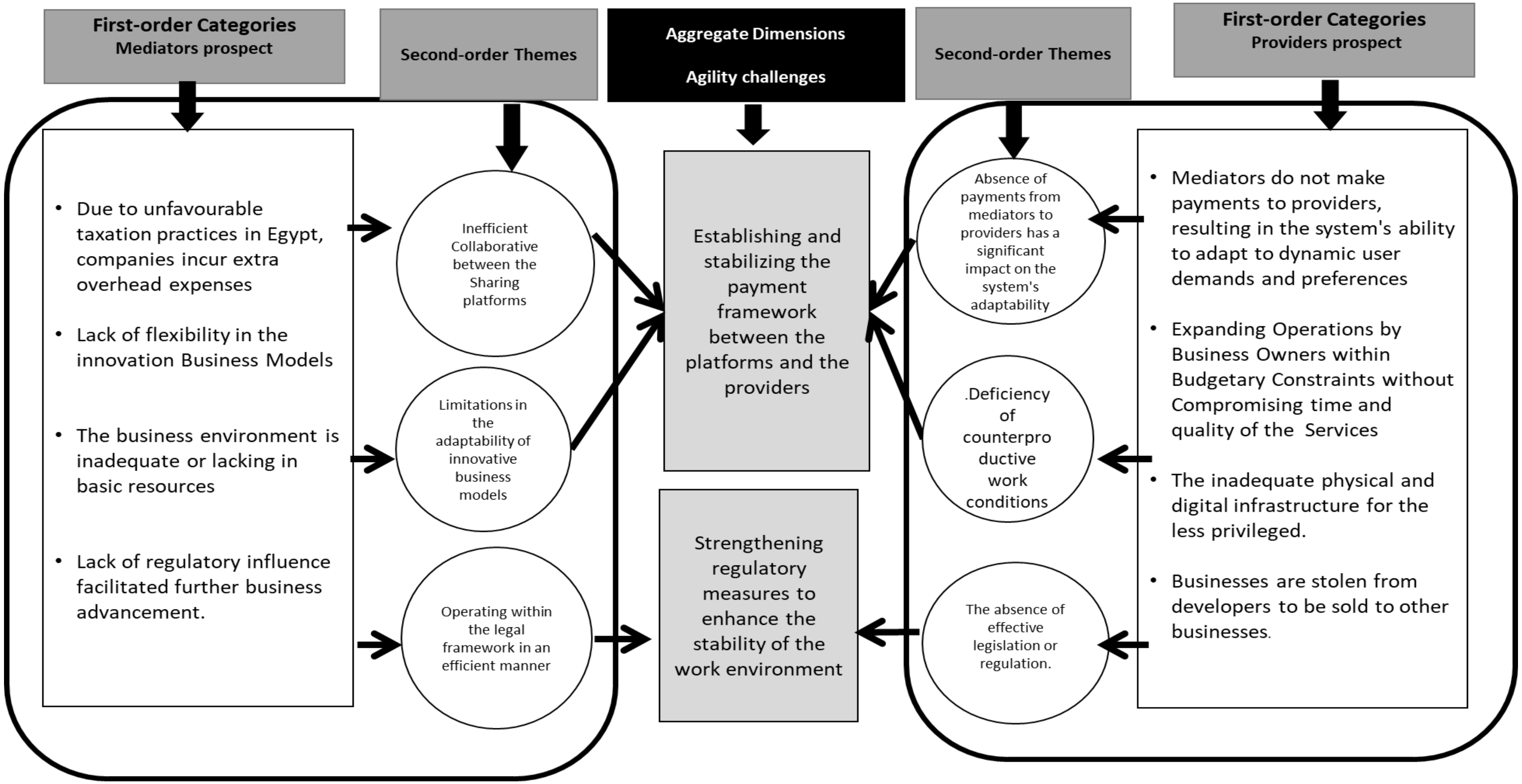

Table 1: Business Classification of participants (Service-Based vs. Product-Based)

Type of Participants / **Classification by Business Sales Type**	**Service**	**Products**	**Total Participants**
Mediators	17	5	**22**
Providers	4	1	**5**
Total Participants	**21**	**6**	**27**

Table 2: Informants' Background (Mediators and Providers)

Code ID	**Gender (i.e., M or F)**	**Title**	**Education background**	**Experience background**
1M	M	CEO and Co-Founder	Graduate Engineer, and a master's in business, Cairo.	Working in three jobs. Owner of the company since 2017 trading in fresh produce.
2M	F	CEO and Co-Founder	DPA from Switzerland MBA from the UK.	An expert in E-Business. She started her E-Business Career in 2003. She has been working at her family business for 20 years now.
3M	M	CEO and Co-Founder	Graduate Electrical Engineer, Cairo. Accomplished in Business Development across four industries- Financial Services, Food & Beverage, Transportation and Energy.	Co-founder and CEO of a famous app; Ex Regional Director of a large international company; Shareholder in an international company; and a board member of several companies in Cairo.
4M	M	CEO and Co-Founder	BSc in Computer Science & master's in business administration (MBA), Cairo; Nominated for high-impact entrepreneurs in emerging markets; Awarded Distinguished Young Alumni Award in May 2015.	Founder of the chatbot company; Co-Founder and board member of the social sharing App has one million plus registered users and was recognized as the best app in 2015
5M	M	Manger Director	BSc in Electronics and Communication Engineering, Middle East. Master of entrepreneurship and innovation management, Stockholm.	Co-Founder and Chief Business Officer of a social company: the biggest African social e-commerce and distribution platform connecting emerging brand owners with a network of sellers.

6M	F	Business development manager	Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) in Business Management in 2021, Germany	23 years old. Investment Analyst in the social sharing company
7M	M	Co-founder and CEO	Graduated with two degrees- language interpretation and translation (2012), and Biomedical Engineering (2012), Cairo.	Serial entrepreneur: CEO, and co-founder of the famous App. and many other start-ups in the past seven years.
8M	M	Opreartion director	Graduated Engineer, UK	Experienced working on an App. May 2020-Nov 2021: operations lead. Nov 2021 - ongoing: fundraising lead, and Chief of staff.
9M	M	CEO and Co-Founder	Bachelor of engineering (BEng). UK	An entrepreneur who established the awards app in 2019 to introduce mobile payments with integrated loyalty to the market.
10M	M	CEO and Co-Founder	Bachelor of Engineering (BEng), UK. Master of Science (MSc) in entrepreneurship and management, UK. Executive education in AI in Fintech and open banking, UK	Serial entrepreneur, mentor, and co-founder of successful ventures in FinTech, mobile VAS, e-Payment, Digital CRM, F&B, and Digital Transformation; with over 30 years of experience across the MENA region in IT.
11M	M	CEO	Degree of Engineering, Cairo. MSc, Switzerland	An entrepreneur contributed to several strategic planning exercises in different sectors with a particular focus on IT, Retail, and advertising.
12M	M	CEO and Co-Founder	Graduated with Computer Engineering, Cairo.	Co-developed a software house. Few projects were completed in the Gulf region within 3 years and co-Founded a new company in 2018.
13M	M	Founder	B.Sc. in Information Knowledge Management (ISAT), in 2018, USA.	Co-developed an app as a college start-up community platform on iOS, Android, and the web in 2016, and was acquired in 2019.
14M	M	CEO	Faculty of Engineering (1994), Cairo. Master of Marketing (2002), Cairo.	Co-Founder & CEO of a business company (2017). Co-founder of a new company since January 2019.
15M	F	CEO and Co-Founder	Graduated (2014), School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Cairo.	Founder of a marketing agency, 2018: a platform showcasing start-ups and providing services to new businesses using technology.
16M	F	Founder	Master's degree in social research methods and statistics. International University in Cairo.	Eight years of experience in the development field. Started Business & established a group on social media.
17M	M	CEO and Founder	Graduated (1995) from the School of Economics, International University in Cairo.	Worked in several higher positions, such as a marketing director in an international company.
18M	M	CFO	Bachelor of Actuarial Science (2012), International University in Cairo.	Worked as a CFO in a company that was established in 2017.

				A subsidiary of global tech, Dubai provides a semi-private alternative to public transportation. Worked in several jobs and was still an adjunct professor at the University, Cairo.
19M	M	Business development manager	Masters in entrepreneurship and innovation (2019), UK	Working as a business development manager.
20M	M	General Manager	Bachelor's degree in business (2010), UK.	Experienced in managing events for a leading company that organizes events.
21M	F	Founder	Bachelor of Business Administration, University in Cairo. Master of Public Administration and an Executive MBA, University in Cairo.	Chief Executive Officer at the leading Publishing houses and the founder of venture capitalists that specialize in digital education. More than 25 years of professional experience publishing digital solutions.
22M	M	Managing Partner	Software engineer & Business and Management Degree, Cairo	Managing partner in a company that worked across borders in venture capital funds.
P1	M	Lecturer	Bachelor of Engineering. Cairo	Freelance content creator and owner of a digital marketing agency.
P2	M	Teacher	BSc in Science Cairo	Freelance provider at several digital education platforms.
P3	F	Teacher	BSc in Science Cairo	Freelance educator and content developer
P4	M	Software engineer	Bachelor's degree in business (2018), UK.	Freelance developer working as a service provider for companies that outsource these services.
P5	F	Lawyer	Bachelor of Business Administration, University in Cairo.	Product provider and online trader (utilizing social media platforms).

Table 3: Codes and Themes

Case Category	***Number of interviews***	***Initial codes***	***Codes collected***	***First order concepts***	***Second order themes***	***Aggregate dimensions***
Mediators	22	181	29	4	3	1
Providers	5	70	19	4	3	1