

Platforms' Social Impact in Times of Disruptions: Cases of Uber and Airbnb During the War in Ukraine^{*}

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Abstract

Businesses, particularly those operating in Ukraine and Russia directly, have faced significant disruption with the beginning of a full-scale invasion in Ukraine. Some have utilized this crisis as an opportunity to adapt, innovate, and prioritize helping over profitability. Such actions, while bold and cost-intensive, demonstrate a shift toward social responsibility in times of crises. This study explores how platforms can simultaneously support societal well-being and achieve long-term benefits for themselves when faced with high-magnitude crises.

Keywords

social impact, corporate social responsibility, external disruptions, innovation, digital platforms¹

1. Introduction

Despite its local nature, the impact of the Russian invasion in Ukraine is felt worldwide. The unplanned military and refugee support costs, threat of starvation in less developed countries due to the dry cargo ships operating on affected sea territories, growing and unstable gas prices, as well as uncertainty that affects too many individuals and territories are all contributing to it. Moreover, as of 2024, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [1] reports that the number of Ukrainian refugees worldwide has surpassed 6 million.

These events also profoundly impact businesses operating in the occupied territories. Ukrainian government and Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) estimate a GDP loss of over 35% for the country, compared to a global GDP loss of only 3.5% due to the COVID-19 pandemic [2]. They also report the loss of nearly 5 million jobs and critical infrastructure damage, indicating significant challenges for both individuals and businesses in the short and long run [3].

However, international businesses operating in Ukraine haven't fled the country, as they had in Russia. On the contrary, many companies have either continued to operate within the constraints of the war state or have shifted their focus towards providing social impact rather than solely focusing on profit. Multinational organizations, with platforms as their core business model, have achieved significant success by effectively connecting those in need with those providing help efficiently and at the lowest possible costs, thanks to their developed technologies and information access.

Operating platforms in Ukraine could impact not only essential sectors that affect lives of Ukrainian citizens but also shape perceptions of the companies involved, both for users directly engaging with their services and for those in other regions who learn about these companies through stories or when choosing between service providers. It is interesting to observe how brands manage their social presence and image in such disruptive times, particularly, as many have begun to proactively integrate sustainability principles into their internal operations. Elevated

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Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards and customer communication drive this shift, emphasizing their commitment to positively impacting the world.

This research examines a unique case where humanity has recently shifted its focus to the new technologies, creating limitless and borderless growth opportunities, at the same time dealing with a military conflict based on territories interest. Such conflict should have exerted significant pressure on management, incorporating various factors into the decision-making process about whether and how to continue operations in Ukraine.

Discovering and incorporating all the relevant assets required to support the firm is often an essential stage in seizing opportunities, so entrepreneurs focus on innovation rather than physical assets, since it is uncommon that superior technology by itself can bring a competitive advantage [4] and [5]. Innovation's form and source, however, varies. This study extends this premise into the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and crisis management, hypothesizing that CSR actions specific to humanitarian crises can significantly sway public perception and consumer behavior, while also serving as a door-opener to innovative products and services.

The aim of this research is to conduct a qualitative study with explorative character, further investigating those dimensions and, therefore, to understand how platform-based multinational companies respond and adapt to disruptions caused by military conflicts. Therefore, this work focuses on the following research question:

RQ: How do social initiatives in times of global disruptions and uncertainty impact perception of the platform-based companies?

The paper aims to guide through an in-depth analysis of how platforms react and adapt to conflicts, specifically examining their strategic responses and the consequent market implications. It is organized as follows: Section 2 investigates related work on the topics of disruptions, innovation, and corporate social responsibility for the digital-native companies. Section 3 further explores specific examples of Uber's and Airbnb's actions with case studies, examining how these platforms were affected and how they responded to disruption caused by the conflict. Section 4 discusses limitations and provides suggestions for future work, with Section 5 concluding the research.

2. Power of Platforms in Times of Disruptions

Sharing economy is experiencing rapid growth. This growth is largely attributed to the platforms and its model's efficient use of underutilized assets and alignment with consumer preferences for convenience, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness [6]. It also significantly reduces transaction costs between the participants [7]. These attributes make the sharing economy particularly attractive to new enterprises that are pursuing innovative, scalable business models looking to implement new approaches and configurations of the value chain [8]. Notably, platforms enable new businesses to expand rapidly with significantly lower initial investments than those required in more traditional business models. The economic efficiency combined with a technologically adept framework allows such platforms to quickly adjust to evolving market demands and technological advancements, making them a preferred choice among emerging companies seeking flexibility and economic efficiency [6].

Platforms play a crucial role in the open innovation approach, enabling users to co-create value through short-term transactions between parties, acting as general innovation drivers and a preferred choice for many innovation-driven startups [9] and [10]. Today, the largest companies worldwide, such as Apple, Amazon, Google, and Alibaba Group, operate on this model, demonstrating an incredible revenue growth from their digital platforms over the last decade [11].

2.1. Innovation

Businesses often change the way operations look and restructure entire industries, approach the challenges and opportunities by involving external parties and users, which in turn accelerates innovations and creates even more value [12]. Also, by connecting consumers and retailers, companies do not need to have any physical products or employ individuals for each separate task – it is a usual case now that the taxi companies don't own taxis (e.g., Uber), vacation accommodation booking services do not have any property owned (e.g., Booking.com, Airbnb), and food delivery is not provided by single restaurants itself anymore but rather by external food-ordering services (e.g., Grubhub, Glovo) [11]. Serving as the intermediaries, they co-create value based on technological advantage and provide access to underutilized assets [13].

Digital platforms have a unique advantage of being literally in the pockets of their users, communicating new features or delivering updates when they are ready to expand their businesses with hardly any efforts involved from the customers. Platforms are dependent on their internal resources, among which are human capital, organizational capital, technological infrastructure, financial resources, and user base. Innovation is in many ways dependent on these resources, putting human capital, including knowledge and skills at the center of value creation and operational efficiency. But being able to produce new technological foundations, register patents, accumulate financial resources, make partnerships, etc. ensures platforms gain competitive advantage in the market [14]. In those cases when external disruptions occur, companies have, however, limited access to their resources, and they may also face changes in external environments.

Disruptions are often found in relation to innovation – namely, how innovation may disrupt whole industries or markets. At the same time, innovation itself is quite a broad term, giving a lot of space for businesses to claim themselves as innovative.

For instance, companies may innovate to achieve market leadership, which refers to exploration innovation, product innovation, or external innovation, but they can also introduce new innovative products based on their previous models. According to Ohki [15], large firms mainly focus on improving their existing products and services rather than on disruptive innovation. Ohki's study [15] shows that disruptive innovation affects a company's growth only indirectly, whereas it also decreases the average product quality. Disruptive innovation results from companies switching from the old technologies to the new ones, disrupting their market position to ensure continuous revenues [15].

One of the newest approaches platforms may use is the super app. Based on available resources, platforms may incorporate this strategy, which aims to diversify them with new products or services in various markets, creating new platform dimensions, particularly, by introducing innovative solutions. While this strategy carries a higher risk, it also offers a potential for new benefits, particularly when decisions to implement it are driven by changing environments or urgent circumstances [16].

2.2. Adaptability

Despite the idea that innovations help companies to adapt to the changing world and play a crucial role in companies' competitiveness and sustainability [17], there are other challenges businesses must address.

Rapid growth of various digital platforms, diversified products, and value-adding options, in turn, also has its consequences, as the cost of switching for many users is very low. With the rise of Internet access and information availability worldwide, as well as the growing number of new startups, more and more questions about customer acquisition and, even more, retention arise. Especially highlighted in the academic research are topics of customer loyalty and attraction from psychological and economic perspectives. Amit and Zott [18] claim that retention also serves as a basis for platforms' value creation. For instance, to build sustainable and long-term relationships,

companies should focus more on experiences from using their products or services, as well as on their core values in general, rather than trying to pursue customers to buy with the traditional marketing exercises [19] and [20].

Which weight does a firm give to its core values is especially visible during the uncertain and difficult times, which can be observed in Ukraine currently. Platforms, being initially created in a stable and thriving economy focused on globalization, mostly offered services, which could have been left aside. However, some platform-based businesses were flexible enough to adjust their proposition to customers' and platform users' needs, reshaping their offering to support what is valuable for their user base, chasing momentum.

Yet Hasselwander [14] confirms that companies investing in innovation and are being ready to take risks are more likely to both pursue the super app strategy and take into consideration new user needs and adapt to the market faster. This includes new offerings to differentiate themselves from competitors, focusing on niche markets, and reacting fast to market changes.

Being flexible and adaptable to circumstances comes along with the new opportunities, which is aligned with the business goals of the platforms. The IT industry, along with telecommunications and information services, nevertheless achieved growth in the first year of the war in Ukraine, even though all other sectors showed decline [21].

According to Kostruba [17], technology and IT sectors can experience further growth after the end of war, especially when utilizing Ukrainian innovation and startup ecosystems. Being ready to seize the moment and stay relevant on the market provides high potential for the upcoming more stable times, but in times of unpredictable disruptions like war, it may require stepping back for a while and shift the focus.

2.3. Corporate Social Responsibility

A successful platform not only aims to achieve virality but also looks for potential options for acquiring, nurturing, and retaining of its users [22]. As part of these actions, CSR was defined by Brown and Dacin [23] as a firm's status and activities related to obligations based on social norms, which refer to actions and beliefs that are shared and generally acceptable across society [24], which create a baseline for practices to contribute to the societal wealth without awaiting a return benefit. In the corporate environment, creating work ethics for employees and engaging in socially responsible projects is dependent on managers and their course of actions. However, as individuals, they usually share the same values and social norms as other people in the community [25].

One of the first models to evaluate the CSR – the Corporate Social Performance (CSP) model – was defined by Carroll [26] and compiled as a pyramid in his later work [27]. The model includes dimensions such as economic responsibilities, legal responsibilities, ethical responsibilities, and philanthropic responsibilities. It should be viewed as a whole, implying that businesses should act simultaneously in all dimensions rather than sequentially.

Carroll [28] states that CSR becomes more and more adopted as a management strategy, being incorporated into organizational structures, policies, and practices globally. Many CSR studies from the marketing perspective stress a strong connection between a company's social responsibility and brand image, choice of a brand by customers, and their further recommendations [29] and [30], making it an impactful factor to consider by a vast number of companies operating in quickly changing environment. Klein and Dawar [31] argue that CSR plays an important role for consumer decision-making both by providing additional value to the product in case of the "standard" or usual choices and contributing to non-standard choices, e.g., evaluation of the new products for a consumer, which, in turn, may lead to a biased decision-making, known as the "halo effect". A halo can also affect the judgment in non-standard situations, among which are also disruptions or crises of various types.

One of the most studied settings for CSR during the crises is the event of a product-harm crisis. However, industry and global crises usually have different contexts and companies, therefore, target different goals when looking for suitable solutions and responses. The COVID-19 pandemic

significantly hindered global economic growth [32] but also served as a catalyst for accelerating digital transformation across numerous businesses [33]. This shift toward digitalization has enabled companies to enhance their social and corporate responsibility practices [34] and [35]. Moreover, this pandemic has resulted in increased engagement of the businesses in CSR practices by allocating more resources to the needs of their workforce, customers, and society, [36] and [37].

Companies have engaged in global operations for numerous years, as entering new markets is an effective strategy for increasing market share. In the context of the war in Ukraine, businesses encountered two facets of the crisis due to its militaristic nature. First, facing logistics issues, lack of employees with many people fleeing to other territories or countries, or shifting their focus to different issues, Ukrainian branches in some cases had to close. Simultaneously, Russian branches have been put under much pressure by customers and users all over the world, demanding companies to shut down operations on the territory of the intruding country.

Nevertheless, after February 2022, many multinational companies have been forced to leave Russia to comply with CSR values. For instance, Kyiv School of Economics and its project Leave Russia [38] track companies that continue their operations in Russia or continue selling products to Russian companies. Now, the Leave Russia project counts more than 500 companies that terminated their activities in the country and more than 1750 companies which are still present there. Similar lists have been created by various organizations, among which is also Yale School of Management [39].

Critics, including Yale Chief Executive Leadership Institute founder Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, argue that companies still operating in Russia may be motivated by profit or even be indirectly supporting Russia's actions [40]. However, the decision to withdraw from a significant market like Russia is complex, even if the reputation might be hurt. Ceasing operations often involves substantial financial and logistical considerations, including impacts on local employees, supply chains, and contractual obligations. This complexity highlights the ethical and strategic challenges businesses face when balancing responsibility with economic interests amid geopolitical tensions [40].

3. Social Impact – Cases of Uber and Airbnb during the War in Ukraine

3.1. Research Methodology

A descriptive multiple-case study as a qualitative social research method was chosen to support with background information of the studied platforms, their actions, and achieved results. Since case study research aims to examine a particular phenomenon in depth, it uses a range of data collection methods and acts as a strategy to provide context and test hypotheses [41]. The paper focuses on multiple cases instead of just one, as this approach enables the provision of more robust and generalizable conclusions and eliminates potential prejudices [42].

The selected companies were chosen based on the availability of reliable data and their strong global brand recognition. This selection ensures the inclusion of well-documented cases with extensive public and corporate information sources. Furthermore, the familiarity of respondents with these brands facilitates potential empirical investigations into topics like growth and brand perception, enhancing the relevance and engagement of future studies.

3.2. War in Ukraine as Disruption for Platforms

One of the most significant consequences for international companies operating globally after the Russian invasion was loss of the market share and revenue drop in Russia in a short period of time. For example, Apple's decision to discontinue product sales and limit services like Apple Pay resulted in notable revenue losses from the Russian market, with only iPhone sales accounting for

2% of Apple's global iPhone sales at the time. Additionally, the removal of Russian state media apps from the App Store may have incited geopolitical backlash [43]. Despite these financial losses, Apple's actions reinforced its commitment to human rights and corporate ethics, likely strengthening brand loyalty among consumers who value corporate responsibility.

Similarly, Spotify closed its offices in Russia and restricted state-sponsored content almost immediately following the attack on Ukraine. Like Apple and many other international companies, Spotify faced the potential loss of the Russian market. However, these actions were consistent with the company's commitment to combating misinformation and supporting ethical standards. The conflict also prompted Spotify to enhance its support for Ukrainian artists and localized content, thereby boosting its reputation as a socially responsible platform [44].

Specifically for Uber and Airbnb, the challenge of war in Ukraine was reflected separately in the annual financial reports to SEC (United States Securities and Exchange Commission), which both companies must file as public offering companies [45]. These reports provide insights into Uber's and Airbnb's identified business risks and their potential impacts, among which are regulatory and legal risks, competitive risks, operational risks, technological risks, financial risks, market and economic risks, strategic risks, and reputation risks. Comparing risks related to ownership of the common stock for three consecutive years before and when the war in Ukraine has begun, which are 2020, 2021, and 2022, Uber's statement about "other events or factors, including those resulting from war, incidents of terrorism..." [46] changed to specifically "war, including the conflict between Russia and Ukraine" [47] and [48] as a disruption to their international business not faced in the United States. Airbnb also highlights it in their latest reports with "wars, such as the ongoing military action between Russia and Ukraine..." and places it on the same level as COVID-19 risk and impact [49] and [50]. In its 2022 SEC report, Airbnb even declared that "Any escalation or unexpected change in circumstances in the ongoing military action between Russia and Ukraine, or sanctions, export controls, and similar measures in response to the conflict, could materially adversely affect our business, results of operations, and financial condition." [50].

Uber also states in its SEC report that conflict between Russia and Ukraine carries a range of potential consequences that could extend well beyond the immediate region, most of which are already visible across the globe [47]. This includes international sanctions, regional instability with a potential ripple effect on neighboring countries, increased tensions between the United States and countries where they operate, and global economic impact with potential fluctuations in global markets, disruptions to international trade, and economic uncertainty affecting businesses and consumers worldwide. Given the complexity and interconnectedness of these factors, it is challenging to accurately predict the full scope of the conflict's impact on the global landscape and for each platform specifically.

Nonetheless, even while listing all these risk factors in annual reports, many companies did not flee from Ukraine but rather decided to act and support local operations. They prioritized ethical considerations and long-term brand integrity over short-term profits, even though the need for operational adjustment to navigate the challenges posed by the war – ensuring the safety of employees, modifying services, and enhancing security measures – has been raised.

Simultaneously, the war presented these companies with opportunities to innovate and provide unique support to their user bases. These opportunities included enhancing support for Ukrainian businesses, non-profit organizations, and artists, transforming their own processes, providing services in a different role, and many more. These actions also underscored their commitment to CSR.

3.3. The Case of Uber

As of June 2022, approximately 105,000 private cars were lost in Ukraine, whereas operating in Ukraine since 2016, Uber's core business model lies in the peer-to-peer ridesharing service [3]. Uber initially ceased operations when the war broke out, but it was also among the first companies to

provide significant support to its own community of drivers, riders, and ordinary citizens, who were not using the app yet.

As the first step, Uber proclaimed that Europe has not seen a similar crisis since World War II [52] and shut down its commercial operations to ensure the safety of the platform users while paying out all the money earned from previously conducted trips to drivers. As during the first month of the war more than 4 million people fled the country [1], Uber nevertheless provided free unlimited on-demand car trips and scheduled minibus routes between the Ukrainian border and Polish cities for refugees and staff at the Migrant Welcome Centers to support delivery of essential goods, resulting in more than 100,000 free rides total [52]. At the same time, Uber collaborated with non-profit organizations outside of Ukraine to support further needs in the destination points. For instance, HIAS Poland, a refugee protection organization, has reported that Uber helps to safely meet the transportation needs of refugees in the U.S., Romania, Colombia, Kenya, Mexico, and Poland, where they enlightened the problem of trafficking, harassment, and rape of refugees in the beginning of war in Ukraine in taxis and provided the platform to overcome those obstacles. Additionally, the company provided free or discounted rides to assist individuals fleeing to new countries with daily tasks that are particularly challenging. These services included transportation to medical centers, community centers, and job interviews [53].

To ensure external support, Uber has adjusted its app functionality by adding an in-app donation button, as shown in Figure 1. This small change in the platform made it possible for the riders worldwide to donate to the International Rescue Committee, Red Cross, UNICEF, UNHCR, and WFP or to raise funds for the Ministry of Health, resulting in more than \$10 million of contributions from users and direct grants and donating 50 ambulances [52] and [54] and [55].

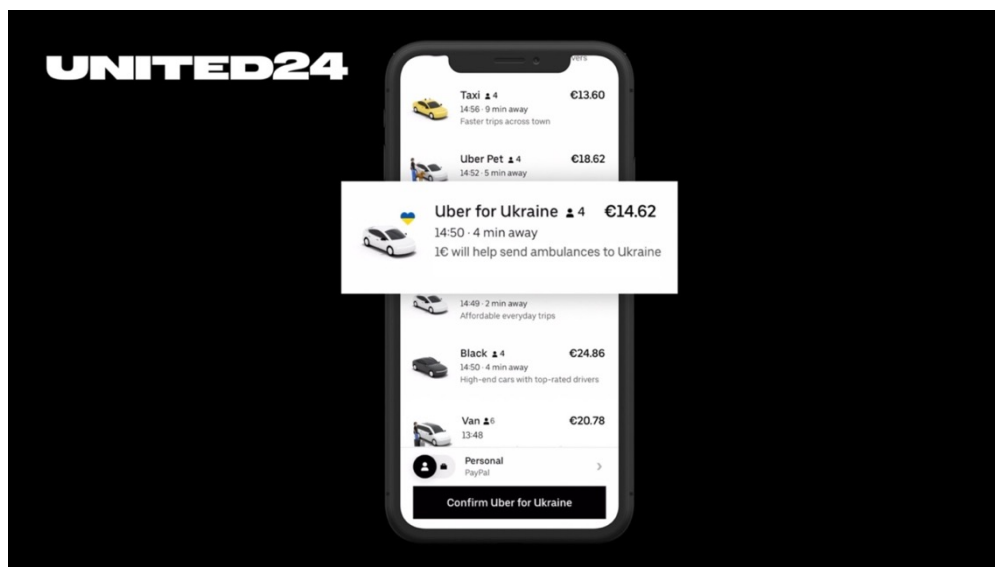


Figure 1: Uber for Ukraine in-app solution via United24 (https://u24.gov.ua/news/uber_rides).

According to the United Nations [1], in June 2022, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and Uber announced their partnership – a specially developed and custom-built version of the Uber Direct app to access and supply people in need – and basically created a new platform. This means that each ride is matched and real-time tracked to the destination place and afterwards confirmed with the safe delivery. This technology allows to efficiently manage delivery by still operating network cars and Uber Shuttle within a 100-km radius from the WFP's warehouses across the country, making it possible to deliver critical humanitarian assistance to more than three million people monthly. This effort resulted in free delivery of more than 220 truckloads of emergency food, medicine, and emergency winter shelter supplies for the most struggling regions or frontline areas, providing the possibility to schedule, track, and manage the progress of deliveries in real time [51].

As the least straightforward effort, Uber heavily supported Ukraine's Ministry of Culture with free on-demand rides for cultural heritage experts, ensuring that artworks, archives, and irreplaceable artifacts survive the war. To facilitate this, the company developed a customized version of its platform specifically for this purpose [51].

In the meantime, by the end of 2022 and not even the end of the first year of the war, Uber has relaunched and expanded its usual ride services from 9 to 18 cities across Ukraine, keeping the prices low for the riders and higher for drivers to provide a source of income for families in need and support access to essential transportation, and essentially operating at a loss [52].

Over the last years, Uber has been highly active in partnerships with many organizations and continued to support Ukraine in many ways. In 2022, in cooperation with Banda, a Ukrainian advertising agency, Uber created the global "Keep Ukraine Moving" campaign, which was launched on Uber's own platforms, as well as its YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn [56]. In 2023, Uber and impact innovation agency Kin launched another campaign on Times Square as the next phase of "Keep Ukraine Moving", honoring Ukrainian drivers and offering people to donate to United24, the government's fundraising platform [55].

3.4. The Case of Airbnb

Same as Uber, Airbnb rapidly responded to the crisis with several actions, just four days after Russia started the full-scale invasion [57]. After suspending bookings in and from Russia and Belarus, the company offered in total free short-term housing to more than 130,000 refugees from Ukraine. The costs were funded by Airbnb itself and the generosity of the hosts, who wanted to provide help to people in need [58].

To support the Ukrainian community, Airbnb also waived guest and host fees for booking in Ukraine, which was very important for both refugees seeking new homes inside of Ukraine and the hosts, as it was an opportunity for them to keep a source of income, especially for those who had lost their jobs because of invasion and business operations termination. It had, however, another huge positive effect: Ukrainian hosts have received bookings from guests all over the world who were obviously not planning to come or stay during the military operation but rather wanted to support Ukrainian residents during the hard times [59]. This was possible due to the network effect, which states that with a higher number of platform users, the incentives will be also higher [60]. The CEO of Airbnb, Brian Chesky, stated that more than 61,000 nights were booked on Airbnb, which resulted in \$1.9 million with no applicable fees in just two days [61].

Airbnb also operates its charitable daughter company Airbnb.org since its launch in 2020, which makes various social initiatives possible and is known for its collaborations with NGOs around the world. To support Ukrainian refugees, the company worked with more than 40 organizations that provide temporary housing [58].

In 2023, Airbnb and the State Agency for Tourism Development of Ukraine (SATD) have signed a joint memorandum to support tourism after the war is over. Some plans have already been disclosed, with one of which being a "route of war" from heavily damaged city Irpin near Kyiv to Chernobyl. According to the chairperson for SATD, highlighting the consequences of the war to local and international visitors will both help to develop the industry as well as work through the trauma [62]. At the same time, since the middle of 2023, Lviv, a major Ukrainian city, participates in Airbnb's initiative City Portal, which provides unique insights into the tourism trends like demographic data, as well as accommodation spendings per person, traveling distance, number of pet-friendly listings, most booked days, etc. [63]. This initiative should support governments and institutions with understanding the community and behaviors of tourists to adapt the offering and the city's regulations, which is extremely crucial in and after times of disruptions like war.

Airbnb continues to operate in Ukraine, providing an opportunity for locals to have an additional source of income. Despite the ongoing war, tourism in Ukraine continues to recover. According to the SATD study, domestic tourism is now close to pre-war 2021 levels with growth in

taxes in Kyiv and 18 regions of Ukraine, compared to 2022. Approximately, while 38% of travel study respondents travel for leisure inside Ukraine, 18% travel at least once a year [64].

Currently, no listings on Airbnb exist for occupied territories or the ones close to the front lines, as can be seen in Figure 2 below. The most obvious reason is the safety of guests but also destruction happening there, as many small cities or villages have been ruined to ashes since the beginning of the Russian invasion. This is supported by SATD data, which claims the decline in tax revenues in 2023 in Kherson Oblast was 84%, 74% in Luhansk Oblast, 53% in Donetsk Oblast, and 42% in Zaporizhia Oblast [64]. These regions have been affected by war at most, and Russia tries to proclaim them as parts of its territory; thus, it is even more difficult to predict whether international tourism will be available there again any time soon, both because of their legal status and Russian control.

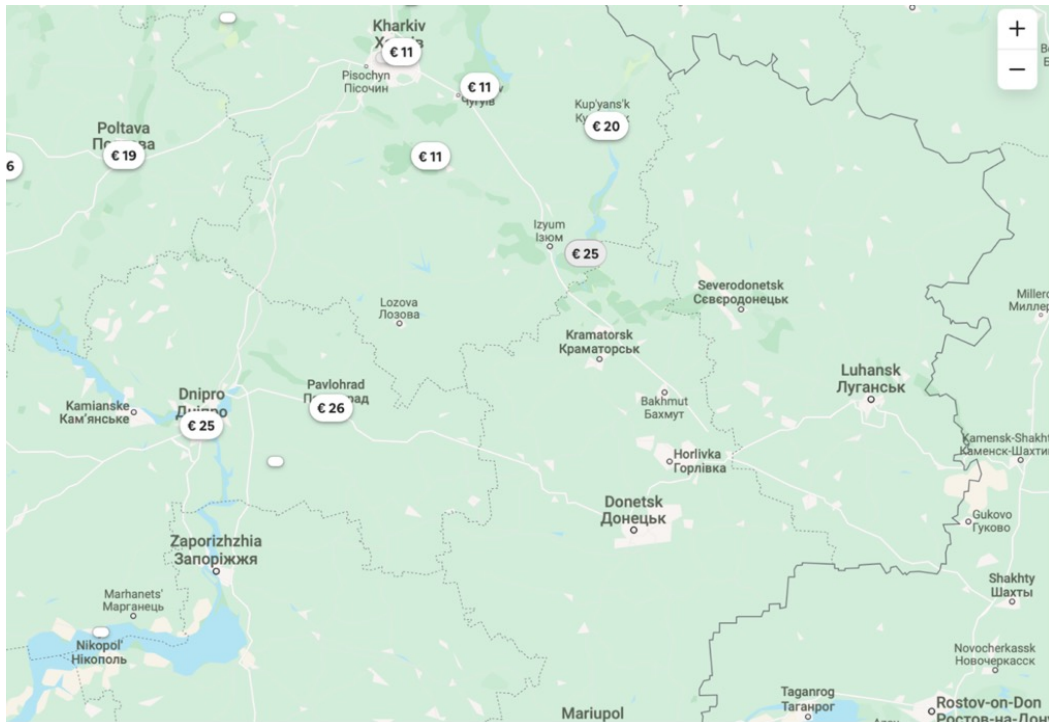


Figure 2: Airbnb accommodation options in the Easter Ukraine via Airbnb.

As a platform, Airbnb has a huge opportunity to connect many people; however, it also requires a lot of coordination and effort to execute it efficiently in cases of unpredicted disruptions like war. For instance, to match refugees and platform's accommodations, Airbnb collaborated closely with German, Polish, Romanian, and Hungarian governments and local NGOs, which can match the registered refugees and communicate their needs [57].

3.5. Alignment Between Social Impact and Innovation

Many existing systems were strained or even collapsed, as is typical in any crisis. The increased demands of the war tend to overwhelm the central institutions, whereas not only response itself is essential, but also flexibility in addressing the constantly evolving needs and responsive methods. Thus, the urgency of the situation requires the failed systems to be recovered or replaced, even if they are coming from an external environment.

Despite detailing numerous risk factors in the annual reports, like mentioned by Uber and Airbnb, many companies have not withdrawn from Ukraine. Instead, they have chosen to actively engage and support local operations. This commitment demonstrates a strategic decision to maintain a presence and provide aid amid the challenging circumstances. Companies that decided to stay recognize the importance of sustaining their operations in Ukraine, both for their business

interests and for the local economy. By continuing their activities, they aim to uphold market presence and customer relationships, which can be crucial for long-term success. Many companies have implemented measures to support their employees, partners, and communities in Ukraine. This includes ensuring the safety and well-being of their workforce, providing financial and logistical support, and contributing to humanitarian efforts.

Firms see their continued presence and support in Ukraine as part of their broader corporate social responsibility. By staying engaged, they can play a role in stabilizing the local economy, offering employment opportunities, and contributing to societal resilience during the crisis. Businesses are adapting their strategies to navigate the risks and uncertainties posed by the conflict. This might involve diversifying supply chains, enhancing security measures, and developing contingency plans to mitigate further potential disruptions.

Both Uber and Airbnb are in command of vast resources, as they not only have the large user bases, but they can unite them to achieve a larger goal. One of the main assets – a technology behind the platform – is highly adaptable, and as was shown by Uber and its different versions of the initial platform, it can mobilize resources quickly and provide very specific solutions if such need arises.

Every modern technology company, whether expanding globally and/or serving a large user base, typically possesses technological advancements and strategic advantages that are easily adaptable to local circumstances and needs, enabling innovation and the creation of new opportunities. Under the time pressure of saving human lives, Uber came up with an innovative solution within just a few months to tackle the complex challenge, scale up operations, and attract more users. This included both drivers who were willing to make an impact and those who needed help, whereas Uber's driver network with small private vehicles was one of the few remaining options for them.

Like Uber, Airbnb leveraged the potential of their huge user community willing to help outside of Ukraine and allowed people to receive an additional source of income, both helpful for domestic tourism and people willing to support without using the purchased service.

However, there is usually a thin line between only driving social initiatives for good causes and innovating for financial purposes and results, which is still the main goal of any business. When a crisis so massive as the war in Ukraine happens unexpectedly, companies with international operations doubtfully can predict how it will unfold and what will be a good reaction; however, being flexible enough or having skilled crisis management with knowledge of how to generally deal with such situations can use it for their own profit, which is not always financial. Making positive societal impact can bring opportunities in the long run, among which are new technologies, processes, know-how, or approaches created for unique situations and then generalized for a broader usage or adapted to serve different goals. Behind the loud and nice actions of the companies may be different reasoning, including potential bonuses for individuals, hidden goals like covering previous brand failures, or intent to increase revenues in territories not directly involved in the crisis by showing off the good sides of the company.

4. Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The study acknowledges several limitations that are important to consider. First, the research context is highly specific due to its focus on a rare and severe disruptions like the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Although comparable situations continue to arise all over the world with the emerging political instability, the uniqueness of such high-risk events may limit the generalizability of the findings. Such disruptions are sporadic and vary greatly in their nature and impact, making it difficult to apply the findings broadly across different geopolitical contexts.

Additionally, both companies subject to the study at hand have previously identified military conflicts as potential risks in their annual reports, suggesting that the issue of responding to disruptions could be partly addressed through enhanced monitoring of geopolitical instabilities and strategic decision-making about whether to operate in potentially unstable regions. This points to a

need for a more proactive approach in corporate strategy, possibly incorporating advanced risk assessment tools and regional analysis to better predict and mitigate the impacts of such crises on business operations instead of responding to them ad-hoc. This analysis highlights the importance of context-specific social support strategies and the challenges in creating universally applicable business continuity plans, especially for multinational corporations operating in volatile areas.

The study, nevertheless, further demonstrates that actions rooted in innovation and agility provide numerous benefits to companies. Embracing responsibility not only drives internal transformation and fosters the development of new, innovative products or services but also reshapes public perception of the brand. For example, if a company adopts a super app strategy and expands into new markets, it becomes crucial to carry forward its positive brand image. Transferring this reputation to new offerings strengthens customer trust and enhances the likelihood of success in these new ventures, creating a synergy between innovation, responsibility, and market expansion.

It has both academic and practical implications, as it contributes to the deeper understanding of sharing economy, platform-based business concepts, and customer relations, and can be developed into a further case study, showcasing the exact methods of transforming a business model in the difficult for everyone times.

Further research could also investigate whether the effects from CSR actions described in this paper persist over a long term or are specific to the crisis period, as well as how better communication of these efforts can help build trust and meaningful relationships with the customer in the long run. As for any of the two companies no data on financial or active users' changes is available specifically for the Ukrainian region or adjacent countries, the precise impact of the war or any measures can't be derived. Further work may also be a quantitative study to understand the outcomes of the business decisions made by Uber and Airbnb.

5. Conclusion

The ongoing war in Ukraine represents a profound global crisis, exerting widespread negative impacts across social, economic, and political domains. While such extreme disruptions demand unique conditions for businesses to navigate, they also present valuable opportunities for research. This study applies Yin's multiple case study approach and provides critical insights into how companies can adapt, innovate, and leverage massive disruptions to sustain operations and even identify avenues for growth. By examining the synergies between innovation, corporate capabilities, and crisis response, this research lays a foundation for understanding how businesses may turn challenges into opportunities. Further exploration, collection and comparison of similar cases and real-world examples presents an exciting trajectory for future research.

This study also underscores the importance of strategic adaptability and innovation in ensuring long-term business success. While platform-based strategies have become increasingly attractive for emerging firms, this research highlights the equally significant role of early-stage performance and the continuous ability to maintain competitive advantages in dynamic environments. Companies like Uber and Airbnb exemplify this adaptability. By mobilizing resources and introducing innovative, crisis-responsive services, they not only demonstrated exemplary CSR but also achieved a "win-win" outcome – supporting communities in need while enhancing their own brand value and customer loyalty. By aligning business objectives with targeted social impact, companies can achieve both societal and organizational benefits, reinforcing the strategic value of CSR during times of crises.

Declaration on Generative AI

The authors have not employed any Generative AI tools.

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