How Technology Affordances of Sharing Economy Platforms Influence Cultural Distance and the Affective Commitment of Immigrants at the Base of the Pyramid

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Keywords: Technology affordance, sharing economy, cultural distance, affective commitment, immigrants, the base of the pyramid

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Abstract

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Introduction

Immigrants are individuals who move permanently or temporarily from one country to another with the intention of residing there (Dail, 1988). In the U.S., immigrants include all those who were not U.S.-citizens at birth (Camarota and Zeigler, 2022). One-fifth of the world’s immigrants live in the U.S., which makes the U.S. host to the largest population of immigrants (Budiman, 2020). Immigrants often come from developing
countries to escape poverty and undesirable conditions (Holtbrügge, 2021). While the motivation for migration is often a better life, immigrants face various challenges in a new country, such as poverty, lack of employment, language barriers, access to medical care, and social prejudice (Dail, 1988). Within the immigrant population, there is a sub-group at the bottom of the economic ladder or the Base of the Pyramid (hereinafter BoP). Compared to others, BoP immigrants receive lower incomes, have weaker informal networks, face greater resource constraints, and live in areas without solid formal institutions (Kistruck et al., 2013). Because of these characteristics, integrating BoP immigrants into a new country is long-term and complex.

Affective commitment plays a crucial role in successfully integrating immigrants into a new country (Morrison, 2002). It refers to the emotional attachment an individual feels towards an organization or social structure, which in this study is the host country (Bak-Klimek et al., 2015; Allen and Meyer, 1990). Greater affective commitment can lead to a sense of belonging and identity, which is essential for immigrants to integrate and thrive in their new homes (Jaros et al., 1993). When immigrants develop a strong affective commitment to their new country, they are more likely to participate in activities (e.g., learning the language, engaging with local communities, and adopting the customs and traditions of the host country) that promote social cohesion (Phinney et al., 2002). The emotional connection resulting from affective commitment also helps reduce feelings of isolation and homesickness, which can hinder the integration process (Watt and Badger, 2009). For BoP immigrants, developing an affective commitment is particularly important in terms of enhancing economic opportunities, facilitating social mobility, and promoting psychological well-being (Kistruck et al., 2013). Because affective commitment is significant for immigrant integration, a large body of research has examined factors
facilitating the development of affective commitment and the social and economic benefits that result (see Bak-Klimek et al. 2015 for a recent review).

Cultural distance has also been found to play a significant role in the integration process of immigrants (Mahfud et al., 2008; Shiraev and Levy, 2020). It refers to the degree of difference between the culture of an immigrant’s country of origin and the culture of the immigrant’s new host country. Differences manifest when immigrants come from cultures that are distinctive or dissimilar from the host country, leading to difficulty in adapting to new norms, values, and customs (Shiraev and Levy, 2020). In other words, the greater the cultural distance, the more significant the challenges to adapt and integrate. And the BoP population tends to experience greater cultural distance because of socioeconomic background, educational opportunities, language barriers, and discrimination and prejudice (Trani et al., 2013). Yet, the association between cultural distance and the affective commitment of immigrants is complex, and it can work in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, a significant cultural distance can make it more challenging for an immigrant to develop a solid affective commitment to the host country. On the other hand, a moderate level of cultural distance can actually facilitate the development of affective commitment, as we will discuss in more detail to follow. As such, one objective of this study is to explore further the relationship between cultural distance and affective commitment in the BoP immigrant context and thereby contribute to the extant literature.

Furthermore, the present study differs from the extant literature in that we focus on the BoP immigrants participating in the sharing economy. We suggest that the use of sharing economy platforms by BoP immigrants would have a significant impact on their
integration into a new country because it would influence cultural distance and affective commitment in multiple ways. First, in economic terms, involvement in the sharing economy can provide a flexible and accessible source of income for immigrants who may face barriers to traditional employment opportunities. By leveraging their skills and assets, BoP immigrants can offer their services to a broader audience and participate in the local economy (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018; Huot et al., 2021). Second, involvement can also facilitate social connections and interactions between BoP immigrants and locals. Using platforms like Airbnb, BoP immigrants can connect with hosts who may provide them with accommodation, local knowledge, or even friendship. Similarly, using platforms like Uber, BoP immigrants can converse with passengers or other drivers and learn more about the local culture and customs. Third, the sharing economy also supports creating immigrant-led communities and networks. For example, platforms such as TaskRabbit can connect immigrants with like-minded individuals or groups with similar interests or skills. By participating in these communities, BoP immigrants can build social capital, gain support and mentorship, and develop a sense of belonging (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Fourth, the sharing economy can foster integration and cultural exchange by enabling BoP immigrants to share their cultures and traditions with locals (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018; Xiao et al., 2019). In doing so, BoP immigrants can challenge stereotypes and prejudices and promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation (Huot et al., 2021).

Therefore, in order to examine how using sharing economy platforms influences the cultural distance and affective commitment of BoP immigrants, we focus on technology affordance, an important concept in the IS literature. Technology affordance describes the potential for goal-oriented activities as individuals interact with an IT artifact or the
possibilities for action that a technology object offers an individual (Markus and Silver, 2008; Volkoff and Strong, 2013). For example, a vendor may use the profile function of a sales platform to list their qualifications and associations because it facilitates the goal of building trust to attract consumers. Thus, trust building is the affordance that emerges from the profiling function which benefits the vendor. In the context of sharing economy platforms, technology affordances refer to how beneficial outcomes emerge from users’ engaging the platform’s features and functionalities for exchange activities. Functionalities in the platforms of Airbnb, Uber, or TaskRabbit, for example, consist of rating and review systems, messaging and communication tools, payment processing, and user verification procedures, among others. Using these features facilitates beneficial outcomes such as trust building and social capital creation. These features and affordances provide users with a sense of trust, security, and transparency, which are essential for successful transactions and interactions on the platforms (Leonardi, 2013; Leidner et al., 2018).

Given the above theoretical and practical considerations, in the present study we explore the relationships among the technology affordance of sharing economy platforms, the affective commitment of immigrants, and cultural distance, with a particular focus on the BoP population. As discussed earlier, the BoP population is a particular group of immigrants that deserves attention because they are ‘the least of the least’. They sorely lack social and economic resources to thrive in a new location and may create burdens for host countries. Hence, understanding how technology facilitates their social and economic inclusion will lead to their flourishing. Also, our literature review, discussed next, indicates little research investigating the technology affordance of sharing economy platforms in the immigrant context. Therefore, in this study, we also seek to contribute to
the IS literature by extending affordance theory and examining the impact of technology affordance on BoP immigrants’ cultural distance and affective commitment.

**Related Studies, Theoretical Background, and Hypotheses**

Technology affordances have been examined in various contexts and settings in IS. Adapting the concept of “structural features” in DeSanctis and Gallupe (1987), Markus and Silver (2008) first proposed and developed the concept of technology affordances. Grgecic et al. (2015) build on and extend Markus and Silver’s concepts of technology affordance to examine how IT-related factors influence the formation of beliefs of individuals. Likewise, in developing a model of information technology and societal change, Faik et al. (2020) propose three mechanisms, i.e., sense-giving, translating, and decoupling, through which technology affordances become elements of societal change. In the context of social media, Karahanna et al. (2018) developed twelve social media affordances grouped into egocentric affordances and allocentric affordances. Researchers have also identified technology affordances specific to Wikis (Mansour et al., 2013), online knowledge-sharing communities (Majchrzak et al., 2013), big data analytics (Lehrer et al., 2018), network change within organizations (Leonardi, 2013), service robotics (Mettler et al., 2017), and online team collaboration (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

Yet, there is a dearth of research on technology affordance in the context of immigrants using sharing economy platforms. In developing the technology affordances for our research context, we adopted the sharing economy affordance framework by Sutherland and Jarrahi (2018). Based on a literature review across different disciplines and types of sharing economy platforms, the framework identifies and conceptualizes several critical affordances between sharing economy platforms and users. Given the discipline (i.e.,
information systems) and empirical setting (i.e., we are not focused on any particular types of sharing economy platforms, such as Uber and Airbnb) of the present study, we focus on three technology affordances that are applicable to most of the sharing economy platforms: *generating flexibility*, *trust building*, and *facilitating collectivity*.

Generating flexibility refers to the ability of sharing economy platforms to provide users with options and adaptability in utilizing resources, services, or assets (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018). As platforms leverage technology to facilitate the exchange or sharing of goods, services, or resources between individuals, often on a peer-to-peer basis, the concept of generating flexibility through technology affordance highlights several important aspects of sharing economy, including resource utilization (Bauer and Gegenhuber, 2015), on-demand access (Chen and Sheldon, 2016), and peer-to-peer interactions (Ertz *et al*., 2016). On the other hand, trust building is a crucial aspect of sharing economy platforms as it helps establish confidence and reliability among platform users (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018). Trust plays a significant role in facilitating successful interactions within the sharing economy and is relevant to technology affordances such as identity verification, community guidelines and policies, and platform reputation and branding (Fagerstrøm *et al*., 2017). Finally, facilitating collectivity involves creating an environment where users can collaborate and engage in collective actions (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018). Sharing economy platforms can support and promote collectivity through collaborative consumption, co-creation/production, and peer-to-peer interactions (Hamari, 2013; Frenken, 2017). It is worth noting that the affordances and features of sharing economy platforms are not independent but often interact dynamically with each other (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018).
Given the above conceptual background and related studies, we suggest that from the technology affordance perspective, sharing economy platforms utilized by BoP immigrants can facilitate cultural exchange by allowing them to share their unique cultures and traditions with local communities. More specifically, participating in local economic activities (i.e., generating flexibility and facilitating collectivity) allows immigrants, especially those at BoP, to interact with locals and build relationships that promote cultural understanding. Additionally, through their work and interactions on these platforms, BoP immigrants may also have opportunities to showcase their own cultural practices and traditions, further fostering cultural exchange and appreciation. Likewise, by helping connect BoP immigrants with a vast network of individuals and businesses in their local communities (i.e., facilitating collectivity), the platforms should provide them greater access to goods, services, and job opportunities. BoP immigrants may also be able to share their own resources, skills, and talents with others, further promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018). Finally, from the trust-building perspective, using the platforms long term would help BoP immigrants establish a reputation for reliability, honesty, and quality work, which can help them overcome negative stereotypes and prejudices (Xiao et al., 2019). Additionally, many sharing economy platforms have built-in mechanisms for dispute resolution and user feedback, which can further enhance trust and confidence in the system (Lu et al., 2021; Truong et al., 2021). As a result, BoP immigrants can demonstrate their commitment to being responsible, helping to build bridges across cultural divides. Therefore, taken together, we hypothesize the following:

*H1: Technology affordance of sharing economy platforms is negatively related to cultural distance.*
Unlike technology affordance and cultural distance, the relationship between cultural distance and affective commitment is multifaceted and can have positive and negative effects, as mentioned earlier. On the one hand, a high degree of cultural distance may lead to feelings of isolation, discrimination, and a lack of belonging, which can negatively impact immigrants’ affective commitment to their new community (Mahfud et al., 2018). It has been found that BoP immigrants are more vulnerable and more likely to struggle to adapt to the new culture (Shakya et al., 2014). Also, they may feel that their own culture is not valued or respected in the host country (Shiraev and Levy, 2020), resulting in a harder time for them to develop a sense of emotional attachment and belonging.

On the other hand, moderate levels of cultural distance may facilitate the development of affective commitment among immigrants. This is because when immigrants encounter a new culture that is not too dissimilar from their own, they may find it easier to identify with certain aspects of the new culture and develop a sense of affinity and appreciation for it (Tafarodi et al., 2002). The familiarity can create a sense of comfort and ease for immigrants in adapting to the new cultural environment. Also, studies on cultural hybridity imply that moderate cultural distance allows immigrants to blend elements of their own culture with those of the host culture (Ackermann, 2012). By embracing and expressing this hybrid identity, immigrants can experience a sense of pride, self-acceptance, and belonging, which should positively influence their affective commitment (Lee et al., 2020). Notably, the level of support and acceptance from locals, the extent of exposure to the host culture, and the personal characteristics of immigrants can also play a significant role in shaping the relationship between cultural distance and affective commitment (Chen et al., 2010). Indeed, it has been found that some immigrants are more willing than others to embrace the differences and unique qualities of their new
culture, leading to a stronger affective commitment and desire to integrate and contribute to their new community (Bak-Klimek *et al*., 2015). Hence, we pose that:

*H2: Cultural distance has an inverted-U relationship with the affective commitment of BoP immigrants.*

**Methodology**

**Data and Context**

To focus on the BoP immigrants, we decided to collect data from Afghan immigrants for several reasons. One, Afghanistan is a developing country with a low level of economic development, high poverty rates, and limited access to services such as education, health care, and infrastructure (Trani *et al*., 2013). Two, Afghan immigrants often work in low-paying, unskilled jobs in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and hospitality (Moughari, 2007). These jobs typically offer low wages and limited benefits, making it difficult for Afghan immigrants to move up the socioeconomic ladder. Three, Afghan immigrants often face social and cultural barriers, such as language barriers and a lack of social networks, that make it challenging to integrate into their host societies (Trani *et al*., 2013). As such, we believe that Afghan immigrants are at the base of the pyramid among immigrant groups.

Yet, one of the challenges of this study is that it was very difficult to find and approach enough qualified individuals who are Afghan immigrants and could participate in the study, because of language barriers, lack of trust, and limited access. To overcome these challenges, we first translated the English survey into three additional languages: *Farsi*, *Pashto*, and *Urdu*. These languages are the most common languages used among Afghans. To ensure content and face validity, we hired a translator to compare the Farsi and English survey versions and make appropriate edits. We also pre-tested our survey
with three Afghan immigrants who knew the languages and edited the survey as needed for clarity. We then contracted with a professional data company to gather data from Afghan immigrants in the U.S. participating in the sharing economy to earn income.

The respondents selected a preferred language version of the survey, and several checks were inserted into the survey to confirm that the respondents could read and understand the survey. Additionally, options were selected to prevent respondents from ballot stuffing (duplicate surveys), and attention checks were inserted into the survey. Considering the survey length (3~5min), a financial incentive of $7 was offered for each participant. Of 115 survey responses received, 90 were usable after eliminating those failing survey attention checks and translation checks. Overall, about 53% of respondents were female, and about 51% were married. The average household family consisted of 4.1 individuals and the average age of the respondents was 32 years. We coded the education on a scale from 1 to 5, starting at 1 being elementary school and 5 being graduate degree. On average, the respondents had some college experience.

**Measurement**

Considering the theoretical background and literature on technology affordance discussed earlier, we measured the technology affordance of sharing economy platforms as a second-order formative-formative construct (Roslí et al., 2016) formed by perceptions of generating flexibility, trust building, and facilitating collectivity. As a second-order formative-formative construct, any of the three types that arise can cause the platform users to perceive an affordance whether the type manifests singly or in combination with other types. Additionally, each affordance type contributes a unique aspect to the conceptualization of affordance and is not expected to be highly interrelated.
The proposed formative structure provides a parsimonious model that is theoretically sound and also useful because any of the first-order affordances are responsive to users’ objectives. Using the sharing economy affordance typology of Sutherland and Jarrahi (2018), we developed indicators for each of the three affordances, as detailed in Appendix 1.

Both cultural distance and affective commitment are measured as reflective constructs, to be consistent with prior research (Bak-Klimek et al., 2015; Drogendijk and Slangen, 2006). Cultural distance comprises items measuring the perception of differences related to norms, values, habits, and customs (Bae and Salomon, 2010; Drogendijk and Slangen, 2006). And we adapted items from the affective commitment scale of Meyer and Allen (1997) to the immigration context of our study to measure BoP immigrants’ sense of belonging and attachment to their host country. All the items were measured on a 7-point scale anchored by 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree).

**Results**

We used partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the model. The model consists of three constructs and two primary paths. A rule of thumb is that a sample size of 10 to 15 times the number of variables, including paths, is adequate (Ringle et al., 2015). As such, it requires a minimum sample size of 50~75. With our sample size of 90, there should be sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful relationships among the variables, especially if the effect sizes are large (Chin and Newsted, 1999; Chin et al., 2008). More importantly, PLS is more appropriate for testing formative and reflective constructs in a single model than other methods, such as covariance-based SEM (Ringle et al., 2015).
Given the formative-formative construct in our model, we employed the sequential latent variable score method (known as the two-stage approach) to model the hierarchical latent variables (Becker et al., 2012; Rosli et al., 2016). In the first stage, we assessed the VIF (variance inflation factor) for the first-order formative measures of technology affordance to evaluate collinearity among the formative items. All VIF values were below the threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2017; Rosli et al., 2016), indicating no substantive issues related to multicollinearity. Next, we examined the outer weights and loadings for the formative indicators, and all showed significant p-values. In the second stage, the latent variable scores for the formative indicators were used as indicators for the higher-order technology affordance construct. The factor weighting scheme was used to estimate the PLS-SEM. Table 1 below details the results of the formative-formative construct.

Table 1: VIF, Outer Weights, and Outer Loadings for First-Order Formative Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>VIF</th>
<th>Outer Weights</th>
<th>Outer Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.gf1</td>
<td>3.459</td>
<td>-0.235</td>
<td>0.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.gf2</td>
<td>2.688</td>
<td>-0.258</td>
<td>0.574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.gf3</td>
<td>2.796</td>
<td>0.284</td>
<td>0.780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.gf4</td>
<td>2.794</td>
<td>0.393</td>
<td>0.798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.gf5</td>
<td>2.671</td>
<td>0.812</td>
<td>0.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.tb1</td>
<td>3.302</td>
<td>-0.163</td>
<td>0.765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.tb2</td>
<td>2.915</td>
<td>0.646</td>
<td>0.957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.tb3</td>
<td>3.553</td>
<td>0.305</td>
<td>0.892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.tb4</td>
<td>3.487</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>0.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.fc1</td>
<td>2.987</td>
<td>0.324</td>
<td>0.904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.fc2</td>
<td>2.911</td>
<td>0.567</td>
<td>0.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.fc3</td>
<td>2.746</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td>0.858</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


We assessed the convergent validity of the reflective items by evaluating construct reliability, average variance extracted, and item factor loadings. As shown in Tables 2 and 3, all construct reliabilities (CR) and Cronbach’s alpha (CA) are higher than the 0.7 thresholds (Hair et al., 2017). The average variance extracted (AVE) measures exceed the 0.50 threshold for good convergence (Fornell and Bookstein, 1982; Hair et al., 2017).
Additionally, all factor loadings are significant (p < .001) and above the ideal of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017). The results show that the items share a higher proportion of common variance, indicating good convergent validity. To assess discriminant validity, we evaluated the square root of the AVE. The correlations in Table 2 show the Fornell-Larcker criterion (square root of the AVE) on the diagonal. Each criterion is larger than the off-diagonal values in the corresponding row and column, supporting discriminant validity (Fornell and Bookstein, 1982).

**Table 2: Reliability, AVE, and Correlations of Reflective Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>Composite Reliability</th>
<th>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</th>
<th>AffCom</th>
<th>CD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AffCom</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.761</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.848</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AffCom: Affective Commitment; CD: Cultural Distance

**Table 3: Loadings and Cross-Loadings for Reflective Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AffCom</th>
<th>CD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AffCom1</td>
<td><strong>0.900</strong></td>
<td>0.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AffCom2</td>
<td><strong>0.845</strong></td>
<td>0.748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AffCom3</td>
<td><strong>0.880</strong></td>
<td>0.743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AffCom4</td>
<td><strong>0.881</strong></td>
<td>0.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD1</td>
<td>0.770</td>
<td><strong>0.920</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD2</td>
<td>0.772</td>
<td><strong>0.921</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common method bias (CMB) is a threat in self-report survey research (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To mitigate this threat, we used 7-point Likert scales for measurement and included attention checks in our survey. We tested for CMB with several methods. First, we applied Harman’s single-factor test using unrotated factor analysis to evaluate the principal components (Podsakoff et al., 2003). CMB exists if only one factor emerges from the analysis or one factor accounts for a majority of the covariance. Multiple factors emerged from the analysis, and the largest factor explained less than half of the variance, indicating a lack of substantial CMB. Second, we used the partial correlation method
The first factor from the principal components factor analysis was entered into the model as a control variable for affective commitment and cultural distance. A general factor on which all others load is a good proxy of the common method variance (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). There was no significant change in the $R^2$ for the dependent variables, which indicates a lack of CMB. Third, we assessed CMB by including a random dependent variable generated with the “rand()” function in Excel. Then, we included this variable in our model as our dependent variable and all the variables as the independent variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). All the VIFs of our inner model were below 3.3. Based on the above tests, we concluded that CMB is not a substantive concern in our study.

We evaluated the strength of relationships between the constructs after determining that the measurement model was sound. Models 1~5 illustrated in Table 4 below were analyzed to examine the relationships among technology affordance of sharing economy platforms, cultural distance, and the affective commitment of BoP immigrants. We started with Model 1 as the main model as it is the most parsimonious. The results show that both paths (“affordance” to “distance” and “distance” to “affective”) are positive and significant ($\beta=0.822$, $p<0.001$; $\beta=0.894$, $p<0.001$). We then added an additional path between technology affordance and affective commitment to examine if the mediation effect of cultural distance is partial. The result is in Model 2, and it supports a full mediation with the path coefficient being nonsignificant ($\beta=0.250$, $p=ns$).

**Table 4: Structural Model Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Paths</th>
<th>Model 1 (Main)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Partial Mediation)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Moderating)</th>
<th>Model 4 (Quadratic)</th>
<th>Model 5 (Full)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordance $\rightarrow$ Distance</td>
<td>0.822*** (21.47)</td>
<td>0.828*** (23.56)</td>
<td>0.828*** (23.56)</td>
<td>0.822*** (21.47)</td>
<td>0.828*** (23.56)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We also investigated whether technology affordance simultaneously moderates the relationship between cultural distance and affective commitment in Model 3, using a technique of conditional mediation (CoMe) (Cheah et al., 2021). We suggest this is a necessary step of analysis because CoMe draws on both mediation and moderation analysis to examine whether a relationship is mediated but conditional on certain exogenous variables (Cheah et al., 2021). Moreover, considering the formative construct of technology affordance, employing CoMe analysis helps account for the measurement error inherent in the multi-item measurements (Hayes, 2018; Cheah et al., 2021). Overall, the results of Model 3 (β=0.053, p=ns) do not support a moderating role of technology affordance. Finally, in Model 4, we examined whether there is a quadratic or nonlinear effect of cultural distance on affective commitment. The result (β=0.055, p=ns) indicates that the nonlinear effect is unsupported. We also tested the size of the indirect effect of the mediation path (affordance→distance→affective) in each model using the thresholds of the sample mean suggested by Gaskin et al. (2023). The results of the large effects confirm the mediation role of cultural distance with sufficient statistical power in the models. Combined, our model configurations and analyses show a full mediation relationship among technology affordance, cultural distance, and affective commitment,
with cultural distance as the mediator. Therefore, H1 is supported while H2 is not supported. We will elaborate more on these findings to follow.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study is important as the number of immigrants and refugees worldwide is increasing drastically due to geopolitical changes, economic disparities, turmoil, and wars such as the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, Afghanistan 2021 crisis, Iran’s 2022 social movement, etc. In the U.S. alone, the number of immigrants increased by 4% (1.7 million) from September 2021 to September 2022 (Camarota and Zeigler, 2022). In fact, many immigrants are at the base of the pyramid regardless of their nationality (UNHCR, 2022) and face challenges that impede them from starting a new life and hinder them from thriving. Our aim is to show how the affordances that manifest from the use of technology in the sharing economy benefit the integration of immigrants at the BoP. Thus, our study has implications for how technology can help in the process of immigrant assimilation because when perceptions of cultural differences and a low sense of belonging persist, BoP immigrants are likely to feel alienated and less than full participants in society.

Drawing upon technology affordance theory and literature on IS and international business, we develop a model facilitating BoP immigrant integration through participation in the sharing economy. We show that as sharing economy platforms are used in the conduct of work, the respondents experienced benefits in several areas including generating flexibility, trust building and facilitating collectivity. In generating flexibility, the respondents were afforded the ability to connect to and access needed resources without the constraints of geographic location or unavailability. The transactional nature of their sharing economy work was not impeded. In trust building,
immigrants experienced growing trust not only with the platform technology but also with other platform users. The platform technology also facilitated BoP immigrants’ ability to communicate with others and derive a sense of support important to assimilating into a new culture and society. Our results indicate unimpeded access to resources, building trust, and open communication with others arose from using sharing economy platform technology. These nascent outcomes of BoP immigrants’ using technology to participate in the sharing economy contributed to reducing their perception of cultural distance between themselves and those in the host country.

Our model first broadens the application of affordance theory in that it empirically tests three sharing economy platform affordances and provides evidence of the association of these affordances with the decrease of cultural distance perceptions and the building of affective commitment. Our study indicates that for BoP immigrants in the sharing economy, platforms’ technology affordances are significant for mitigating perceptions of cultural differences with others in a new social environment. Hence, the sharing economy is a pathway for integration processes. As such, we suggest that platform designers and policymakers work to create and improve functionalities from which outcomes such as trust, communication, and access can emerge. For example, the design of the platform’s messaging system may make it easier or harder for BoP immigrants to communicate with potential clients or other users, depending on the existence of an effective translation function. The availability of cultural sensitivity training may affect how BoP immigrants interact with others on the platform. And a platform that prioritizes user ratings and reviews may reinforce cultural norms around reputation and social trust (Sutherland and Jarrahi, 2018; Xiao et al., 2019) to build communities of diverse people. All these
technological factors can help shape BoP immigrants’ perceptions of the platform’s culture and the culture of the broader social environment.

Second, and more importantly, unlike prior research suggesting a nonlinear relationship between cultural distance and affective commitment, our results support cultural distance as a full mediator of the relationship between technology affordance and the affective commitment of BoP immigrants. This finding could hold important implications for technology affordance theory and the integration of immigrants into a new country. More specifically, from the perspective of technology affordance for cultural exchange (Mora et al., 2021; Romano et al., 2010), the finding indicates that by providing opportunities for cultural exchange, sharing economy platforms can help to reduce cultural distance and, as a result, increase BoP immigrants’ sense of belonging and connection to the local community. In other words, a sense of belonging is achieved when one feels ‘at home’ and familiar with cultural norms and values. Notably, it is not our contention that BoP immigrants must divest their native cultural norms and customs to attain a sense of belonging in a host country, but that through technology affordances, sharing economy platforms provide a means for BoP immigrants to learn and understand how to traverse a new culture. For example, food-sharing services can enable BoP immigrants to share their traditional dishes with local customers and showcase their culinary skills. Homestay services can enable BoP immigrants to live with local families and learn about social norms and customs from each other. Also, ride-sharing services can provide options for women-only rides, which can be particularly important for female Afghan immigrants who may face cultural barriers or preferences (Moughari, 2007; Drogendijk and Slangen, 2006). As such, future research could examine more specific affordances of sharing economy platforms that contribute to cultural exchange for BoP immigrants. Such
research would help identify which technology affordances are most effective in reducing cultural distance and promoting affective commitment as more and more immigrants participate in the sharing economy.

Finally, this study also has limitations that can inspire future studies. One limitation is the selection of the host country, which we restricted to the U.S. However, examining how immigrants, especially the BoP population, utilize sharing economy platforms in developing countries may support and/or complement our findings, especially the potential non-linear relationship between cultural distance and affective commitment. This is because it has been found that individuals, organizations, and countries have differences in technology adoption and use (Venkatesh et al., 2000). And sharing economy platforms may be developed and used differently, reflecting differences in cultural norms, economic conditions, and technological infrastructure. As such, examining how BoP immigrants use sharing economy platforms in both developing and developed countries should provide insights into these differences and help researchers and policymakers develop more effective strategies for promoting technology adoption and use among immigrant populations. Similarly, our study was restricted to Afghan immigrants, which may impact its generalizability to other immigrant nationalities in the U.S. We recommend that future studies focus on other ethnic groups of immigrants, such as immigrants from Africa or Far Asia to determine how the relationships in our model may change.

More importantly, we recommend that future studies capture two groups of immigrants, one culturally similar to the host country and the other different, to capture how cultural similarity may impact the integration dynamic. For example, British immigrants to the
U.S. would be more culturally similar to U.S. citizens than Afghan immigrants, which would likely influence the platform affordances, the perception of distances, and the development of affective commitment. As explained earlier, the challenges of immigrants in a new society far exceed the cultural factor we considered. Thus, future studies would contribute by capturing and examining the effect of technology affordances on other distances, such as political, cognitive, or knowledge distances. Also, cultural distance and affective commitment may have a circular relationship. As the level of affective commitment increases, it can motivate immigrants to participate in social and cultural activities in the new country. When immigrants feel a strong sense of emotional attachment to the local community, they may be more likely to engage in activities that promote their integration.

In conclusion, this study is one of the first to empirically investigate the impact of technology affordances in the sharing economy on BoP immigrants’ perception of cultural differences and their affective commitment to the host country. Our study makes several theoretical and practical contributions related to technology affordance theory and BoP immigrant populations. It shows that platform affordances in the sharing economy have important theoretical and practical relevance for the building of BoP immigrants’ affective commitment through the closing of cultural gaps. The sharing economy is one of several ways BoP immigrants can obtain connections, trust, and knowledge to integrate and prosper in a new society. While the motivation to earn a living likely drives BoP immigrants’ participation in the sharing economy and using its technologies, the latent outcomes are the emergence of technology affordances, the closing of perceived distances, and the development of bonding and emotional attachment to a new society.
References


J. Bae, R. Salomon, Institutional Distance in International Business Research, Advances in International Management. 23 (2010) 327–349.


**Appendix 1**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct Level</th>
<th>Construct Name</th>
<th>Measurement Items (7-point Likert scales ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-order</td>
<td>Generating Flexibility</td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to sign up with few constraints.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>formative</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to log in to the platform whenever I need to.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to sign up as a user and as the worker.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to access resources (examples: goods, rides, places to stay) at any time.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trust Building</td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to trust the system to share my information with the platform.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to trust other third-party applications that work with the platform.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to trust the information that the platform shares with me.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to trust other users that I am dealing with when using the platform.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Facilitating Collectivity</td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to connect to other users of the platform.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to communicate with other users on the platform.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps me to obtain support from other users on the platform.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>Cultural Distance</td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps reduce the difference between my norms and values and those of America.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>The sharing economy platform I use helps reduce the difference between my habits and customs and those of America.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>Affective Commitment</td>
<td><em>I feel a strong sense of belonging to America.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>I feel personally attached to America.</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>I am proud to tell other I work in America.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Working in America has a great deal of personal meaning for me.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>