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Is it time to share?

- A qualitative study of consumers' attitudes and engagement on platforms in the sharing economy

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ABSTRACT

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Title

Is it time to share? A qualitative study of consumers' attitudes and engagement on platforms in the sharing economy

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Abstract

The sharing economy is a fast-growing movement where consumers share and exchange underutilised goods and services on digital platforms. Today, these sharing platforms are being dominated by millennials due to their inherent digital mindset and awareness of global issues. As a result of this movement, consumer attitudes and engagement are important to study as it helps us understand, influence and respond to the needs of consumers. To this end, the purpose of this paper is to further explore this concept of the sharing economy and to examine consumer attitudes and engagement towards sharing platforms.

The research conducted in this study was exploratory and an abductive approach was used. Qualitative data was collected through five focus groups to understand different attitudes and perspectives in relation to sharing platforms. Results indicated that attitudes are generated differently among millennials due to various demographic and cultural differences. The study contributes with a revised attitude model and provides insights for businesses and entrepreneurs who seek to engage on sharing platforms.

This research study provides new insights to the field of the sharing economy as no previous research, to the best of our knowledge, has been conducted on millennials' attitudes and engagement. For future studies on the topic, we emphasise the importance to choose one or similar platforms and to distinguish the types of millennials so that a more targeted analysis can be conducted.

Keywords

Sharing economy; sharing platforms; consumer behaviour; consumption; attitudes; engagement

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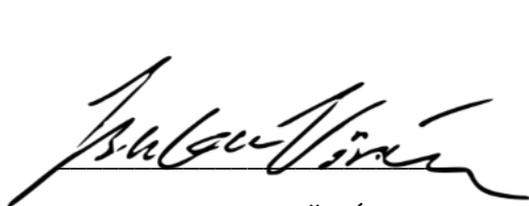
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Kristianstad 25th of May 2018



ISABELLE VÖRÉN



SOPHIE WESTERLUND

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 BACKGROUND.....	1
1.2 PROBLEMATISATION.....	3
1.3 RESEARCH PURPOSE	5
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION	5
1.5 DISPOSITION	5
2. RESEARCH METHOD.....	6
2.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY	6
2.2 RESEARCH APPROACH.....	7
2.3 CHOICE OF THEORY.....	7
2.4 CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY	8
2.5 SUMMARY	8
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	9
3.1 WHAT IS SHARING?.....	9
3.1.1 SHARING IN THE SHARING ECONOMY	9
3.1.2 SHARING PLATFORMS	10
3.2 CONSUMER ATTITUDES & ENGAGEMENT.....	12
3.2.1 CONTEXTUALISING OF CONSUMPTION	12
3.2.2 ABC-MODEL.....	14
3.2.3 CONSUMER CHANGE.....	16
3.2.4 THE USER.....	16
4. EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY	18
4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND STRATEGY.....	18
4.2 TIME HORIZON	18
4.3 DATA COLLECTION.....	19
4.4 FOCUS GROUPS	19
4.4.1 GUIDELINE FOR FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS	20
4.4.2 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS	21
4.4.3 EXECUTION.....	23
4.5 DATA ANALYSIS	23
4.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS & AUTHENTICITY	24
4.7 LIMITATIONS	25

4.8	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	25
5.	EMPIRICAL FINDINGS & ANALYSIS	27
5.1	ATTITUDINAL COMPONENTS	27
5.1.1	AFFECTIVE COMPONENT	27
5.1.2	BEHAVIOURAL COMPONENT.....	30
5.1.3	COGNITIVE COMPONENT.....	31
5.1.4	ACCUMULATION OF COMPONENTS.....	34
5.2	ENGAGEMENT	36
5.3	DISCUSSION OF ANALYSIS	38
5.3.1	REVIEW OF THEORETICAL MODEL	39
6.	CONCLUSION.....	41
6.1	SUMMARY OF THE THESIS.....	41
6.2	THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS	42
6.3	PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS	42
6.4	LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH.....	43
	REFERENCES	45
	APPENDIX 1 – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	48
	APPENDIX 2 – FOCUS GROUP DOCUMENT.....	51

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Sharing economy categories (based on Botsman & Rogers, 2011).....	11
Table 2: Focus group participants.....	22
Table 3: Participants engagement on sharing platforms	37

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Contextualising the ‘why?’ of consumption (Solomon et al., 2006, p. 128).....	14
Figure 2: Frame of reference (van der Walt, 1991, p. 297)	15
Figure 3: Foundation of an attitude (based on Solomon et al., 2006).....	16
Figure 4: Reviewed “ABC-model” (based on Solomon et al., 2006).....	40

1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter one provides a background and definition into a “sharing economy” which forms the basis for this dissertation. A research problematisation is then discussed that argues why studying attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms is both interesting and relevant in today’s society. Finally, the purpose and research question together with disposition of this dissertation will be presented.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Digitalisation has shifted consumers’ behaviours by enabling them to consume whatever, whenever and wherever they want in order to satisfy their needs (Cartina, 2017; Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016). For a long time, consumers’ consumption has been both impulsive and fast. However, in recent years consumers have had a desire to change due to many believing that hyper consumption is moving society in the wrong direction. Consumers have started to see opportunities to get away from the aggressive consumption that is infiltrating society as new alternatives of consumption arise (Benett & O’Reilly, 2010). They now realise it is their need for something that drives their actions (Botsman & Rogers, 2011), which makes them look for purpose and fulfilment in their consumption rather than to constantly buy new products (Benett & O’Reilly, 2010). For example, it is not the new cd-player consumers want, it is access to music (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). Consumption priorities are also becoming more conscious and considered. Consumers now look for better ways to live, where they can be more connected with the world around them, and at the same time save money, reduce waste, buy locally and be environmental friendly in their consumption choices (Benett & O’Reilly, 2010).

In recent years, new consumption opportunities have emerged, such as sharing. However, sharing is not a new concept in society as we have, in the past, given friends a ride, had them stay in our spare room or done errands for them (Sundararajan, 2016). What is different is that we now can provide these services to strangers through digitalisation for reciprocity (Sundararajan, 2016; Frenken & Schor, 2017; Reisch & Thorgersen, 2015). Businesses use these new consumption opportunities to create ways to rent or exchange goods or services through a more sharing-based economy, which consumers show a high

interest in (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015). These opportunities have unlocked a whole new concept which is defined as the “sharing economy”.

As of today, there is no universal definition of the concept sharing economy (Huurne, Ronteltap, Corten, & Buskens, 2017; Hamari et al., 2016). Words such as collaborative economy (European Commission, 2018), collaborative consumption (Sordi, Perin, Petrini, & Sampaio, 2018; Hamari et al., 2016), the “mesh” (Gansky, 2010) and access-based consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Barnes & Mattsson, 2017) have been used inconsistent and with various definitions.

Hamari et al. (2016) consider the sharing economy as an umbrella concept that was brought forward by technological advances, and it involves access or re-ownership of underutilised assets. The concept of sharing economy is further interpreted by Sordi et al. (2018, p. 265) as a “model between sharing and exchanging in the market, but with elements from both,” and Ertz, Durif and Arcand (2016) explain that this model has formed sharing platforms where consumers can be both obtainers and/or providers. Across these platforms, it is possible to save or make money and time, to meet friends and to be a part of a community (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). Henceforth, we define sharing platforms as digital platforms that allow consumers and businesses to exchange and share underutilised goods and services.

Over the last few years, sharing platforms have made an incredible growth (Böcker & Meelen, 2017), and represent a new form of striking consumption (Albinsson & Perera, 2018), where sharing has gained popularity particularly among millennials (Möhlmann, 2015) and in urban areas (Albinsson & Perera, 2018). The success largely depends on consumers’ motivations to engage on sharing platforms (Albinsson & Perera, 2018) as consumers now want to be more socially and digitally connected (Botsman & Rogers, 2011). This has resulted in increased interest to investigate the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive participation (Böcker & Meelen, 2017). Hamari et al. (2016) further point out that intrinsic motivations are strong determinants of attitudes, which is regarded as a major source for consumer behaviour studies. Therefore, behaviours, such as engagement on sharing platforms, could be influenced by consumers’ attitudes towards

sharing platforms (Hamari et al., 2016). Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeek (2013) strengthen this by pointing out that positive attitudes result in engagement. Engagement can further be important in the context of sharing platforms, as it has received lots of attention as “a new way” to create consumer value and is characterised as the empowerment from interactions of consumers (Blasco-Arcas, Hernandez-Ortega, & Jimenez-Martinez, 2016).

1.2 PROBLEMATISATION

Sharing has received a lot of attention from researchers, entrepreneurs and media, much of which have resulted from the evolution of the two sharing platforms Airbnb and Uber (Martin, 2016). Data from 2013 has indicated a future growth of 320 billion USD in five sharing economy sectors by 2025, from 15 billion USD to 335 billion USD (Barnes & Mattsson, 2017; Albinsson & Perera, 2018). Despite the increased interest in sharing and the sharing economy, Hamari et al. (2016) and Sordi et al. (2018) point out the limited research that exists about the movement of sharing goods and services through technology, as well as encourage future studies in the sharing economy as it is a relatively new concept. The movement of a more sharing society has been of special interest to consumer researchers as it involves the way consumers perceive material things. Consumers can now borrow or lend what they normally cannot afford to buy, or alternatively choose not to buy due to other concerns, such as environmental impacts. They can also decide to buy underutilised goods that someone else has previously owned (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012).

Another orientation that is becoming more popular among researchers, is the study of motivations behind attitudes and participation in the sharing economy (e.g. Hamari et al., 2016; Kim, Yoon, & Zo, 2015; Zhu, So, & Hudson, 2017; Hwang & Griffiths, 2017). The increased interest to look deeper into drivers behind participation could also be explained by Belk (2014a) who says motivation is a key factor to consider in the sharing economy in order to have successful platforms, as well as to be able to address consumers’ needs and wants in the right way (Böcker & Meelen, 2017).

We have discovered, to the best of our knowledge, that literature seems to focus on consumers’ consumption motivations (‘why’) in the sharing economy (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006). However, Solomon et al. (2006, p. 128) state “the ‘why’

question cannot stand alone,” and that it is important to also study consumers’ consumption from affective and cognitive processes (‘how’), consumption behaviours (‘what’), situation/contextual differences (‘when/where’), and differences among people, groups and cultures (‘who’) to fully understand consumers in relation to sharing platforms (Solomon et al., 2006).

The ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘when/where’ can further be understood by exploring consumers’ attitudes. Kasten, Pank and Tillin (2018) argue the importance to investigate consumers’ attitudes as it helps to understand them, and how to influence and respond to their needs more efficiently. Attitudes also influence engagement (Hamari et al., 2016), and engaged consumers are further expected to have more positive attitudes towards an object than non-engaged consumers (Brodie et al., 2013).

During recent years consumers’ attitudes towards consumption have undergone a shift (Hamari et al., 2016), mostly due to information and communication technology (ICT). ICT has also enabled consumers to search information, to make purchases, to network, or to stream whenever they want online (Malik, Suresh, & Sharma, 2017; Hamari et al., 2016). Malik et al. (2017) argue that consumers, especially millennials, have reached a new level of complexity. They are now used to have full connectivity, which has put pressure on both platforms and businesses to meet new needs. The connectivity has also empowered consumers and made them more aware of the impact hyper consumption has on society and environment (Botsman & Rogers, 2011).

Consumers that have reacted the most to hyper consumption are millennials (Reisch & Thorgersen, 2015; Botsman & Rogers, 2011). They are targeted as an important group for the sharing economy (Gupta & Goyal, 2018; Sengupta, 2017; John, 2017; Hwang & Griffiths, 2017) as they have another digital mindset (Botsman & Rogers, 2011) and are more familiar with online sharing (John, 2017). Therefore, this dissertation explores millennials’ attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms.

1.3 RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to explore the sharing economy from consumers' perspective. This will be done by studying sharing platforms through consumer attitudes and engagement.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

How do millennials engage on platforms in the sharing economy, and what are their attitudes towards them?

1.5 DISPOSITION

This dissertation consists of six chapters:

1. Introduction
2. Research method
3. Theoretical framework
4. Empirical methodology
5. Empirical findings and analysis
6. Conclusion

The introduction provides the background, problematisation and purpose of the study. The research method then explains the research philosophy, research approach, choice of theory and choice of methodology. The theoretical framework chapter follows to provide previous literature related to the sharing economy as well as models that have previously been used. Subsequently, the empirical methodology section presents our choices of research design, research strategy and time horizon, as well as the execution of the study, how data was analysed, and the limitations. This section also explains the trustworthiness and authenticity of the collected data and the ethical considerations in undertaking this study. The empirical findings and analysis section is then presented to explain the findings and analysis based on the study. The final chapter concludes with a summary of the study, the theoretical and practical implications, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

There are various research methodologies to choose from when carrying out research as each study requires a particular method. The second chapter presents the most appropriate research method for our study, and includes a distinctive research philosophy and research approach, as well as choice of theory and choice of methodology. It is concluded with a brief summary to clarify the choices in relation to our purpose.

2.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

It is important to be conscious of and reflect on the philosophical commitments made through choice of strategy. They have a meaningful impact on how studies are understood by researchers and the one chosen should be defended in relation to other philosophical commitments that could have been adopted (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

The four research philosophies in business and management research are; pragmatism, positivism, realism and interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2012). Pragmatism has an external and multiple viewpoint, where scientists do not have a singular perspective, as research can have many realities. Various methods are used to gather reliable data and to further develop the research. Positivism, on the other hand, is research independent on social actors and uses observable phenomenon to provide credible facts and data. It focuses on law-like generalisations and on causality, which means using simple elements. Realism, further, is an objective philosophy that revolves around human knowledge, belief and existence. There are two different types of realism: direct and critical (Saunders et al., 2012). Saunders et al. (2012) explain direct realism as “what you see is what you get” (p. 136), while critical realism argues that “what we experience are sensations, the images of the things in the real world, not the things directly” (p. 136). Interpretivism is subjective and sees the reality behind situations. It uses in-depth investigations where the researcher is part of the study (Saunders et al., 2012). As we wanted to explore sharing platforms through attitudes and engagement, interpretivism was the most relevant philosophy to use. We focused on the reality behind the sharing economy and gathered data based on social constructions (Saunders et al., 2012) to reflect on differences between consumers (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

2.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach defines the design of the theory within a study and can be divided into three different approaches: deductive, inductive or abductive (Saunders et al., 2012). The first approach, deductive, is normally used in quantitative research when the process to collect data is based on theories and/or hypothesis that need to be tested (Bryman & Bell, 2015). An inductive approach is the opposite to a deductive approach, where researchers start to investigate a phenomenon with empirical data and, thereafter, build or create a new theory (Saunders et al., 2012).

Abductive, the last approach, has become more popular to use among business researchers, and was used in this dissertation. The approach is a mixture of deductive and inductive approaches and involves the collection of data to investigate a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, and to build a new theory or modify an existing one. The main advantage with an abductive approach is the constant examination of additional data against the theory (Saunders et al., 2012), which means we simultaneously worked with empirical data and theory during the research process. To explore sharing platforms through millennials' attitudes and engagement, the research required a flexible approach with continuous data collection tested against the chosen theories. The abductive approach enabled in-depth analysis, as well as the possibility to uncover "surprising facts" (Saunders et al., 2012).

2.3 CHOICE OF THEORY

Existing theories within the field of consumer behaviour and a sharing economy set the foundation for this dissertation and are presented in chapter three. We included books, publications and journals. Two practical models, the "ABC-model"¹ (Solomon et al. 2006) and the "three systems model"² (Botsman & Rogers, 2011) were applied to explore sharing platforms and to gain a better understanding of consumers' attitudes towards sharing platforms. The "ABC-model" was used to analyse attitudes through three attitudinal components; affective, behavioural and cognitive. The "three systems model" was applied

¹ Henceforth, when discussing the "ABC-model", refer to Solomon et al., 2006

² Henceforth, when discussing the "three systems model", refer to Botsman & Rogers, 2011

to study sharing platforms, as this model provides three categories; product service systems, redistribution markets and collaborative lifestyles, in to which platforms can be divided.

2.4 CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and quantitative research strategies are methods used in business research when empirical data is required (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To differentiate the methods, researchers distinguish different kinds of data (Saunders et al., 2012); qualitative research strategy focuses on words while quantitative research collects wide quantification (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this study, it was important to focus on the qualitative method as the research aimed to analyse attitudes and engagement, which required in-depth investigation (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

2.5 SUMMARY

The research followed an interpretive philosophy with an abductive approach as it was a more suitable choice for the purpose of this dissertation. Existing theories and two theoretical models within consumer behaviour and sharing economy studies were used to analyse millennials' attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms. We additionally performed a qualitative study to acquire a deeper knowledge and understanding, with more flexibility.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter three presents relevant models and theories to the research of millennials' attitudes and engagement. The theoretical framework includes definitions of sharing and the sharing economy, as well as a model of sharing platforms. Moreover, consumers' attitudes and engagement are explained, which includes a consumption model, an attitude model, consumer change and users of the sharing economy.

3.1 WHAT IS SHARING?

The idea of sharing is not a new concept around the world. According to the Oxford Dictionaries (2018a, p. 2), the word itself has many meanings, including “use, occupy, or enjoy (something) jointly with another or others.” Belk (2007, p. 127) proposes a similar definition of the word sharing; “the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use as well as the act and process of receiving something from others for our use.” John (2017, p. 15) further refers sharing as having “something in common with someone,” or to “be an act of communication,” which applies to both concrete and abstract sharing. Sharing, regardless of what the definition may be, is based on social relations (John, 2017), where goods and services are being shared and exchanged between strangers, friends or family (Reisch & Thorgersen, 2015).

3.1.1 SHARING IN THE SHARING ECONOMY

There is no universal definition for the growing movement of sharing and the exchange of goods and services via digital platforms. Literature on the subject (e.g. Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Belk, 2014a; Huurne et al., 2017; Hamari et al., 2016) use terminologies that are inconsistent and that have various definitions, however they all seem to stress that digital platforms have made it possible for consumers to become micro-entrepreneurs where they can take matters into their own hands to satisfy their own needs (Martin, 2016).

Hamari et al. (2016) describe the sharing economy as an umbrella concept, while Botsman (2018) separate the sharing concept into two terminologies: sharing economy and collaborative consumption. She claims that the sharing economy is an economic system and a peer-to-peer activity of sharing goods or services on platforms while collaborative

consumption is the overall activity of renting, lending, bartering, swapping, sharing and gifting through technology and consumer communities. Belk (2014b) offers an alternative explanation of the movement and he claims there must be a separation between true and pseudo sharing. Pseudo sharing can be seen as communal sharing based upon business relationships where an exchange is expected, and true sharing is something consumers do freely and without monetary exchange or reciprocity.

3.1.2 SHARING PLATFORMS

Botsman and Rogers (2011) propose to divide sharing activities on digital platforms into three categories: product service systems, redistribution markets and collaborative lifestyles. The model represents the definition of collaborative consumption, however, as it is more aligned with the concept of the sharing economy as per Hamari et al. (2016). Therefore, the “three systems model” is suitable to use in this dissertation in order to explore sharing platforms.

The category product service systems (Botsman & Rogers, 2011) allows consumers to provide or obtain underutilised assets as services, so that the assets reach full capacity. The main idea is to access the benefit of a product without owning it. Table 1 further presents examples on sharing platforms with this attribute and includes typical car-sharing platforms such as Uber, Blablacar and Lyft.

Redistribution markets (Botsman & Rogers, 2011), displayed in table 1, competes with traditional marketplaces by redistributing pre-owned and unneeded goods for others to own. Online marketplace platforms, such as eBay, Blocket and Tradera, allow re-ownership of products where consumers can sell and buy goods for monetary exchange or reciprocity.

Collaborative lifestyles (Botsman & Rogers, 2011) is where goods and services can be found with other consumers that are sharing similar interests and values. Platforms in this category connect consumers to share and exchange less tangible products, such as time and skills. As shown in table 1, specific examples on collaborative lifestyles vary from garden sharing to skills sharing (Martin, 2016) and includes platforms, such as Airbnb, Taskrabbitt and CouchSurfing.

Table 1: Sharing economy categories (based on Botsman & Rogers, 2011)

PRODUCT SERVICE SYSTEMS	REDISTRIBUTION MARKETS	COLLABORATIVE LIFESTYLES
Car-sharing: Uber, Lyft, Blablacar	Free exchange: Kashless, Freecycle, Around again	Working spaces: The Cube London, The Trampery Lemon Studios, Hub Culture
	Sold for points: Barterquest, UISwap	Goods: ThingLoop, Ecomodo
	Sold for cash: eBay, Flippid, Tradera	Tasks, Time and Errands: Camden Shares, Southwark Circle, SPICE Timebank Wales
	Mix markets: Gumtree, Craigs-list, Blocket	Gardens: Landshare
	Swap markets: Swapstyle, BigWardrobe, thred-Up, Swap, SwapCycle, ReadItSwapIt	Skills: Brooklyn Skillshare, Taskrabbit
		Food: Neighbourhood Fruit, Lourish
		Parking space: ParkatMyHouse, Park-UK
		Social lending: Zopa, YES-Secure, Quakle
		Travel: Airbnb, CouchSurfing, Roomorama, CrashPadder

3.2 CONSUMER ATTITUDES & ENGAGEMENT

An attitude is complex and individual, which means the reasons behind development of attitudes that are similar may be somewhat different (Solomon et al., 2006). For this thesis, an attitude is “a lasting, general evaluation of people (including oneself), objects, advertisements or issues” (Solomon et al., 2006, p. 138). This means consumers have subconsciously made a specific assessment on sharing platforms, which is to some extent permanent and applied to multiple occasions.

Consumers’ engagement has recently become more important within consumer behaviour research and is getting attention as a new way to achieve increased consumer value (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2016). The Oxford Dictionaries (2018b, p. 1) defines engagement as “the action of engaging or being engaged” and Blasco-Arcas et al. (2016) further characterise engagement as an empowerment from the interaction of consumers. Yu, Patterson and de Ruyter (2015) define engagement as a concept that contains affective, behavioural and cognitive dimensions. Bowden (2009) further sees engagement as a psychological process that includes both cognitive and emotional aspects. The author believes that it plays an important role in relational exchange. With this in mind, this thesis sees consumer engagement as a psychological process that result in consumer interactions on sharing platforms.

Attitudes and engagement further influence each other. Positive attitudes result in more willingness to engage, and engaged consumers have more positive attitudes towards an object than non-engaged consumers (Brodie et al., 2013), as they usually are consistent in their attitudes and convince themselves that the object they engage in is, in fact, good (Solomon et al., 2006)

3.2.1 CONTEXTUALISING OF CONSUMPTION

The model “Contextualising of Consumption” (Solomon et al., 2006), displayed in figure 1, contains five important questions; ‘why’, ‘what’, ‘how’, ‘who’ and ‘when/where’ regarding consumers’ consumption, and it is used to apply attitudes and engagement.

‘Why’ explains why consumers consume the way they do, and is a deeper investigation in consumption motives, goals and desires (Solomon et al., 2006). Previous researchers, as mentioned in chapter 1.2, focus on the ‘why’ spectrum in the context of the sharing economy. However, Solomon et al., (2006, p. 128) argue “that the ‘why?’ question cannot stand alone,” and it is important to study ‘what’, ‘how’, ‘who’ and ‘when/where’ to fully understand consumers.

The ‘what’ question refers to consumers’ consumption behaviours, which include intentions, reactions and habits (Solomon et al., 2006; van der Walt, 1991). The ‘how’ includes affective and cognitive dimensions consumers go through during the consumption process (Solomon et al., 2006). The affective dimension further involves emotions, feelings and prejudices, and the cognitive dimension refers to consumers’ beliefs, experiences and knowledge (van der Walt, 1991). The question of ‘when/where’ involves differences in context and situation of consumption, and ‘who’ refers to differences among people, groups and cultures (Solomon et al., 2006).

Groups can be defined as people who share certain norms, beliefs and values, which further guide behaviours (Solomon et al., 2006). It is the groups’ combined set of feelings, thoughts and behaviours learnt from childhood and derived from social settings that is referred to as cultures (Solomon et al., 2006; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). There are different types of cultural groups, including demographic groups (e.g. countries and regions), subcultures (e.g. millennials) and microcultures (e.g. hipsters), with different levels of belonging and influence (Solomon et al., 2006). If consumers feel social identification with certain groups, it can result in positive outcomes when they engage with others in that group as they feel a level of belonging and want to be accepted. Consumers can also feel attraction to aspirational groups they identify themselves with and maintain consistent attitudes through positive images of that group or they dissociate themselves from group they feel no belonging to (Solomon et al., 2006).

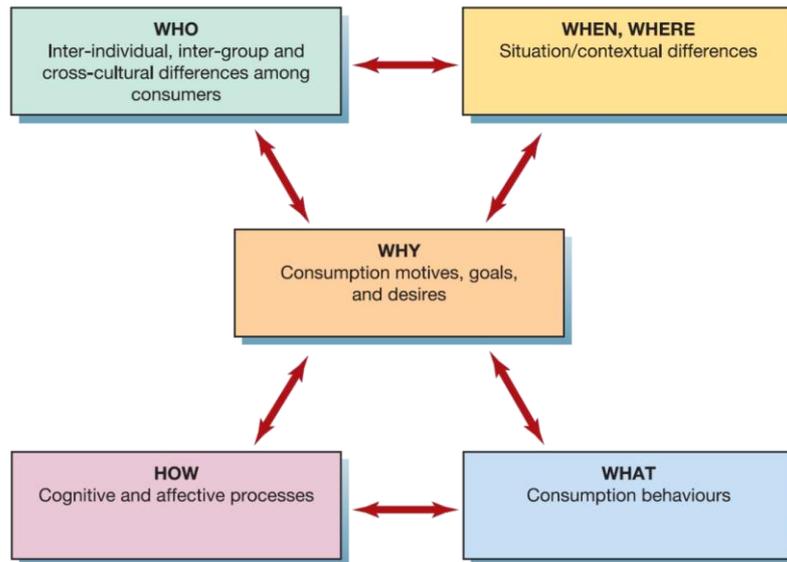


Figure 1: Contextualising the 'why?' of consumption (Solomon et al., 2006, p. 128)

The 'how', 'what', and 'when/where' can further be compared to the components of an attitude, which will be defined in the following paragraph.

3.2.2 ABC-MODEL

Solomon et al. (2006) claim that many researchers have agreed that an attitude has three components: affective, behavioural and cognitive. The authors compile these components and call this the "ABC-model", while van der Walt (1991) names this "the frame of reference", which is displayed in figure 2. The model is important in order to analyse attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms as affective, behavioural and cognitive components result in overall attitudes towards attitudes objects (i.e. sharing platforms), followed by consumers' decisions on their level of engagement.

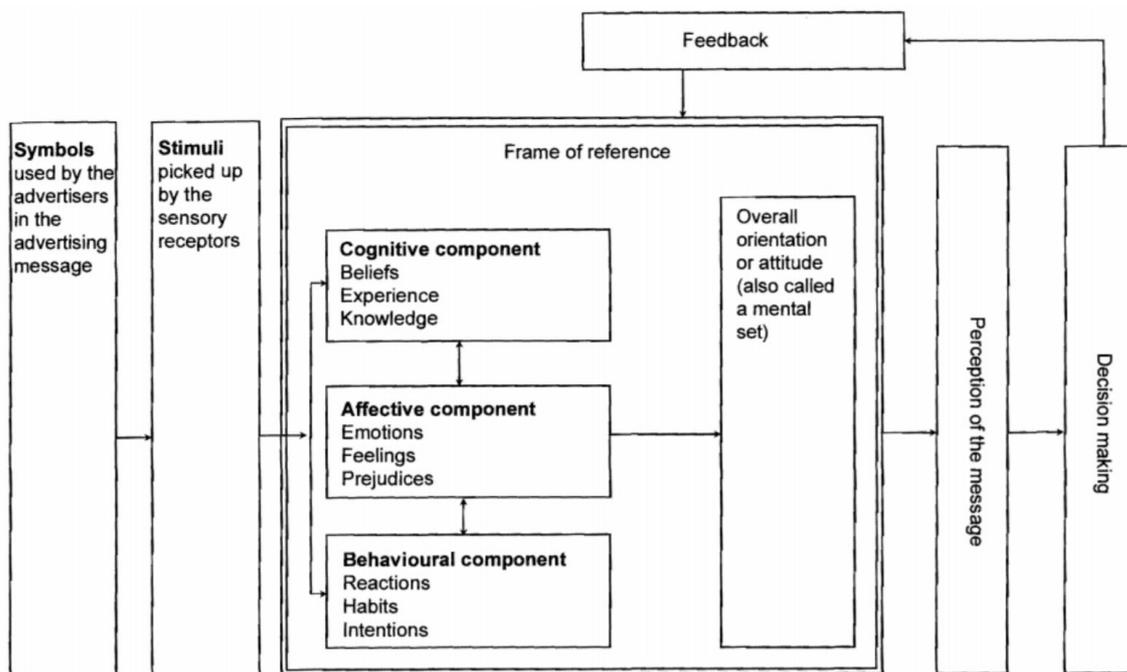


Figure 2: Frame of reference (van der Walt, 1991, p. 297)

As displayed in figure 2, the affective component includes emotions, feelings and prejudices consumers have towards an object (i.e. sharing platforms), while the behavioural component includes consumers' reactions, habits and intentions. Solomon et al. (2006) further emphasise the differences between intentions and behaviours. They explain that even if consumers may have intention to buy a product or service, it does not always end up as actual behaviour. On the contrary, Barnes and Mattsson (2017) explain the relationship between intention and behaviour is very strong and emphasise that behavioural intentions, most often, result in actual behaviour (i.e. engagement). The cognitive component further refers to beliefs, experiences and knowledge consumers have about an object (i.e. sharing platforms).

These three components accentuate the interrelationship between feelings, doings and knowing (Solomon et al., 2006), which is displayed in figure 3. This means that consumers' attitudes towards sharing platforms are contingent on how consumers feel, behave and know towards the phenomenon. Therefore, we combine participants' feelings, doings and knowing and use them as a foundation to form attitudes per the "ABC-model".

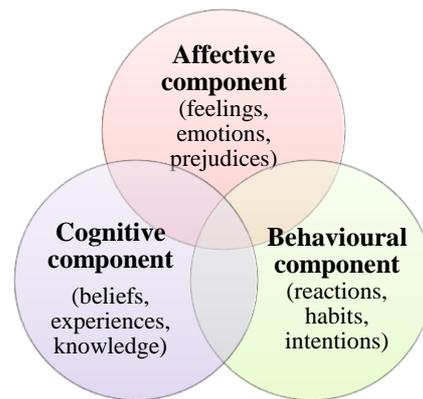


Figure 3: Foundation of an attitude (based on Solomon et al., 2006)

Moreover, consumers' attitudes can result in engagement as their components guide their decision whether they will interact with platforms.

3.2.3 CONSUMER CHANGE

The sharing economy and its platforms slowly change the way consumers perceive and value different things. According to many scholars (e.g. Priporas et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2017; Botsman & Rogers, 2011), societal factors, including the change in consumers' behaviours and values, are one of the key drivers towards a sharing society. Consumers today have gone from a "me" to a "we"- mindset, where they share more with others. They also want goods with a history, a story or a person behind it as products today have lost its uniqueness and are alike. Consumers wish to learn more about the goods they purchase (Botsman & Rogers, 2011), and they want to reach a greater environmental consciousness in society in order to have awareness of their consumption. The realisation that material things may not be good to the planet, nor favours relationships to friends, family and neighbours, has pursued consumers to re-create stronger communities and have a need for social connections (Owyang 2014; Priporas et al. 2017; Botsman & Rogers, 2011).

3.2.4 THE USER

Technological advances is another key driver towards the sharing economy movement (Owyang, 2014; Priporas et al., 2017; Botsman, & Rogers, 2011), and new digital opportunities enable internet users of all ages to get involved in the sharing economy (Reisch & Thorgersen, 2015). Observers further argue that millennials, born between the years 1982 -2009 (Gupta & Goyal, 2018), are being targeted as an important group for the

sharing economy (Sengupta, 2017; John, 2017; Gupta & Goyal, 2018; Hwang & Griffiths, 2017). Reisch and Thorgersen (2015) claim that millennials are having an increased interest to use services and goods provided by sharing platforms, and Botsman and Rogers (2011) explain that millennials want to take part in the sharing economy due to various reasons, including their inherent digital mindset.

Millennials grew up in a technological world where sharing was predominant (e.g. sharing music, photos, videos, daily thoughts and actions, and so on). The generation is more open to new experiences (Botsman & Rogers, 2011; John, 2017), and have a bigger interest in social interactions on the internet (Hwang & Griffiths, 2017). Therefore, millennials tend to be familiar with online sharing (John, 2017), as well as used to full access to instant information (Hwang & Griffiths, 2017). Gupta and Goyal (2018, p. 79) claim that the generation use “technology as a sixth sense,” and Hwang and Griffiths (2017) further state millennials demand digital solutions and are positive to change. Other generations may be skilful with technology; however, they would still be considered as immigrants compared to millennials who are indigenous (Gupta & Goyal, 2018). Sengupta (2017) explains that millennials soon will be the largest generation group, in fact, by 2025 around 75 per cent of the world’s workforce will be made up of them. Hwang and Griffiths (2017) explain that the generation, in general, has a deeper interest in global topics, as well as being more aware of the impact their consumption have on the environment. Millennials also have stronger attention to things that will benefit others, such as helping, sharing, donating, volunteering and so on.

4. EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY

Chapter four presents our empirical methodology, which includes the research design and strategy, time horizon and data collection. The section also consists of guidelines and execution of focus groups, as well as selection of participants, data analysis, limitations and ethical considerations of the chosen methodologies.

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND STRATEGY

To meet the aim of research, a strategy needs to be defined. The strategy explains how a researcher can answer the research question(s) and should be guided by the research question(s) and purpose (Saunders et al., 2012). Saunders et al. (2012) have divided the different research strategies into eight categories: experiment, survey, archival research, case study, ethnography, action research, grounded theory and narrative inquiry. As the purpose was to explore sharing platforms through millennials' attitudes and engagement, case study research was followed (Saunders et al., 2012). When doing a case study, questions such as 'how' and 'what' can be studied (Saunders et al., 2012), and this was relevant in relation to attitudes and engagement. A case study further explores a specific phenomenon, which in this dissertation was sharing platforms.

A research design can be either descriptive, explanatory or exploratory, and should be defined by the research question. Descriptive research involves an accurate description of events, people or situations, while explanatory research aims to explain the relationships between different variables by studying a situation or a problem. Exploratory research is used when to gain insight and to understand a specific topic or problem and is often beneficial when a case study strategy is followed. There are also several advantages, including flexibility and adaptability (Saunders et al., 2012). This dissertation followed an exploratory design, which gave us the opportunity to be able to change direction as new data and insights were gathered throughout the process (Saunders et al., 2012).

4.2 TIME HORIZON

When research is designed, there are different time horizons that need to be considered: Cross-sectional or longitudinal studies (Saunders et al., 2012). The cross-sectional research

design is usually used when qualitative or quantitative research is conducted. Cross-sectional studies are also suitable when a phenomenon is to be investigated at a specific time and/or within a short time period. On the contrary, longitudinal studies stretch over a longer time, meaning there can be more than one occasion and different time periods for data collection.

It is common to use semi-structured interviews, such as focus groups, when a qualitative and cross-sectional research design is followed (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As we wanted to examine millennials in the sharing economy, semi-structured interviews were used as they provided us with detailed necessary data in order to answer the research question. The time-frame for the research was also relatively short, therefore, the time horizon of a cross-sectional design was chosen.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

Primary data was used in this dissertation, which means we gathered new data derived for the specific purpose to explore sharing platforms through millennials' attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms (Saunders et al., 2012). Data can also be gathered from secondary sources, such as books and publications (Saunders et al., 2012). However, this was not required in our empirical research as we needed new data in accordance to the dynamic nature of attitudes and, with primary data, we were able to collect in-depth results. The primary data in this dissertation was gathered through focus groups, which is qualitative data collection. Focus groups allow consumers' behaviours to be better understood and give reliable and relevant data (Saunders et al., 2012). The focus groups were further semi-structured, which allowed results to be captured reliably and effectively to ultimately explore millennials attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms and the strategy adopted (Saunders et al., 2012).

4.4 FOCUS GROUPS

Focus group is a well-established method within qualitative research to understand consumers as they are explorative in nature and the method can further be used in various stages of a research project (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). Focus group discussions are appropriate to use when the opinions of participants, how they express themselves and what

they consider significant are important (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It is also suitable to conduct focus groups when attitudes and experiences around certain topics are researched (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999), and when exploring consumers' perceptions regarding specific things and why (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). Focus groups are not supposed to represent individuals, instead they represent the shared meanings and experiences of a phenomenon (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). In this dissertation, focus group interviews were suitable as the purpose was to study millennials' attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms.

The number of focus groups required depends on the research question(s), time scheduling, range and convenience among participants, limitation of resources, size of the research, and time (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Another factor that may influence the number of focus groups is whether the researcher believes the different views of the participants are to be affected by socio-demographic factors (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Researchers also argue that having too many focus groups will result in a waste of time (Bryman & Bell, 2015). For this dissertation, a large research with several focus groups was not possible due to time constraints and limitations with the number of available participants. However, small groups consisting of people from different backgrounds were involved to ensure that participants were varied. A total of five groups were organised with four to five participants in each, including two groups with international students.

4.4.1 GUIDELINE FOR FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

The planning of the focus groups started with formulation of key discussion questions and followed by coordination of participants and choice of moderator. The key questions were made in accordance with the "ABC-model" with the aim to create independent discussions that would cover how consumers feel, what they intend to do and what they already know of sharing platforms, as well as their engagement on platforms. The formulation of key discussion questions further helped us to prepare a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 1) and a document designed for participants (Appendix 2) defining important concepts and examples on sharing platforms. Before the execution of the five focus groups, a pilot group of two was conducted during week 14 with the aim to test the interview guide. The interview guide and the participation document were, thereafter, adjusted accordingly.

The interview guide (Appendix 1) was made as a protocol for our benefit as moderators. It included ten open-ended questions designed to recognise participants' attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms. The document for participants (Appendix 2) defined the sharing economy and sharing platforms as the topic was a bit complex to understand without visual material. Discussions were based on the case study of sharing platforms as phenomenon, however, to make the concept more familiar and tangible, platforms examples per the "three systems model" were included in the document to enhance participants knowledge of what would be discussed.

4.4.2 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Saunders et al. (2012) argue that focus groups normally involve four to twelve participants and the number of participants mostly depend on the nature of the groups and subject. For example, a more sensitive and/or complex topic tends to have a smaller number of participants. It is also common to conduct focus groups with few participants when the study involves attitudes towards specific phenomenon or objects, since they are more emotional and/or complicated (Saunders et al., 2012).

Many researchers, according to Barbour and Kitzinger (1999), also prefer to work with already established social groups, for example, primary, secondary, formal, and informal groups (Solomon et al., 2006), in order to build an environment where participants can relax, discuss freely and be interactive among each other. With the aim to get millennials within established social groups to our focus groups, we reached out to students at Kristianstad University and Lund University through coordinators and personal contacts. Our main target among students in Kristianstad and Lund were business students as they were easily accessible. The international students at Kristianstad University were approached through a coordinator on the platform ItsLearning, while students in Lund were approached through emails, which we received by other business student contacts. The Swedish business students at Kristianstad University were reached through a student Facebook group and through LinkedIn. To fulfil the criteria of millennials, we made sure social media posts and emails contained information of participation requirement of 18 to 30 years old. Students were further given a link to Doodle, which is website where appointments can be made, and a deadline of one week to answer. On Doodle, students

could choose among alternatives of different times and dates and tick their choice of suitable times for participation.

After deadline, we got an overview of the students' availability, and to create established social groups or have students that were familiar with each other, we made sure all focus groups included students from the same university as well as to let international students be kept separate in two groups. We also decided the days and times where most participants from each university could partake in order to increase participation. Table 2 displays a total of 22 participants that participated in our focus groups and, as we organised the groups with students from the same universities, we had four to five participants in each. There was also a mixture of females and males born between 1989 and 1998, which covered the generation of millennials as were discussed in chapter 3.2.4.

Table 2: Focus group participants

	SEX	YEAR OF BIRTH	COUNTRY OF BIRTH	FOCUS GROUP
A	Female	1992	Sweden	Group 1
B	Male	1993	Sweden	
C	Male	1993	Sweden	
D	Female	1994	Sweden	
E	Male	1990	Sweden	
A	Male	1989	Brazil	Group 2
B	Female	1994	Czech Republic	
C	Female	1997	France	
D	Male	1997	USA	
A	Male	1995	Sweden	Group 3
B	Female	1996	Sweden	
C	Female	1996	Sweden	
D	Female	1996	Sweden	
A	Male	1990	Sweden	Group 4
B	Male	1993	Sweden	
C	Female	1993	Sweden	
D	Male	1994	Sweden	
E	Male	1995	Sweden	
A	Male	1989	Colombia	Group 5
B	Male	1990	Australia	
C	Male	1994	Germany	
D	Female	1994	USA	

4.4.3 EXECUTION

Five focus groups were conducted during week 17 on different days at Kristianstad University to maximise participation. Each group took about 90 minutes to execute and included a short welcome network session to make participants feel comfortable. Before the execution of the focus groups, the choice of moderator between us was made. We attended all focus groups together; one acted as moderator and the other took notes on the interaction between participants. Since the focus groups included both Swedish and international students, we conducted them in Swedish and in English to make it convenient for all participants. Focus group 1, 3 and 4 were conducted in Swedish while focus group 2 and 5 were conducted in English.

The focus group sessions started with presentation of purpose and introduction of participants. The moderator later opened the discussions by asking a couple of basic questions about sharing in general, and, thereafter, presented the concept of the sharing economy and its sharing platforms. A hand-out of the focus group document (Appendix 2) was given to participants at this time, and all focus groups were asked to fill in their personal details, such as name and age, and to circle the platforms they had previously heard of, as well as putting a cross next to those they had been engaged with. When this was done, the moderator once again opened for discussion with a set of key questions in order to create a dialogue about sharing platforms. During the sessions, questions were answered simultaneously with minimal involvement from the moderator that was required in order to guide the group in the right direction.

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

During qualitative studies, researchers often come close to situations and environments studied. The distance between researchers and participants is not as detached as it would have been in a quantitative study, and the contact is more intense. The analysis and process of collected data in qualitative studies often start before all data is gathered. Therefore, it is normal that different phases in the research process overlap, making the analysis available earlier. Qualitative methods are also used when there is a need to be flexible or to understand different perspectives. When qualitative data is analysed, there are rarely any finished models, which encourage researchers to develop their own strategies and tools to

be able to interpret data collected (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). The raw qualitative data also needs to be managed to see if anything stands out. This can be done through audio recordings and transcriptions of the investigation (Botsman & Rogers, 2011).

For the process to interpret data in the study, we audio recorded and compiled notes during the field investigation. We further made transcriptions of the audio files in the online application oTranscribe. Before the start of focus group sessions, the recording devices were tested so the gather of data and the possibility to interpret results would be successful. After focus group sessions, transcriptions of the audio files were required. This took three days to complete and involved a process to convert sound into writing. For the Swedish focus groups, we translated the discussions into English so that all texts were consistent. We then arranged, structured and processed the gathered data and made it into a combined summary of relevant information. This also included notes about the collective interactions between participants made during the focus groups. Thereafter, we structured and coded all information per the “ABC-model” and the “three systems model” in order to find sequences and links (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

We interpreted the completed documents (Appendix 2) together with relevant information from the summary in order to code engagement. To code attitudes, the summary was further categorised into affective, behavioural or cognitive components as described in the “ABC-model”. However, as affective, behavioural and cognitive components are all interrelated (Solomon et al., 2006), it resulted in interconnected discussions. This means participants could, for example, feel something due to a cognitive component and then react accordingly. Therefore, we separated the attitudinal components in summaries as much as possible and then accumulated to overall attitudes.

4.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS & AUTHENTICITY

The criterion trustworthiness can be divided into four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility is based on a systematic and thorough study, as well as researchers’ knowledge of topic. To fulfil credibility, it is important to make sure the research is in accordance with good research practices and with participants’ perception of reality. Transferability refers to contextual uniqueness of qualitative studies and

questions if findings can be transferred to other contexts. Dependability means that researchers should take on an “auditing” approach to establish if proper procedures are made to achieve trustworthiness, and confirmability is established when researchers act in good faith and not let personal values influence their research (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

In order to reach the criterion trustworthiness, with the above mentioned sub-criteria in mind, we gained insights in the sharing economy and its platforms by repeatedly work through material and acquired knowledge through different literature. In the beginning of our focus group discussion, we gave the participants a document with the purpose of the study, as well as definitions of important concepts to make sure they were well-prepared and understood what they contributed to. We made detailed description of the research process through in-depth information of our empirical data for findings to be transferable to other social environments. Participants could also take part of the transcripts to make sure there were no faulty statements.

4.7 LIMITATIONS

There were some limitations brought upon the research in terms of focus groups and its participants. The choice to use focus groups required time, of which we had little. To plan and execute the focus groups were time consuming, and a large amount of data was produced in a short matter of time, which needed to be transcribed, coded and analysed. Researchers argue that data collected from focus group discussions cannot represent the population of consumers, however, focus groups were suitable for the research as we aimed to gain insights in consumers’ attitudes and engagement (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The examples on sharing platforms (Appendix 2) could have impacted the results and influenced the discussions, as well as restricted participants opinions and feelings towards platforms in general.

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical principles in business research have been a major topic during recent years and given rise to several issues, such as harm towards participants in a study and lack of informed consent. Whether there is harm towards participants is addressed through confidentiality and anonymity and means the identities and personal information about

participants in research should be confidential if no consent has been given. The lack of informed consent includes whether information of the research and its purpose is given to participants, and if researchers have asked for consensus regarding recording equipment or observation techniques (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

With the aforementioned considerations in mind, participation in our focus groups was voluntary, which meant withdrawal from the research could happen at any time. Participants in the focus group sessions were also informed of the process and purpose of the research in order to achieve transparency and consensus. By explicitly asking for permission to reveal participants' sex, country of origin and year of birth, we ensured their anonymity and confidentiality throughout the process to keep them out of harm. To not lose any data and to validate the reliability of the transcription, we attained consensus to use recording devices.

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

This chapter provides empirical findings and analysis of the focus groups. The findings are first presented in accordance to the ABC-model of attitudinal components (i.e. affective, behavioural and cognitive) and then accumulated to overall attitudes. The chapter continues with a section on engagement on platforms in relation to attitudes. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of important findings and analysis followed by a section of review of theoretical model.

5.1 ATTITUDINAL COMPONENTS

We separated our empirical findings in accordance to the “ABC-model” (i.e. affective, behavioural and cognitive components) in order to analyse millennials’ attitudes towards the phenomenon sharing platforms. The affective component involves feelings, which in this dissertation included positive emotions (e.g. joy, gratitude, appreciation) and negative emotions (e.g. fear, anxiety, resentment). We also interpreted prejudices and preconceptions that were not based on reasons or consumers’ actual experiences of sharing platforms. The behavioural component included ‘what’ their reactions and intentions were towards sharing platforms. This component also included participants’ habits, for example, if they were used to do something in a certain way, they continued to do it in that specific way. Lastly, the cognitive component included previous experiences and perceptions, beliefs and knowledge about sharing platforms.

5.1.1 AFFECTIVE COMPONENT

Participants had various feelings towards sharing platforms, and these feelings were in conflict as participants appeared to have both positive and negative emotions to the sharing economy and its platforms. They also argued about differences in each category (i.e. product service systems, redistribution markets and collaborative lifestyles), which was followed by various emotions and preconceptions. Some had positive feelings of enjoyment in certain platform categories, whereas others were more sceptical. It was also found that participants’ feelings changed depending on the platforms within each category and situational context. Some platforms were perceived as safer than others and participants stressed the importance of safety while engaging with strangers online. Participants

appeared to have greater awareness of global topics, which resulted in certain preconceptions and uneasiness towards sharing platforms in terms of how unsafe interactions appeared to be. Millennials, in general, tend to have more interest in global topics, as Hwang and Griffiths (2017) mention, and this means participants follow international matters on digital platforms, such as on social media, forums and news sites, that might increase their distrust:

*“I feel unsafe on sharing platforms”
(Participant C, focus group 4).*

*“I like the concept and it is a good thing in a perfect world, but unfortunately, everyone is not normal, and we are not living in an ideal world. Anything can happen”
(Participant B, focus group 3).*

Discussions further revealed that some participants were uncertain about sharing platforms in general, and to decrease uncertainties one solution was to investigate platforms and other users before participants decided to engage. They further mentioned their distrust in strangers and mentioned potential risks that could happen while engaging. As many uncertainties were involved in the process to engage on platforms, participants were more trusting towards traditional companies with a few exceptions. Participants meant that there was increased trustworthiness towards more familiar sharing platforms when the foreign location was unfamiliar as they were uncertain to many things in foreign environments and cultures.

Participants further expressed their appreciation to be able to meet up with users engaged on redistribution markets before exchange of products. They explained that reliability and safety on platforms minimised fraud as participants could make sure the correct products were exchanged. However, the idea to meet up with strangers resulted in anxiety for some participants as they were unsure of strangers and afraid that something negative could happen.

Discussions brought up perceived unsafety on platforms in product service systems and participants experienced more negative feelings as they believed that anyone can, for example, drive cars for Uber. This resulted in increased cautiousness towards other users, which increased participants' fear for sexual harassments and other crimes. However, some participants expressed their enjoyment with engaging on platforms in product service

systems. They explained the possibility to be able to choose whom to share a ride with (e.g. BlaBlaCar) and to communicate via an application to bridge uncertainties and misunderstandings (e.g. Uber).

Apart from concern in safety and distrust in strangers, collaborative lifestyles caused additional apprehensions in, for example, hygiene, reliability and uncertainty. Participants argued that engaged users on platforms are strangers and they would not want to share certain items (e.g. laptops, beds) with other users as they were too personal to lend or borrow. They also thought that to share with strangers was not worth the risk due to lack of insurance and guarantees:

“I find it difficult to share my own home, I trust myself and, therefore, it is not a problem to stay in a stranger’s apartment, but I don’t trust strangers and find it challenging the other way around”

(Participant C, focus group 3).

Sharing platforms further caused various feelings in terms of social aspects. Some participants were very sceptical and uncomfortable with meeting strangers and meant that if you engage on platforms, the other user would expect some kind of conversation. This resulted in social pressure and made these participants hesitant to engage on platforms:

“You have to sit there and talk with them It is different from normal taxi drivers as they are just doing their job, but here, it is more of a private person who is nice in a way”

(Participant B, focus group 3).

“You have to sit there and keep up a conversation and I do not like to be social”

(Participant C, focus group 3).

On the other hand, some participants highly enjoyed the social opportunities and experienced positive feelings towards platforms. They expressed a sense of belonging as they connected with an online group of similar minded peers. They further argued that this online group were mostly made up by millennials. This supports what previous research claim, that millennials are the most important audience for the sharing economy (e.g. Sengupta, 2017; John, 2017; Gupta & Goyal, 2018; Hwang & Griffiths, 2017). Participants were delighted with new opportunities to meet new people and explained their engagement on platforms was due to their need of social interactions and to counteract environmental issues:

*“I love to meet new people”
(Participant D, focus group 2).*

As some participants did not have the social need to connect with peers on platforms, they decided to dissociate themselves from millennials engaged on sharing platforms. Solomon et al. (2006) explain that consumers subconsciously avoid groups they do not feel any belonging to and when participants explained they could not relate to the phenomenon sharing platforms, it affected their feelings, emotions and prejudices. Participants connected more with generations that are not associated with the sharing economy as they perceived themselves as more conservative and stressed the safety on sharing platforms:

*“I think I was born in the wrong generation”
(Participation D, focus group 4).*

5.1.2 BEHAVIOURAL COMPONENT

During discussions, some participants emphasised that they would rather take taxis, stay at hotels or go to traditional stores due to convenience, safety, warranties and services (e.g. in-store experience, customer help-line). They had little intention to engage on sharing platforms due to their strong consumption habits:

*“I rather stay at a hotel and to shop at a retail store. I cannot imagine why some people would prefer to use sharing platforms”
(Participant D, focus group 4).*

These participants further pointed out that humans are creatures of habits and it is difficult to change consumption behaviours, and even if they intended to engage on sharing platforms, it did not necessarily equal actual engagement. Solomon et al. (2006) explain that consumers may have intention to buy a product or service, however, it does not always end up as actual behaviour. It was difficult for some participants to try something completely different as it took a lot of effort, and they experienced more convenience with traditional stores:

*“It is easy to say you are going to do something, however, it is more convenient to do it the way you are used to”
(Participant D, focus group 3).*

*“I have a hard time leaving my comfort zone as I have a lot of habits”
(Participant E, focus group 1).*

Other participants reacted positively to the economic benefits (e.g. cheaper products) that sharing platforms in some cases created, and this increased their intention to engage on sharing platforms. Participants' intentions also differed in relation to which platform they would like to engage on, as well as 'when' and 'where' they would engage. Some participants were more likely to engage on platforms in the category redistribution markets as they had previous experiences with these kinds of platforms and found it more accessible than platforms in other categories. Others were in the habit to engage on redistribution markets when they needed to sell or buy specific items, such as cars or snowmobiles. Participants also had more intention to engage on well-known platforms abroad as it created opportunities to overcome language barriers and other uncertainties due to advanced technology:

*“My dad and I usually sell and buy motorcycles, snowmobiles and cars off Ebay”
(Participant D, focus group 2).*

5.1.3 COGNITIVE COMPONENT

Botsman and Rogers (2011) mention that millennials often are more interested to use platforms in the sharing economy, and are open to new experiences that, in turn, influences their preferences. Participants claimed that millennials are the main generation to engage on sharing platforms as they are more receptive to new experiences, willing to share with peers, likely to follow trends, aware of environmental and sustainable questions in society, and have a larger interest in social interactions. They meant that their generation is more conscious of reusing products and want to share underutilised goods as sharing decrease unnecessary consumption, which results in a more sustainable world. Participants also believed that technology made it easier for consumers to engage on sharing platforms, especially for younger generations as they grew up with the digitalisation:

*“Millennials are more concerned about the environment”
(Participant C, focus group 2).*

*“I think it is a growing movement for our generation to engage on sharing platforms. We are more environmental friendly, and it is a better way to consume”
(Participant B focus group 3).*

*“I think millennials are more willing to use these kinds of platforms”
(Participant D, focus group 5).*

Some participants stressed the importance to have knowledge about platforms before they engage on them. They believed it is essential to compare platforms to traditional companies in order to gain insights if platforms were more convenient and less time consuming:

*“I don’t have enough knowledge about sharing platforms to be able to engage on them”
(Participant C, focus group 4).*

Many were also doubtful to the efficiency of sharing platforms, as total time spent gathering information, becoming members, finding transportations, clothes or accommodations, and meeting strangers resulted in difficulties and inconvenience. Participants stressed their annoyance to plan and coordinate resources when they wanted to engage on certain platforms. For instance, if consumers need to book accommodation through Airbnb, or need to borrow tools for a brief time, they are dependent on the host, and vice versa. Some agreed that sharing platforms does not make your life easier and were hesitant towards engagement on platforms. Therefore, it is easier for consumers to turn to traditional companies when they need something:

*“I have never used platforms such as Airbnb, but I believe it is easier with traditional companies”
(Participant D, focus group 3).*

*“It is easier for a company to be held accountable. It is safer with a larger and more well-known company”
(Participant C, focus group 3).*

Other participants believed it was more convenient with sharing platforms than with traditional companies. In the category product service systems all communication, payment and planning on platforms occurred online. Participants believed technological advances on platforms would be safer in some countries as it would decrease risks for robbery and other crimes:

*“In Brazil, it is safer to use product service systems platforms, such as Uber, because of the online payment as it otherwise is really common with robbery”
(Participant A, focus group 2).*

All participants thought platforms in redistribution markets were old-fashioned, traditional and commercial, and some proposed social media markets (e.g. Facebook markets) as new platforms for redistribution. They explained that social media markets made it easier to contact people and to consume locally as there are opportunities to join smaller

communities for neighbourhoods and hobbies. Other participants thought social media platforms should not include redistribution markets as platforms would lose their original idea:

*“I do not really see some of the platforms in redistribution markets as sharing”
(Participant A, focus group 3).*

*“I am pretty annoyed by social media platforms as you can see that people are, like, buying stuff then trying to sell for a higher price. Social media platforms are kinda losing its original idea and as I think it is less serious”
(Participant A, focus group 2).*

Participants had different views on collaborative lifestyles and some thought platforms, like Airbnb, resulted in a lack of accommodation for inhabitants in larger cities as house and apartment owners rent out their accommodation short-term to travellers and tourists. Other participants disagreed as they observed many social opportunities created by platforms and believed that collaborative lifestyles connect people on a global scale in ways that were not possible before:

*“Collaborative lifestyles are really good when you want to meet new people and socialise with locals from other countries”
(Participant A, focus group 1).*

Many participants were conscious of certain problems that sharing platforms can create for market economies in terms of competition, work conditions and sexual harassments. They meant that competition from unregulated markets can have negative impact on governments’ financial stability and on employees’ current and future work conditions, and this generated worries for an unstable future. When discussions revolved around the increase of sexual harassments in today’s society, a few participants believed the risk was amplified on sharing platforms, especially on platforms in the categories product service systems and collaborative lifestyles, as there is a lack of internal control on who participates on them:

*“There are a lot of criminals or people who cannot get a job elsewhere that are, for example, driving for Uber. Uber don’t do any real backgrounds checks and letting anyone to drive for them”
(Participant C, focus group 4).*

Others meant that sharing platforms can create work opportunities and money flows in the economy, as well as convenient and accessible ways of transportation and living. Other

participants meant sharing platforms create work opportunities and money flow in the economy, as well as convenient and accessible ways of transportation and living. With alternative ways to earn or save money, consumers can reach better life quality and fulfil other needs (e.g. social needs). They further argued that governments and traditional companies should adapt to this new way of living for a more developed society:

“My buddy did not have a job, and now he drives for Lyft and makes good money. So, I think it is a good opportunity”
(Participant A, focus group 2).

“Governments should adapt and keep up with new trends. If they would have said for, like, 100 years ago ‘we are not going to start with the steam-engine, we are staying with the old’ we wouldn’t move anywhere. Companies should do the same, it would be stupid to hold back”
(Participant B, focus group 2).

5.1.4 ACCUMULATION OF COMPONENTS

We identified several differences between participants’ overall attitudes towards sharing platforms. Those participants that appeared to have positive attitudes towards platforms tended to maintain consistency in all attitudinal components, which means they experienced positive affective, behavioural and cognitive components. This appears to be in agreement with what Solomon et al. (2006) and van der Walt (1991) advocates; consumers unconsciously strive to maintain consistency in attitudinal components.

The same participants had some negative cognitive aspects, such as how unregulated markets can have negative impact on society’s economy, however, they emphasised their cognitive beliefs that sharing platforms contributed to more work opportunities and more convenient and accessible ways of transportation. In this case, positive beliefs outweighed negative beliefs, which resulted in an overall cognitive component that was positive. Together with the positive affective component (e.g. appreciation, joy and gratitude), who further appeared to be based on previous life experience and their interest in environmental topics, participants also had a behavioural (e.g. doings) component that was positive, which meant they had full intentions to engage on platforms. However, it did not necessarily result in engagement due to situational context and other circumstances, such as no opportunity for engagement.

We also found participants who exhibited overall negative attitudes towards sharing platforms. Their affective component involved negative feelings and preconceptions about platforms, and some emphasised their scepticism and questioned if it truly was as convenient as expected. They also stressed their uncertainty in terms of safety and distrust in strangers, which gave them negative feelings of concern and anxiety. Participants with negative attitudes further experienced certain positive feelings connected with cognitive thinking in terms of sustainability. However, safety appeared to be a significant topic which guided participants' overall affective component to become negative, which results in a negative behavioural and cognitive component as consumers unconsciously maintain consistency in their attitudinal components (Solomon et al., 2006; van der Walt, 1991). Participants based their cognitive beliefs on global matters in terms of unsafety and crime rates, which made them more concerned. This resulted in a negative behavioural component with no intention to engage on platforms.

Participants who appeared to have similar attitudes towards sharing platforms had different reasons for the development of them. As Solomon et al. (2006) stated, the reasons for development of attitudes can be different as an individual's feelings, doings and knowing differ from one another, and our discussions showed that participants' overall attitudes could have been guided differently by either feelings, doings, knowing or a mix of them. Some participants with negative attitudes voiced concern in, for example, safety issues, and others had lack of knowledge about platforms. Few participants also believed both aspects were a problem and expressed concern in safety issues and lack of knowledge.

We further found that most participants did not necessarily have overall attitudes towards sharing platforms. We experienced they could have positive attitudes towards certain similar platforms in, for example, product service systems, as well as negative attitudes towards other platforms in the same category. Participants appeared to be inconsistent in their attitudinal components towards the phenomenon sharing platforms, which is contrary to what Solomon et al. (2006) and van der Walt (1991) argue in terms of consistency in attitudinal components.

During discussions of sharing platforms, it appeared that all participants felt connection with millennials in terms of digitalisation and environmental issues. However, some individual participants could not fully classify themselves as millennials in relation to the sharing economy, as they experienced some conservative traits and did not follow trends as much, neither were they positive to share with peers they did not know. The differences in identification with millennials could be compared to various attitudes among participants, and many of those who had positive attitudes identified themselves more with the generation of millennials. One participant identified herself with the generation and clearly stated *her* generation as environmental friendly, whereas another participant dissociated herself from the generation when she stated *millennials* are concerned about the environment:

“[...] we are more environmental friendly [...]”
(Participant B, focus group 3).

“Millennials are more concerned about the environment”
(Participant C, focus group 2).

Participants’ attitudes could further be related to the mental sets in different groups, societies and cultures (Hofstede et al., 2010). Participants in our focus groups believed to have certain dissimilarities in their attitudes towards sharing platforms as they had different backgrounds (e.g. social strata), cultures (e.g. countries) and life experiences (e.g. exchange, holidays, work). On the contrary, those who had grown up in similar countries, or had similar experiences on platforms appeared to have comparable attitudes. This clearly indicated the difficulty in applying the “ABC-model” to one generation as many, for example, did not identify themselves with sharing platforms or did not have same amount of experience.

5.2 ENGAGEMENT

Information of participants’ engagement on sharing platforms have been gathered to better understand how they connect with sharing platforms and to further see if engagement results in positive attitudes. We used the “three systems model” to differ between engagement on various platforms, and as displayed in table 3, all 22 participants had heard of platforms in the category product service systems’ and 19 participants had been engaged

at least once. Platforms in the redistribution markets were also widely known by all participants and had high level of engagement, as 20 participants previously had been engaged at least twice. The category collaborative lifestyles had 20 participants who had heard of these kinds of platforms, whereas only 10 participants had been engaged with them at least once.

Table 3: Participants engagement on sharing platforms

	Product service systems	Redistribution markets	Collaborative lifestyles
Engagement on platforms	19 participants	20 participants	10 participants
Heard of platforms	22 participants	22 participants	20 participants
Engagement on platforms at least one	X	X	X
Engagement on platforms at least twice		X	

Many participants had been engaged on the platforms within the category redistribution markets and participants had the most positive attitudes towards these platforms. Discussions revealed that engagement on platforms within redistribution markets had happened repeatedly for each participant, compared to other platforms in the categories product service systems and collaborative lifestyles. According to Brodie et al. (2013), engaged consumers are expected to have more positive attitudes towards an object than non-engaged consumers, and participants' engagement within the platform categories clearly stated engagement affects attitudes. More engagement resulted in better experiences, knowledge, change of habits and increased trust that, in turn, affected their attitudes:

*“The more you encounter sharing platforms, the more you are willing to trust them”
(Participant E, focus group 4).*

On the contrary, Hamari et al. (2016) argued that engagement on sharing platforms is influenced by consumers' attitudes towards them. However, we could only interpret that attitudes towards specific platforms result in engagement on those platforms. Participants with positive attitudes towards redistribution markets had further only engaged on few specific platforms that were similar to each other in the category. This means attitudes can

affect engagement and, in turn, engagement can affect attitudes. However, only for specific or similar platforms within each category in sharing platform.

5.3 DISCUSSION OF ANALYSIS

We discovered four main findings that were notably interesting in relation to the research purpose. The first finding showed that attitudinal components (i.e. affective, behavioural and cognitive) are balanced unequally depending on participants' individual and collective mental sets of feelings, thoughts and behaviours, which, in turn, affected their attitudes towards sharing platforms. This means one component may outweigh other components depending on 'who' consumes and on situational contexts as individuals have their own way of feeling, thinking and doing.

The second finding indicated that group and cultural differences (i.e. 'who') was another dimension that influenced attitudes towards sharing platforms, in addition to the attitudinal components (i.e. affective, behavioural and cognitive). It was discovered that consumers' collective values and norms impacted attitudinal components differently, which means if consumers, for example, grew up with certain norms (e.g. not to talk to strangers as it is deemed unsafe) it would influence their attitudinal components accordingly and, therefore, their overall attitudes.

This results in our third finding, which indicated the difficulty to explore millennials' attitudes towards sharing platforms as a phenomenon. Millennials represents an immensely large group with many consumers from different cultures and with various mental sets, norms, values and beliefs. It was found that attitudes of large subcultures, such as millennials, are difficult to explore without narrowing the groups down to smaller and more similar target groups. It also indicated that millennials may not be the most important target group as previous research claim (e.g. Sengupta, 2017; John, 2017; Gupta & Goyal, 2018; Hwang & Griffiths, 2017). Instead, it is suggested that engagement on sharing platforms is a certain type of lifestyle and results in a microculture. Sharing platforms is further an exceedingly large phenomenon, which includes platforms with various business objectives and orientations. Participants' mental sets influenced their attitudes in accordance to what platforms it regarded. This means, consumers' attitudes towards sharing platforms differ

between platforms, and they cannot have one overall attitude towards the phenomenon nor categories per the “three systems model”. Therefore, to explore millennials in relation to sharing platforms would require extensive research into division of several smaller groups of ‘who’ and of the attitude object.

The fourth finding implied that engagement is difficult to recognise in relation to attitudes towards sharing platforms. Our results suggested strong interrelationships between attitudes and engagement on specific or similar platforms within the sharing economy, which means if consumers previously had been engaged on certain platforms, it contributed to consumers’ attitudes towards certain platforms, and conversely. However, when consumers experienced positive attitudes towards sharing platforms, it was difficult to recognise the impact it had on engagement to all platforms.

5.3.1 REVIEW OF THEORETICAL MODEL

For future studies, we believe the “ABC-model” should be used with caution. The model explains that all components need to be consistent to create an overall attitude as Solomon et al. (2006) argue there are interrelationships between affective, behavioural and cognitive components and consumers unconsciously strive to maintain consistency in attitudinal components. We observed components were mostly dependent and interrelated to one another, however, components appeared to be balanced unequally depending on what platforms it regarded, as well as situational and contextual differences (i.e. ‘when/where’). For some participants, the affective component guided their attitudes, while for others it was their cognitive component. During our analysis of collected data, we also found difficulties in separating feelings from knowing, knowing from doings, doings from feelings and so on, which made it difficult to apply data to the “ABC- model”.

Depending on ‘who’ individuals are and in what group or cultural context they belong to, attitudes are influenced accordingly, and this factor could not be applied to the “ABC-model”. It is, as Hofstede et al. (2010) suggest, the collective mental sets of feelings, thoughts and behaviours that set aside groups from one another, and this influenced ‘who’ we analysed in relation to sharing platforms. To this end, it is suggested to include a dimension of inter-individuals, inter-groups and cross-cultural differences and similarities

in the “ABC-model”, which is displayed in figure 4, in order to explore how consumers’ attitudes can vary due to the collective mental sets of feelings, thoughts and behaviours as well as cultural norms, values and beliefs.

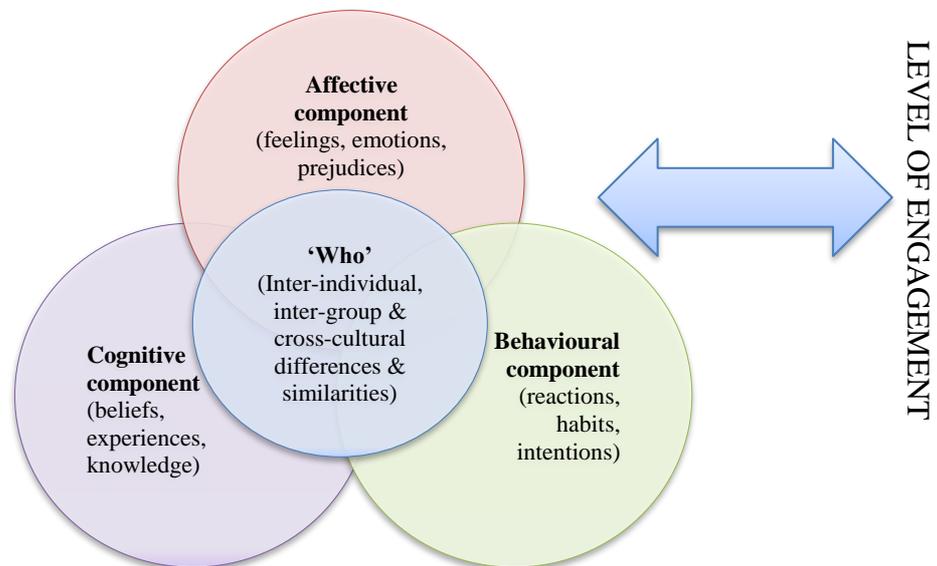


Figure 4: Reviewed “ABC-model” (based on Solomon et al., 2006)

6. CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter provides a summary of this study with four main findings. These findings further contribute to theoretical and practical implications and contributions. Limitations and future research are also illustrated to add important insights.

6.1 SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

This dissertation illustrated the importance of exploring millennials' attitudes' and engagement on sharing platforms to further understand their behaviours, perspectives and differing contexts in which they consumed on sharing platforms. The purpose and research question were inspired by the growing interest in the sharing economy, which has given rise to many new consumption opportunities over recent years (Barnes & Mattsson, 2017; Albinsson & Perera, 2018). The decision for selecting millennials as the target group for this study was due to the fact that young consumers have more advanced digital abilities to easier be able to engage on sharing platforms (Reisch & Thorgersen, 2015; Botsman & Rogers, 2011).

Through a qualitative study we could better analyse consumers' attitudes and engagement, and an abductive approach enabled us to simultaneously work with a theoretical framework and empirical data, which resulted in comprehensible and valuable findings. The theoretical framework consisted of attitudes, consumption and sharing platforms theories and models, and we combined, as well as applied these throughout this dissertation. Empirical data was gathered through five focus groups conducted with students from Kristianstad University and Lund University, and their attitudes and engagement were analysed thoroughly in the context of sharing platforms.

We discovered four main findings in relation to the research purpose. Our first finding implied that the attitudinal components (i.e. affective, behavioural and cognitive) are balanced unequally depending on participants' individual and collective mental sets of feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Our second finding suggested that, in addition to the attitudinal components, group and cultural differences (i.e. 'who') was another dimension that influenced attitudes towards sharing platforms. Our third finding indicated that it is difficult to explore large subcultures and phenomenon in relation to attitudes without

further narrowing down millennials into smaller, more similar and specific groups. Millennials cannot have one overall attitude towards phenomenon nor categories per the “three systems model” as all platforms have their own business objectives and target markets. It also appeared that engagement on sharing platforms require a specific lifestyle, which means that millennials may not be the most important target group as previous research suggested (e.g. Sengupta, 2017; John, 2017; Gupta & Goyal, 2018; Hwang & Griffiths, 2017). Our fourth finding implied that engagement is difficult to explore in relation to attitudes towards sharing platforms as consumers’ previous engagement could not contribute to consumers’ attitudes towards sharing platforms in general, and vice versa. We further suggested that a new component is added to the “ABC-model”, which shows that the interrelationships between feelings, doings and knowing are influenced by inter-individual, inter-groups and cross-cultural differences and similarities.

6.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Previous research has focused on studying consumers’ motivations (‘why’) towards the sharing economy and its platforms. However, it is also important to study consumers from other dimensions. For example, it is important to consider the attitudinal components as motivations are not the only reasons for consumption (Solomon et al., 2006). We chose to contribute to theory by exploring millennials’ attitudes and engagement as the generation was believed to be important for the sharing economy (Möhlmann, 2015). However, the findings indicated it was not possible to draw conclusions from millennials as a generation because group and culture contexts appeared to influence individual’s attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms. To this end, we proposed a revised version of the “ABC-model” that includes an added component in order to distinctly show that interrelationships between attitudinal components are influenced by inter-individual, inter-groups and cross-cultural differences and similarities.

6.3 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

As the sharing economy is constantly growing (Barnes & Mattsson, 2017; Albinsson & Perera, 2018) platforms gain more obtainers and providers, which results in various practical implications and contributions. These implications may be helpful for businesses

and peers to further understand how their consumers are engaging and behaving with their platforms as well as ethical aspects that may need to be considered.

Previous research considers millennials as an important target group for the sharing economy (Möhlmann, 2015), however, the findings indicate that consumers who engage on sharing platforms appear to have a specific lifestyle. This lifestyle is independent of generation, and it is suggested that businesses and entrepreneurs who are active on platforms should market their products and services in accordance to this lifestyle instead of large demographic segments (e.g. generations). Businesses and entrepreneurs who seek to engage in the sharing economy also gain insights into their needs to have a target audience with lifestyles suitable for engagement on sharing platforms.

Furthermore, consumers who engage on these platforms are generally more unprotected (e.g. work harassments and security issues) compared to traditional companies. This dissertation questions whether it is the right time for sharing among consumers on these platforms as there are still a lot of open issues regarding safety, security and trust. The study also contributes from an ethical standpoint by emphasising the importance of having regulations in place and how it can not only increase the level of safety on these platforms but more importantly alter consumers' attitudes and engagement in a positive way.

6.4 LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation allowed us to recognise the level of difficulty in undertaking a study about attitudes and engagement on sharing platforms. To be able to understand consumers' attitudes, the focus groups could have been broken down to further distinguish the type of millennials. It may have also been more valuable to group consumers into similar cultural backgrounds, experiences and knowledge as it was clear that engagement on sharing platforms is largely based on its own lifestyle. As we could not get consistent and united attitudes towards sharing platforms, it may have also been appropriate to study attitudes of cultures within subcultures (i.e. microcultures). This may have resulted in improved and more accessible findings as it was not suitable to look at engagement, and how it was connected to attitudes, on all sharing platforms. For future studies on consumers' attitudes towards sharing platforms, we recommend to choose one platform, or a group of similar

platforms, so that the findings could have been more focused and consistent. Moreover, we want to further emphasise the importance of lifestyle when exploring consumers' engagement on sharing platforms and the importance of considering the implications that these platforms have for society, businesses and the sharing economy.

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APPENDIX 1 – FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Hi and welcome to our focus group!

We appreciate that you had time to join us today, and we are really hoping for a fun and open discussion. Before we start, are you okay with us recording the discussion so that we can listen to it again later? It will not be shown to anyone other than us.

During the focus group, it is important that we respect each other, that means we try not to interrupt when others speak and listen to what everyone has to say. We would also like to point out that in our discussion today, there are no wrong answers. We, therefore, encourage everyone to speak freely about the subject.

Our purpose with this focus group is to investigate your attitudes to sharing platforms in the sharing economy. We will shortly explain the concepts sharing platforms and the sharing economy.

Before we get started, we would like to ask you a few questions:

1. What do you think you can share or exchange in the society?
2. What are your opinions about doing it?

INTRODUCING THE SHARING ECONOMY

The sharing economy is a new economic system where you share or exchange underutilised assets on digital platforms. Moreover, the digital platforms that are used for this purpose is called sharing platforms. The sharing economy has created a revolution where we, as consumers, choose not to buy new products as much as we did in the past, and take part of the assets that are already available in the society. This happens on sharing platforms by selling/buying redistributed goods or selling/buying the access to products without giving or having ownership of them.

- *Every participant gets a paper with definitions and a table with examples of platforms (Appendix 2)*

The paper you have in front of you show different sharing platforms where you can share or exchange underutilised resources. These are classic examples of sharing platforms.

Before we continue, is it clear to everyone what all the definitions mean?

➤ *Explain the different sharing platforms*

Can you please circle the platforms you recognise and put a cross next to the ones you have been in contact with or used? Moreover, on the top of the paper, please write your name, age, and country of birth. We would like to use your age and country of birth in our thesis, if that is okay with you. You will be anonymous, and your identity is only for our internal use.

Everyone ready? Then let us get started.

3. What are your opinions about sharing or exchanging underutilised resources on platforms like these?
4. How do you think sharing platforms have affected or are affecting the society?
5. In what context have you or would you take part of product service systems platforms?
6. In what context have you or would you take part of redistributed markets platforms?
7. In what context have you or would you take part of collaborative lifestyles platforms?
8. What do you think is the reason for people in your age to take part of sharing platforms instead of traditional companies that are offering the same thing?
9. What role would you consider taking on the sharing platforms? Provider, obtainer, or both?
10. Are other generations, compared to people in your age, more or less willing to participate in the sharing platforms?

ENDING

That was all the questions we wanted you to discuss. Is there anything you would like to add before we finish? If you change your mind, you can always contact us later to add

something to the discussion. Moreover, if you would like to take part of our thesis, just send us an email and we would be happy to forward it to you once it is finished.

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX 2 – FOCUS GROUP DOCUMENT

Name:

Year of birth:

Country of origin:

DEFINITIONS

Digital platforms:

Digital platforms are websites/applications where you can take part of or receive information through communication from companies or through contact with other users.

Examples: Social platforms (Facebook), marketplaces (Amazon), media platforms (Spotify), etc.

The Sharing Economy:

Economic system where you share or exchange underutilised resources (goods you do not use or do not use as much) on platforms online. The consumer can be both the provider and the end user.

Sharing platforms:

Digital platforms that can be used for sharing or exchanging underutilised goods or services.

QUESTIONS

1. What do you think you can share or exchange in the society?
2. What are your opinions about doing it?
3. What are your opinions about sharing or exchanging underutilised resources on platforms like these?
4. How do you think sharing platforms have affected or are affecting the society?
5. In what context have you or would you take part of product service systems platforms?
6. In what context have you or would you take part of redistributed markets platforms?
7. In what context have you or would you take part of collaborative lifestyles platforms?

8. What do you think is the reason for people in your age to take part of sharing platforms instead of traditional companies that are offering the same thing?
9. What role would you consider taking on the sharing platforms? Provider, obtainer, or both?
10. Are other generations, compared to people in your age, more or less willing to participate in the sharing platforms?

PRODUCT SERVICE SYSTEMS	REDISTRIBUTION MARKETS	COLLABORATIVE LIFESTYLES
<p>As an obtainer: Not owning a product but taking advantage of the benefit it can give you at a specific time.</p> <p>As a provider: Let someone benefit from your underutilised asset (something you do not use or use a little), but not give them ownership over it.</p>	<p>As an obtainer: Buying or taking ownership over pre-owned and unneeded goods of others.</p> <p>As a provider: Selling or giving ownership over your owned and unneeded goods to others.</p>	<p>As an obtainer: Getting access of a good or service that can be found with other consumers that are sharing similar interests and values.</p> <p>As a provider: Giving access of your good or give service to consumers that are sharing similar interests and values.</p>
 <p>A ride-sharing platform for fast, reliable rides (IFTTT, 2018)</p>	 <p>Buy and sell used good, to or from others</p>	 <p>Hospitality service for people to lease or rent short-term lodging</p>
 <p>Long-distance carpooling service that connects drivers with empty seats to people travelling the same way (BlaBlaCar, 2018)</p>	 <p>Sweden's biggest market for used goods to sell and buy</p>	 <p>Matches freelance labour with local demand, allowing consumers to find immediate help with everyday tasks, including cleaning, moving, delivery and handyman work (gatherms, 2018)</p>
 <p>A ride-sharing platform to get a ride whenever you need one (Lyft, 2018)</p>	 <p>Swedish platform that allows consumers to buy and sell used good, to or from others</p>	 <p>A travel community to find accommodations, meetup with nearby locals and travellers, discover the best things to do, or find travel advice (couchsurfing, 2018)</p>

(Based on Botsman & Rogers, 2011)