

# **TALKING INSTITUTIONS IN THE SHARING ECONOMY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ACTOR QUOTES IN THE PRINT MEDIA AND A TAXONOMY OF DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES**

*Completed Research Paper*

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## **Abstract**

*We study how actors engage in institutional work to manage legitimacy by influencing media discourse in the face of discontinuous innovation. We content-analyze actor quotes reproduced in newspaper articles about the 'sharing economy' in the taxi and lodging industries to survey this aspect of media discourse and offer a taxonomy of the discursive strategies used in the public debate on institutional change. We find that actor quotes are dominantly from offensive actors striving for institutional change, mostly due to a relatively low share of voice of incumbent firms as defensive actors aiming at institutional maintenance. Whereas offensive actors aimed for legitimacy in their discursive strategies by balancing attacks on existing institutions with assertions of new institutions, defensive actors aimed for legitimacy more by attacking new institutions than by reinforcing existing ones. Our findings suggest that, contrary to prior beliefs, preventing the emergence of new institutions plays a crucial role for defensive institutional work.*

*Keywords: Institutional work, discourse strategies, rhetoric, discontinuous innovation, change, technology, disruption, technology, sharing economy, Uber, Airbnb.*

## 1 Introduction

Institutional scholars have long noted that firms strive for legitimacy, i.e., a “generalized perception [...] that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574), because legitimacy is instrumental to firms’ survival. Firms are typically considered as legitimate if they comply with so-called institutions, i.e., regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive “rules of the game” (North, 1990).

Since compliance with institutions creates legitimacy, firms have an incentive to do so and institutions thus frequently provide “stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2008, p. 48). Nevertheless, firms are not completely bound by institutions and can also engage in “institutional work,” i.e., “purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 217), to influence their institutional environments. For example, scholars have explored the institutional work of two types of actors: ‘institutional entrepreneurs’ (Battilana, Leca, and Boxenbaum, 2009; DiMaggio, 1988), such as new ventures, asserting new or challenging existing paradigms (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994); and institutional conservatives, such as incumbent organizations, defending existing paradigms (Micelotta and Washington, 2013).

One key mechanism through which institutions are shaped is discourse, which enables “actors [to] interact and come to accept shared definitions of reality” (Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy, 2004, p. 635). A particularly critical kind of discourse is media discourse because mass media can widely distribute textual material and thus exert large influence on the formation of institutions and thus, ultimately, the legitimacy of firms (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Firms can consequently engage in institutional work by way of trying to influence media discourse (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

Such institutional work becomes particularly relevant in the context of discontinuous innovations, which “depart dramatically from the norm of continuous incremental innovation” (Anderson and Tushman, 1990, p. 606). Discontinuous innovations like, e.g., the emergence of the sharing economy (Albinsson and Perera, 2012), typically have wide-ranging “implications beyond the technology itself” (Tripsas, 2009, p. 441). Institutional work matters in these contexts because new entrants like *Uber* and *Airbnb* do not possess legitimacy since they violate established institutions, and incumbents like taxi firms and hotel companies may want to stabilize extant institutions to ensure that new entrants remain illegitimate. In addition, discontinuous change serves as a ‘precipitating jolt,’ i.e., a social, regulative, or technological disruption (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings, 2002) that triggers a period of institutional uncertainty and provides an opening for institutional change in the first place (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, and King, 1991).

However, we know very little about which actors contribute to relevant discourse in the context of discontinuous change, and in which ways. For instance, most previous research has focused only on the institutional work of *either* proponents or opponents of institutional change. For instance, Greenwood and colleagues (2002) describe how changes in regulatory changes triggered firms in the field of accounting to engage in offensive institutional work by expanding their service offering to include consulting. Desai (2011) discusses how accidents that challenged the railroad industry’s legitimacy triggered firms to engage in defensive institutional work aimed at minimizing the disruptions and reassert the field’s legitimacy. Even though scholars acknowledge that institutional change is the product of a struggle between actors with different institutional interests (Battilana and D’Aunno, 2009), few studies have explored concurrent offensive and defensive actions. As a result, we know surprisingly little about the dynamics of institutional work and the strategies of different actor types to influence institutions (see Maguire and Hardy, 2009, for an exception).

This study thus aims to contribute at least partial answers to two questions: *How do which actors contribute to the media discourse that shapes future institutions in the context of discontinuous innovation? Which discursive strategies do they use to influence their own and others’ legitimacy?*

We identify the new entrant firms *Airbnb* and *Uber* from the sharing economy as a discontinuous innovation and perform a case study of the two industries that are mostly affected: the taxi and the

lodging industry. We find that actors' institutional discourse in the media is dominated by new entrants and that surprisingly, most defensive quotes come from macro-level actors and not from incumbent field actors. Furthermore, the discursive strategies between proponents and opponents of institutional change differ substantially.

Our findings contribute to the institutional work literature (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), the body of research describing strategies to manage legitimacy (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005), and they advance emerging innovation-related perspectives on discourse (e.g., Davidson, Østerlund, and Flaherty, 2015; Maguire, 2004; Reischauer, 2018). First, we increase our understanding of who engages with media discourse on discontinuous innovation and to what extent. Second, we develop a taxonomy of the strategies offensive and defensive actors use to gain legitimacy and shape institutions.

## **2 Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Institutions and Legitimacy**

Scholars of institutionalism propose that firms are constantly under pressure to behave in accordance with certain rules (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). In particular, firms must comply with regulations formally set and enforced by authorities, respect socially constructed expectations, display appropriate behavior with regard to moral norms and values, and conform to taken-for-granted concepts and beliefs (Scott, 2008). Institutional theorists describe these “rules of the game” (North, 1990) in an organizational field as ‘institutions’ and refer to the three categories of institutions as ‘institutional pillars’ (Scott, 2008). Firms are under pressure to align with institutions because deviance from them is costly in that it is consistently counteracted by “repetitively activated, socially constructed, controls” (Jepperson, 1991, p. 145). In particular, three mechanisms make deviating from institutions unattractive to firms. Deviance is associated with increases in economic risk, with increases in cognitive costs, and finally and arguably most importantly, with a reduction of a firm's legitimacy (Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy, 2000).

Legitimacy is a notoriously multidimensional concept (Suddaby, Bitektine and Haack, 2017) but can be briefly characterized as a “generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Prior research has shown that legitimacy is highly beneficial for firms in a variety of ways. Specifically, legitimacy has been demonstrated to be positively linked to firms' acquisition of resources (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978), the value of initial public offerings, stock prices, stock market risk, stakeholder support, and, ultimately, organizational survival (Deepphouse and Suchman, 2008). Consequently, legitimacy is clearly desirable for firms.

Given that actors in an institutional field are thus likely to seek to attain or retain legitimacy and avoid the costs associated with illegitimacy, they have two options. On the one hand, they can comply with the existing institutions, and potentially actively contribute to their stability. On the other hand, they can attempt to use residual agency they possess despite any extant institutional pressures (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009) and actively work to change the institutions that govern their field.

### **2.2 Types of Institutional Work and Discontinuous Innovation**

Recently, institutional scholars have increasingly turned towards precisely such activities of actors in the process of institutional change (Lawrence, Leca, and Zilber, 2013). The corresponding research stream on ‘institutional work,’ i.e., the “purposive actions of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 217) combines two streams of research. Actions that create new or disrupt existing institutions previously had mostly been the subject of research on institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009; DiMaggio, 1988), a stream that aimed to reinforce the concept of agency in institutional change. Actions that reproduce and reinforce existing institutions had been the subject of an emerging research stream on institutional maintenance (Dacin, Munir and Tracey, 2010; Desai, 2011; Heaphy, 2013; Micelotta and Washington,

2013), following the argument that even the most powerful institutions do not automatically persist but need ongoing reinforcement (Jepperson, 1991).

We borrow the concept of ‘defensive institutional work’ from Maguire and Hardy (2009) to describe actions aimed at institutional stability and introduce the term ‘offensive institutional work’ as the counterpart to describe actions aimed at institutional change. In line with this, we call opponents of institutional change ‘defensive actors’ and proponents of institutional change ‘offensive actors’. Research on offensive institutional work and defensive institutional work has proceeded in relatively separate streams until now. Scholars have mostly focused on *either* the offensive *or* the defensive actions within a given context. The few exceptions that did examine both types of actions have produced powerful insights and contributions to theory, in particular those studies that discussed how the two perspectives interact and relate to each other. One such example is Maguire and Hardy’s (2009) study of the deinstitutionalization of widespread practices of using DDT as insecticide in the agricultural sector. When change agents criticized taken-for-granted institutions, field members responded to such disruptive work originating from outside the organizational field by countering the assertions of change agents. The strength of the concept of institutional work is that it “has helped to correct simplified images of mindless institutional reproduction or unconstrained individual agency and to replace them with more nuanced alternatives of collective and distributed agency” (Smets and Jarzabkowski, 2013, p. 1281). However, collective and distributed agency in the context of institutional change can best be explored when the interactions of proponents and opponents are explored simultaneously.

One type of condition that triggers both offensive and defensive institutional work is the emergence of a discontinuous innovation. Whether referred to as disruptions (Desai, 2011), jolts (Greenwood et al., 2002), or shocks (Fligstein, 2001), these exogenous events typically challenge the existing institutions and initiate a period in which proponents and opponents of change wrestle over the future institutions of the field. Research on institutional entrepreneurship acknowledges that “the conditions that favor institutional entrepreneurship are frequently linked with exogenous jolts, such as technological [...] discontinuities” (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005, p. 38) and numerous studies have explored offensive institutional work in the context of discontinuous innovation. In contrast, research on institutional maintenance has only recently begun to acknowledge that disruptions, such as legitimacy threats to an entire field (Desai, 2011), are important triggers for defensive institutional work to minimize their effects. Whereas maintenance work is already required to ensure institutional stability in normal conditions, it becomes of particular importance in the context of discontinuous innovation.

### **2.3 Media Discourse as a Link Between Institutional Work and Legitimacy**

While the term discourse is used in slightly different ways in various disciplines, we understand discourses as “structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing [...] that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated and consumed” (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, and Putnam, 2004, p. 3; Parker, 1992; Phillips et al., 2004). Notably, the term ‘texts’ denotes all kinds of inscribed material and discourse can thus take many different shapes such as writing books (Maguire and Hardy, 2009), telling stories (Zilber, 2007), and engaging in dialogue (Whittle et al., 2011). One of the most important collection of texts, and thus one of the most influential forms of discourse, is that produced and disseminated by the mass media (McCallum, Hammond, and Covello, 1991). Text in the form of media coverage both sets the ‘agenda’ for public debate and frames issues through “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7; Graf-Vlachy et al., 2019).

Consequently, media discourse plays several roles for the legitimization of firms (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005): on the one hand, it “reflects public evaluation [providing] a measure of [...] legitimacy” and on the other hand, it “affects perceptions of legitimacy” (Pollock and Rindova, 2003, p. 632) or how legitimacy is socially constructed in the public arena. With regard to the latter, it is particularly important to additionally note that discourse may sustain (Lammers and Barbour, 2006) or in fact *change* institutions (Phillips et al., 2004). Such changes of institutions may naturally influence

the legitimacy of actors (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) because the degree of compliance between their practices and the new institutions may be smaller or greater than with prior institutions. This is particularly true for new entrants that, a priori, lack legitimacy provided by the adherence to established institutions. Consequently, media discourse represents a critical resource to gain legitimacy in a number of ways (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994).

Correspondingly, both offensive and defensive actors have a strong interest in actively shaping the media discourse to ultimately influence institutions and legitimacy endowments by the public (Desai, 2011). Scholars have long highlighted the strong links between communication and institutions (Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, and Vaara, 2015) and legitimacy (Harmon, Green, and Goodnight, 2015) and explain that one of the most crucial means of influence on discourse is the creation of texts. In fact, Phillips and colleagues argue that “institutions [are] constructed *primarily* through the production of texts” (2004, p. 638, emphasis added). Organizational agents therefore attempt to manage their organizations’ own media coverage by communicating – providing own texts – for example in the form of press releases, interviews, and official statements (Elsbach and Kramer, 1996). If such texts are taken up by the media and consequently “leave meaningful traces that become embedded in new or existing discourses” (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 640), they can exert substantial powers to change discourse, institutions, and legitimacy. Since firms’ acts of creating texts are language-centered practices “aimed at affecting the institutional context within which those practices occur” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 239), i.e., aimed at changing institutions, they represent a form of institutional work (Hardy, Palmer, and Phillips, 2000; Phillips et al., 2004).

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design and Context**

Our research design is that of an exploratory case study (Yin, 2009). We study the emergence of key sharing economy firms, i.e., new entrants providing online platforms that allow users to offer and access peer-to-peer services or products without transferring ownership, on the basis of trust, within communities (Albinsson and Perera, 2012; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). The rise of sharing economy players constitutes an exemplary case regarding the challenges with which discontinuous innovation confronts incumbent organizations. We opted for organizational fields as embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2009) because discontinuous innovations typically affect all organizations in a given industry collectively (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). Specifically, our paper describes the results of a content analysis of a part of the media discourse in the two fields in which sharing economy ventures were most successful and, in turn, incumbent firms were most challenged: the taxi and the lodging industry.

This setting was ideal to study institutional work in the context of discontinuous innovation. First, the sharing economy represents an innovation that confronted incumbents with discontinuous practices of value creation and value capture. Second, both organizational fields were highly institutionalized, and the sharing economy challenged many common institutional paradigms. Actors in both fields were subject to strong regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive rules (Scott, 2008), e.g. bodies of law, standard operating practices and categorizations (Coughlan, 2001; Greenwood et al., 2002), and common beliefs about who belongs to an industry and what customers value. Third, both cases produced a substantial media echo and therefore provided a rare chance to observe an extensive institutional debate unfolding in public.

#### **3.2 Data Sources and Content Analysis**

Our content analysis (Mayring, 2000) studies actors institutional work as reflected in the verbatim quotes of actors that are reproduced in news articles on *Uber* and *Airbnb*, the two dominant new entrants. First, we gathered articles from high-circulation national newspapers in the U.S. We chose *The New York Times* as representative of papers allowing legitimacy-building towards a broader public and *The Wall Street Journal* as addressing primarily the investment community (Lamin and

Zaheer, 2012). We performed searches on November 11, 2015 and obtained a universe of 1,130 articles, that partially date back to before 2010 and thus give us a window of coverage greater than five years. We read each article and excluded those that only mentioned the firms' names as examples. This first step yielded a sample of 389 relevant articles, 256 related to the taxi and 133 related to the lodging industry. In a second step, we extracted all direct or indirect quotes contained in the articles, together with information about the person to whom the quote was attributed. Our final sample comprised 1,502 relevant quotes, 1,016 related to the taxi and 486 related to the lodging industry.

We used axial coding (Glaser and Strauss, 2009) of the quotes as the primary method of analysis. To ensure reliability and validity, we adhered to common procedures like developing a coding scheme and codebook (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, 2013). We tested intercoder reliability and obtained a satisfactory average Krippendorff's alpha of 0.81. In total, we coded four variables for each quote:

**Actor:** Discourse around the sharing economy was driven by six actor groups: *new entrants* (individuals associated with sharing economy firm), *incumbents* (members of incumbent firms and professional associations), *macro-level actors* (policy makers, executives of regulative bodies), *experts* (academics, experts), *consumers* (customers of incumbents or new entrants), and *stakeholders* (all other actors).

**Topic:** Actors referred to seven broad topics: operations of new entrants, customer value, the industry landscape, labor issues, socio-economic impact, authoritative action, and technology. We used the methodology of Gioia and Thomas (1996) as a three-step procedure to develop first-order categories, second-order themes, and overarching dimensions to conceptualize what actors talked about.

**Institutional work:** First, we captured, for each quote, the most prominent institution the author referred to and what was said about it, employing language as close as possible to the words that informants offered (Gioia and Thomas, 1996). Whenever we could not identify any reference to institutions, we coded the quote as not institution-related. This first step produced 885 first-order codes. Second, we aggregated similar first-level codes into second-order themes, called *narrative topoi*. This resulted in 192 themes. Third, we interpreted the most prominent narrative topoi at a higher level of abstraction to describe the underlying discursive strategy from an analytical perspective. Finally, we associated each of the 18 identified discursive strategies with one of three *institutional pillars* as an overarching dimension, i.e., *regulative*, *normative*, or *cultural-cognitive* (Scott, 2008).

**Position towards institutional change:** We assessed whether a quote leaned towards favoring institutional change (*offensive*) or institutional stability (*defensive*) with respect to the main institution the quote referred to. If no stance could be discerned, we coded the quote as *neutral*. *Defensive* quotes largely reflect actions directed at maintaining existing institutions, *offensive* quotes generally reflect actions aiming at creating new or disrupting existing institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006).

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Quantitative Analysis of Actor Quotes

Actor quotes in media coverage in the context of the sharing economy pertained to one of three categories: offensive discourse aiming at institutional change, defensive discourse aiming at institutional stability, and neutral discourse. The first two types extensively referred to all three pillars of institutions (Scott, 2008), as is evident from Table 1. Most quotes could be understood as institutional work, i.e., intentional actions aimed at shaping institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). All three pillars of institutions received considerable work by offensive and defensive actors.

Offensive actors in favor of institutional change dominated the public debate. We found considerably more quotes supporting change than opposing it, both in the non-institution-related discourse and in the institutional discourse. The primary reason for this gap was the high number of new entrant executives' quotes, accounting for a third of all quotes in both industries. The relative scarcity of defensive quotes can be attributed to the surprisingly small number of quotes from incumbent organizations. Instead, macro-level actors were the dominant defensive actors.

Position towards change	Number of quotes				Total
	Institutional pillars			Not institution-related	
	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-cognitive		
Offensive	189	201	117	241	748
Defensive	127	133	111	89	460
(Neutral)	-	-	-	294	294
<b>Total</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>1,502</b>

Table 1. Numbers of Quotes

## 4.2 Taxonomy of Offensive Discursive Strategies

Offensive actors used ten major discursive strategies as forms of institutional work to influence future institutional logics. Table 2 provides an overview of these strategies, organized by the institutional pillar each strategy attempted to influence. Besides the *narrative topos* for each strategy, the table also shows an exemplary quote to illustrate the form of institutional work.

Discursive strategies used to promote *regulative* institutional change consisted of “lobbying for resources, promoting agendas and proposing new or attacking existing legislation” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 221) as well as “disconnecting existing regulation from the technical definitions and assumptions on which they were founded” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 236). The first of these strategies was based on *coupling regulation with technology and categorizations*. Actors using this strategy argued that rules were contingent on the technologies and categories existing at the time of rule-making. They argued that existing regulation was written “a long time ago” and did “not anticipate a business like ours,” as the CEO of OneFineStay – an upscale competitor of Airbnb – noted.

Discursive strategy	Narrative topos	Exemplary quote
<i>Regulative pillar of institutions</i>		
1 Coupling	“Regulation is contingent on existing technology and categorizations”	“There were rules that made sense in that analog economy, like meters to determine fares, and colors for taxi vehicles to determine their association. But <i>I don’t think these rules make as much sense with new technology.</i> ” (CEO, Uber)
2 Challenging achievement of regulative objectives	“Existing regulation obstructs innovation and competition, rather protecting incumbents’ than customers’ interests”	“Regulation should never be a weapon used by connected and established industry to <i>crowd out innovation and competition</i> , and this is a real-world example.” (State senator, Florida)
3 Criticizing regulatory capture	“Aggressive approach towards regulation is necessary to be able to enter the field”	“If you put yourself in the position to ask for something that is already legal, you’ll find <i>you’ll never be able to roll out.</i> The corruption of the taxi industries will make it so you will never get to market.” (CEO, Uber)
4 Building goodwill	“We are willing to cooperate for regulative compromises”	“Within a reasonable set of boundaries, <i>we are eager to work with municipalities.</i> We aren’t going to say: ‘My way or the highway.’” (SVP for policy and strategy, Uber)
<i>Normative pillar of institutions</i>		
5 Challenging achievement of normative	“Existing practices inappropriately fulfill the field’s purpose for society”	“The reason that taxi drivers are experiencing <i>miserable conditions</i> is because the taxi industry hasn’t worked well for more than 40 years. It has <i>refused to keep up with</i>

Discursive strategy	Narrative topos	Exemplary quote
	objectives	<i>customer needs</i> ; it has refused to keep up with driver needs.” (Spokesman, Uber)
6	Creating moral foundations	“New practices serve customers better and have a positive impact on society at large” “When I look at these new mobility companies coming, where they’re <i>using information and communication technology</i> , at a very high level, it is <i>long overdue and should be embraced</i> with open arms.” (Professor, University of California)
7	Decreasing threat perception	“New services increase the pie and do not interfere with existing market segmentation” “Yes, they are all competing, but I think Airbnb is bringing something different <i>to a different segment of the marketplace</i> .” (COO, Global Business Travel Association)
<i>Cultural-cognitive pillar of institutions</i>		
8	Anchoring	“Change is inevitable” “There is going to be more people doing home-sharing tomorrow than there are today, there is going to be more the day after that. <i>This is now a movement</i> .” (Head of public policy, Airbnb)
9	Mitigating fears	“New practices fulfill social imperatives” “Safety is our top priority and our checks <i>far exceed what’s required for taxis and limos</i> in nearly every municipality across the country.” (Press statement, Uber competitor Lyft)
10	Associating with socially legitimate concepts	<i>Using pro-social vocabulary like “sharing,” “community,” “collaborative”</i> “ <i>Collaborative consumption</i> is built on the idea that access is more powerful than ownership and Airbnb is a prime example of this philosophy.” (Spokeswoman, Airbnb)

Table 2. Taxonomy of Offensive Discursive Strategies

They also remarked that regulation did not account for new categories like “people as businesses.” Hence, these actors challenged the application of existing regulation, as expressed by Uber’s CEO:

*Old transportation rules [...] govern an analog service. In a world where you get into a cab and there’s no technology, you’re getting into the unknown. There were rules that made sense in that analog economy, like meters to determine fares, and colors for taxi vehicles to determine their association. But think these rules [don’t] make as much sense with new technology.*

This argument was the basis for further offensive discourse such as attacking existing legislation or proposing new legislation. For instance, a US Senator stated that “as information becomes more widespread, maybe you need less and less government,” referring to online customer ratings and reviews.

Second, offensive actors questioned the legitimacy of existing regulation by *challenging the achievement of regulative objectives*. More specifically, they argued that regulation failed to promote a fair and efficient market in which customers receive appropriate service. In their view, the market was unfair and inefficient because regulation limited competition. For instance, the Uber head of public policy for Europe said that “outdated rules, such as return-to-garage regulations or minimum price and duration rules [...] squash competition.” Ultimately, these actors argued that incumbents were “so protected through these regulations that they do not have to offer a better service to customers.”

Third, offensive actors *criticized the regulatory capture* of incumbents and defended their own aggressive behavior as necessary to be even able to enter the field. In their view, not only the existing regulative rules themselves, but also their interpretation by regulators was highly influenced by incumbents. Some actors, like this Uber executive, even accused incumbents of corruption:

*I didn’t just fall off the turnip truck. I think this [government decision] is less about traffic congestion than it is about political contributions.*

New entrants deduced that their aggressive approach of first “punching the way into new markets” without the approval of regulative authorities and then aiming for ex-post legitimization by “looking for good ways to compromise” was the only way to counter the regulatory capture of incumbents.

Fourth, an important way in which offensive actors aimed to promote their agendas was by *building goodwill*. On the one hand, new entrants aimed to appease authorities. Actors’ affirmations to “welcome the opportunity to work with [authorities] in crafting sound policies” served the purpose of counterbalancing the rather aggressive stance produced by the attacks on existing regulation mentioned above. The statements ranged from expressions of general willingness to cooperate to offensive requests for inclusion into regulative schemes. Said Airbnb’s head of public policy:

*We want to work with governments. We’re saying, ‘Regulate us, and we want to pay taxes, too!’*

On the other hand, as a response to new entrants’ attacks on the regulative scheme, authorities asserted their openness to innovation and “reasonable” change. In employing this narrative, regulators showed offensive actors that they were not fundamentally opposed to new entrants’ demands and opened their doors for negotiations. Much of this discourse referred to improvements in customer service by assuring to be “eager to pave the way for [consumers] to take advantage of the most up-to-date technology,” but macro-level actors also appealed to normative imperatives of regulation:

*We can be the kind of government that closes its eyes and acts like nothing is changing. Or we can say, ‘How can we make this work?’*

Most offensive discourse promoting *normative* institutional change aimed to undermine the legitimacy of existing practices, increase the legitimacy of own practices, and play down conflicts of interest between new entrants and incumbents. First, actors *challenged the achievement of normative objectives* of existing practices. They argued that existing practices were inappropriate to fulfill the field’s purpose for society, in our case to provide safe, cheap, and reliable rides or accommodation. Arguments related to performance criteria of the particular industry blamed existing practices for not satisfying customer needs. For instance, the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission chairman criticized authorities for the restriction of supply through licenses and the repercussions on availability, saying that “People in Staten Island know that finding a yellow taxi is just one step above finding a unicorn.” In addition, arguments blamed the entire field for not fulfilling its purpose in society. For instance, actors decried practices for environmental pollution: “the cabs were dutifully lined up – at least 30 of them waiting just for me; 30 cabs idling and spewing pollution.”

The second strategy aimed at *creating moral foundations* for new practices by asserting their socio-economic benefit. These statements stressed the positive impact of new practices on the field as well as on society at large. They often provided a vivid image of what a future with new practices might look like. The described societal changes all originated from new practices but encompassed various areas of life, ranging from the reduction of drunk driving to a decrease of car ownership and the participation of elderly people in everyday life, as a retirement coach stated:

*It’s an opportunity for people who aren’t in the work force to earn some money, have social interaction and a reason to get out of bed in the morning.*

The third discursive strategy aimed to *decrease incumbents’ threat perception* of new entrants. Actors in this category asserted a minimal impact of the new technology on existing customer segments. For instance, Uber’s general manager in New York was quoted on yellow taxis:

*They’re not going anywhere. [...] Sometimes waving your arms and just jumping in a car is the best way to get around.*

Actors conducting offensive *cultural-cognitive* work attempted to legitimize the discontinuous innovation by decreasing “the costs associated with actors moving away from taken-for-granted patterns of practice, technologies and rules” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 237). First, they portrayed *change as inevitable* by pointing to the strong growth of the new services and to the already acquired relevance to the field. For instance, Airbnb’s head of public policy explained:

*It's really important to understand that this isn't a weird underground activity that a couple of hundreds of people are doing.*

Further, they suggested that this change was necessary to fulfill changed customer expectations. As one mayor explained, “there is a big need for it [and] you're seeing particularly among young people an expectation to have Uber.”

A second argument aimed to *mitigate fears*. Actors employing this discursive strategy realized that some assumptions about the risks of a product or service were so deeply engrained in customers' minds that it could impede adoption. In confirmation of previous scholars' work (Desai, 2011), we found that a large share of offensive discourse aimed at constructing a perception of safety and at fostering customers' trust in the new technology. For instance, a spokeswoman of Lyft assured that “safety was Lyft's top priority and that its [background] checks [for drivers] far exceed what's required for taxis and limos in nearly every municipality across the country.”

We also found that actors in favor of institutional change used pro-social vocabulary to *connect with ancient concepts of social legitimacy*. By referring to well-known concepts of social life, actors tried to benefit from a legitimacy spill-over to their own identity and practices. For instance, by naming the discontinuous innovation ‘sharing economy,’ actors alluded to sharing as “the most universal form of human economic behavior” that “creates feelings of solidarity and bonding [...], goes hand in hand with required trust and [...] differs from economic exchange, which rarely creates communal bonds with other people” (Belk, 2010). Even if sharing is typically devoid of pecuniary motives and the new entrants' business model is not, entrants still aimed to benefit from the positive associations.

### 4.3 Taxonomy of Defensive Discursive Strategies

In analogy to the previous chapter, we also identified the eight major defensive strategies of institutional discourse, which are summarized in Table 3.

Actors defending *regulative* institutions aimed at “preserving the mechanisms through which rewards and sanctions were associated with institutional compliance” (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006, p. 232). One discursive strategy that actors used to pursue this goal aimed to *decouple regulation from technology*. Actors engaging in this strategy argued that regulation was valid independently of the technology or practices. The New York Attorney General exemplified this by saying that “just because a company has an app instead of a storefront doesn't mean consumer protection laws don't apply.”

Discursive strategy	Narrative topos	Exemplary quote
<i>Regulative pillar of institutions</i>		
1	Decoupling	“Regulation applies independently of underlying technology”
		“Amazingly, many of these companies claim that the fact that their goods and services are provided <i>online</i> somehow makes them <i>immune from regulation</i> .” (Attorney General, New York)
2	Demanding equal requirements	“A fair regime subjects all field actors to the same regulative requirements”
		“We welcome <i>fair competition</i> and a <i>level playing field for all market participants</i> . The taxi industry is now more in demand than ever before, and this judgment is a step in the right direction.” (CEO, European network of taxi radio operators)
3	Underscoring authority of regulation	“Even if actors perceive regulation to be inappropriate, they still have to follow it”
		“You can think that the law is too restrictive. But the <i>legislators decided on their solution</i> to the problem. <i>You have to have rules</i> .” (CEO, French taxi company)
4	Interpreting regulative boundaries	“New practices contain illegal elements and should be prosecuted”
		“Using a meter in a private vehicle is a <i>criminal matter</i> .” (General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers' Association)

Discursive strategy	Narrative topos	Exemplary quote
<i>Normative pillar of institutions</i>		
5	Attacking moral integrity of new entrants	“New entrants’ aggressive behavior towards regulation is arrogant and unethical”
6	Delegitimizing new practices	“The implications of change on society are undesirable and dangerous”
<i>Cultural-cognitive pillar of institutions</i>		
7	Increasing perceived risks	“We want users to understand the risks involved in adopting new practices”
8	Portraying new entrants as socially illegitimate	<i>Using illegitimacy vocabulary like</i> “pirate,” “shadow,” “cowboy,” “terrorism,” “barbarism”
		“The company’s <i>ugly and disingenuous tactics</i> will not dissuade the city from looking out for the public’s interest.” (Spokesman for the mayor, New York)
		“Can you imagine if this turns into a Mechanical Turk economy, where everyone is <i>doing piecework at all odd hours, and no one knows when the next job will come, and how much it will pay?</i> ” (Economist, University of California)
		“Passengers still don’t know that it isn’t a legal car service, and drivers don’t understand the <i>risks</i> they’re running, such as <i> fines or the seizure of their vehicles.</i> ” (Spokesman of the minister of the interior, France)
		“Airbnb isn’t standing up for <i>average New Yorkers</i> who rent out their apartments from time to time, Airbnb is standing up for <i>highly profitable, illegal businesses</i> that make up a huge chunk of its corporate revenue.” (Attorney General, New York)

Table 3. Taxonomy of Defensive Discursive Strategies

The second defensive strategy advocated for a ‘level playing field’ with *equal regulative requirements* for new entrants and incumbents. Actors argued that there was “no reason why [new entrants] should be subjected to a completely different set of rules than the legacy hotel businesses,” as the President of a hotel chain put it. In many cases, defendants complained about the unfairness of having different regulative requirements for incumbents and new entrants, both in general and in particular regarding regulation-induced costs, as did the owner of a bed-and-breakfast:

*I [...] have to deal with inspections, fees ranging from fire extinguishers, insurance, food and use permit licenses and more. Entrepreneurs [...] are able to undercut me and others and take money that we have been using to pay our (substantial) mortgages. How is this right?*

A third strategy underscored the *authority of regulation* by emphasizing that everyone had to follow the law, even if one perceived regulation to be inappropriate. A French official summarized the argument by saying: “You can’t steal just because you think theft shouldn’t be illegal.” Defendants often employed this form of discourse combined with a reference to the aggressive expansion strategy of new entrants that included entering a market without obeying the laws governing this market. Some defendants also explicitly demanded regulators to actually exercise their authority. Their calls were often emotional, like this statement by a lawyer to Dallas Yellow Cab:

*I’m getting very angry in the Uber intrusion and your department’s lack of protection. What will it take? Bankruptcy of the cabs?*

Finally, we observed defendants of regulative institutions *interpreting regulative boundaries*. In an environment of great regulatory uncertainty, actors engaging in this discourse tried to shape the regulatory field by identifying elements of new practices that were illegal under current law and thereby defining the boundaries of legal behavior. For instance, defendants stated that processing “payments using Uber or one of its competitors will be in violation of TLC policy” and that “private drivers operating as ride services without commercial licenses would be classified as illegal behavior.”

Interestingly, most defensive discourse in the *normative* pillar aimed at counter-attacking the moral foundations of new entrants’ behavior and the new practices rather than defending and preserving the normative underpinnings of existing norms. Even though being defensive, we found this type of institutional work to be linked to Lawrence and Suddaby’s disruptive concept of “disassociating moral

foundations” (2006, p. 235). A first form of defensive discourse *attacked the moral integrity of new entrants*. Actors engaging in this strategy referred to new entrants’ aggressive behavior towards regulation to portray them as arrogant and unethical, following a strategy of “stop me if you can.” They denounced new entrants’ lack of cooperation with regulators, as exemplified by the quote of the chairman of the Washington D.C. cab commission saying that “we need cooperation; we can’t deal with an organization that sticks its thumb up our nose.” An investor succinctly summarized the essence of this discourse, calling Uber “the most ethically challenged company in Silicon Valley.”

Defensive actors also aimed to *delegitimize new practices* by warning of undesirable and dangerous implications. When specifying the implications, they not only referred to field-level performance criteria, but also to more general parts of social life, ranging from job quality and the risks for individuals and neighborhoods to quality of life in general. For instance, a French police officer complained about the increase of short-term rental by saying that “the center of our city is becoming deserted; more and more, it’s just tourists.” Defendants also scathed the new business models for delegating all risks “to people who are the most at risk in the labor market.”

The predominant discursive strategy of actors defending the *cultural-cognitive* institutions concentrated on discouraging consumers from adopting the new practices by *increasing the perceived risk* of adoption. In one approach, actors educated users about risks by claiming that “personal safety is at stake” and calling new practices “an invitation to disaster.” They further pursued their goal by educating users about specific negative consequences resulting from the use of the new services. For instance, a New York state senator provided an explicit example of risks for private short-term rental:

*Irrespective of state law or city codes, these short-term rentals are almost always illegal under the terms of residential leases and co-op or condo bylaws and can result in eviction from one’s home.*

In a further discursive strategy, defendants *portrayed new entrants as socially illegitimate* by using illegitimacy vocabulary when describing them. They hoped that some of the illegitimacy associated with socially outlawed words would stick with new entrants. For instance, a Rio de Janeiro councilwoman stated that “taxi drivers understand [Uber as a] pirate company” and a Paris taxi driver accused Uber of “economic terrorism.” These actors also compared new entrants to corporations that had experienced reputational challenges in the past, as expressed by the mayor of New York:

*We wouldn’t let ExxonMobil or Wal-Mart or any other corporate giant operate in New York City without basic rules in place to protect the public.*

In addition to connecting new entrants with illegitimacy, we also found actors to contrast their perception of new entrants with how new entrants wanted to be perceived by the public. For instance, the chairman of Taxi Deutschland highlighted a discrepancy in Uber’s image:

*Uber operates with billions of cash from Goldman Sachs and Google, wraps itself up to look like a start-up and sells itself as the savior of the new economy.*

## 5 Discussion

We set out to advance our understanding of institutional work in media discourse in the context of discontinuous innovation. Collectively, the findings of our study establish that these two research streams are linked more closely than indicated by previous scholars. By focusing on media discourse, we contribute to the growing research stream that highlights the importance of discourse and communication for institutional work (Cornelissen et al., 2015; Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Maguire and Hardy, 2009; Phillips et al., 2004) and legitimacy (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2005). Whereas previous scholars of institutional work regarding the media have mostly focused on one actor group – for instance incumbent organizations responding to legitimacy crises (Desai, 2011) – we include all actor groups within an organizational field. This enables us to compare the institutional work being performed and derive several insights from its quantitative distribution and qualitative strategies. In particular, our study offers two main contributions: first, we advance our understanding

of *who* is reflected in the media as shaping future institutions; second, we develop a taxonomy of *how* offensive/defensive actors use the media to build legitimacy and shape institutions.

Our study prominently illustrates how discontinuous innovation can trigger intense institutional work in all three pillars of institutions (Scott, 2008). Even though our findings show that both proponents and opponents of institutional change intensively use the media to influence future institutional logics and their perceived legitimacy, the observed distribution between actor groups leads to interesting insights. First, our finding that new entrants are dominant regarding verbatim quotes in media coverage is in line with previous research describing it as critical means to establish the legitimacy of new institutions and work towards institutional change (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). New entrant firm CEOs in particular play a key role in driving the institutional change debate in the media, especially in the early stages of ventures. Second, we contribute by showing that incumbent firms do not necessarily play the most important defensive part. Given the high scrutiny on the sharing economy as well as its rapid growth, existing literature on institutional work would suggest that incumbents engage heavily in defensive discourse to maintain the threatened institutions (Desai, 2011; Maguire and Hardy, 2009; McDonnell and King, 2013). However, even though incumbent firms and professional associations arguably have the greatest interest of all field actors in maintaining institutional stability, they played a lesser role in defending it than macro-level actors such as policy-makers and regulatory body executives. We conjecture three mechanisms behind incumbent firms' surprisingly low share of voice: a low threat perception of new entrants, an underestimation of the importance of the media discourse, and a potential difficulty to place quotes in the media.

Most prominently, we add to existing literature on institutional work by providing a taxonomy of discursive strategies and by suggesting that there are crucial differences between those of offensive and defensive actors in the context of discontinuous change. Whereas offensive discourse balanced strategies of attacking existing institutions with strategies of defending new institutions, defensive discourse predominantly used strategies of attacking new institutions and surprisingly few strategies of defending existing institutions. This finding contradicts the existing scholarly belief that defensive institutional work primarily revolves around reproducing, reinforcing, and strengthening existing institutions (Micelotta and Washington, 2013). Instead, we show how incumbent organizations primarily aim to prevent the institutionalization of new logics to maintain institutional stability. Until now, institutional work literature has primarily associated such attacks with offensive actors aiming to disrupt existing institutional logics (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). We encourage future scholars to embrace both types of defensive institutional work and integrate them into a coherent framework.

As any empirical research endeavor, ours has limitations. These pertain, e.g., to our selection of media outlets. Future studies might wish to consider more publications and move beyond the newspapers we selected. Further, future research might go beyond the print media, or even beyond mass media altogether and incorporate, for instance, social media. Our research is also limited in that our analysis of news coverage extends only until the end of 2015. Future researchers might study if additional discursive strategies were used after this point in time. Additionally, it is important to note that the appearance of actor quotes in news coverage may not represent all attempts at text creation and provision by actors, but might also depend on journalists' decisions which questions and actors to ask, and which statements to include in their articles. For example, journalists could favor 'the new' over 'the old' and therefore be biased in their selection of quotes. However, in view of the relatively high number of quotes from macro-level actors, this seems not fully convincing. Similarly, journalists might interview only specific groups of actors. This, however, appears unlikely as it would violate some of the most traditional professional norms of journalists, such as fairness and balance (Bennett, 1996; Shoemaker and Reese, 2013). Nevertheless, complementary analyses, e.g., of firm press releases, press conferences, or social media channels; or interviews with key journalists in the field might be fruitful avenues for future research. Finally, the sharing economy as research context might represent a rather extreme case in the sense that it is not limited to an organizational field but has implications for society at large. More specifically, the sharing economy challenged more general societal institutions that were not specific to a given field. Hence, we urge future scholars to test our propositions in different settings of discontinuous innovation.

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