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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### DIGITAL COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION: A TECHNO-CONSCIOUS APPROACH FOR SHARING RESOURCES

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#### Abstract

Collaborative consumption or sharing of resources has always been an important part of human life. When collaborative consumption and digital technology collided, it gave rise to a new economic paradigm known as digital collaborative consumption. The emergence of digital collaborative consumption has paved the way for individuals to shift from conspicuous to conscious consumption of existing resources. The paper aims to discuss the various prospects of digital collaborative consumption and its role in promoting conscious consumption. The paper uses affinity mapping to describe the various areas, players, activities, channels, financial feasibility, and value propositions related to digital collaborative consumption. It also emphasizes the three levels of the collaborative consumption ecosystem. The paper concludes that digital knowledge and trust are pivotal for collaboration through digital techniques. It also suggests that digital techniques should reach the grassroots level for encouraging collaborative consumption at a larger scale.

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#### Introduction:-

“The best collaborations create something bigger than the sum of what each person can create on their own.”

— Anon

Consumption is defined as the use of final goods and services for satisfying human wants and economists have a general argument that consumption is positively connected with happiness and welfare. Conventionally it is believed that money can't buy everything and thus happiness too. Human welfare is measured in terms of the material possessions they own (Creatuse, n.d.). Therefore, to raise welfare, people generally start accumulating material things and move towards conspicuous consumption to maintain their social standings. Conspicuous consumption has eroded economic equality. It has become a big cause of dissatisfaction for those who lack material possessions. The present consumption patterns are intimidating the world with the problem of hyper-consumption which is further arising major ramifications of excessive resource usage (Iscan, 2020). Easterlin Paradox challenges the conventional view which suggests that increased income can raise the level of happiness. It stressed the idea that spending and acquiring material goods is not the source of happiness and enhancing welfare. Consumption is not just confined to fulfilling the physical and psychological needs of people; rather it has strong connotations for their social needs and a huge impact on the environment (Roach et al., 2019).

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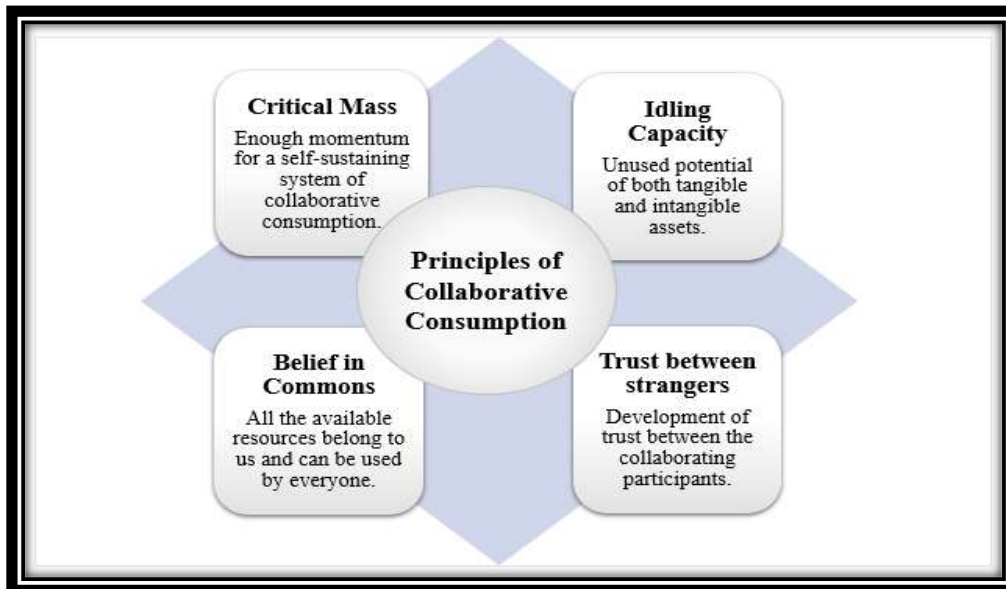
Countries across the globe are confronting the major challenge of resource scarcity and emphasizing the conservation and efficient use of resources. Considerable efforts must be made to create a framework that allows for the conscious use of available resources. People are required to shift to resource-efficient patterns of consumption wherein nothing is being wasted or unutilized (Leismann et al., 2013). The concept of using resources optimally generates the idea of collaborative consumption.

Collaborative Consumption is an economic model based on the sharing of resources rather than owning them. Collaborative consumption emerges when people consciously harmonize their assets for monetary or non-monetary compensation (Correa et al., 2019) and co-creating value from them (Benoit et al., 2017).

Collaborative consumption can be organized into three different systems –product-service, redistribution markets, and cooperative lifestyles (Botsman and Rogers, 2011).

According to the *product-service* system, the accessibility and utility of a product take precedence over ownership. The system enables users to reap the benefits of using products or services without owning them (Nwaorgu, 2018). Car sharing is an example of this system, which allows users to access cars owned by service providers in exchange for a fee (Wahl, 2016). The system of *redistribution markets* entails the relocation of products from the source where they are not needed anymore to the place of scarcity, usually in exchange for money (Born, 2016). Portals like OLX and Quikr offer an online marketplace for owners of different products to trade (redistribute) their redundant belongings in exchange for cash. The *cooperative lifestyle* system expands collaborative consumption beyond physical goods to include sharing of resources such as time, space, skills, and money (Pettersen, 2017). Urban Company (skills), Lendbox (money), and GoWork (space) are leading examples of cooperative lifestyle systems.

The aforementioned systems explain the various facets of collaborative consumption. However, the question of how these systems operate is still unanswered. Therefore, Botsman and Rogers (2010) determined four crucial principles that serve as the foundation of collaborative consumption (Figure 1). These include *critical mass*, *idling capacity*, *belief in the commons* and *trust between strangers*.



**Figure 1:-** Principles of Collaborative Consumption.

**Source:** Self-structured.

*Critical mass* has been taken from the social dynamics. Rogers (2003) defines it as “the point at which enough individuals in a system have adopted an innovation so that the innovation’s further rate of adoption becomes self-sustaining.” A sufficient number of participants is required to provide and seek enough products and services to make the collaborative consumption system self-sustaining (Karmann, 2011). Its structure depends upon the form of

collaborative consumption and the needs and expectations of the service recipients (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). The larger the critical mass configuration, the more efficiently the idle capacity of resources will be utilized.

*Idling capacity* refers to the number of goods and services that are not being used optimally (Sanny, 2019). More specifically, it indicates the untapped potential of resources viz. vehicles, living spaces, equipment, and skills (He, 2020). By providing easy and secure access to seekers; the idle capacity of such resources can be utilized for enhancing aggregate welfare.

In contrast to the *tragedy of commons*, in which people act for their self-interest and end up depleting the common resources, the principle of *belief in the commons* (Wange and Lions, 2016) implies that resources are common and can be used by everyone to extract value from them (Sanny, 2019). The principle suggests that when the resources are mutually shared, they create social value at a vast level. To illustrate, Botsman and Rogers (2011) explain that when people use ride-sharing services, traffic is reduced, people can get around faster, and the environment is also less polluted. Belief in the commons ensures greater cooperation among collaborating participants when fueled by trust.

Trust is the bedrock of collaborative consumption. Most of the time, collaborating participants are unknown to each other. It is required that the users must have trust in the service providers' credibility, honesty, and intentions (Sanny, 2019). Thus, *trust between strangers* is the prerequisite for the smooth operation of collaborative consumption (Karmann, 2011).

#### Collaborative Consumption: A Triadic Model:-

Collaborative consumption is a decentralized model that operates by pooling human and physical capital to offer easy accessibility of various goods and services. The three main actors of the triadic collaborative consumption model (Figure 2) are the owner (of resources), the seeker (for resources), and the digital platform (to connect two actors) (Benoit et al., 2017).

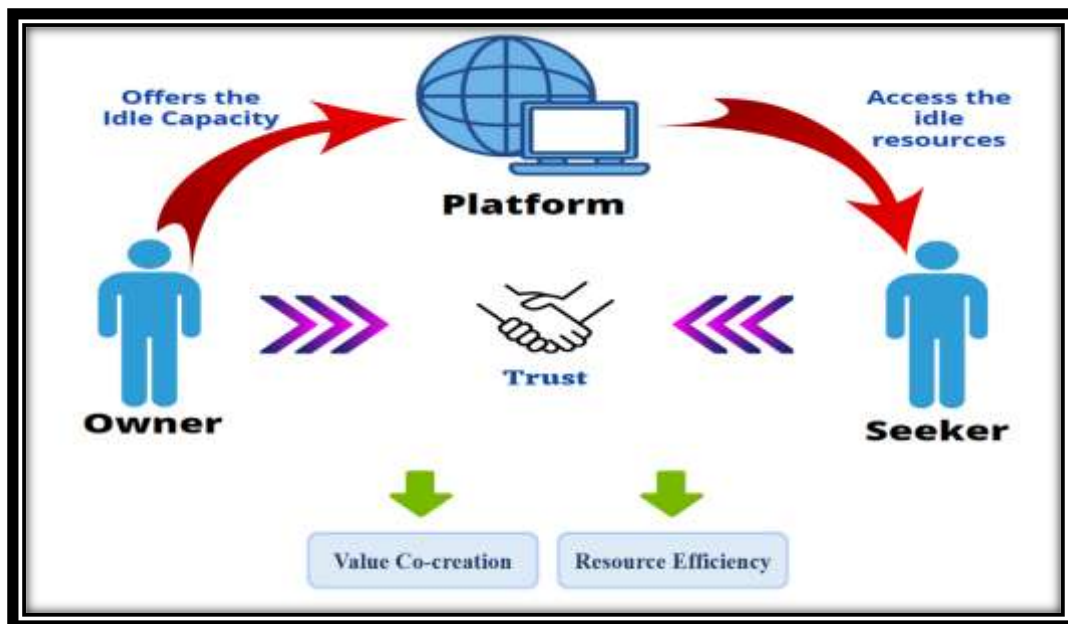


Figure 2:- A Triadic Model of Collaborative Consumption.

Source: Self-structured

Collaborative consumption is not a new phenomenon. Traditionally it occurs in close relationships but the emergence of the digital platform provided an opportunity to connect strangers in such activities. Hence trust has become the key element in collaborative consumption. Owners of the resources offer temporary access (Ertz, 2016) to seekers for monetary or non-monetary rewards and on the other hand, seekers try to fulfill their requirements by getting access to other resources by paying a fee for the same. Networked technologies have facilitated such

exchanges and reduced costs, time, and efforts required to complete such tasks. Trustworthiness is an important element for the effective working of the model (World Economic Forum and PWC, 2017). The three actors involved in collaborative consumption share equal responsibility for co-creating value from available resources and ensuring that they are used consciously.

The service providers create value by assembling resources for the seekers, hence prolonging the life cycle of the available resources (Gronross, 2015). Seekers of idle resources are the cardinal participants of the model who continually co-create value with the service providers (Nadeem et al., 2020). The seekers make use of the underutilized resources and maximize the value of the available assets or services (Gronross, 2015). The existence of digital platforms serves as a logistic hub to fuel the functioning of collaborative consumption (Babson Executive, 2016). The digital platforms facilitate the interaction of distributed and heterogeneous people (Gawer et al., 2021) in various contexts: transportation, hospitality, housekeeping, and personal care services. Thus, the convergence of information, technology, and marketing encourages conscious consumption of existing resources and value extraction from them (Dabbous and Tarhini, 2021). Furthermore, digital collaborative consumption has proved to be a compelling alternative to traditional businesses by digitally disrupting the existing economic paradigm (Dabbous and Tarhini, 2021).

#### **Digital Transition of Collaborative Consumption:-**

The model of collaborative consumption is capturing the attention of an increasing number of people, thereby challenging the traditional notion of private ownership (Sands et al., 2020) and the traditional way of exchange which has limited appeal and geographical constraints. To ascertain comfort for the changed perspective of the consumers, the suppliers have adopted a transition with the help of the internet. With the passage of time, the firms have switched from the traditional form to digital functioning to get better outcomes. Digital transition happens when a specific activity such as business operations, paperwork, physical documents, telephonic or physical order, and purchasing products or services is transitioned or converted to the online mode. This conversion promotes new opportunities, cooperation, convenience, and flexibility for both seekers and owners (O'Carroll, 2018; McFadden, 2012). It also encourages tech-savvy people to engage in collaborative consumption and promote a conscious perspective on the modern world.

Digital transition of collaboration is assisting in connecting a larger group of individuals of interest. Commercial businesses and individuals, by offering on-demand access to goods and services, are transforming themselves into digitally-supported businesses and communities that are helping in reshaping economies.

The focus of digital collaborative business is not on the owner but rather on sharing underutilized resources and providing direct experience based on the mutual trust of service providers and users. Technology has helped in building this trust and creating a safe environment of exchange. Easy availability and accessibility to the technology are the foundation of enhancing collaborative consumption. Consumers are becoming more comfortable with digital purchases. It enhances economic growth and human well-being and also protects the environment.

#### **Affinity Mapping for the Digital Collaborative Consumption:-**

Figure 3 depicts the affinity mapping for diverse aspects of digital collaborative consumption gathered from the literature review. It includes demand and supply-side mediation via key resources and activities performed by digital platforms. It also discusses the various forms in which digital platforms provide value propositions for both the service providers and recipients.

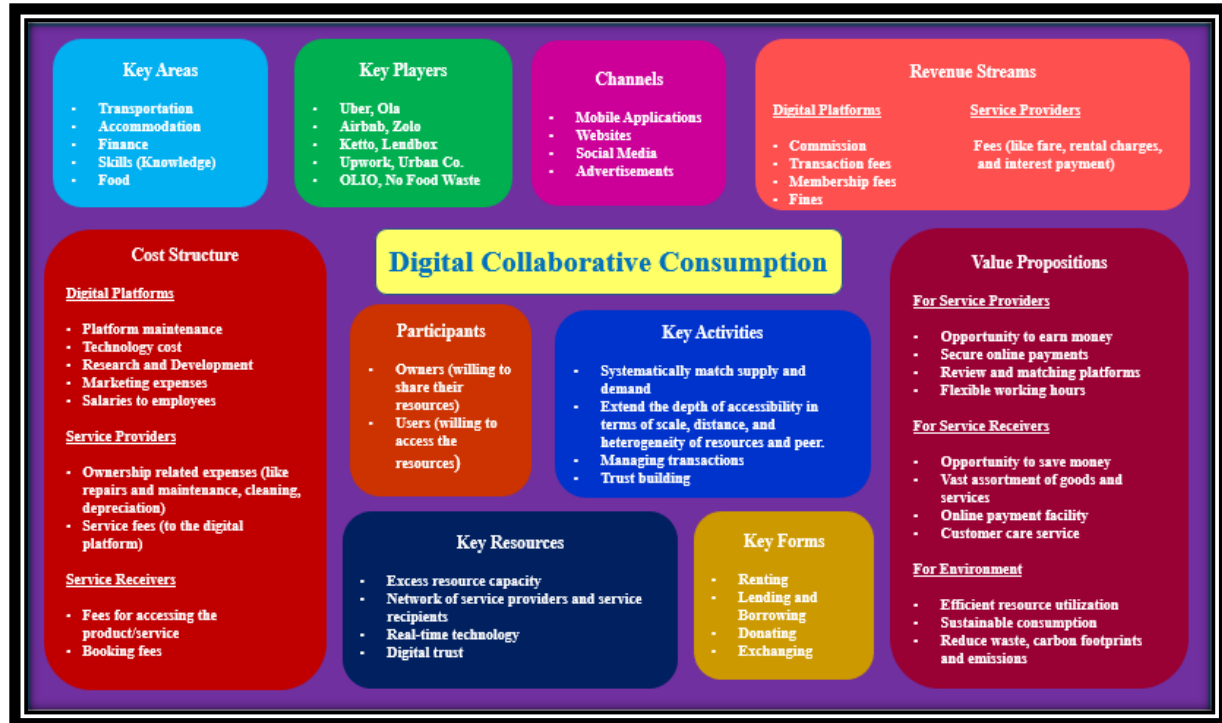


Figure 3:- Affinity Map for Digital Collaborative Consumption

Source: Self-structured

The phenomenon of collaborative consumption is capturing plenteous attention owing to its functioning through digital technology. The increasing number of smartphones (6,378 million users) and internet users (825.30 million) has facilitated the ubiquitous exposition of digital collaborative consumption (UN DESA, 2020; TRAI, 2021). The double-sided market established by digital platforms connects the collaborating participants i.e., owners and seekers of the idle capacity so that both can fetch the benefits of collaboration (Codagnone and Martens, 2016).

The service providers are benefitted from an extra source of income by offering resources to those who need them to attain benefits in return. On the other hand, the service recipients are offered an assortment of products and services on an as-needed basis. Since products and services are offered for temporary access, therefore, the financially restrained individuals enjoy a variety of goods and services without bearing the ownership costs (Guo and Lamberton, 2021). The active involvement and the mutual actions of the collaborating participants allow efficient utilization of the available resources by mitigating their wastage and thus stimulating conscious consumption (Pouri and Hilty, 2021).

The successful functioning of collaborative consumption highly depends upon the network of those individuals who are willing to collaborate, which further necessitates the existence of digital platforms (Nwaorgu, 2018). Digital platforms entwined with Web 2.0 match the collaborating individuals who are otherwise spatially distributed, thereby increasing the depth of collaboration among a diverse group of people and resources (Sutherland, 2018).

Historically, people kept away from sharing with strangers and were confined to sharing only within their trusted social network. Sharing with strangers entails a high risk of theft or another kind of damage (Frenken and Schor, 2017). Digital platforms have made stranger sharing quite appealing and safe by introducing various applications and websites to provide a marketplace for secure, efficient, and reliable transactions. As a mediator, a digital platform keeps track of all the transactions and ensures that the defaulters are penalized and cheated users are compensated. Moreover, the digital platforms also adopt various trust-building techniques like feedback systems, star rating, and review management systems to facilitate both the service providers and receivers with a system to evaluate each other (Pettersen, 2017).

The platforms through their multiple online channels of websites, mobile applications, social media, and advertisements have gained wide recognition. Several digital platforms, including Uber (transportation), Airbnb (accommodation), Ketto (finance), Urban Company (skills), and OLIO (food/meals), have witnessed their businesses exemplified in recent years (Cheng et al., 2021). Renting, borrowing, trading, swapping, giving, lending, and sharing goods and services have occupied their digital seats.

The renting form of collaborative consumption is generally applicable to accommodation and transportation facilities (Guyader, 2018). The millennial population in the world has a significant command over using these accommodation renting applications. To be specific, around 60 per cent of Airbnb users are millennials (Oskam, 2019). Peer-to-peer financial lending and borrowing platforms that are directly governed by the central bank of a country have established quick services. They have made fund transactions at a certain specified pre-fixed interest rate convenient for both the investors and borrowers (Monteiro, 2021; Tretina, 2022). Connecting over different platforms for trading or swapping goods and services (for a minimum fee or other goods and services) has also been made efficient and trustworthy (Philip, 2016; Das, 2015; Madhav, 2016).

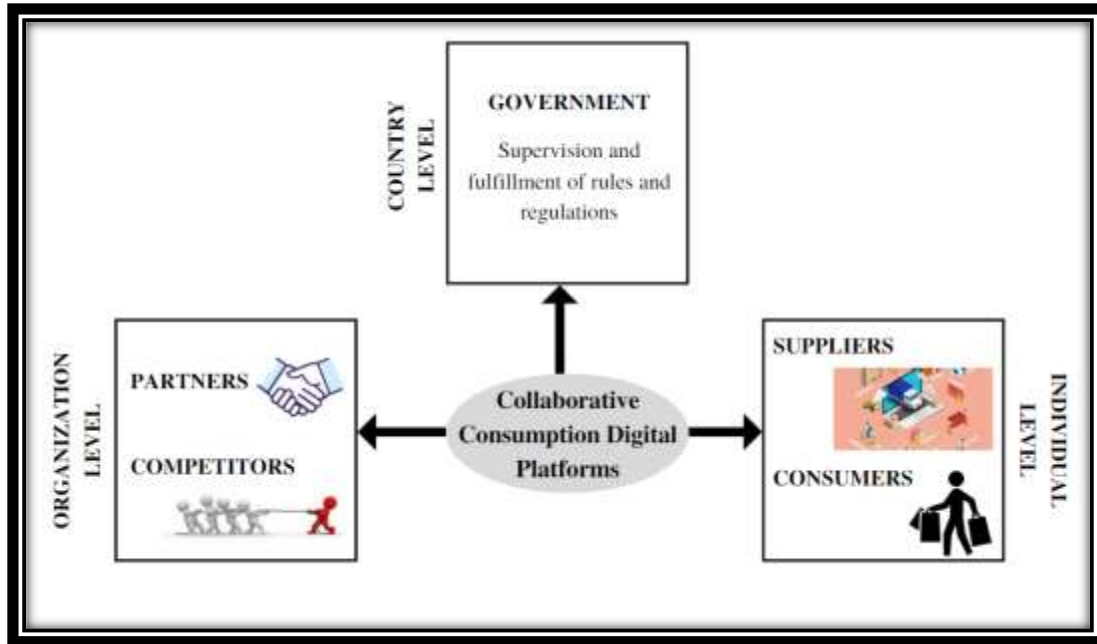
The potential of digital collaborative consumption to generate value from the available resources is heavily dependent on the system's financial viability as well. The creation of value, demand and supply side mediation, and functioning of collaborative consumption involves several costs that are borne by the collaborating stakeholders and digital platforms (Ranjbari et al., 2017). As the owner of the resources, the service provider has to bear various ownership-related expenses such as repairs and maintenance, cleaning, and depreciation so that the product is readily available for the user to access (Guo et al., 2020). In order to find a suitable match for sharing resources, both the service provider and the service receiver pay a service fee and a booking fee (usually a very small amount), respectively, to the digital platform (Telles, 2016).

The evolutionary nature of digital platforms necessitates the need for continuous investment in the maintenance of the platform. Platforms require a commitment to increase both the amount of money spent on technology and the amount of money spent on the people who support and implement that technology (Samuel, 2021). Furthermore, platforms are also required to conduct market research in order to better understand their customers and tailor advertisements to their specific needs and desires. Thus, a huge amount of money is spent on research and development (Rangaswamy et al., 2020).

The existence of sufficient revenue streams is crucial for compensating the costs incurred in collaborative consumption. Considering the service providers, they earn revenue by monetizing their untapped potential (Gorog, 2018). The fees charged by service providers for granting the right to use their assets can take various forms, such as rent, fare, or interest, depending upon the type of service rendered. The revenue of the digital platforms is majorly based on commissioning. The platform deducts some percentage of the total payment in the form of commission from the owner for providing service. The percentage of commission varies for different platforms based on their policies (Washington State University, 2020). Alternative revenue streams include transaction fees, membership fees, fines, and earnings from advertisement views (AltexSoft, 2020).

#### **Collaborative Consumption Ecosystem:-**

The collaborative consumption ecosystem operates on both micro and macro levels including individuals, organizations, and the country in its dynamic framework. All the levels and the entities work together for accomplishing the goals of collaboration. Figure 4 depicts the collaborative consumption ecosystem that involves the presence of different parties interacting with each other for collaboration purposes.



**Figure 4:-** Collaborative Consumption Ecosystem.  
**Source:** Self-structured.

The individual level includes both suppliers (service providers) and consumers that have responsibilities to play in fostering collaborative consumption through digital platforms. These platforms act as a mediator in establishing connections between the collaborating participants (Cheng et al., 2021). Digital collaborative consumption at the individual level encourages on-demand employment opportunities, equal access, conscious consumption of resources, and cooperation leading to efficient economic outcomes.

The synchronization of partners and rivals of the concerned organizations that have carried out their prospects digitally is part of the organizational level. At this level, digital collaborative consumption promotes innovative ideas and opportunities for collaboration, establishes healthy competition among rival firms, increases revenue and profits, and offers prospects of growth in the economy (World Economic Forum, 2015).

In the country, the level is the government that is responsible for upholding the laws and regulations as well as overseeing the organizations' participation in collaborative consumption. The government is responsible for enhancing socio-environmental consciousness by improving the social, economic, and environmental aspects. At this level, digital collaborative consumption fosters social cohesion, economic growth, resource efficiency, economic and social welfare, and environmental protection (Leismann et al., 2013; Cherry et al., 2018).

Thus, the three levels together form the collaborative consumption ecosystem. For the ecosystem to function efficiently, the individual and the organization level are required to participate actively in collaborative consumption. The government (country level) lays its focus on supervision and proper management of the other two levels.

### **Conclusion:-**

A change from ownership to access has boosted not just convenience and comfort but has also paved the road from conspicuous to conscious consumerism. In other words, collaborative consumption aims at regulating the consumption of existing resources instead of reducing them thereby benefitting the society and environment. Digital collaborative consumption provides several advantages, including shared costs, reduced hassles, simplified reservations, and improved company services. Apart from that, it has a significant positive impact on the environment and also has a scope to fulfill future needs. Individuals, companies, and the government all stand to gain the most through collaborative consumption. Individuals participating in collaborative activities can benefit from a simple and user-friendly approach as well as lower costs, while companies can benefit from increased

revenues and healthy competition. Collaborative consumption may minimize pollution (in the case of shared transportation), reduce adverse environmental consequences, and tackle the problem of conscious consumerism in the modern world leading to benefits for the government as well. Thus, digital collaborative consumption has enhanced the functioning of the economy and has transformed individuals into conscious decision-makers.

However, on the contrary, digital trust has been a key challenge for all the enterprises in our technologically advanced world. Since the Covid-19 situation, technology has demonstrated its importance, but the people have not fully embraced it. Lack of digital trust has hindered individuals' ability to participate in digital collaborative consumption, as well as companies' ability to flourish to a great extent. Another major challenge is the lack of digital knowledge and skills. Therefore, putting a little more emphasis on the above-mentioned challenges would go a long way towards improving the economy and can further contribute to social, technical, and economic advancement.

Digital collaborative consumption can grow even further if the government sufficiently concentrates on the inclusion (reaching the grass-roots level) factors in the economy. People's inclusion in terms of technological access and use can assist in increasing the scope of digital collaborative consumption while also advancing the economy into an internet-driven environment. Therefore, increased awareness of conscious consumption and understanding of digital techniques would likely improve collaborative consumption and aid in the long-term sustenance of essential resources.

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