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# Characteristics of BlaBlaCar as one of the world's ridesharing leaders

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**Abstract.** The article addresses one of the relevant global trends – the sharing economy or participation economy. The authors explore its features and benefits (time and resources saving, rational consumption, use of communication technologies etc.). The publication considers the driving forces, namely peering social networks, real-time technologies, the global economic crisis, environmental issues and a renewed belief in the importance of communities. The authors argue that BlaBlaCar is one of the world leading online ridesharing platforms. The article defines the essence of BlaBlaCar as a new model of shared consumption tracing the history of its inception and development. The authors examine characteristics and peculiarities of BlaBlaCar in terms of a modern information network; reveal the behavioral traits of BlaBlaCar users worldwide and in Ukraine. The article attempts to anticipate the prospects of BlaBlaCar development.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The problem statement

Information plays a pivotal role in all spheres of post-industrial society. It is common knowledge that “whoever owns the information owns the world”, as it is even more relevant today than in the days of Nathan Rothschild. The swift breakthrough of information technologies and the advance of information production brought about the growing economic importance of the information sector and the advent of new infrastructural elements – information networks. These networks contribute to the evolution of the sharing economy, since people exchange goods and services via them, so the transport is no exception.

The growing demand for transportation causes the creation of new information platforms offering transport services. To function properly transport service platform improve existing logistics systems and introduce a new transport trend – the joint trips in private vehicles arranged via online services for finding fellow travelers now known as ridesharing or carpooling. The term “ridesharing” is coined from two English words “ride” and “sharing” which mean to share a trip, and denotes the phenomenon when a driver or a passenger search for a companion to share a ride in order to travel costs. Carpooling is a shared car trip, agreed upon in advance between a car owner and passengers to save on fuel costs and to reduce the amount of traffic. Unlike hitchhiking, with carpooling, the costs of the trip are shared between the car owner and the passengers. Carpooling used to be practiced only by neighbors and acquaintances, currently



with the advent of the Internet and social networks, this phenomenon reached a completely new level.

So, nowadays traditional car transport services are gradually being replaced by car sharing services, which by nature are an example of responsible consumption of resources.

Responsible consumption and production [1, 2], is correspondently the twelfth goal of sustainable development proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 2015. One of the feasible ways to accomplish this objective is to develop information transport networks, e.g. BlaBlaCar [3], since their advantages in the environment protection are absolutely apparent, because car sharing is incomparable means in reducing humanity's carbon footprint.

The transition to a shared consumption economy is a modern key to sustainable development, which meets the needs of the current generation without threatening the following generations to meet their own needs [4].

### *1.2. The objective of the article*

Within the scope of this publication, we aim to examine the characteristics of BlaBlaCar as one of the world ride-sharing leaders, to consider its advantages and disadvantages, to envision the prospects for its development.

### *1.3. Theoretical background*

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of the sharing economy, among which are the studies of Lessig [5], Deakin et al [6]. We want to acknowledge the works of Botsman and Rogers [7], Walsh [8], Mazzella [9], Sundararajan [10] on the advantages and pitfalls of the participation economy. Jiang and Tian [11], Barbu et al [12] recognises the critical role played by responsible consumption in the sustainable development. Kim and Jin [13], Mukhopadhyay and Mukhopadhyay [14], Luri Minami et al [15] address the relevant issue of information transport networks. In Ukraine, the phenomenon of sharing is still relatively new and is just beginning to spread [16–21].

However, the researches to date have not yet established how the sharing economy works. Much uncertainty still exists about the advantages of ridesharing compared to traditional transportation services. It is now well determined whether people are ready to share with each other and to what extent exactly. The influence of the quarantine restrictions caused by the global pandemic or the war in Ukraine on carpooling has remained unclear. A number of questions concerning the prospects for the development of information networks are particularly relevant.

The research data in this publication is drawn from three main sources: reports and statistical materials of various companies and their branches, publications and information resources that are freely available and are relevant to the problem of ridesharing or carpooling. As we consider the BlaBlaCar information network as an example of a sharing platform, so data for this study were collected from its official website.

## **2. Results and discussion**

The digitization of modern society encouraged by rapid development of information technologies has led to the emergence of the sharing economy making it a trend modern world. The basis of the sharing economy is the sharing of goods or services, not their ownership. Therefore, it is not the ownership of goods or services that is important nowadays, but timely access to them. Hyper consumption, widespread in the 20th century, was replaced by joint consumption, characteristic of the 21st century [6]. Thus, a new responsible model of consumption and a new approach to any resources use are gradually refined. These models are definitely more appropriate for present-day, as they contribute to the sustainable development of mankind.

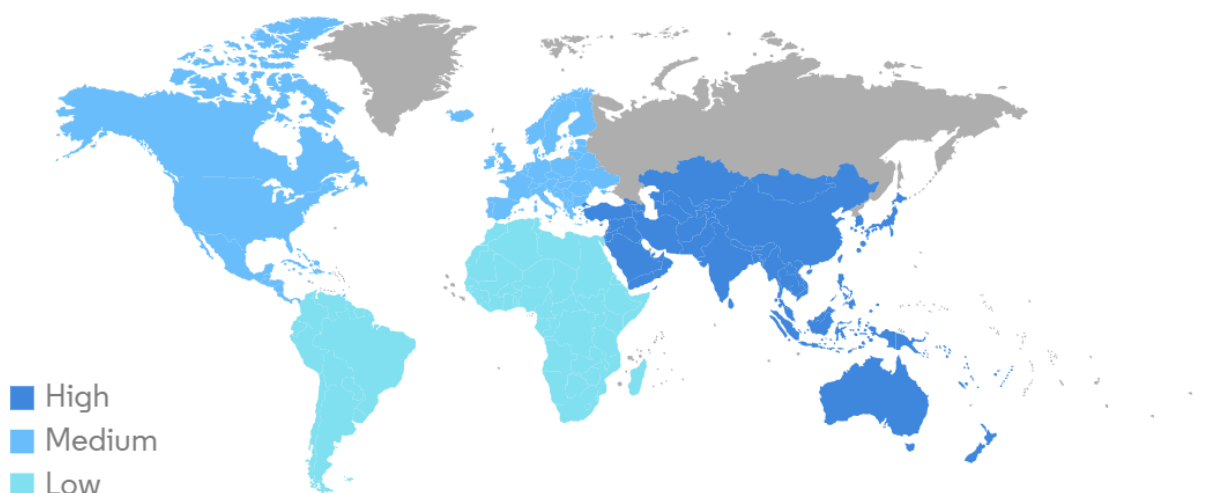
Rachel Botsman, a well-known propagandist of the sharing economy, convincingly responded to a question why humanity should move to a more coherent and responsible consumer culture [22]. In her speech at the TED conference back in 2010, she noted that the majority of people owning a drill use it for only 12-13 minutes of the entire operation time. A car, of about \$8,000 average cost, is usually idle for 23 hours a day. Botsman introduced the idea of sharing the equipment or tool by borrowing, lending or leasing them. This constitutes the primary idea of shared consumption economy – instead of possessing, people can share resources, which makes more efficient use of material goods and reduces the costs of their acquisition or production.

Fred Mazzella, a founder of BlaBlaCar, characterized the era of sharing and emphasized that humanity “stands on the threshold of the era of exchange” of goods, knowledge, money, time, skills, content, etc. “The arrival of the sharing age is a logical evolution from the disruptive innovations of the early 2000s, all of which are now allowing individuals to scale their network and gain access to solutions best suited to their needs. But the phenomenal growth and continued popular support of these models is better explained by the virtuous impacts of sharing” [8].

Botsman and Rogers [7] investigate the positive impact of the sharing of goods and services in their research. Moreover, their book *What’s Mine Is Yours: Rise of Collaborative Consumption*, substantiates the basic principles and driving forces of the sharing economy [6]. Let us briefly characterize them using the example of ridesharing.

Internet sharing platforms exist all over the world, but they are predominantly developed in European countries such as Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, France and Sweden. The number of sharing companies and their incomes grow annually, which indicates the growing demand in them among the world’s population [2].

Carpooling came into being in the USA and the countries of Western Europe in the 40s of the XX century, and with the advent of the Internet, it received an impetus for development. According to Mordor Intelligence [23], the ride-sharing market will continue to grow rapidly due to the increasing demand for economical and timesaving vehicles and by 2027 it will grow by 18%. The European region presently demonstrates the largest carpooling market, although the Asia-Pacific region shows the signs of even faster growth.



**Figure 1.** Global Ridesharing Market – Growth Rate by Region (2022 – 2027) [23].

Being the booming market, ridesharing constantly attracts new market players offering transportation services. It is worth mentioning such major players as Via Transportation, Scoop Technologies, Mahindra Logistics Ltd. UCR, Didi Chuxing Technology Co, Zimride, Uber, Nuride, Zipcar, Turo, Getaround, Rides Ridingo, and JayRide.

**Table 1.** Basic principles and driving forces of the sharing economy on the example of ridesharing.

Sharing Economy	Ridesharing
<b>Basic principles of functioning and their characteristics</b>	
Profit. In case of use, it brings benefit, in case of idling, it causes lost	Renting a car reduces maintenance costs. Carpooling reduces transportation costs for trip participants. The car owner saves money and resources, fuel, parking fees, maintenance of the vehicle and guarantees to fellow travelers that they will arrive at their destination on time
Saving time and resources (to use, it is not necessarily to own)	Renting a car for a small fee is more profitable than buying it, as modern young people are not usually tied to the place of their residence or work
Rational consumption	Minimizing traffic should effect total fuel consumption, and correspondingly the decrease in harmful emissions and the carbon footprint in the atmosphere
Trust as a basis for sharing	The growth of the carpooling market contributes to an increase in the general level of trust in society
Use of communication technologies	Information platforms providing car transport services contribute to the connection between the car owner and potential passengers
<b>Driving forces of sharing</b>	
Peering social networks and real-time technologies	The quality of communication improves because peering social networks establish a powerful sharing connection between the physical and virtual spheres of life. The economy of shared consumption and its platforms have become the most convenient and cheap means of client information compared to the traditional ones [19]. All mentioned above leads to a reduction in traffic and efficient use of motor vehicles.
World economic crisis	It caused the refusal of people from mindless consumption in favor of responsible consumption; the use of resources and goods, cars particularly, in order to ensure sustainable social development
Environmental issues	The aggravation of environmental issues made the humanity change the approach to their solution from an anthropocentric to an eco-centric. Ridesharing is considered to be one of the means to reduce anthropogenic impact on nature, especially on the atmosphere
Growing trust between people	The basis of ridesharing is the concept of “trust” (client – driver, driver – client).

BlaBlaCar is considered one of the leaders in the shared ride market, and can serve as a vivid example of the sharing economy. BlaBlaCar is a carpooling information network that provides drivers with the opportunity to save on gas expenses and travelers to economize on fares due to shared cost of trip, which turns out to be lower, compared to rail and airline fares. According to the BlaBlaCar regulations, drivers compensate most of the fuel costs allowing passengers to travel cheaper than in public transport.

BlaBlaCar presently supports the intersection of more than 100 million drivers and passengers who share the common goal of traveling cheaply and conveniently. BlaBlaCar as a leader in its field to date offers a variety of route options especially for short distances (less than 150 km).

BlaBlaCar is not only an online platform for a more effective search of traveling companions, but also a cloud data storage. The company has an Internet service that monitors possible trips, warns against fraud and organizes correspondence or calls between a driver and passengers. The international web site of this service is currently functioning in 22 countries worldwide.

We can distinguish three stages of the BlaBlaCar development presented in table 2.

BlaBlaCar is also a powerful information network that takes into account the needs of every person, regardless of age and gender. The information found in the BlaBlaCar network can be grouped into the following categories: rules of use, user characteristics, social impact, environmental efficiency and regional features of user behavior. BlaBlaCar has clear terms of use that allow everyone convenient and safe travel experience:

- registration and profile filling;
- submission of an application to search for fellow travelers or a vehicle.

Registration and profile filling phase suggests different ways of registration possible (via a Facebook account, via e-mail) and entering minimal user information (name, gender and year of birth, preferences, photo). Car owners also need to specify the technical characteristics of their vehicle.

On the phase of submitting an application for travelling companion or finding a car, users can fill out a special form with the place of departure and destination, date and time. After the ride, passengers and drivers leave feedback about the shared ride, which affects trust in the community. There are several criteria for choosing a travel partner or a vehicle, including comfort, price, route, time of a trip, age and experience of the driver and reviews on BlaBlaCar. At the same time, the service is available via mobile applications for iPhone and Android, as well as on the main website on the Internet.

The findings merged from the data analysis can identify the following generalized characteristics of BlaBlaCar users:

- the majority (about 2/3) of BlaBlaCar users are males (62%). We believe that the main reason for the smaller number of female users is the issue of safety, less trust of women in unfamiliar drivers and passengers. To ensure women feel comfortable and safe, BlaBlaCar provides the “Girls Only” option;
- the diversity in age with the predomination (more 1/2 making 43%) of young users (aged 25 to 34), people aged 35 make up 30% of users. This can be explained by the fact that this age group are the most advanced users of social networks, the main consumers of goods and services of the sharing economy;
- BlaBlaCar enables people with special needs to use network services by changing interface settings, zoom and navigation using the keyboard.

We believe an important feature of BlaBlaCar is the positive environment effect due to the reduction of traffic. The report of the French research institute *Le BIPE BRO* [24] on the results of a study, commissioned by the BlaBlaCar company, states that in 2018 BlaBlaCar users, traveling with fellow travelers and sharing fuel costs, reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by approximately 1.6 million tons. The projected saving of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (in millions of tons) as of 2023 is presented in figure 2. According to the 2018 IPCC report, stabilizing global warming at 1.5°C requires reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 45% no later than 2030.

Therefore, ridesharing trend and BlaBlaCar particularly can make a huge difference in solving a number of issues and may contribute to the sustainable development of humanity in the near future.

**Table 2.** Development stages of BlaBlaCar.

Development stages	Stage characteristics
1. The emergence of BlaBlaCar (2006–2010)	The idea to create BlaBlaCar dates back 2004 and belongs to Fred Mazelli, who wanted to go to visit his relatives outside the city, but could not get to them. It occurred to Fred to find a driver who was willing to take him as a passenger on the condition that he shared fuel costs. That shared trip inspired Fred Mazelli to create an information site for finding fellow travelers, and in 2006 Fred Mazzelli purchased the <i>covoiturage.fr</i> domain. The co-founders of the project were Fred Nappeson, Nicolas Brusson and Olivier Bonnet. At this stage, the product development strategy was worked out and planned.
2. Development of BlaBlaCar and its entry into the European market of shared trips (2011–2014)	BlaBlaCar enters the European market using different websites (for example, in Spain, the company is called Comuto with the website <i>comuto.es</i> ). In June 2011, the company expanded its services to the UK and changed the name to BlaBlaCar, as users indicated their level of “talkativeness” from “Bla” (silent), “BlaBla” (moderately talkative) to “BlaBlaBla” (very talkative) when registering on the site. In 2012, BlaBlaCar entered the market of 6 more European countries: Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal. The Spanish and French sites were renamed to standardize the network. At this stage BlaBlaCar became one of the most expensive startups in Europe thanks to the investments of Insight Venture Partners and Lead Edge Capital.
3. New markets extension, new product offers (2014–2023)	BlaBlaCar came to Turkey in 2014, and India the following year. 2015 was the year BlaBlaCar expanded into Latin America, particularly Mexico and Brazil, with \$200 million funding. Since 2019, BlaBlaCar has become part of the BlaBlaCarPro international project, which is a legal bus carrier service. It assists carriers and bus fleet owners to find passengers for nearly 100 million BlaBlaCar users. However, only carriers with legal license to transport passengers can work with this service. In 2018, BlaBlaCar moved beyond carpooling for the first time, announcing the purchase of Ouibus, one of France’s largest bus operators, owned by the state-owned SNCF, which manages the country’s railways. Later on BlaBlaCar, the world’s largest carpooling service for long-distance trips, announces a joint effort with Busfor, the leading service for finding and buying bus tickets in Ukraine and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The merger of companies was supposed to contribute to the expansion of BlaBlaCar in the passenger transport market in the region with a population of more than 300 million people. With the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, demand for transportation services and platforms dramatically increased as public transportation and intercity transportation were shut down. In this regard, since April 2020, BlaBlaCar has launched a new <i>BlaBlaHelp app.</i> , the application helps buy products or medicines in a pharmacy.



**Figure 2.** Projected savings of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions [24].

The next stage of our research aims to reveal the behavioral traits of BlaBlaCar users in various regions worldwide. The results of this study show that the behavior of BlaBlaCar users in different countries demonstrate no fundamental divergence. However, it has been established that users from different regions still have some distinctions due to peculiarity of mentality and cultural customs.

The most interesting finding concerns the time and details of the trip planning. For example, the users from the Western, Southern and Northern European countries usually plan shared trip a week or two in advance, and clarify the trip details and check the driver's profile in 2-3 days before the trip takes place. The Central and Eastern Europe users also plan a trip, but usually in 2-3 days, and they clarify the trip details on the day of departure. Moreover, they rarely carry out a detailed check of the driver's profile. However, users from Latin American countries may plan a trip a week in advance, but can often cancel it in 2-3 days; also the driver profile check may not be very detailed.

In the countries of the Asian region, users strictly observe customs and traditions peculiar to oriental culture. Thus, women in India, for example, ride only with a female driver. The gender of the user determines the thoroughness of detail checking in the driver's profile.

BlaBlaCar entered the Ukrainian market in February 2014 due to the takeover of *Podorozhniki*, the Ukrainian startup, whose founder and first regional manager was Oleksiy Lazorenko. In January 2022, because of personnel changes Roman Miroshnichenko took the position of general director of BlaBlaCar in Ukraine.

As of 2023, Ukraine is among the top three countries where BlaBlaCar is developing rapidly. The Ukrainian BlaBlaCar market has currently 8 million users, of which 1 million people use it every month. About one hundred employees work in the Ukrainian office of the company. The analysis of the data taken from the company's official website reveals that 55% of users use the network for vacation trips, 49% for visiting parents or relatives, and 42% for business trips.

Passenger traffic traditionally increases on the eve of holidays. The most popular in 2019 (in terms of the number of seats offered in the cars) proved to be summer destinations in Ukraine, i.e. see resort cities: Berdyansk (Zaporizhzhia region); Kyrylivka (Zaporizhzhia region); Iron port (Kherson region); Zatoka (Odesa region); South (Odesa region). Among the most popular winter resort regions were: Bukovel (Ivano-Frankivsk region); Vorokhta (Ivano-Frankivsk Region); Yaremche (Ivano-Frankivsk Region); and Skhidnytsia (Lviv region).

Unfortunately, with the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine, the former popular summer



travel destinations are no longer relevant.

The introduction of quarantine restrictions caused by the COVID-2019 pandemic, followed by the Russian-Ukrainian war, effected the development of BlaBlaCar in Ukraine.

In March 2020, BlaBlaCar appealed to its users asking to stop traveling temporarily and urged to use the platform only for exceptional and urgent trips. In accordance with the Government of Ukraine decision to ban passenger transportation, dated March 16, 2020, BlaBlaCar temporarily suspended all bus trips, including on the Busfor platform.

Presently, the government of Ukraine gradually allows restoring long-distance travelling. BlaBlaCar introduced improvements and new features on the platform that are called to assist traveler's necessary safety measures and health precautions. BlaBlaCar reminds every user of safety recommendations the moment he/she post or book a ride, including: not to drive in case of COVID symptoms arise, to wear a medical mask, to keep a safe distance, and not to hold hands.

In April 2020, BlaBlaCar announced the launch of *BlaBlaHelp* (*iOS*, *Android*), a free application that helps buy essentials during the spread of COVID-19 [25]. To date, more than 35,000 users apply *BlaBlaHelp* and the company encourages its users to share the application with those who may need help.

One more company's initiative is the assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine by making quick and free of charge trips for the militaries who need to get to their destination.

In the conclusion, we can summarize the salient features of the BlaBlaCar information network:

- BlaBlaCar information network is a part of the sharing economy, which is developing at a fast pace;
- the network provides users with wide possibilities to make trips;
- BlaBlaCar interacts and cooperates with other sharing platforms, expands the car sharing service on the world market;
- the network differs from traditional types of logistics systems;
- some aspects of BlaBlaCar activities are partly non-commercial, international, global and informal;
- BlaBlaCar provides cross-cultural exchange through communication opportunities between users;
- users can travel in any direction and at any time;
- BlaBlaCar site is accessible for users with special needs.

Considering the features listed above, we can distinguish the main advantages and disadvantages of BlaBlaCar.

The main advantages of BlaBlaCar over its competitors, i.e. transport companies, are: a slightly lower price of the trip; free choice of more favorable route and time; individually suitable location of departure and destination; the availability of trip routes that are not provided by the regular carriers; less emission of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere; and mutual assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We see the main disadvantages of BlaBlaCar as follows:

- many drivers use the BlaBlaCar platform for commercial purposes, although it is against the terms of use of the free platform;
- the lack of reporting documentation, which can create problems with taxation and insurance;
- the issue of income accounting and taxation: the lack of real mechanisms for monitoring the flow of money which causes the transfer of part of the money into the "shadow";

- insufficient safety guarantee for passengers and drivers;
- in most countries, BlaBlaCar works only with long-distance transportation, which limits the capabilities of the platform;
- passengers have to tolerate the time and route offered by drivers, which may not always meet their needs;
- the transition from a social platform to a business platform may lead to an increase in service prices and change BlaBlaCar's philosophy.

### 3. Conclusion

Sharing economy in general and ridesharing in particular grounds in financial benefit, time and resources saving, rational consumption, trust, and communication technologies. Nowadays BlaBlaCar is a new model and a vivid example of the economy of shared and responsible consumption. It is one of the world leading online sharing platforms, which has gone a long path from the idea of finding fellow travelers to mastering the global market of shared trips and offering new products (bus trips, BlaBlaHelp, etc.).

BlaBlaCar has as advantages (traffic minimization, lower trip price, free route and time choice, CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction), as some disadvantages (insufficient guarantee of passenger and driver safety, lack of reporting documentation, restrictions on intercity transportation).

Thus, BlaBlaCar is a special information network with unique characteristics that distinguish it from other similar networks, and some common features with existing sharing platforms, such as the user communication available. BlaBlaCar is an innovative solution in passenger transportation issue, which has gone through successful testing on the world market and proved competitive with the other companies.

As the prospects of BlaBlaCar development, we can envision the entry of insurance companies into the BlaBlaCar market and implementation of monetization; expansion of the service market and entry to the joint transportation market of Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Colombia, and Argentina, etc.

Our further scientific research aims at the study of modern trends in the development of the sharing economy in the global economic system.

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