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The Rise of Collaborative Consumption in EU Member States: Exploring the Impact of Collaborative Economy Platforms on Consumer Behavior and Sustainable Consumption

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Abstract: This study identifies a consumption model and consumer behavior patterns in the collaborative economy paradigm. The authors assessed the demand for technical innovation in the online commerce market in EU member states through monitoring, and used a moving average method to highlight the trend of the overall economic effect concerning national conditions. They also analyzed the main sectors of the collaborative economy for 2020–2022 and large online platforms subject to the legal landscape for studying European consumer behavior, establishing a consumption model and characteristic purchasing patterns within the collaborative economy. It has been discovered that collaborative consumption practices in European society are still expanding despite changes in global economic trends. It has been determined that the physical goods sector is the collaborative economy's priority. It is demonstrated that online platforms of the collaborative economy primarily contribute to the redistribution of consumption centered on the following behavior patterns: economic value quality, social responsibility, and rational consumption. The study's findings deepen our comprehension of collaborative consumption while also furnishing decision-makers and business leaders with information that can be put into practice to encourage responsible and sustainable consumption behaviors within the collaborative economy.

Keywords: collaborative economy; consumer values; ethical activities; online platforms; shared economy; social environment; sustainable behavior

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1. Introduction

Significant changes in the global economy over the past ten years will be the economy's defining difficulties. The most important megatrends today and in the future are climate change [1], the cost of living crisis, and geo-economic conflicts [2]. Megatrends have caused changes in the global economy's hierarchy and its composition [3,4]. Collaborative consumption understood as a system of sharing resources between individuals and service providers via online platforms as an alternative to residential/car rental is a potentially growing economic trend. According to statistics, the collaborative economy is currently being used by a sizeable portion of the global population. They take part as both a service provider and a service consumer. This demonstrates the popularity of this practice and its viability alongside traditional economic models.

In 2023, the collaborative economy has grown to include over 10,000 businesses, providing a wide range of goods and services in 133 of the world's 196 nations. Approximately 500 million people in China, Germany, France, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America shared services to generate income between 2020 and 2023, and 680 million people used these services as collaborative economy consumers. China is regarded as the leading collaborative economy market, with 73% of the online population participating in the collaborative economy and 55% providing goods and services. The market in the United Arab Emirates is second, with 54% and 61%, respectively. In the European market, 54% of the online population is willing to share or rent, while 44%

are willing to rent from others [5]. On the surface, the EU collaborative economy appears to be limited. According to a study conducted at the request of the European Commission, it accounts for 0.17% of Europe's GDP, with permanent jobs accounting for 0.15% of total EU employment [6]. Simultaneously, systematic experimentation with new ideas at the level of local initiatives is growing and spreading throughout the EU. The primary drivers of growth are environmental concerns and the enhancement of well-being by achieving sustainable consumption [7]. Therefore, shifts in the global economy's hierarchical structure against the backdrop of megatrends are reshaping the business environment for players in collaborative consumption practices.

This study attempts to justify the growth of collaborative consumption in the EU. It is based on descriptive statistics to examine the impact of collaborative economy platforms on consumer behavior and sustainable consumption. The goal is to understand the current status and potential of the collaborative economy, which is currently underrepresented. This necessitates an in-depth review of collaborative economy platforms as a legitimate demand- and supply-driven means of developing and supporting this sector of the economy. As a result, this study will promote a better understanding of the collaborative consumption economy from the perspectives of purchasing behavior, economic efficiency, and sustainable consumption.

The study's novelty is that it provides an analytics tool to explain consumer decision-making in the context of a collaborative consumption offer. The rationale is grounded on the benefits and advantages of descriptive statistics [1,5]. These include consumer environmental awareness. The study makes a practical contribution in two ways: first, it provides insights into the current trend in the collaborative economy from the standpoint of European society, and second, it provides an empirical description of consumption patterns and consumer behavior patterns in the collaborative economy paradigm.

1.1. Literature Review

Originally, the collaborative consumption economy was a logical continuation of the evolution of theory. It started with disruptive innovations in the early 2000s regarding social engagement and positive impact on the development of society in the US. It then subsequently penetrated into the EU [8]. These days, the collaborative economy is increasingly viewed in terms of economic relations, and there has been a shift towards platforms as new ways of organizing the economy as a whole. The Netherlands was among the first to introduce the collaborative economy in the EU during the global recession following the 2007–2008 financial crisis [9,10]. In the modern paradigm of the development of economic science, a collaborative economy [11,12] is defined as a socio-economic system of a closed type. Online platforms and peer-to-peer transactions support it. It is based on the law of supply and demand, as well as social norms, with the moral values of the participants in collaborative consumption. In this context, collaborative economy platforms embody several large exchange platforms. They are disruptive business models capitalizing on market opportunities [13]. Collaborative consumption is becoming a widespread form of exchange. It operates within a triangle of actors: platform providers, peer service providers and customers. It also operates within three parameters: motive, action, and resource [14,15]. Today in the EU, the collaborative economy is part of the Single Market Strategy. It focuses on digital harmonization between countries and is governed by the rule applicable to collaborative economy business models—the European Agenda for the Collaborative Economy, 2016. Supporting the collaborative economy is regarded as essential to achieving a sovereign digital ecosystem in which consumers have access to online goods and services, and businesses reap the benefits of digital potential. This, in turn, is expected to lead to more efficient services. It will also promote reusing existing resources and creating more flexible lifestyles [16]. The most prominent examples of the collaborative economy are car sharing, renting private accommodation, coordinating the delivery of on-demand services, and fashion sharing [7,17]. The collaborative economy differs from conventional agreements in that platform providers intend to share goods or services without owning

them [18]. According to Cesnuityte et al. [7], a collaborative economy is an alternative to traditional business. It builds its base models on hyper-consumption and private capital. It focuses on technical innovation and the economic foundations of sustainable societal development. Online bartering is a form of collaborative consumption that is intended to reduce social tensions like excessive consumption, environmental damage, and poverty by fostering economic unity and promoting harmonious development through the wise use of resources within communities. For example, Uber's online platform allows ride-sharing services at lower fares than traditional taxis, stimulating sustainable transportation solutions [18,19]. At the same time, this collaborative economy platform creates inequalities between age generations and the economic strata of society, contributes to increased vehicle density on the roads, and clashes with traditional management paradigm companies. The collaborative consumption economy, as provided by the online platform Airbnb, allows tourists to rent private accommodations, staying at lower prices than hotels and correlating with the P2P (peer-to-peer) accommodation sector [20]. Sharing data via web services essentially facilitates online commerce, which benefits all participants in the collaborative consumption process, particularly through the experience of interacting with locals and satisfying private economic interests. Additionally, there are numerous negative effects on local economies and communities, such as tourist congestion in cities and reaction zones, rising housing prices, and environmental degradation [17]. Consumer demographics, internet accessibility, and the active use of technological innovation are the main factors influencing collaborative consumption [21]. The researchers' findings from cluster analyses revealed two user profiles that correspond to consumer motivations for collaborative consumption via online platforms: the first group is oriented towards comfort and convenience. In contrast, the second group is oriented towards economic gain through social commerce. Consequently, the collaborative consumption economy has become a big part of modern business over the last ten years. Even though there are some problems with it, such as the digital divide in society, growing economic inequality, and problems with traditional business models, Rossmannek and Chen [22] say that collaborative economy services are sustainable and help create sustainable consumer attitudes. In this context, sustainable consumption entails purchasing more environmentally friendly goods and empowering consumers with data to make choices that reflect their values [23]. This will help drive the circular economy [24] and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals [25,26]. In general, collaborative consumption practices on online platforms are based on the concept of sharing via economic–technological coordination and socially responsible consumer behavior, emphasizing sustainable consumption [7,27]. According to the researchers, this type of business organization will depend heavily on developing and applying digital trust because it entails peer-to-peer transactions for direct selling and exchange, as well as mutual participation. It has recently been confirmed [28] that consumers worldwide are transitioning to a digital lifestyle. This trend is particularly relevant when looking for and researching products or services. Additionally, consumers' spending habits are becoming more frugal due to factors like geopolitical and economic uncertainty, the COVID-19 pandemic, and rising living costs. Given the current circumstances, the researcher discovered that most purchase decisions would be based on behavioral patterns like seeking the best value for money, looking for alternative purchase channels, prioritizing quality and convenience, and upholding social and environmental values. Based on the established patterns of consumer behavior, companies can adapt their marketing and sales strategies to better align with the intentions of their audience, as noted by Song et al. [29], and promote sustainable consumption, as suggested by Arora and Mishra [30].

The studies discussed above mainly focus on conceptual analyses of the collaborative consumption economy. They also evaluate global online collaborative economy platforms or a specific category of collaborative product or service consumption. However, this empirical limitation is present in the practice area being considered. Consequently, this study aims to address the identified practice gap by organizing theoretical knowledge regarding how collaborative consumption and collaborative economy business models

grow. Following that, empirical validation based on statistical data will provide a reliable picture of how collaborative economy platforms affect Europe's consumer landscape.

1.2. Problem Statement

The present study is motivated by the need for an empirical description of how to target sustainable consumers, the dominant group in European society, to increase collaborative consumption. There is a significant amount of research on developing and functioning collaborative consumption practices. This research includes responsible behavior that incorporates basic consumption ideology and environmental stewardship. However, there is still a lack of understanding regarding the role of the collaborative economy in sustainable societal development. It is important to utilize the collaborative economy as part of a policy solution for sustainability. Empirical analysis to track the growth of collaborative consumption using standard data collection methods and official statistics processing will give the research process structure and give credibility to the findings in the public domain. Thus, this research aims to explore objective commercial data on online consumer behavior and sustainable consumption on collaborative economy platforms.

The research purpose is to identify consumption patterns and consumer behavior patterns within the collaborative economy paradigm.

The research objectives are as follows:

1. Examine how the collaborative economy is understood and applied in practice in EU member states;
2. Analyze the main sectors of the collaborative economy and online platforms concerning European consumers' consumption patterns;
3. Identify the key aspects of the collaborative economy paradigm used to create the consumption model and purchasing behavior patterns.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Research Design

This study focuses on collaborative consumption in the collaborative economy platform technology. It examines the European consumer's perspective through a synthesis of theoretical and empirical analysis. The study covers topics such as interpretation, development, the functioning of collaborative consumption, and the practice-oriented approach.

2.2. Sample

The methodological concepts of Anwar [31], Cesnuityte et al. [7], the European Union [26], and Eurostat [32–34] inform the empirical environment of this study. Geographically, the study focuses on EU economies and societies. Due to the availability of official statistics, the time frame of the analysis covers 2020, 2021, and 2022, identifying the main trends in collaborative consumption against the backdrop of global economic changes, including the pandemic, climate change, the cost of living crisis, and geopolitical tensions, as noted by Statista Research Department [1] and the World Economic Forum [2]. The study is divided into three sections, each focusing on a different aspect of consumer behavior in the collaborative economy. The Section 1 interprets the collaborative consumption economy and monitors studies to determine its applicability in real-world situations. The Section 2 analyzes the collaborative economy's sectoral structure and the major market exchange participants. The Section 3 examines key aspects of consumer behavior in the collaborative economy. The study employed the following methodological tools: a review of literature on collaborative economics to gain theoretical foundations and insights from previous research; the monitoring of collaborative consumption practices in EU member states based on the analysis of data gathered from Eurostat databases, including reports on collaborative consumption, statistics on collaborative economy platforms, and legislation across different EU countries; the application of the moving average method in analyzing time series data related to collaborative economics on a country-by-country basis to observe trends and changes over time; descriptive statistics for obtaining a general understanding

of data distribution and identifying key characteristics, along with Excel and Visio for summarizing and interpreting the obtained data. The utilized methodological toolkit allows for a comprehensive understanding of collaborative economics and its dynamics in EU member states.

2.3. Statistical Processing

The Section 1 examines the growth of collaborative consumption. This is done through the theoretical analysis of a collaborative consumption economy, as defined through a literature review [7,31,35]. Additionally, the growth is examined practically by monitoring collaborative consumption practices in EU member states. This monitoring focuses on the information society indicator, specifically the online purchasing of physical goods, transport services, P2P accommodation, and on-demand household services from a private individual [32]. The selection of these data indicators is driven by several key factors: the relevance and shifts in consumer behavior, the significance of collaborative consumption, and the comparability of data across EU member states. This enables a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of modern technologies and collaborative consumption on society, the economy, and regulation. Physical goods are products created through labor and intended for exchange or sale to fulfil people's needs. Transport services refer to individuals who share a vehicle or parking area with others. P2P accommodation refers to households renting out their accommodations to others for short periods. This provides short-term accommodation to individuals in need. On-demand domestic services involve freelancers who offer their services to households, specifically to address various household tasks upon request. The result of the monitoring is presented using a graph. The graph visualizes the comparison of time series data for 2020, 2021, and 2022. Additionally, it includes the approximation applied to the data, which is a moving average trend line. This trend line helps to smooth out short-term fluctuations in demand from the mean and highlights the overall trend concerning national conditions for consumers of the collaborative economy. The arithmetic moving average is numerically equal to the arithmetic mean of the original function. It is calculated over the analyzed period. The calculation formula has the following form:

$$SMAt\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=0}^{n-1} Pt-i = \frac{Pt+Pt-1+\ldots\ Pt-i+\ldots\ Pt-n+2+Pt-n+1}{n},$$

where $SMAt$ is the arithmetic moving average value at time t; n is the number of time series values in the time interval for calculating the moving average (smoothing interval); $Pt-i$ is the value of the original function at point $t-i$.

The working document with a data overview for monitoring is presented in Appendix A.

The study's Section 2 analyzes the collaborative economy's main sectors. These sectors include physical goods, transport services, P2P accommodation, and household services on demand. Additionally, it examines variable trade via online platforms that offer goods and services on the European market for joint consumption [33]. Data on the activities of online collaborative economy platforms come from a secondary data source [31,36], as they are not included in Eurostat statistics. The data collected refer to the capital performance of companies localized in the EU. The approach here is guided by three steps:

1. The data are transformed to reflect the definition of the main sectors of the collaborative economy;
2. An analytical method is used to collect data on the activities of online collaborative economy platforms and correlate them with the main sectors;
3. The European consumer market, which includes the trade in goods and services through major online collaborative economy platforms, is visualized in terms of the main sectors using graphical data processing in Excel.

The authors aggregate the visualization of the European consumer market. They also consider the current EU legal regime for collaborative economy business models.

The Section 3 of the study focuses on empirical descriptions of statistical data. It examines the content of the EU collaborative economy, specifically looking at demographic groups of the population aged 16 to 74, education level, economic status, the origins of online shoppers, consumer behavior patterns, transaction patterns, and resource consumption within environmental boundaries. The raw data are based on the results of e-commerce statistics for individuals reported by all EU member states [33]. The inputs [26] reflect consumption and consumer behavior patterns in the EU collaborative economy paradigm. The result is visualized using a summary table and Visio Professional 2021 software tool.

The research object is the collaborative consumption process seen as a new consumption model. The research subject is consumer behavior patterns and the intangible incentives influencing them within the collaborative economy paradigm.

The study exhibits two types of limitations: the absence of data interpretation in Eurostat's official statistics regarding the names of business models and activities of online platforms within the sectors of the collaborative economy, which creates barriers to attaining a comprehensive and accurate understanding of resource-sharing practices and reduces the objectivity of the results obtained; geographical concentration on EU member states, which narrows the generalizability of the findings on a global scale and limits knowledge about collaborative consumption practices beyond the EU. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the research results and their application in a broader context.

2.4. Ethical Issues

The research design was collaboratively established and approved by all co-authors. Each participant was assigned specific tasks, encompassing publication matters, to address the research objectives outlined in the paper and ultimately accomplish the purpose of the study.

3. Results

The literature review reveals that the collaborative consumption economy is a product of various megatrends. These megatrends arise from limited resources and are driven by evolving technical innovations. They reshape the value creation process through peer-to-peer activities among internet users, resulting in economic effects. Additionally, social commerce contributes to social effects, online collaboration leads to technological effects, and consumer ideology focuses on optimizing resource consumption, resulting in environmental effects. The collaborative economy paradigm is based on the synergy of technological, economic, social, and environmental effects. This approach considers the interests of crucial elements pertaining to the sustainable development of society. To study the manifestation of collaborative consumption in the EU member states, the collaborative economy's online commerce markets have been monitored (Figure 1). According to Eurostat data, the internet was used by 93.0% of the EU population between the ages of 16 and 74 in 2022; 75.0% of individuals purchased goods and services for personal needs in the e-commerce sector, while 26.4% purchased through collaborative economy platforms.

According to the monitoring results (Figure 1), the share of internet users on collaborative economy platforms increased from 22.7% in 2020 to 26.4% in 2022. This represents a 3.7 percentage point (p.p.) increase. In 2022, more than a third of consumers in Poland used these platforms (39.2%). France followed with 26.4% of consumers using them, and Norway with 26.0%. Users in Bulgaria were the least likely to make online purchases, with only 5.2% using these platforms. The growth was particularly significant during the analyzed period in Slovakia (+9.5 p.p.) and Malta (+6.9 p.p.). The moving average method shows that collaborative consumption is still in its early stages but is growing quickly. This is shown by the spread of collaborative platforms in areas like physical goods, transportation services, P2P accommodation, and on-demand household services. Collaborative economy sectors have a positive impact on the EU economy. This impact is observed within the legal regulation of trade on online platforms of the European consumer market, as shown in Figure 2. It is important to note how different the legal system is for business models in

the collaborative economy. These models are governed by the European Agenda for the Collaborative Economy, 2016, and are implemented in the economies of EU member states through a variety of different regulatory measures. This situation creates legal ambiguity and necessitates aligning current laws to uphold social and consumer rights.

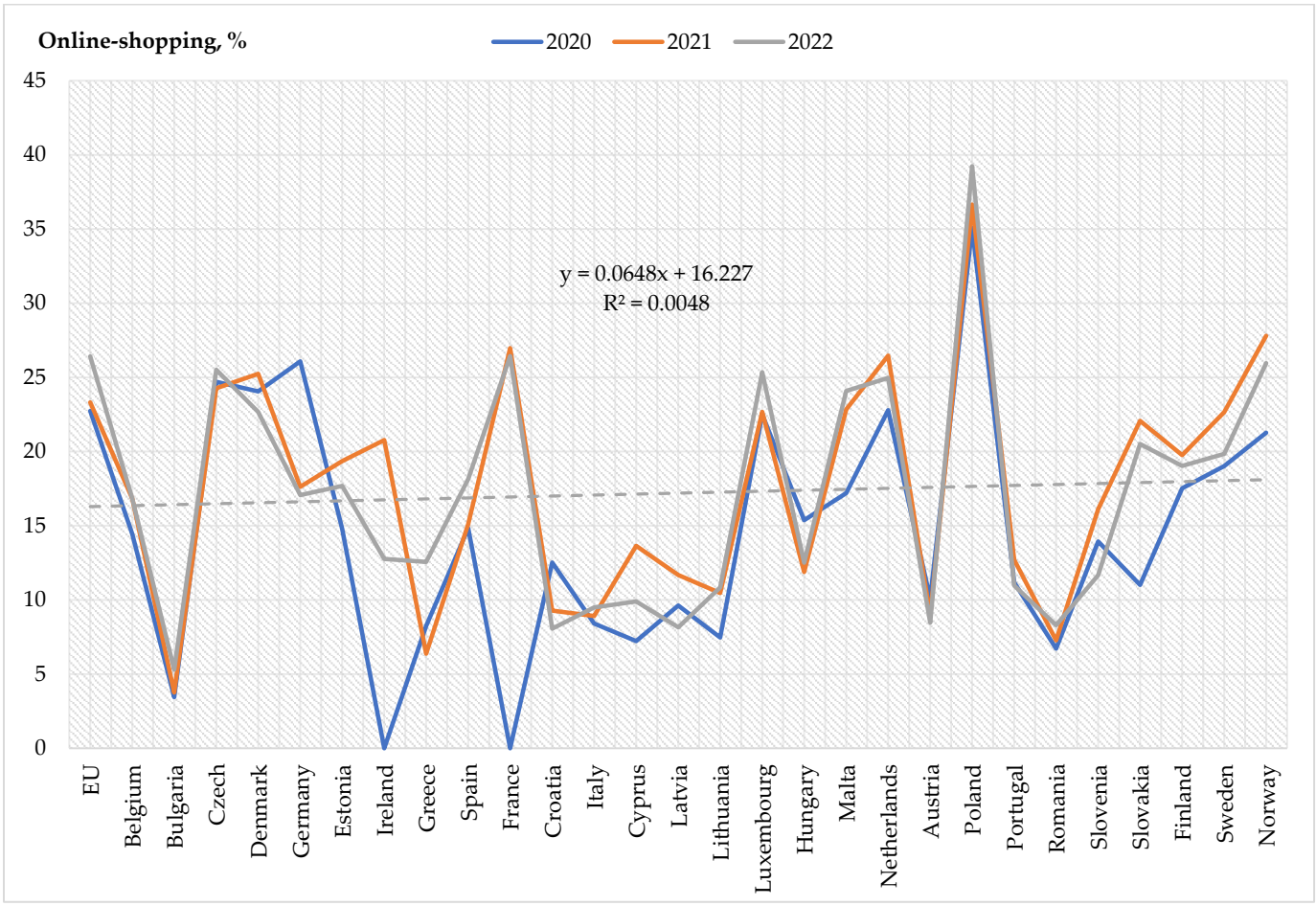


Figure 1. Monitoring online collaborative consumption practices in EU Member States, 2020–2022. Source: Developed by the author based on data from Eurostat [32]. Note: Data for 2020 are not available for Ireland and France as they were not centrally collected.

Over the analyzed period, online collaborative consumption in the physical goods sector dominated the online version of the collaborative economy, as shown in Figure 2. In 2022, 18.9% of internet users purchased products from others in the EU to meet personal needs. Additionally, 5.6% rented short-term accommodation, 1.2% used transport services, and 0.7% availed of on-demand household services. The major EU online platforms for collaborative consumption are Sharewear in Sweden, Carma in Ireland, Kodesk in Belgium, Oasis in France, BlaBlaCar in France, Bolt in Estonia, Livop in France, SnappCar in the Netherlands, and Ring Twice in Belgium. These platforms capitalize on European society's ethical activities and economic well-being through online technologies. Shareware focuses on sharing a collection of clothes, Carma and SnappCar offer car sharing and renting services, Kodesk facilitates office sharing, Oasis enables house sharing, BlaBlaCar provides car sharing services, Bolt offers taxi service, Livop focuses on carsharing, and Ring Twice provides services and performs everyday tasks simply and interactively. The findings of this study offer empirical support for the modest yet increasing involvement of European consumers in the collaborative economy, encompassing their roles as both consumers and providers. In this context, new collaborative business models offer convenient solutions for consumers. They provide a new way of exchanging goods and services through online

technologies. Additionally, they offer new sources of income for people. This affects existing consumption and patterns of consumer behavior. There is a shift towards online resources, economic feasibility, responsible behavior, and basic consumption ideology. A pattern in the study refers to consistent consumption behavior. Table 1 presents consumption practices concerning online shopping consumer behavior patterns. Elements of consumer behavior include age, education, economic status, and geographical origin of buyers. These factors can influence how consumers make purchases and decisions in the online environment. Elements of sustainable consumption encompass efficient resource utilization, circular material usage, global waste reduction, and digital transactions. These factors are associated with more responsible and sustainable resource and material utilization, contributing to a reduction in the negative impact on the environment.

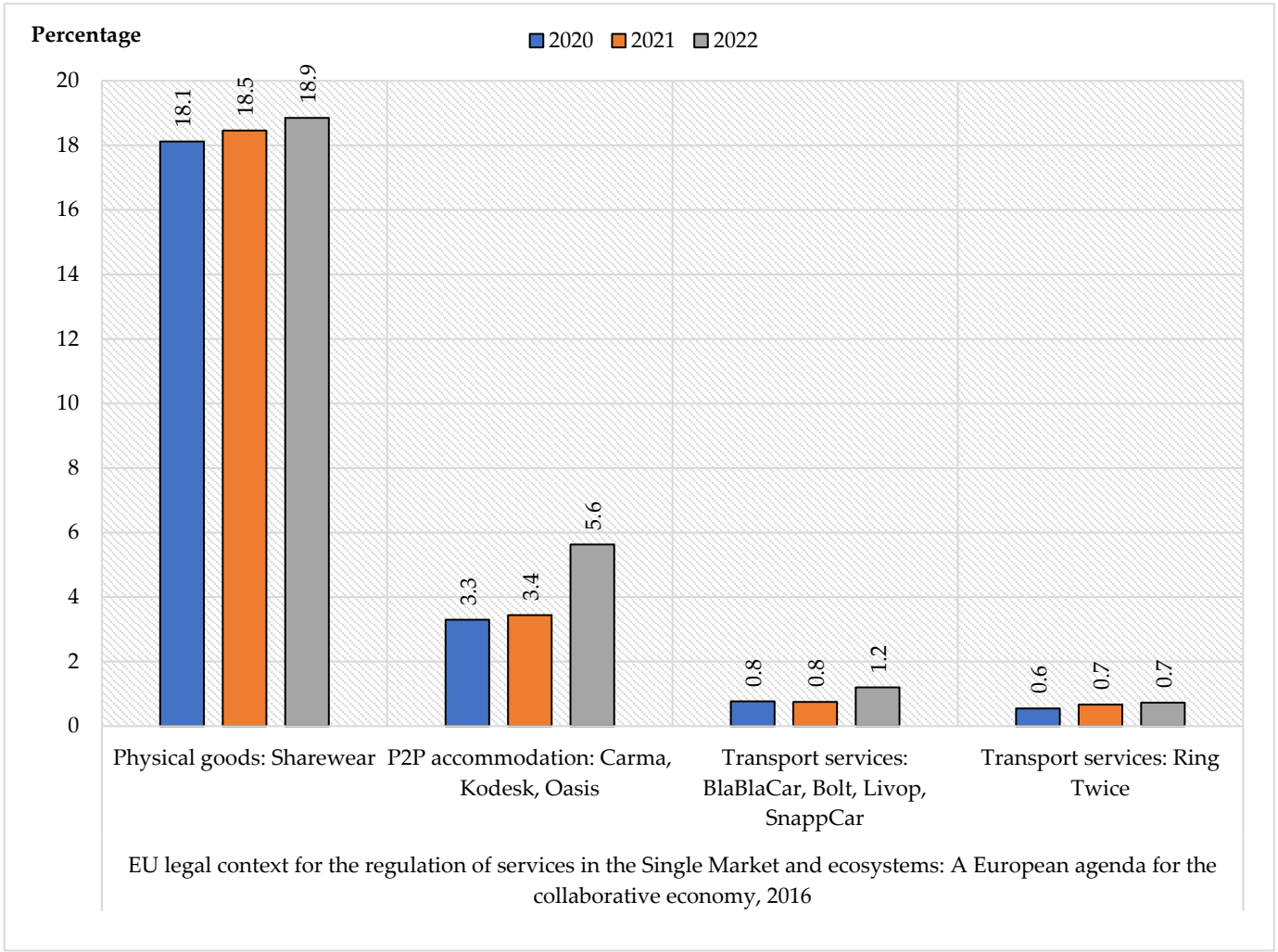


Figure 2. Online shopping sectors of the collaborative economy in light of European consumer behavior, 2020–2022. Source: Developed by the author based on data from Anwar [31], and Eurostat [33].

The empirical analysis of Table 1's findings reveals that the age group of 25- to 34-year-olds (35%), which makes up the largest proportion of online platform users, is driving the growth of collaborative consumption. Ages 35 to 44 (33%) are in second place. The degree of education (34% of higher education holders) and employment status (29% of employees and entrepreneurs) both favor the online economy. It is important to note that the consumption pattern in the EU collaborative economy paradigm is dominated by local online shoppers (26%) and residents of other EU member states (24%). During online shopping, among the behavioral patterns to consider are price and product analysis, customer reviews on websites and social platforms, as well as information provided by

various sellers, manufacturers, and service providers. However, a significant determining factor in online purchases is the pricing policy of products (45.9%). Additionally, it is important to note that the system used on collaborative economy platforms not only shifts society's lifestyle towards reducing the environmental footprint, but also promotes more sustainable economic growth and trust-based responsible consumption. This is achieved by enhancing resource efficiency, stimulating circular material usage, waste reduction, and conducting digital transactions. For example, a reduction of 0.8 tons per capita in resource consumption and a decrease of 0.4 kg per capita in waste represent significant steps towards a more sustainable and responsible economy focused on circular business models and digitization. According to the research findings, a shift in the motivational basis of collaborative consumption has been identified, prioritizing sustainable consumption and responsible behavior among highly educated working-age individuals, especially in the context of local markets. This shift is characterized by satisfying personal needs based on trust, social well-being, and local environmental preservation. Therefore, it can be concluded that collaborative economy platforms influence sustainable behavior by promoting resource conservation, supporting sustainable practices, creating new entrepreneurial opportunities, enhancing awareness and education, and contributing to a reduction in the negative environmental impact.

Table 1. Consumption and consumer behavior patterns in the collaborative economy and EU society paradigm, 2023.

Items related to consumer behavior variables	Age group:				
	16–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–74
	26%	35%	33%	24%	14%
	Education:				
	No or low formal education	Medium formal education		High formal education	
	15%	23%		34%	
	The economic status of buyers:				
	Retired	Employees, entrepreneurs		Students	Unemployed
	14%	29%		26%	20%
	Origins of internet consumers:				
	Residents of other EU member states	Residents of a non-EU state		Local online shoppers	
	24%	19%		26%	
	Consumer behavior related to online shopping:				
	Analyzing prices or products every time before purchasing/ordering online	Using customer reviews on websites or blogs every time before purchasing/ordering online	Using information from the websites of several sellers, manufacturers, and service providers before purchasing/ordering online	Rarely or never using information from websites of multiple sellers, manufacturers, and service providers before purchasing/ordering online	Online purchasing/ordering by clicking/purchasing immediately through the website or social media app advertizing
	49.5%	22.3%	14.9%	9.0%	4.3%
Elements related to sustainable consumption	Sustainable consumption:				
	Resource utilization efficiency	Circular use of materials		Reducing global waste	
	2019–2021 −0.8 tons per capita (14.4–13.6)	2019–2021 −0.3% (12.0%–11.7%)		2019–2021 −0.4 kg per capita (5.2–4.8)	
	Transaction Payment (TP) = Collaborative Economy (CE) + Digital Platform (GP)				

Source: Developed by the author based on data from European Union [26] and Eurostat [32–34].

4. Discussion

The research conducted focuses on exploring the growing phenomenon of collaborative consumption. It also examines its impact on consumer behavior and consumption patterns through collaborative economy platforms. In this context, the initial focus is on the theoretical awareness of the collaborative consumption economy of physical goods, transport services, P2P accommodation, and on-demand household services. This is followed by monitoring the online commerce markets of the collaborative economy across EU member states. Finally, the trend of collaborative consumption, preference, and purchase decision is highlighted. The findings of this study demonstrate that collaborative consumption practices are a developing trend of the collaborative economy in European society. These practices aim to facilitate collaborative activities between various online actors based on ethical conduct and fundamental consumer ideologies. The number of people using collaborative economy platforms varies between EU countries.

This study's findings are consistent with those of Daglis [37]. The researcher defines a collaborative consumption economy as a new form of economic activity characterized primarily by the exchange of remaining resources between equals. In this way, the need to possess resources is reduced, resulting in less surplus production. In their study, García-Rodríguez et al. [38] examined the actions of individuals that contribute to participation in the collaborative consumption economy. They discovered that mutual motivation in this economy is mediated by social norms and responsible behavior [39]. This form of consumption aims to redistribute resources and has economic, social, and environmental effects, aligning with the conclusions of Huang et al. [40]. As stated in the introduction, physical goods, transportation services, P2P accommodation, and on-demand household services have been identified as strands of collaborative economy consumption patterns. This study examined the main sectors of the collaborative economy and the major EU online platforms to evaluate new economic activity from the perspective of the European consumer. According to the data analysis, shopping for physical goods takes precedence over demand for services in the European consumer market. A set of regulatory measures are offered for online platforms that support the collaborative economy under the legal framework that governs the European consumer market.

In this context, legal regulation is implemented differently by EU national governments, thereby giving rise to a state of legal uncertainty for all stakeholders involved in the collaborative economy. Thus, it is concluded that there is a need in the European Union to harmonize the legal regime applicable to the business models of collaborative platforms. This conclusion aligns with Rodrigues's earlier findings [41]. Similarly, and generally, this study's findings are consistent with those of Echikson [6] and Tatarinov et al. [42]. The scholars view new economic activities of collaborative consumption forms utilizing digital technologies as a response to the challenges of unlocking business activity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic at the local level, and building resilience. Furthermore, Echikson [6] believes that both traditional and new digitally enabled platforms should be treated equally and governed by clear European rules. In practice, the collaborative economy, according to Menor-Campos et al. [43] and Kong et al. [44], entails changes in the economic behavior of consumers and fosters new business models where trust is a prerequisite for individuals to engage in commercial transactions. In this context, the activity of real-time risk identification and management in e-commerce, as discussed by Sharmaa et al. [45], becomes relevant for the advancement of retail trade, as emphasized by Su et al. [46].

The empirical study's findings [44–48] show that reviews, information privacy, and transaction security build users' trust. This trust contributes to their continued intention to use the exchange platform for social commerce and share positive consumption experiences with other consumers. The findings also show that transaction security is roughly four times more effective than social reviews in building trust and two and a half times more effective than information quality. Based on empirical data from e-commerce in the emerging Eurostat collaborative economy, it is found in this study that consumption patterns are dominated by aspects focusing on economic viability and environmental stew-

ardship. This aligns with the concept of the collaborative economy, which emphasizes the co-consumption of goods and services in the local community. Furthermore, within the EU's monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals [49] concerning responsible consumption and production, a highly educated working-age population's economic strategy in a local community reflects these priorities. Collins [50] also confirms that the collaborative consumption economy has several important benefits for the environment, sustainable development, and reductions in natural resource usage. It is also emphasized that collaborative consumption promotes sustainable consumption practices through online services and communities, including one-to-one exchanges with subsequent compensation, as indicated by Delgado et al. [39]. This economy influences sustainable development and reduces the use of natural resources. The findings obtained by Minami et al. [51] generally demonstrate that the new form of economic exchange in the consumption model is dominated by environmental orientation. This is consistent with the fact that the consumer's sustainable action is governed by the economy of externalities and the satisfaction of personal needs, as demonstrated by this study's findings.

5. Conclusions

The analysis in this study shows that, theoretically, a collaborative consumption economy is a response to megatrends. These megatrends are related to technical innovation, sharing, socialization, new economic benefits, and sustainability. Collaborative consumption has shown a growing trend in the economies of many EU member states. In the European consumer market, the number of people using online collaborative economy platforms is found to vary from country to country. This means that the collaborative consumption economy is gradually altering social and societal relations, as evidenced by the presence of numerous small actors and online platforms that serve the collaborative economy within the legal framework that governs services in the Single Market and ecosystems. There is a correlation between the revenues of European service providers and the four major sectors of the collaborative economy: physical goods, transportation services, P2P accommodation, and on-demand household services. The physical goods sector experiences the largest transaction volume flows. The other three significant sectors, namely, transportation services, P2P accommodation, and on-demand household services, have the lowest demand among European consumers' consumption patterns. In this situation, the collaborative consumption economy's various online platforms serve as a tool for suppliers to commercialize their products and services and gain direct access to consumer spending. It has been determined that the collective effects of all collaborative consumption participants—service providers, consumers of these services and goods, and platforms of the collaborative economy that link them with each other via online technologies and high-quality transactions—have a real bearing on the EU's economic growth. It has been found that people between the ages of 25–34 and 35–44, with higher education and a focus on the local market, are more likely to use online trading platforms for the collaborative economy. The new mode of exchange influences consumers' consumption patterns and behavioral patterns through online collaborative economy platforms. The advantage of the new consumption pattern is a digital and green transition in the economy. This transition is based on high resource efficiency and material reuse. It also involves a reduction in global waste and changes in consumer behavior patterns related to online resources, savings, and social responsibility. Overall, it can be concluded that the rise of collaborative consumption positively impacts purchasing behavior and sustainable consumption. This leads to improved well-being through a resource-efficient economy. In this economy, economic growth is decoupled from resources, and focuses on the ideology of basic consumption and sustainable actions of consumer behavior. This approach emphasizes both economic value and social connectedness.

The obtained research results can serve as a foundation for the development of targeted policies and strategies in the fields of circular economy and collaborative consumption. This includes supporting innovations and startups, as well as educational programs aimed

at increasing consumer awareness, promoting international cooperation for information exchange regarding the collaborative economy, and strengthening consultations and dialogues among government authorities, businesses, and civil society in matters related to sustainable utilization. Consequently, the application of the research findings enriches the political, business, and educational landscape, facilitating the implementation of responsible and sustainable consumption practices.

It is advisable to focus future research efforts on the European employment market, specifically examining aspects such as flexibility and entry barriers.

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Conflicts of Interest: This research has no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Data monitor: internet purchases—collaborative economy 2020–2022. Source: developed by the author based on data from Eurostat [32].

Internet Purchases—Collaborative Economy (2020 Onwards)	2020	2021	2022
EU	22.7	23.3	26.4
Belgium	14.4	16.8	16.8
Bulgaria	3.5	3.8	5.3
Czech	24.7	24.3	25.5
Denmark	24.1	25.2	22.7
Germany	26.1	17.6	17.1
Estonia	14.8	19.4	17.7
Ireland	0.0	20.8	12.8
Greece	8.3	6.4	12.6
Spain	14.8	15.1	18.2
France	0.0	27.0	26.4
Croatia	12.5	9.3	8.1
Italy	8.4	8.9	9.5
Cyprus	7.2	13.7	9.9
Latvia	9.6	11.7	8.2
Lithuania	7.5	10.5	10.8
Luxembourg	22.5	22.7	25.4
Hungary	15.4	11.9	12.5
Malta	17.2	22.8	24.1
Netherlands	22.8	26.5	25.0
Austria	10.1	9.0	8.5
Poland	35.1	36.7	39.2
Portugal	11.2	12.7	11.0

Table A1. *Cont.*

Internet Purchases—Collaborative Economy (2020 Onwards)	2020	2021	2022
Romania	6.7	7.3	8.3
Slovenia	13.9	16.1	11.7
Slovakia	11.0	22.1	20.5
Finland	17.5	19.8	19.0
Sweden	19.0	22.7	19.8
Norway	21.3	27.8	26.0

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