Article

Digital-Platform-Based Ecosystems: CSR Innovations during Crises

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Abstract: Humanitarian crises caused by war, natural disasters, famine, or disease outbreaks are growing globally and are persistent human tragedies threatening human health, safety, and well-being. Digital-platform-based ecosystems' corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities have become a vital tool to support humans during crises. However, little is known about the impact of the innovative CSR practices of digital-platform-based ecosystems during a crisis. Therefore, this study investigates this crucial question. Building on dynamic capabilities theory and using thematic analysis of 89 news articles and data from website sources and reports relating to Airbnb Inc.'s CSR innovation in the Afghan 2021 and the Russia–Ukraine 2022 humanitarian crises, we find that strategic digital-platform-based ecosystem-driven CSR interventions during crises can be helpful for society and for businesses. The results suggest Airbnb.org leveraged its resources and capabilities to provide innovative, quick, and timely responses to redefine refugee resettlement, promoting a platform to harness community partnerships, creating a robust collaboration model with international non-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and initiating a novel financial inclusion strategy for refugees and displaced persons. This result also implies that CSR technological innovations during s crisis can be theoretically explained and have further significant implications for policymakers, companies, and societal stakeholders.

Keywords: digital-platform-based ecosystem; corporate social responsibility; dynamic capabilities; humanitarian crisis

1. Introduction

Crises, whether from a global, regional, national, or ethnic point of view, have inevitably orchestrated an interconnected and interdependent impact on world economies, corporate organizations, and the livelihoods of all and sundry (Cottle 2011; Elmarzouky et al. 2022). The current upswing in crises globally, from geo-political, economic, and religious aspects, has heightened their impact everywhere around the world. As the onus lies on governments across the globe to offer responsive measures to alleviate the knock-on effects of crises on their economies and citizenry (Karabag 2020), corporate organizations also play an integral role through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) function. For corporate organizations, CSR initiatives have created a conduit for responsible business through which firms enact their societal obligations while creating shared value for both shareholders and other stakeholders (Wang et al. 2016). Thus, even in normal times, the impact of a firm's CSR activities in enhancing social and environmental value cannot be underestimated. However, the game-changing character of crises has generally required businesses to re-innovate their CSR strategies to mitigate the effects of the crisis on their pool of stakeholders. Thus, Hill (2020a) argued that business organizations are the primary frontline, who act as "primary response agents" in times of crisis through diverse CSR activities. Corporate organizations, specifically digital-platform-based ecosystems, have

recently been engaged in diverse CSR activities during recent crises as strategic intervenors to provide support for crisis-focused organizations, displaced victims, and refugees.

Previous studies have evidenced the devastative impact of crises on every facet of our social (Ötker-Robe and Podpiera 2013), economic (Rother et al. 2016), organizational (Pearson and Mitroff 2019), and human lives (Sundheim 2020). Although there have been extensive studies on crises and companies' CSR responses to events such as Brexit (Tetlow and Stojanovic 2018), refugee and asylum seeker crises (Kang 2021), and the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Carroll 2021), there are limited academic studies that have examined company's CSR responses to crises in Afghanistan and to the on-going Russia–Ukraine crisis. As the Afghanistan and Russia–Ukraine crises have had significant and devastative impacts on the humanitarian landscape both at the regional and global levels (Dobbins et al. 2019; Pasitselska 2022), there is the need to assess the CSR response strategies deployed by corporate organizations to support both internal and external stakeholders. Thus, the emphasis on firms' CSR response is crucial as this corporate function arguably provides a robust vehicle that drives and reaffirms firms' commitment to mitigating societal challenges and enhancing value creation, especially during times of crisis.

The response of Airbnb, a digital-platform-based ecosystem company, to two major crises received enormous attention due to its global significance and impact. The rationale for the focus on a digital-platform-based ecosystem company, Airbnb, not only lies in the novelty of their CSR intervention model, which has been understudied academically, but also in the company's possession of a capability that could be flipped overnight to enhance its CSR offerings to the two crisis situations. Thus, this study employs dynamic capabilities theory, which assesses a "firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments" (Teece et al. 1997) to offer insights into this strategic CSR intervention. Helfat and Peteraf (2015) describe the concept of dynamic capabilities as "the capacity of an organization to create, extend, or modify its resource base purposefully". The study aims to answer two separate calls. First, to assess the impact of the CSR intervention of digital-platform-based ecosystem companies such as Airbnb during the two crises, and second, to directly respond to the studies of Coombs (2007) and Sellnow and Seeger (2013), who suggested a lack of theoretical and empirical rigor in research relating to crises. This study hence leverages dynamic capabilities theory to frame our analysis, offering a lens through which we examine how companies like Airbnb not only react to immediate crises but also how they strategically leverage their platform capabilities to meet emergent societal needs. By focusing on the innovative CSR responses during the Afghan 2021 and Russia–Ukraine 2022 humanitarian crises, this research fills a critical gap in understanding the intersection of technology, corporate responsibility, and crisis management within the evolving digital landscape.

The study contributes to the existing literature in three ways. First, to the researcher's knowledge, this is the first academic case study of a digital-platform-based ecosystem company's CSR response to the humanitarian Afghanistan and Russia–Ukraine crises. Second, this study directly responds to the positions of Coombs (2007) and Sellnow and Seeger (2013), who emphasized a lack of theoretical and empirical rigor in research relating to crises by providing a theoretical explanation to interventions deployed during a crisis using dynamic capabilities theory. Finally, the study contributes to the literature on technology and CSR during crises and presents an agenda for future research.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the background information and the relevant reviewed literature. Section 3 discusses the methodology and the research approaches employed. The selection of data and source is justified, and the employed techniques for collecting and analyzing research data are explained. Section 4 focuses on the analysis and discussion of the case study with relevant supporting data and Section 5 draws conclusions, discusses limitations, and suggests ideas for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Background of Crises from Different Perspectives

The subject of crises has been defined and studied extensively from different viewpoints by diverse scholars, institutions, and practitioners, making it challenging to establish a common scholarship about what the term means both in theory and practice. The dictionary definition of a crisis, for instance, includes meanings such as "a time of great disagreement, confusion or suffering" and "an extremely dangerous or difficult situation" (Cambridge Dictionary 2021). Early scholars such as Pauchant et al. (1992) described a crisis as a disruption that materially affects a system, threatening its core existence and governance framework. Thus, the sudden change drives normal into abnormal times, with possible adjustments to the impacted community of people either on a global, regional, or national stage (Booth 2015).

From an organizational perspective, previous scholars have defined a crisis as an extremely striking, unanticipated, and potentially disruptive situation that can threaten an organization's goals and have profound implications on its relationships with stakeholders (Williams et al. 2017). What characterizes a crisis is its unexpectedness and uncontrollability, which abruptly impede operations and redefine work functions (Al-Dahash et al. 2016). Regardless of its intensity and the danger it poses both at the individual and community level, Farazmand (2001) argued that the root cause of a crisis cannot be ignored as it helps in understanding the source and nature of the crisis, as no two crises are the same (Shaluf et al. 2003). As such, Walby (2015) argued that crises can be categorized based on their characteristics. Examples of these characteristics have been collated in Table 1.

Table 1. Crisis categorization by characteristics.

Category	Definition	Author(s) and Year
Financial	Any situation where significant financial assets such as stocks suddenly experience a sharp decline in value	Acharya and Richardson (2009); Foster and Magdoff (2009)
Humanitarian	A singular event or a series of events that is threatening in terms of the health, safety, or well-being of a community or large group of people	Ferris and Kirisci (2016) Piot et al. (2014)
Economic	A period where an economy shrinks due to factors such as hyperinflation, stagflation, and stock market crashes	Kirman (2010) Castells et al. (2012)
Fiscal	The inability of a state to bridge a deficit between its expenditures and its tax revenues	O'connor (2017) Toye (2000)
Political	A divergence between the objectives of the government and its people	Chang et al. (2007) Ercan and Gagnon (2014)
Geo-political	The consequence of conflict and dispute between states and organized political–spatial groups over controlling and seizing both natural and human geographic factors	Ágh (2016) Rutland (2015)
War/Civil unrest	A state of conflict or protest against major sociopolitical issues or between political actors within a country	Epstein et al. (2005) Sakwa (2017)

Source: Table developed by the authors.

Owing to the multidimensional characteristics of a crisis, as shown in Table 1, Bundy et al. (2017) observe that "we have only just begun to scratch the surface of our understanding" and invite greater investigation of, most importantly, the theoretical mechanisms that interplay during and in response to a crisis (Coombs 2010). Research in this field has been

largely criticized for its lack of theoretical and empirical rigor since many of the results and recommendations are based on case studies or anecdotal evidence (Sellnow and Seeger 2013; Coombs 2007). According to Sellnow and Seeger (2013), a critique of the theorizing of crisis has always centered on crisis communication from the perspective of management, response, resolution, and significance of failures in corporate responsibility from destructive events such as pandemics, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, chemical spills, terrorist attacks, etc. Coombs (2007) on the other hand expresses how crisis communication theories offer a framework for understanding the dynamic nature of a crisis. However, both studies bemoan the limited application of metatheoretical considerations and theoretical advancements of how theories from other disciplines such as organizational studies, management, accounting, and social sciences have been integrated and applied to real-world crises as a whole and not the aftermath expressed through crisis management. Thus, while theories for crisis communication are well established in the literature, theories examining real crises are limited, especially in the light of exploring theories from other disciplines. Again, many academics continue to bemoan the silo effect, noting that researchers from various viewpoints frequently speak past one another without capitalizing on possibilities to develop inter-disciplinary knowledge (James et al. 2011; Kahn et al. 2013) to explain the various interplays in a crisis. As a result, there is limited consensus and integration across disciplines, as there are multiple and sometimes contradictory prescriptions of what a crisis represents. Nonetheless, amidst the contradictions and diversity of viewpoints of the antecedents and meaning of a crisis from the arguments above, it is undeniable that we must underscore the significant impact any crisis has on economies, companies, individuals, and likelihoods in general, including the aftermath effects.

2.2. Platform-Based Ecosystems

A "platform-based ecosystem" is characterized as a network in which a platform owner promotes third parties to create complementary ideas, and the ensuing network of enterprises exhibits substantial interdependencies (Parida et al. 2019; Hussainey et al. 2022). Platform-based ecosystems have emerged to contain a few characteristics such as search engines, social networking, content and reviews, booking, shopping, payment, and sharing platforms, making it possible to combine these broad functionalities in one space (Mody et al. 2020). For instance, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok started initially as social networking sites but are now vibrant marketplaces that provide similar services to eBay and Amazon (Jacobson and Segebarth 2019).

One of the most popular ecosystems is sharing platforms (see Figure 1) which combine broad functionalities that match capacity-constrained assets with an ever-increasing consumer demand due to the peculiarity of its business approach, which excludes ownership of the assets provided on the platform (Frenken and Schor 2017).

Digital-Platform-Based Ecosystems

Even though digital markets are inadequately defined, Täuscher and Laudien (2017) posited four characteristics for identifying a company as a digital marketplace. First, digital marketplaces connect demand and independent supply side players (individuals or organizations) through a digital platform. Individuals can participate in the market on both the supply side and the demand side; therefore, they are not necessarily two distinct groups of people. Second, these parties engage in direct encounters to begin and consummate economic agreements. Third, the platform offers a regulatory and institutional framework for transactions and, fourth, the platform does not manufacture or exchange considerable commodities or services.

Platform-based businesses such as media outlets and credit cards have revolutionized the global marketplace by bringing a pool of actors together, regardless of their geographical location, into the demand and supply nexus (Zhu and Iansiti 2012). The increased used of internet services has occasioned an exodus of consumers to online marketplaces, especially with the advent of digital giants such as Google, Amazon, and Apple (Cozzolino et al.

2021), which has significantly influenced the digital-platform-based ecosystem economy. Although there is no consensus on what the meaning of a digital-platform-based ecosystem is, there is evidence attesting to the commonality of the meaning on how digital platforms orchestrate an ecosystem of actors to co-create value (Lusch and Nambisan 2015) as shown in Figure 1.
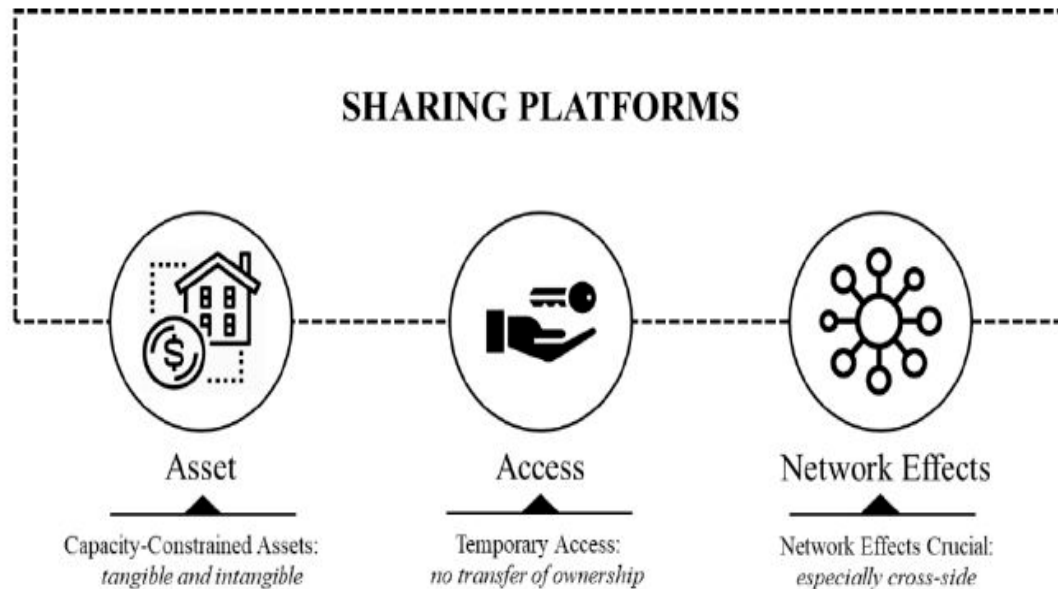

Figure 1. Overview of key features of sharing platforms. Source: Jacobson and Segebarth (2019).

Digital platforms are a pervasive phenomenon that threaten incumbents by altering how digital products and services are consumed and provided. Whereas traditional enterprises produce value inside the confines of a corporation or supply chain, digital platforms co-create value using an ecosystem of autonomous agents (Hein et al. 2020). For example, the interaction between electrical product manufacturers and Amazon or eBay and smartphone manufacturers and Android is facilitated by a digital platform infrastructure (Cozzolino et al. 2021). Uber's network of seven million drivers dwarfs local taxi services (Iqbal 2024), while Facebook hosts two billion active users and businesses every month, far exceeding the number of newspaper subscriptions (Constine 2017). All of these digital platforms rely on the ubiquitous availability of the ever-evolving resources and capabilities of information technology, including cloud computing, in-memory databases, and analytical solutions for big data, which firms internalize for their competitive advantage and for CSR activities as well.

The hospitality industry, specifically the accommodation booking sector, has also felt the impact of digital-platform-based ecosystems. Hotel chains do not wait for customers to search for their hotels on their parent websites but rather resort to listing their range of room varieties, including pricing, promotions, and other exclusive offers, on digital platform sites such as Booking.com, Expedia, Orbitz, TripAdvisor, and KAYAK (Cozzolino et al. 2021). However, what the industry considers a disruptive entrance is the presence of digital-platform-based ecosystems such as the likes of Airbnb that have diluted accommodation offerings and provided business opportunities for listing private properties to let by landlords for short- and long-term vacation rentals to tourists and holidaymakers (Cavique et al. 2022). Ecosystems such as Airbnb have challenged the adage "Don't let strangers into your home" as the economic and social benefits that come with this venture far outweigh the security threats posited by the aforementioned axiom. The proliferation of Airbnb-style businesses has since led an increase in consumer patronage as an alternative to hotel and short-term bookings as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Digital-platform-based ecosystems (accommodation).

Global Players	Regional Players	Niche Players
Airbnb	Traveloka	Anyplace
Vrbo	Despegar/Decolar	Coliving
Wimdu	eDreams	9flats
Booking.com	PegiPegi	InstantWorldBooking
Expedia	Rakuten	Only Apartments
TripAdvisor	Riparide	Habicus Group
Agoda		
Trip.com		

Source: The authors developed the table.

2.3. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

In his disquisition—The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits—Friedman Milton (Friedman 1970, 2007) maintains that businesses cannot have a social responsibility even in a vague sense, as only people can have such responsibilities. However, Hill (2020b) argues sharply that Milton could not have predicted in 1970 that his popular *New York Times* piece would fall into a global pandemic for instance. He may be astounded that CSR is seeing a resurgence half a century after he castigated directors for indulging in "hypocritical window-dressing" by squandering shareholders' funds "for a general social interest". Nonetheless, Friedman acknowledged that "one way for a company to generate goodwill as a byproduct of spending that is wholly justified in its self-interest was through acts of social responsibility" (as cited in Hill 2020a).

CSR is characterized by various definitions, as this area is condensed with concepts. According to Lindgreen and Swaen (2010), it is a management technique that increases social concerns associated with an organization's internal and external environment but Latif and Sajjad (2018) consider CSR as a strategic utilization of corporate power for socially responsible initiatives. However, Carroll (1999) explains CSR from a non-economic stance and not as a social technique, as the economic component of CSR is what the firm does for itself, while the non-economic component is what it does for others and society. The necessity of CSR projects has expanded in tandem with corporations' evolving knowledge of how their activities affect stakeholders in the sense that CSR activities are not only for stakeholder relational purposes or for stable times, but are especially for times of crisis as well (Ashraf et al. 2021; Shohaieb et al. 2022).

Wanderley et al. (2018) interestingly further noted that the need for social initiatives embodied in CSR is part of the concept of capitalism in the contemporary global corporate context, but Porter and Kramer's (2006) view on this position contradicts this assertion. With regard to the latter, a firm's ability and its strategic approach to shared value by linking its competitive advantage to CSR through deploying its resources and capabilities are critical in this dynamic marketplace. Critics of this disposition by Porter and Kramer, such as Wilson (2015), who is a proponent of purposeful or purpose-driven business, argue that businesses should create profitable long-term solutions in tandem with the company's vision of being responsible. This concept falls short in the context of this study as it does not account for how the strategic deployment of a company's existing resources and capabilities, especially in times of crisis and in the short term, can be adapted to changing environments. For Porter and Kramer (2006), CSR has evolved from a mere philanthropic activity to a more strategic way of deploying a firm's internal resources and capabilities as a competitive advantage to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of a company.

The emphasis on the deployment of a firm's resources and capabilities as CSR tools as mentioned above, in alignment with the proposition of Porter and Kramer (2006), is crucial in examining how companies, both in normal times and in times of crisis, can use these to their advantage as well as test the robustness and resilience of their CSR strategies, initiatives, and activities. Thus, in times of crisis, a firm's resources and capabilities

deployed for CSR must be flexible enough to adapt to external shocks and the environment (Fox et al. 2020).

CSR Activities in Times of Crisis

Historically, corporations have incorporated CSR into their operations mostly when the economy was thriving; however, CSR may also be employed as a strategic approach to recover and sustain businesses during a period of adversity (Ashraf et al. 2021; Shohaieb et al. 2022; Moussa and Elmarzouky 2023). The prior literature presents evidence of the increased engagement of CSR activities with stakeholders in times of crisis, heightened by the effects of the pandemic (Baatwah et al. 2022). According to Šain (2021), previous studies examining CSR and its impact on stakeholders have shown that CSR activities in times of crisis have "an insurance-like function that mitigates adverse effects" on stakeholders. Companies that have practiced robust CSR initiatives before the crisis are likely to suffer fewer losses, be more robust and resilient, and recover from unforeseen shocks faster than those that did not (Qiu et al. 2021). Especially for companies that have extensive experience and exposure in dealing with humanitarian crises and their related aftermaths, effective and consistent CSR activities have grounded and tested their CSR practices, which puts them in a better place than other companies (Qiu et al. 2021). The question that has not been answered in the prior literature, which is of paramount importance in the scope of delivering CSR activities, especially in times of crisis, is how firms have utilized their internal resources and capabilities dynamically to their advantage to prevent exposure and vulnerability of their systems and processes when needed most to mitigate the impact on stakeholders.

In the context of digital-platform-based ecosystems and CSR activities, a comprehensive bibliometric analysis conducted by Khuan et al. (2023) shows a lack of prior studies in this area. Studies closer to this topic have examined the economic impact, including affordability (Zervas et al. 2017); social impacts such as mobility and reductions in air pollution using sharing bikes and cars (Cohen and Kietzmann 2014); and stakeholder value creation (Carrasco-Farré et al. 2022). Thus, apart from the above and corporate philanthropy activities, the question of how companies have been able to reconfigure their internal resources and capabilities to advance their CSR activities in abnormal times, for instance, has not received attention in the prior literature.

As such, how digital-platform-based ecosystems can drive CSR initiatives through the deployment of their resources and capabilities viz-a-viz the collective efforts of the actors in the ecosystem has received less attention both in normal times and especially in times of crisis. Thus, in times of crisis, the question of how digital-platform-based ecosystems such as Airbnb can deliver collective efforts and value in a rapidly changing environment during a crisis has not been researched. This study seeks to explore this question.

2.4. Theoretical Considerations: Dynamic Capabilities

In their paper, Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Management, Teece et al. (1997) defined dynamic capabilities as "the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments". Dynamic capabilities can be differentiated from operational or "everyday" capabilities; in contrast, Helfat and Peteraf (2015) refer to the former as "the capacity of an organization to purposefully create, extend, or modify its resource base". This brings into context how organizations have the flexibility to deconstruct and reconstruct internal resources and capabilities to meet rapidly changing environments which are typical of crises. Teece's concept of dynamic capabilities essentially says that what matters for a business is corporate agility, that is, the capacity to (1) sense and shape opportunities and threats, (2) seize opportunities, and (3) maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting, and, when necessary, reconfiguring the business enterprise's intangible and tangible assets. The dynamic capabilities framework—a multidisciplinary model of a firm with dynamic capabilities at its core—is illustrated in Figure 2.
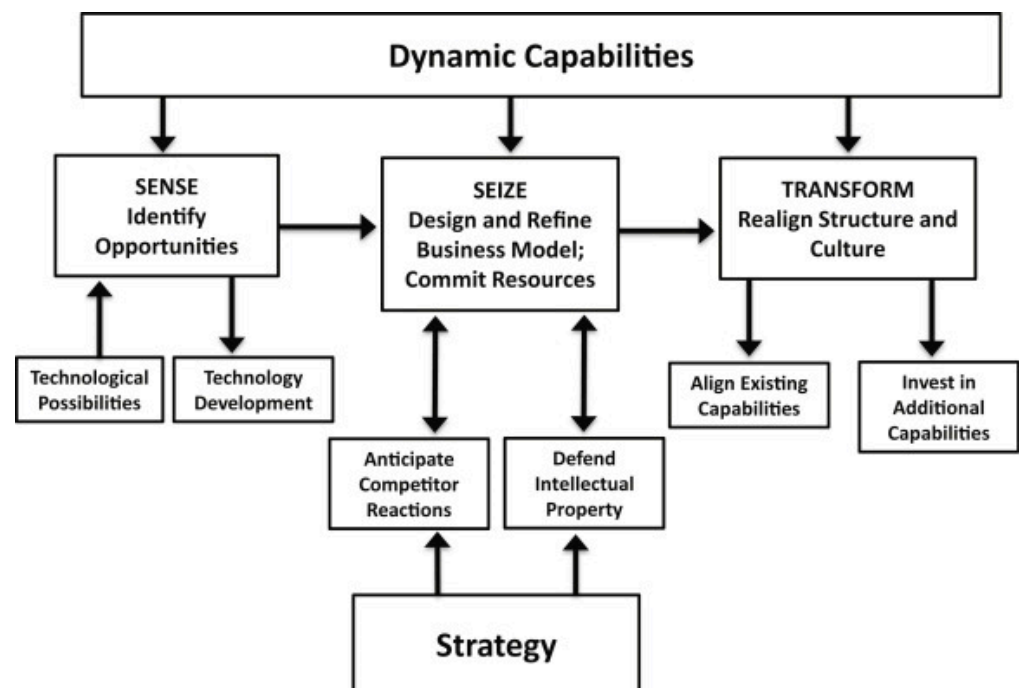
Figure 2. Dynamic capabilities framework—source: simplified schema of dynamic capabilities, business models, and strategy (Teece et al. 1997).

The basic assumption of the dynamic capabilities framework according to Barreto (2010) is that core competencies should be used to modify short-term competitive positions that can be used to build a longer-term competitive advantage, but Teece and Pisano (2003) finds this to be more restrictive and rather maintains that the goal is not for merely short-term efficiency, as in classic management, but rather the maintenance of "evolutionary fitness" over time. Digital-platform-based ecosystems possess some dynamic capabilities that enable them to reconfigure their resources and capabilities (Garud et al. 2022). To accomplish this, digital-platform-based ecosystems must be able to respond rapidly and effectively to threats, opportunities, and even crises. Thus, the strength of a firm's dynamic capabilities determines the speed and degree of aligning the firm's resources and capabilities to meet consumer needs and emergencies (Teece and Pisano 2003). To achieve this, digital-platform-based ecosystems must be able to continuously sense and seize opportunities and to periodically transform aspects of the organization to proactively reposition to address crises as they arise.

Linking dynamic capabilities theory to the concept of CSR, as posited by Porter and Kramer (2006), digital-platform-based ecosystems are tactically placed to sense and seize opportunities by reconfiguring their internal resources and capabilities in times of crisis to offer strategic CSR interventions to society. This study therefore aims to explore how Airbnb, a digital-platform-based ecosystem company, was able to exploit its internal resources and capabilities to deliver strategic and timely CSR interventions in the Afghanistan and Russia–Ukraine crises.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Method and Data

This study applies an exploratory research approach, as exploratory studies are especially useful when the phenomenon under study is very recent and little academic research has touched upon it (Olawale et al. 2023). As there is limited previous academic research on digital-platform-based companies' CSR innovations in times of humanitarian crisis, an exploratory investigation is a natural fit for this study. The research design applies a case study approach to Airbnb as a digital-platform-based ecosystem company. A case

study design, according to Yin (2018), is especially applicable when the research question seeks to explain a contemporary phenomenon, focusing on how and why its social circumstances occur, and aims to provide an in-depth description of the social phenomenon within its real-world context. The study uses qualitative data sourced from secondary sources through a variety of materials such as news articles, reports, publications, and company websites which are popularly used in the exploration of a phenomenon (Capelle-Blancard and Monjon 2012). This study uses secondary sources from the BBC, CNN, CBS News, CTV News, the *Daily Mail*, Forbes News, the *Irish Times*, Bloomberg News, Vox News, the Airbnb company website, publications from the UK Government website (UK Gov), and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports. First, altogether, 198 documents were extracted from news articles, reports, publications, and websites. Second, the researchers used an exclusion criterion and omitted 50 documents from unreliable sources (defined as unverified and individual-run outlets as compared to media institutions such as the BBC, CNN, etc.). A further 59 documents were omitted due to repeated information. This was reviewed by a third party to aid a controlled and systematic analysis (Bowen 2009). In total, 89 documents were used for the analysis.

3.2. Data Analysis

This study employs a thematic analysis. Using a thematic analysis for this study, both researchers aim to recognize patterns and themes within the data that function as the categories for analysis popularly used in previous studies (Elmarzouky et al. 2023). This study uses sentences as the unit of analysis consistently used in prior studies, as they provide a precise level of accuracy and information that is complete, reliable, and meaningful (Milne and Adler 1999). Hence, within the thematic analysis procedure, both researchers, through a manual approach, thoroughly performed coding separately, and they reviewed and discussed similarities and differences objectively. Afterward, both researchers used the selected data and performed coding and category construction based on the data's characteristics (Bowen 2009), as shown in Appendix A.

4. Results

4.1. Case Study Context

4.1.1. Airbnb Company Profile

The event of two hosts welcoming guests to their San Francisco home led to the birth of Airbnb, a digital-platform-based ecosystem company, in 2007, which currently hosts over 4 million letting suppliers who have received more than 1.2 billion guests across over 220 countries and regions globally. The Airbnb business model allows the financial benefits associated with tourism to be shared with the people and places in the ecosystem (Airbnb.com 2021c). Since its inception, the company has generated billions of dollars in remunerations for hosts (Forbes 2021). Airbnb commits 400,000 shares of its stock to support Airbnb.org, the company's non-profit organization dedicated to facilitating temporary stays for people in times of crisis around the world. It is worth noting that Airbnb.org leverages Airbnb Inc.'s capabilities and resources, i.e., technology and services, to carry out its charitable purpose of emergency response, and has provided stays to evacuees, relief workers, refugees, asylum seekers, and frontline workers fighting the spread of COVID-19 (Elmarzouky et al. 2021).

4.1.2. Afghan Crisis: Post-Withdrawal Evacuation Humanitarian Crisis

After the Donald Trump-led administration and Taliban signed a deal on 29 February 2020 in Doha (Qatar), which involved the withdrawal of US troops taking part in the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) from Afghanistan, the Joe Biden administration announced a mass evacuation of US citizens, persons who have worked with the US, and vulnerable Afghan citizens (Drossart 2021). The post-withdrawal scenario of evacuations, chaos, and scrambling for flights, and other ground realities, causing a humanitarian catastrophe (Bloomberg 2021) amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, meant that access to healthcare, ces-

sation of aid from the West, and massive economic hardship devastated the populace (Drossart 2021). While relief organizations, including United Nations agencies and the Red Cross, played significant roles in lessening the pain of the crisis, with countries such as China, India, Pakistan, the UAE, Iran, Qatar, and Turkey sending aid such as food, shelter, and medical supplies (Jain et al. 2021), corporate organizations have recently, after the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, responded considerably to crises through various CSR initiatives and activities (He and Harris 2020; Huda et al. 2021).

4.1.3. Russia–Ukraine Crisis

The annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula by Russia in 2014, a significant escalation in the Russia–Ukraine conflict, and the events of 24 February 2022 have led to the biggest humanitarian crisis and loss of human life and property since WWII (Asadzade and Izadi 2022). Numerous Ukrainian migrants have unprecedentedly fled to other European countries, including the UK. As a crisis of this magnitude seldom develops as anticipated, the local therapeutic infrastructure, such as refugee shelters along the borders, i.e., in Poland, Hungary, Romania, etc., has been overwhelmed (Statista 2022). Aside from the efforts by international relief agencies, the peculiarity of this humanitarian crisis orchestrated several governmental humanitarian interventions by countries like the UK through the "Homes for Ukraine" scheme, which has provided a platform for UK citizens and charities to support Ukrainians fleeing the war (UK Gov 2022). Apart from the withdrawal of large corporations and multinationals from the Russian market, corporate citizenship has been evident through the diversity of CSR activities, aimed at lessening the rippling effects of this humanitarian crisis (Juric 2022; Marchese et al. 2022)

4.2. Conceptual Snapshot

The conceptual snapshot shows the sense of synergy and coordination made possible through the deployment of the dynamic capabilities and resources of Airbnb. Apart from the fact that the capabilities and resources deployed by Airbnb can meet the multi-faceted needs of the various stakeholders involved in the humanitarian and social good net, another point worth noting is the complexity and sophistication these capabilities and resources provide in a timely and quick manner, as well as the level of inclusion and accessibility they make possible in response to the challenges posed by the crisis. A snapshot of the comprehensive and robust dynamism of Airbnb's capabilities and resources, especially in ensuring that the diversity of stakeholders is utilized to achieve this feat in a timely manner, is summarized in Figure 3.

Airbnb Inc., through its charitable wing, Airbnb.org, has exploited the dynamic capabilities of its resources, i.e., technology and services, to provide strategic CSR offerings in the humanitarian crisis caused by the Afghan and Russia–Ukraine crises. As Porter and Kramer (2006) argued, the deployment of strategic CSR initiatives is critical for a company's competitive advantage, and, in the case of Airbnb, provides a strategic approach to recover and sustain the business during and after a period of adversity (Ashraf et al. 2021; Alkaraan et al. 2022; Alkaraan et al. 2024).
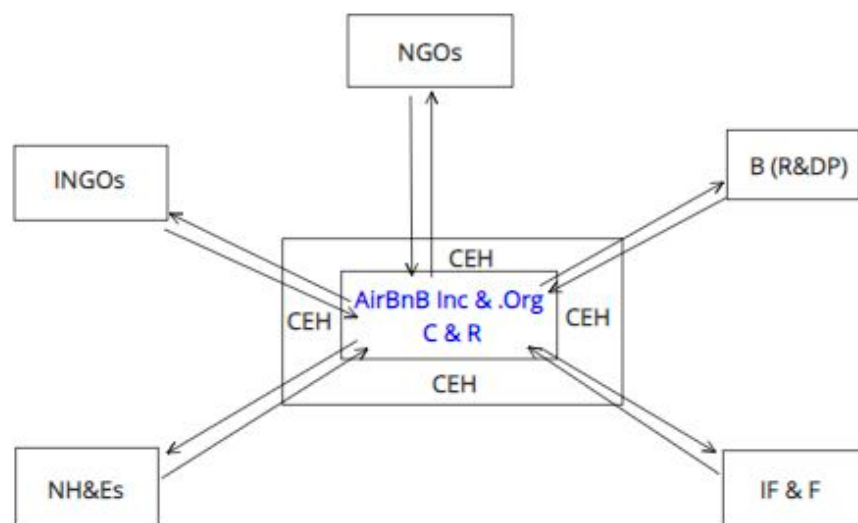
Figure 3. Airbnb strategic CSR innovation snapshot—source: developed by the authors.

5. Discussion

The global presence of Airbnb provides the company with a wide reach, impact, and diversity of stakeholders and partners it pulls together through the deployment of its resources and capabilities strategically for CSR. Airbnb delivered several successful test-run humanitarian housing programs for vulnerable groups in 2012 during the Hurricane Sandy crisis and, most recently, provided housing for frontline workers during COVID-19. The success of the company's CSR interventions during the peak of COVID-19 and the consistent response to the crisis have thus provided the company with expertise, experience, and exposure and tested their internal capabilities and resources. This has put the company in a resilient and robust position for strategic CSR offerings. This unequivocally corroborates with Martínez and Cervantes' (2022) and Ashraf et al.'s (2021) argument that companies that have practiced robust CSR initiatives before any crises are likely to suffer fewer losses, be more robust and resilient, and recover from unforeseen shocks and circumstances faster than those that did not have or had insufficient CSR operations. Thus, Jessica Reese, Vice President of Institutional Development of HIAS, succinctly stated that "Our emergency partnership for the Ukraine crisis leverages five years of lessons learned and best practice established from the HIAS-Airbnb partnership serving refugees, asylum seekers and those forcibly displaced by conflict". This reiterates the position above described by the authors.

5.1. Redefining Refugee Resettlement (from Refugee Camps to Welcoming Homes)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been the lead organization spearheading the temporal resettlement of refugees, displaced persons, and asylum seekers for over a century using old, aged refugee camps which are spread across countries that host these victims (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2022). Recent events, for example, have marked the tenth anniversary of Jordan's Za'atari refugee camp shown in Figure 4 which started with 450 victims in 2012 and currently holds over 80,000 victims (Carlisle 2022).

Figure 4. Jordan's Za'atari refugee Camp—source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2022).

The UNHCR estimates that about 89.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2021 as a result of conflict, human rights violations, or events extremely disturbing public order. The figure below illustrates the breakdown of the population of displaced persons.

Narrowing the context of these figures as shown in Figure 5 to the Afghan and Russia–Ukraine crises, the UNHCR reports that 4.1 million people have been displaced in Afghanistan, with a further 5.7 million being held in refugee camps in host communities in neighboring countries. For the Russia–Ukraine situation, UNHCR reports show, as of July 2022, the following statistics: 5.6 million individual refugees, over 8.7 border crossings from Ukraine, and more than 7.1 million internally displaced people in Ukraine. Although refugee camps have proven beneficial, they also come with serious negative impacts at different levels as shown in Table 3.

Figure 5. Global refugee trends—source: UNHCR Global Trends Report (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2021).

Table 3. Different levels of impact of living in refugee camps.

Type of Impact	Definition	Author(s)
Psychological and mental health	Overall well-being and psychological state	Kizilhan and Noll-Hussong (2020)
Economic	Financial situations and access to job opportunities	Alloush et al. (2017)
Health	Issues of disease outbreak, personal hygiene, and medical care	Vonen et al. (2021)
Education	Restricted access to education opportunities and facilities	Shohel (2022)
Security	Personal threats, crime, and domestic violence	Lukunka (2012)
Social	Social exclusion, emotional support, and restricted exposure	Fajth et al. (2019)
Family life	Restricted family time and development	Robertson et al. (2016)

Source: The authors created this table.

Airbnb Inc. through its charitable wing, Airbnb.org, leveraged its resources and capabilities, i.e., technology and services, to redefine the refugee resettlement concept through several fundraising efforts and free and discounted stays to fund crisis victims to stay in the welcoming homes of the hosts on its platform (Airbnb.com 2021c). From Australia to France, working with different governments and UN agencies, more than 100,000 hosts on the Airbnb platform offered to open up their homes and have provided accommodation to over 75,000 refugees from these two crises, which answers to the security issues previously highlighted by Lukunka (2012). Complementing its CSR efforts with initiatives such as the Airbnb.org Refugee Fund and the compelling message of "In times of crisis, be a Host", the company has been able to use its capabilities to draw both internal and external support with this initiative, which has changed the phase of refugee resettlement, thus encouraging new hosts and potential hosts into its pool of listings as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Airbnb signage for the "Host a Refugee" campaign—source: Gebbia (2021); Airbnb.com (2021d).

Airbnb Founder Brian Chesky added,

> "As tens of thousands of Afghan refugees resettle around the world, where they stay will be the first chapter in their new lives. For these 20,000 refugees, my hope is that the Airbnb community will provide them with not only a safe place to rest and start over, but also a warm welcome home". (Airbnb.com 2021c; Forbes 2021)

Thus, through this CSR intervention, Airbnb has connected over 25,000 refugees to temporary housing, providing a platform for their socio-economic development as well as victims' psychological health (Forbes 2021). A testifying victim says "I feel like I'm staying in my own house. Even though I don't know this area, I don't know the people, I feel 100% safe and I am happy here—Shaheen, an Afghan refugee in the U.S" (Forbes 2022). This, for example, lessens the challenges of issues relating to mental health and security, as observed in the previous literature by Vonen et al. (2021) and Lukunka (2012). This redefinition of refugee resettlement through the CSR intervention of Airbnb aligns and corroborates with Teece et al.'s (1997) and Teece and Pisano's (2003) argument that a firm's dynamic capabilities are able to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments.

5.2. Community Partnerships

A distinct feature of digital-platform-based ecosystems is the players, i.e., the suppliers and customer base, who form a community that the platform builds over time and readily relies on as first-point contacts for the dissemination of new information, developments, and initiatives introduced by the platform owner (Hein et al. 2020). To keep Airbnb's business afloat amidst the intense pressure to deliver and expand their CSR mandate of providing temporal housing relief for refugees fleeing the Afghan and Russia–Ukraine humanitarian crises, the company demonstrated how dynamic and flexible their internal capabilities and resources are in adapting to these crises.

With a call to existing Airbnb hosts and other potential charity-centric customers (CCCs) within its platform community, the company was able to, in a short turnaround time, deploy its technology to make room for existing and first-time user customers to host their available spaces for free to aid the expansion of their free and discounted housing program. After the announcement and activation of the "Host a Refugee" campaign, and after waiving all fees on all refugee's stays, Airbnb, on the first day, registered more than 25,000 people within the community who had spaces to offer for the victims, with more than 1000 people signing up daily to share their homes with refugees (Forbes 2022; Airbnb.com 2022b). As Teece and Pisano (2003) argued in the prior literature, the strength of a firm's dynamic capability is in the speed, i.e., the "response time", and degree of aligning firm resources to the changing environment. Airbnb's ability to respond rapidly and effectively to the crisis has been phenomenal, especially with the swift absorption of 25,000 hosts on its platform on the first day, followed by 1000 daily (Airbnb.com 2022a). A newcomer host stated:

> "I already donate to support Airbnb.org's work, but I wanted to do more". (Airbnb.com 2021a)

> "When I saw that Airbnb.org was going to house 20,000 refugees, I wanted to answer the call for help and sign up to Host a refugee family. . .Quinci and her husband". (Airbnb.com 2021b)

This, in essence, further evidences how Airbnb has been able to sense, seize, and shape opportunities and threats during the crisis which supports the prior literature (Teece et al. 1997). With this new base of over 100,000 new hosts contracted through these two crises, Airbnb can leverage this pool of newcomers to expand its CSR and even business offerings to its current and future customers. First, these newcomers who may be interested in the short-term accommodation business would potentially choose to stay with Airbnb in the future. Second, Airbnb, through the goodwill achieved through their CSR efforts during this crisis, may present the business to their newcomers for consideration. Third,

competitors will find it difficult to win over these newcomers as the crisis has established an informal sense of loyalty to Airbnb, and, lastly, potential landlords who may want to venture into this business may want to join Airbnb due to the publicity of its strategic CSR intervention during these two crises. Thus, Porter and Kramer's (2006) advocacy for the use of capabilities and resources as tools of CSR for a firm's competitive advantage is evidenced in Airbnb's approach to this crisis. As of 14 March 2022, more than 36,800 new hosts were signed up through Airbnb.org to offer their homes to refugees around the world in just the first two weeks (Airbnb.com 2022c).

5.3. INGO and NGO Partnerships

Building partnerships during emergencies amongst players, i.e., corporate organizations, governments, international non-profits, and non-governmental organizations, in the humanitarian space over the years has been crucial in delivering collective efforts to lessen humanitarian crises of varying degrees (Busch and Givens 2013). Through partnerships, players share expertise, experience, and resources to accelerate efforts to provide solutions in times of crisis (Chen et al. 2013). Airbnb partnered with several international non-governmental organizations and local non-governmental organizations in both crises in the areas of immigration, refugee protection, advocacy, education, legal, and resettlement services as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. List of partner organizations.

Name of Non-Profit/NGO	Core Mandate	Scope of Operation
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	Humanitarian aid, refugee protection, and resettlement service organization	Global
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)		
International Bar Associations' Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)	Legal, immigration, and resettlement services	Global
International Organization for Migration (IOM)		
Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM)	Services to support refugees and immigrant communities	Ethiopia
Welcome.US.		United States of America
Save the Children Sweden	Advocacy, education, and humanitarian aid organizations	Global
Catholic Relief Services		

Source: Airbnb.com (2023).

Airbnb, through the deployment of its capabilities and resources, i.e., technology and services, has created an onboarding platform for these humanitarian organizations through subscriptions to their initiatives, which provided them with real-time information on available free housing and discounted accommodation for refugees. This helped these organizations to easily connect the refugees under their watch to accommodation facilities, saving them time and money from scouting for these facilities and allowing them to expand their work (Airbnb.com 2023). Again, Airbnb made it possible for these organizations to find individuals willing to host these refugees, an access that was made possible only through the dynamic deployment of Airbnb's capabilities. For example, companies like Levi Strauss and Co mobilized employees to share their homes for the benefit of this network of humanitarian organizations through the hosting partnerships Airbnb established with these private organizations (*Irish Times* 2022; *The Guardian* 2022). Some of the heads of these organizations expressed the game-changing impact this intervention from Airbnb has had on their purpose and activities as shown in Figure 7.

"Throughout the Ukraine crisis, GEM has assisted thousands of individuals and families with their need to relocate globally. We are grateful for the collaboration and support of Airbnb.org, which has allowed us to offer displaced individuals a safe and healthy environment in an otherwise stressful and disheartening situation." - **Michael Capponi, Founder, and President, Global Empowerment Mission Inc**

HIAS is grateful to partner again with Airbnb.org to rapidly address the urgent housing needs of refugees fleeing the crisis in Ukraine. Together we will ensure that the most vulnerable, including women, children, and the elderly – have access to immediate shelter and critical protection services. Our emergency partnership for the Ukraine crisis leverages five years of lessons learned and best practices established from the HIAS-Airbnb partnership serving refugees, asylum seekers and those forcibly displaced by conflict - **Jessica Reese, Vice President of Institutional Development, HIAS**

With 3 million refugees having crossed the border already, the need for housing is growing. Ordinary people reach out to Nova Ukraine daily to offer their homes as refugees seek temporary accommodation. Together with Airbnb.org, we have an effective way to connect the dots and contribute to a meaningful solution for those in need - **Yulia Zimmerman, Marketing Lead, Nova Ukraine**

Figure 7. Public posts of INGO and NGO Heads—source: Airbnb.com (2021d).

5.4. Financial Inclusion Strategy

In times of crisis, accessibility to financial or monetary resources, be it from the state or on a corporate or personal level, has proven to be restricted due to the devastating effect of disorder during these periods. Whether victims are internally displaced, fleeing from their home country, or find themselves in refugee camps, the possession of money or the financial wherewithal is critical for survival, especially for meeting the basic personal needs of these victims. The flexibility and dynamism of the capabilities and resources of Airbnb to adapt, accommodate, and integrate ideas externally generated by its community and the general public in the delivery of a financial inclusion strategy that provides money directly into the accounts of the victims of the Russia–Ukraine crisis are novel. This campaign for individual financiers and facilitators, where members of the public pay for Airbnb rentals in Ukraine for residents who choose to remain who are trapped or fleeing, was a swift public move to help get money to residents facing extreme financial hardship (Forbes 2021). This campaign was strategically integrated into the operations of Airbnb, facilitated by its internal capabilities and technology, thus reiterating Fox et al.'s (2020) view on the dynamic capabilities deployed for CSR as being flexible "enough" to adapt to external shocks as well as opportunities.

Through this campaign as evidenced in Figure 8, westerners spent over GBP 1.5 million on 61,000 bookings between the 2nd and 3rd March on Airbnb holiday homes in Ukraine, even though they could not get there, all in the bid to provide direct financial support to hosts in the war-torn country (*Daily Mail* 2022; CNN 2022). Another beneficiary, Olga Zviryanskaya said that:

"Thank you very much for your help, which is so much needed now, I have been standing in line for food since the morning, which I can now buy with the money you sent". (CBS News 2022)

It is evident that the lessons learned from previous CSR activities have not only made Airbnb's CSR activities with its partners robust, they have also allowed the general public to proffer novel ideas compatible with Airbnb's dynamic capabilities and resources. Through the deployment of Airbnb's technology and services, the company was able to "sense", "seize", and "shape" opportunities in times of crisis. This advantage aligns with the viewpoint of Huda et al. (2021), who argue that in times of crisis, where all other firms are on the point of collapse, app-based enterprises with digital-platform-based ecosystems

are no exception, but they can deliver more and have additionally found a new purpose for their company by offering humanitarian support and other relief services to people.
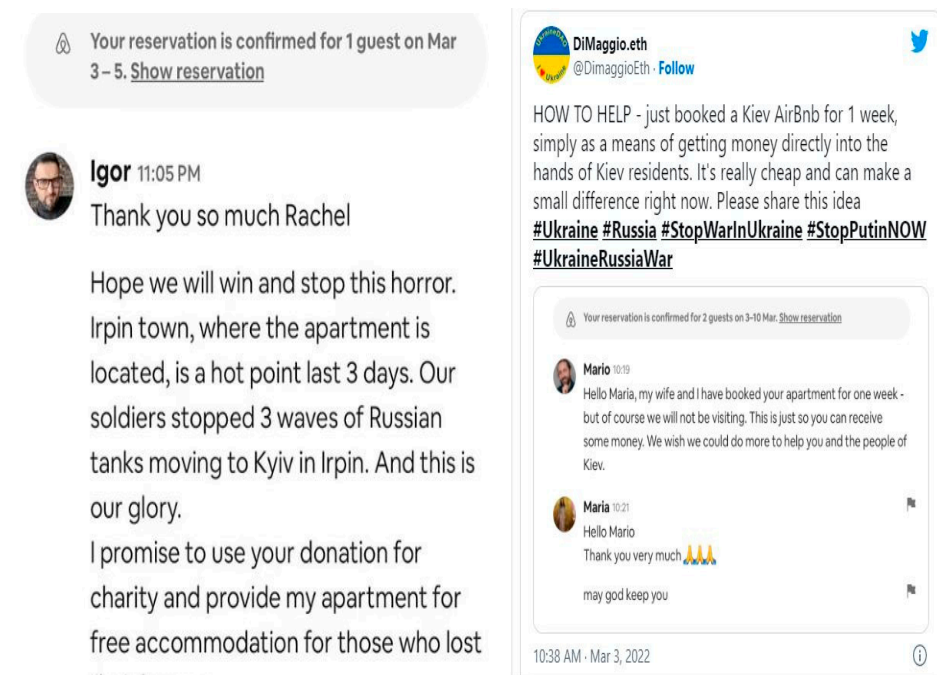

Figure 8. An example of the financial campaign strategy post—source: Copied from Twitter (*Irish Times* 2022) and *Daily Mail* (2022).

6. Conclusions

Digital-platform-based ecosystems have had a disruptive impact on all facets of the industry, including the hospitality sector, with accommodation not being an exception (Adner and Kapoor 2010; Cozzolino et al. 2021). Yet, examination and exploitation of their internal capabilities and resources for CSR purposes during times of crisis have not been fully explored. The flexibility of such companies to reconfigure their internal resources and capabilities promptly to respond to external threats, opportunities, or crises makes these companies unique and integral in the delivery of CSR in times of crisis. Again, the findings of this case study are also a direct response to the studies of Coombs (2007) and Sellnow and Seeger (2013), who suggested a lack of theoretical and empirical rigor in research relating to crisis. This study has provided empirical evidence that interventions deployed during a crisis can be theoretically explained, making a significant contribution to the theoretical development of studies relating to dynamic capabilities and crises. This study identifies some limitations and avenues for further research. First, this study over-relies on secondary data and could benefit from further studies focusing on interviews with the management staff at Airbnb on how the company's capabilities and resources were deployed to provide further insights, as well as to help generalize findings for companies in the digital-platform-based ecosystem industry. Second, this study focused on only one company and presented generalizability concerns of the findings, while future studies could conduct a comparative case study of companies in this industry to support the generalizability of findings. Future research could focus on how Airbnb, in the aftermath of a crisis, leverages its partnerships with INGOs, NGOs, and the community as a strategic competitive advantage over competitors in the industry. Future studies could further look into how CSR gains can be transformed into business creation points in digital-platform-based ecosystems. Third, some limitations inherent in document analysis are highlighted by Bowen (2009), who focuses mainly on the fact that the documents have been produced for a purpose other than the research itself and hence might lack necessary details. There is the possibility of an incomplete collection of documents due to biased selectivity. Additionally,

the irretrievability is questioned, as some sources and valuable information may be blocked and not accessible to the researchers (Yin 2018). Further research may include reports from credible international organizations to augment the data source for analysis. Fourth, our paper presents results from the perspective of the theory of dynamic capabilities without showing whether this provides a competitive advantage for Airbnb. Further studies could explore the competitive advantage dimension to examine how this is reflected in the performance against competitors.

Our findings underscore that Airbnb's strategic utilization of its digital-platform-based ecosystem significantly enhances its crisis response, aligning closely with dynamic capabilities theory. This study not only contributes to the academic discourse by providing empirical evidence of how digital platforms can effectively deploy CSR in times of crisis, but also suggests practical pathways for integrating CSR into business models for enhanced preparedness and response efficacy. Future research should explore other digital ecosystems to generalize these findings and policymakers should consider frameworks that encourage the embedding of dynamic capabilities in digital platforms to better harness their potential for societal good during crises. The study also has implications for society by evidencing how collaborations between companies in the digital-platform-based ecosystem and non-profits working in the crisis space can offer support to displaced victims and refugees.

Appendix A

Quote from Data Source	Initial Coding	Category Construction for Themes
For these 20,000 refugees, my hope is that the Airbnb community will provide them with not only a safe place to rest and start over, but also a warm welcome home.	Refugee welcoming homes	Redefining Refugee Resettlement
I feel like I'm staying in my own house	Refugee homely feeling	
I already donate to support Airbnb.org's work, but I wanted to do more	Local collaboration	Community Collaboration/Partnerships
When I saw that Airbnb.org was going to house 20,000 refugees, I wanted to answer the call for help and signed up to host a refugee family	Charity centric customers	
GemBstrong has been able to already place 1257 people in comfortable homes	NGO partnerships	INGO and NGO Partnerships
HIAS is grateful to partner again with Airbnb.org in this tragic Ukraine crisis	INGO partnerships	
Hello Maria, my wife and I have booked your apartment for 1 week—but of course, we will not be visiting	Individual donors	Financial Inclusion Strategy
HOW TO HELP—just booked a Kiev Airbnb for 1 week, simply as a means of getting money directly into the hands of Kiev resident	Finance campaign and facilitation	

Example of the thematic coding procedure.

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