

An Investigation into how Brands in the  
Sharing Economy can deliver Exceptional  
Customer Experiences.

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# Abstract | Jordan Farry

## Title:

**An Investigation into how Brands in the Sharing Economy can deliver Exceptional Customer Experiences.**

Every day we deal with customer experience, whether it's consciously or subconsciously, we often value our positive experiences and detest those negative experiences as a customer. The inspiration for this research stemmed from the authors own experience as a customer within the economy, but also the authors experience as a professional attempting to contribute to the experiences had by customers, prospective clients and individuals within the marketplace.

In addition, the sharing economy represents a complex marketplace, one which seeks to bring dispersed groups of customers together to create economic opportunity. The author recognises that this disruptive marketplace represents a new opportunity for the delivery of customer experience. By bringing multiple stakeholders to a single transaction, through a digital channel, the sharing economy is creating new experiences, new customers and ultimately, new opportunities to delight.

There are surely components of customer experience which can be leveraged for the greater good of every stakeholder in the sharing economy. Businesses can increase profit, providers are afforded economic opportunity on underutilised assets and last but by no means least, customers can begin to live in an experience economy where their personal experiences are the priority.

This paper examines those components of customer experience in greater detail. Through qualitative research, the author proposes a conceptual model for consideration by sharing economy businesses. Furthermore, the research finds that customer experience represents a complex array of touchpoints, and that businesses must prioritise the experience at each touchpoint to deliver exceptional experiences to their customers.

Finally, despite significant gaps in the current literature, the researcher has made several recommendations and suggestions for future research into customer experience in the sharing economy.

# Declaration |

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation National College of Ireland Research  
Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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## Chapter 1 | Introduction

According to PwC (PwC, 2015), the sharing economy represented a \$15 billion-dollar industry in 2013 with projected growth to \$335 billion by 2025. An industry that is bringing people together in new ways and channelling altruistic behaviours, like lending money or sharing a car ride, into a decentralised marketplace (MacDonald, 2016). The sharing economy is a collection of peer-to-peer markets, which have emerged as a direct alternative to traditional suppliers of goods and services within industries often monopolised by long-established firms (Zervas et al., 2017). Sundararajan (2016) describes the sharing economy as a market in which ordinary consumers can begin to act as sellers and provides services which were once exclusive to professional sellers. The sharing economy has also been named as the gig economy and the platform economy, based on the same premise that it gives users the opportunity to make money on their own schedule through digital platforms (Heller, 2017). These digital platforms have been fundamental to the growth of the sharing economy, as they promote social interaction and economic transactions through web-based technology (Stors and Kagermeier, 2017).

Whilst the sharing economy remains an emerging concept in both academic and industry literature, the phenomenon of the sharing economy has helped to re-shape the economic, social and cultural landscape of the world (Novikova, 2017). The sharing economy has been proven to promote entrepreneurship, create efficiencies and often enhance personalised customer experiences (MacDonald, 2016). However, it has also been accused of creating job insecurity and operating in a way like that of an unregulated capitalist environment (Slee, 2016). Nonetheless, whilst sharing is by no means a new concept

(Belk, 2010), it has been subject to a substantial surge of interest and consequently the sharing economy has presented a solution which offers flexibility to the consumer and opportunity to the owner (Francom, 2015).

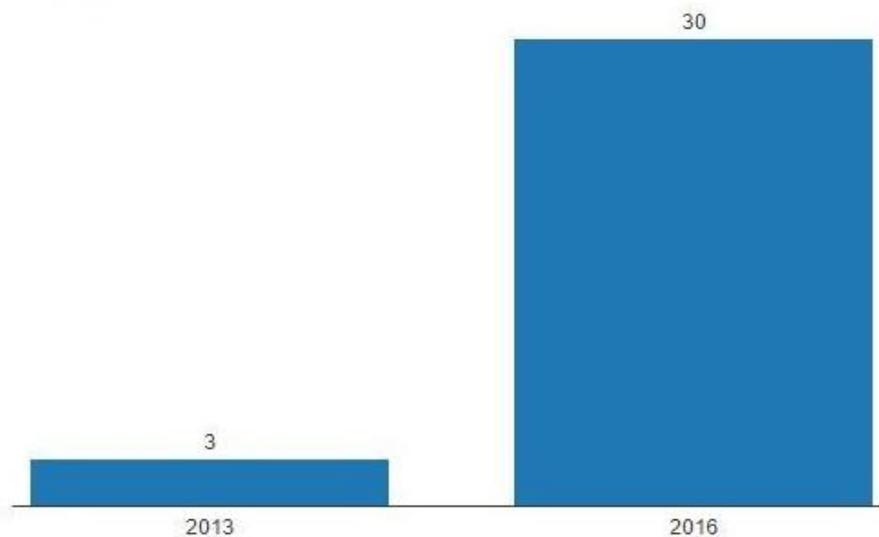
Third-party digital platforms have provided a marketplace which matches peers-to-peers and enables a transaction, these have been the driving force behind the sharing economy (Lin, Wang and Wu, 2017). The appearance of these platforms at the centre of every transaction is what distinguishes the sharing economy from traditional marketplaces (Narasimhan et al., 2017). The sharing economy marks a fundamental shift in consumer culture, and the rise in services within the sharing economy represents the beginning of an era in which consumers value access and experiences over ownership (Masters, 2017).

Pine II and Gilmore (1999) have pioneered much of the initial research differentiating experiences from traditional services or possessions and argue that experiences represent the next step in what they called the 'progression of economic value'. Their research highlights that consumers unquestionably desire experiences, and businesses are now responding to the changing desires of their customers. Much like the literature from Lovelock (1983) which explores the transition and differences between goods and services, Pine II and Gilmore (1999) discuss how goods, and services have periodically become commoditized because of price. Their fundamental argument when introducing the 'experience economy', is that experiences are now a distinct economic offering. Therefore, the sharing economy is not only underpinned with a shift towards usership but also, a focus on customer experiences.

Interestingly, the same shift away from ownership is present amongst the digital platforms making up the sharing economy as they simply represent opportunity for users to sell or rent unused product or service capacity (Poczter, 2018). Another fundamental difference and a contributor to sharing economy success, is that platforms within the sharing economy avoid the headache of inventory (Poczter,2018). For example, the world's largest retailer, Alibaba, carries no stock. Similarly, two of the world largest sharing platforms, Airbnb and Uber own accommodation and vehicles respectively. These sharing economy business models are not only disruptive to traditional industries, but also generating significant venture capital investment, see figure 1. below, which represents the shift in investment from 2015 to 2016. This substantial investment represents a risk for venture capitalists, given that the sharing economy is underpinned by customer experience, something which to a degree is out of the firm's control.

## Venture Capital investments in sharing economy companies

USD, billions



Note: figures do not include China

Source: PwC, McKinsey, April Rinne • Created with Datawrapper

**FIGURE 1. VENTURE CAPITAL INVESTMENTS IN SHARING ECONOMY COMPANIES (PWC,2016)**

As a result, this study seeks to examine how businesses in the sharing economy are gearing themselves towards delivering superior customer experiences. By reviewing the research and literature around the sharing economy and more prominently, customer experience, this paper seeks to bring into sharper focus the key levers that can be pulled by sharing economy firms to continuously deliver exceptional customer experiences, deliver increased profits and shareholder returns.

## Research background

Whilst the popular press has brought the sharing economy to attention over the last 12-months, there are limitations in the low quantity of published and peer reviewed research surrounding the topic (Narasimhan et al., 2017). The aim of this contribution is therefore to review the current literature on both the sharing economy and customer experience within the sharing economy, whilst also offering perspectives for future research directions. Whilst Sundararajan (2015) represents a substantial volume of scholarly research in the sharing economy, Barbu et al (2018), Botsman and Rogers (2011) and Belk (2011) offer multiple practitioner-based discussions into the sharing economy, highlighting strengths and issues related to the overall sharing economy.

Much of the customer experience literature iterates the importance of experience as goods become commoditized (Pine II and Gilmore, 1999), and argues that customer experience represents a considerable battleground for businesses focused on deliver customer satisfaction (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Furthermore, the figures emerging from PwC (2015), highlight the rate of growth predicted in the sharing economy and

a market of opportunity for consumers and providers. As such, the sharing economy is more competitive than ever, hence the need to understand a major lever being pulled to gain competitive advantage, customer experience.

As the sharing economy grows and disrupts many traditional industries including accommodation, transport and financial services, the academic interest in the area seems to be accelerating, making this research topic both current and engaging. Nonetheless, there is a challenge here in that there are substantial gaps in varying definitions and levels of knowledge in the topic i.e. the foundations in which sharing economy businesses much build to deliver exceptional customer experiences and gain competitive advantage over traditional service providers. This paper intends to fill that gap.

The researcher intends to use both primary and secondary research to echo the two areas of discussion, the sharing economy and customer experience. Initially, the research explores previous literature from both topics seeking to identify commonalities and trends. Shortly following this, the researcher intends to conduct primary research to examine and test the key themes which arise across the wide breadth of literature covered. Whilst it would be interesting to explore both consumer and firm perspective in both areas, there have been obvious time limitations to this research, as a result the researcher will take a qualitative research approach whilst focusing on industry insight. The researcher will analyse and reflect on the data collected in the findings section of this paper, whilst drawing comparisons of this data to the research objectives discussed in the methodology section and the pre-existing theory from the literature review.

## Research Interest

According to The Customer Rage study (Arizona State University, 2017) in the 12-months of 2017, 62 million families experienced at least one customer experience related problem which left them angry or frustrated. Customer expectations and perceptions are evolving, whilst businesses aim to gain competitive edge through the creation of loyalty and brand advocates, not just customers. The sharing economy is uniquely positioned as an emerging market, but also an economy which enables a complex array of stakeholders to interact with the overall customer experience (Lee Yohn, 2016), as a result firms operating within the sharing economy have less control over customer experience and must spend their time managing stakeholders. The researcher recognises that wider society may not engage with the terminology of stakeholder management, however, the creation of a customer centric culture offers a compelling reason to engage with the sharing economy as a provider, a consumer and a researcher. As such, the interest in this research stems from the belief that the sharing economy is creating a human-centric approach to business modelling and an opportunity for personal development and economic growth.

## Research Procedure

As the researcher found this topic both emotive and compelling, a decision was made early in the research process to conduct a series of pilot interviews amongst peers and fellow academics. The primary objective of this pilot qualitative research was to remove any emotive biases from the semi-structured conversations. This was successfully achieved by homing in on interview style and techniques and offered the researcher an opportunity to make changes were appropriate to the interview questions and format. The sampling for these pilot interviews was based on individuals who had experience within the sharing

economy as a consumer, but also an acute awareness of customer experience and perceptions. This pilot interviews were carried out in the National College of Ireland, or the participants place of work in the interest of comfort and convenience. These pilot interviews also offered an early opportunity to cross examine the pre-existing literature with the insight of primary research. The secondary research that has inspired this thesis is reviewed in the next chapter.

# Chapter 2 | Literature Review

## Introduction

The central subject matter of the research related to the sharing economy is the disruption of traditional marketplaces, followed by the introduction of peer-to-peer business models. The research direction taken in this review, looks at what defines the sharing economy and how companies can deal with the new networks of trust needed to drive transactions and economic growth (Horlacher, Feubli and Neumann, 2015). The research question underpinning this thesis seeks to explore how businesses within the sharing economy can begin to understand what contributes to customer experience, whilst also enabling these organisations to gear towards delivering exceptional experiences and gaining competitive advantage in their respective marketplaces.

The sharing economy and customer experience do not merely co-exist, both concepts are fundamentally intertwined and lean heavily on each other for future development. Customer experience represents the main vehicle with which a brand is measured and valued within the sharing economy, whereas the sharing economy presents a diverse opportunity for peer-to-peer experiences as opposed to traditional business-to-customer experiences. Whilst there is a paucity in research taking a holistic approach to customer experience within the sharing economy, the researcher aims to review both the sharing economy and customer experience literature in unity, before attempting to create a conceptual model which seeks to outline the key themes of customer experience in the sharing economy.

There are studies within the broader literature that look at concepts such as the role of trust (Ahn et al., 2017; Chica et al., 2017), the role of efficiency (Zott and Amit, 2017; Klaus and Maklan, 2011) and the role of price (Filippas and Gramstad, 2016; Neumann and Gutt, 2017) in creating positive customer experiences within the sharing economy but interestingly, also in more traditional marketplaces. One of the fundamental findings from the review of the literature is that the principles of positive customer experiences are both similar and comparable in sharing economy and more traditional markets. The key themes of trust, efficiency and price have been explored within the following literature review but have also helped shape the overall research objectives to be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

## Sharing Economy

The sharing economy has not yet been fully defined in the literature. In fact, there are several concepts that designate sharing practices; from the sharing economy, to peer-to-peer or collaborative economy, to the concept of access-based consumption (Barbu et al. 2018). Botsman and Rogers (2011) identify three distinct characteristics present in the sharing economy; product service systems, collaborative lifestyles and redistribution markets. They argue that product service systems enable consumers to share products or services that may be owned by a company, such as GoCar carsharing. Collaborative lifestyles and redistribution markets essentially represent the demand-based allocation of products, services and other intangible assets (Botsman and Rogers, 2011). For example, the use of Rent the Runway for the rental of dresses, or Airbnb which caters for a social exchange of accommodation.

Similarly, the framework put forward by Schor (2014) attempts to identify the four distinct characteristics present in the sharing economy. These characteristics explore the differences in business-to-customer and

customer-to-customer interactions, and the economic nature of these interactions, with non-profit and for-profit sub categories (Schor, 2014). Whilst there are obvious similarities in Botsman and Rogers (2011) and Schor's (2014) characterisations of the sharing economy, it has become clear that landing on a holistic definition of the sharing economy is no mean feat.

Nonetheless, the aim of this paper is not to define the sharing economy concept, but rather build upon the below definition by Bucher et al. (2016) to gain an understanding for how sharing economy businesses are gearing themselves to deliver superior customer experiences.

The sharing economy represents a culture of peer-to-peer sharing, created by people making their belongings accessible through online networks (Bucher, Fieseler & Lutz, 2016). An innovative business model, geared at engaging participants to make use of underutilised commodities has fundamentally transformed consumer behaviour (Belk, 2014). Similarly, Barbu et al. (2018) define the sharing economy quite simply, as the sharing of physical assets and services between people. Critically, both Bucher et al. (2016) and Barbu et al. (2018) categorise the sharing economy as a phenomenon, which has enabled technology led businesses such as Airbnb, Uber and Lyft to generate access to underutilised goods and services, and to prioritise accessibility and usership over ownership.

The sharing economy has attracted widespread investment from entrepreneurs seeking to disrupt traditional service providers and create a diverse and competitive landscape. What started out as a niche market, now represents a marketplace set to reach combined revenues of \$355Billion by 2025 (PwC, 2015). Whilst the sharing economy is evidently profitable, several authors have argued that the widespread

growth of the market has come because of its unique ability to reconcile people's passions and interests (Lougher and Kalmanowicz, 2016).

Molz (2013) and Sheth et al. (2011) agree that the sharing economy is driven by conscious consumption, cooperation and generosity, whilst also lowering the barriers of entry for the consumer to engage with the platforms of the sharing economy. This area of conscious consumption is spotlighted by the argument that customer experience is based on emotional and rational links between the customer and the firm (Keller, 2008). Keller's (2008) argument further highlights that customer experience is key to taking advantage in the sharing economy (Barbu et al. 2018).

Critically, whilst the volume of start-up sharing economy firms continues to grow exponentially, most of these companies tend to be loss-making, small in size and leaning heavily on venture capital (Cusumano, 2018). As companies like Airbnb and Uber seem to be the major success stories from the sharing economy, scandals and turmoil seem to be common and extremely damaging to the business' ability to make money (Cusumano, 2018). Cusumano (2018) describes this as the promise of the sharing economy meeting reality. Täuscher and Kietzmann (2017) argue that the low control over service quality and low customer lock-in creates a lower control of customer experience and as such, can impact the bottom-line and output of the companies within the sharing economy. These arguments from Täuscher and Kietzmann (2017) and later Cusumano (2018) have fundamentally placed a critical emphasis on the importance and role played by customer experience in the sharing economy.

## Customer Experience

The sharing economy has emerged and flourished because of a fundamental shift in consumer culture. A consumer culture where access to commodities is now more valuable than ownership, and where emphasis is placed predominantly on human experience and social interaction highly (Posen, 2015). This reinforces the idea coined by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) surrounding customer's desires for exceptional experiences over product functionality. Equally, the creation of strong and lasting customer experiences is a leading objective for management teams as discussed by executives when asked their top annual priorities (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). However, to accurately discuss experience in the realm of business and customers, it first requires clarification around the notion of experience.

Experience in the realm of consumption has been defined as a mental impact felt by the individual as a result of outside stimuli and it very much depends on the person's perception of a situation (Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013). Similarly, other literature defines consumption experiences as cognitive, physical and emotional interactions that are unique to every individual (Arnould et al. 2004; Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Arnould et al. (2004) provide an interesting Segway into the realm of customer experiences by arguing that experience happens in phases such as pre-consumption, consumption and post-consumption, these phases represent the different stages on the customer journey.

Critically, customer experience has traditionally been explored in the realm of business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions, the sharing economy creates a new model of consumption through a peer-to-peer transaction (Bachnik, 2016). This allows for an exploration into the key drivers in customer experience across the sharing economy. Furthermore, despite the obvious necessity to purchase and own specific products or services, businesses must recognise the role experience plays in both the transaction and relationship with the customer.

Given the somewhat inceptive nature of customer experience literature, there is limited empirical work directly associated to customer experience and the sharing economy. The concept of humans desiring satisfying experiences over products stretches back to Abbott (1955), this theory was foundational in the later work of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), which highlights the role of emotions in customer experiences. Early research in customer experience seems to take a broader view of human behaviour, only to be offset by Schmitt (2009) suggesting that every exchange creates a customer experience and that customer experience encompasses every aspect of a company's offer alongside the emotional, sensory and social responses of the customer (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

The literature from Schmitt (1999); Pine and Gilmore (1998) defines the holistic process of customer experience, and how customers engage through their senses. Emotions, the physical environment and the social engagement play a pivotal role in the overall customer experience. Similarly, the research of De Keyser et al. (2015) outline the different types of experience that customers can encounter with a brand. When applied to the sharing economy, one of the unique characteristics of businesses is the agility at which they can change their business models, products and services (Chen et al. 2018). This agility can create a multitude of new customer touchpoints and more opportunity to deliver delightful customer experiences.

In summary, Pine II and Gilmore (1999), alongside Posen (2015) have introduced the fundamental shift in consumer culture towards the experience economy. Customer experience now must incorporate a holistic process, and a strategic touchpoint strategy. Trust, efficiency and price represent some of the fundamental themes contributing to both

positive and negative customer experiences. With Abbott (1955) and Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) introducing the primary foundations for this research, the role of emotions in creating brand trust with your customers.

## Trust

As outlined by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), customer's relationships with a brand, are often based on an emotional connection. When a brand leaves a customer with a positive experience, this encourages the customer to reflect upon that instance and dramatically increases their propensity to return. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) suggest that this positive reflection creates a bond of trust between the customer and a brand. Similarly, trust is the foundation of influence, and whether it is a brand or an individual, trust can be used to influence the activities of the customer (Hill and Lineback, 2011). Therefore, it is important that brands engage in meaningful interactions with customers to gain their trust.

In the sharing economy, the best performing companies recognise that their reputation is underpinned by trust, not only trust related to their service but also, subjective social trust which can result in bias of reputation (Ahn et al. 2017). As a result, trust management is inevitable in the sharing economy, user participation is fundamental for its growth, and the presence of untrustworthy users will ultimately cause decline and disuse of a sharing economy platform (Ahn et al. 2017). Chica et al. (2017) seems to build upon this concept whilst outlining their sharing economy trust model, which incorporates four types of people: The trustworthy consumer, the untrustworthy consumer, the trustworthy provider and the untrustworthy provider. Considerations should be made as the sharing economy disrupts the traditional trust relationship between a business and the consumer, with transactions taking place in the

somewhat private sphere of the provider (Chica et al. 2017). For example, a customer experience with Uber typically takes place in the driver's personal vehicle. As a result, Chica et al. (2017) argue that this sharing economy trust relationship requires both the consumer and the provider to behave trustworthily and make allowances for their perceptions of trust to mutually benefit from the sharing economy.

Furthermore, Sieber (2016) states that trust is a central feature of the sharing economy and that trust fundamentally acts as an enabler in the sharing economy. Building upon Sieber (2016), Mazzella et al. (2016) outline the necessary differences between trust in a romantic relationship versus trust in a commercial transaction. The authors discuss three dimensions of trust in the sharing economy; authenticity, assessment of intentions and the perception of quality (Mazzella et al. 2016). The speed at which the sharing economy is growing, highlights that individuals are trusting each other at a surprising rate, likely because of individuals becoming their own brands within the sharing economy (Mazzella et al. 2016). The arguments made by Mazzella et al. (2016) and Sieber (2016) complement each other, and trust is no longer just a product of a single engagement or perception, but rather trust is formed because of multiple cues. For example, prior interactions, cultural dialogue, learning from the experiences of others, brand certification and the validation of digital identities.

Critically, sharing economy firms face challenges when it comes to building and sustaining trusting relationships with end-consumers. Whilst these companies can control the digital engagement on the sharing platform, it is difficult for the business to influence customers in the moments of truth. For example, when a customer arrives at their accommodation, they're not met by an Airbnb representative. As a result, the first impression and physical interaction is in the hands of the

property owner. Airbnb must then rely on the cues which should help to build create trust in the peer-to-peer economy.

Interestingly, Sundararajan (2016) summarises that high-quality and safe experiences are the key in the formation of trust. It becomes critical that these companies relentlessly focus on the user experience and security of their digital platforms upon which providers and users of the services engage. Similarly, research from Schmitt (1999) explores the role this physical dimension plays in customer experience within the sharing economy. For example, how easy is it to use the physical platform to start a transaction or how efficient is a service based on demand. As such, efficiency has emerged from the literature as another central feature of the sharing economy.

## Efficiency

Efficiency in any business often begins with an investor's view, meaning efficiency is driven by a reduction in costs, or an increase in profits. However, efficiency should encompass an overall increase in the performance of business operations, looking at both cross-functional business unit relationships and customer relations (Kasim et al. 2018). Whilst literature around efficiency in the sharing economy is somewhat limited, Zott and Amit (2017) identify efficiency as a key value driver in the wider digital world, as such spanning into the digitised sharing economy. Zott and Amit (2017) argue that business focused on operational and cost efficiencies can create highly sophisticated internal and customer facing processes which ultimately contribute to their value creation and competitive advantage within an industry.

Furthermore, efficiency has been outlined as a key dimension used in assessing customer experience, with Klaus and Maklan (2011) exploring

the role of efficiency in a customer's perception of positive customer experience. Their research also explores the contrasting perceptions of experience held by first-time customers and returning customers. Their findings show that first-time customers often have lower expectations for efficiency and experiences, therefore businesses must not only use efficiencies to drive positive experiences but also continuously improve their ability to identify new efficiencies for repeat customers (Klaus and Maklan, 2011).

When applied to the sharing economy, companies like Airbnb and Uber are using complex digital platforms to increase the efficiency of using resources, in this instance, properties and vehicles (Bratianu, 2018). The efficiency within these businesses can be mostly attributed to the speed at which consumers and providers can share knowledge and information between one and other (Bratianu, 2018). The sharing of this knowledge and information is what stimulates and enables this peer-driven sharing economy (Heimans and Timms, 2014). Using an Airbnb example, Richardson (2015) outlines that the platform used to connect guests and hosts acts as an efficient and fast intersection which allows supply meet demand and ultimately, reduces peer-to-peer uncertainty and costs associated with these transactions. Not for the first time, the literature is becoming intertwined as the important trust factor can be built through recognising efficiency.

Sundararajan (2016) discusses some of the other driving forces behind the success of sharing platforms such as Airbnb and Lyft, by outlining the 'new' behaviours of both organisations and customers. Giving people the ability to transport themselves across short distances without owning a car, or a place to rest on a short business trip to a European city, it is primarily driven by efficiency, both for the consumer, the provider and the business. For example, on the provider and consumer side, getting set up to transact with peers is as easy as downloading an application and

coordinating the relevant data. These platforms are evidently helping to create large economic efficiencies, and as a result, the sharing economy has even been described as a phenomenon of “crowd-based capitalism” (Sundararajan, 2016).

In contrast, Täuscher and Kietzmann (2017) discuss efficiency from an organisation’s perspective. Defining two efficiency characteristics of successful peer-to-peer sharing platforms, these include scalability and network effects. By referring to the efficiencies of offering service to large numbers of users without incurring additional costs and by offering self-managed peer-to-peer matching through a digital platform reduces the need for ownership of raw materials etc. Furthermore, the authors argue the impact of network effects on the businesses success. Focusing on the efficiency in generating larger supply and availability to the consumer. For example, Airbnb enabling upwards of 70 million guests the use of accommodation globally (Sundararajan, 2016).

Interestingly, the CEO of Airbnb, Brian Chesky’s initial mission for the company was not primarily focused on efficiency. Rather on design, and the ability to solve a problem and help people. This design focus lent itself to process and consumer efficiencies as the business continued to scale and gain market share. Critically however, there is limited research into the driving force behind the efficiency approaches of Airbnb, which perhaps presents opportunity for the researcher to explore the customers role in creating a culture of efficiency.

## Price

Consumers and providers in the sharing economy must market themselves as trustworthy in order to be granted permission to either use or share products or services (Karlsson et al., 2017), and whilst many

variables are considered when determining the reputation or trustworthiness of individuals in the sharing economy, price can also be used as a determinant of a provider's reputation (Teaubner et al., 2017). For example, providers of products or services in the sharing economy can use price as an indicator which signals the quality of their offering (Basoglu and Hess, 2014). Similarly, Neumann and Gutt (2017) conducted research into the optimal price setting and the role that online ratings play in pricing within the sharing economy. The findings fundamentally show that prices and profits tend to increase as a result of these trust signals such as online ratings (Neumann and Gutt, 2017). However, whilst the literature presents findings that price tends to increase because of trust, and trust is fundamental in delivering positive customer experiences, Neumann and Gutt (2017) also outline that the research on pricing in the sharing economy has only recently begun to emerge and that there are underlying challenges to be faced by providers when pricing in the sharing economy.

Interestingly, further literature has shown that providers often set higher prices when they have achieved a high awareness amongst the consumer or have been uniquely positioned in a market niche (Filippas and Gramstad, 2016). Pricing within the sharing economy has been subject to substantial fluctuation, this fluctuation mainly appears over time and is often attributed to demand based pricing amongst better known providers (Filippas and Gramstad, 2016). For example, positive word-of-mouth may serve to build a provider's reputation, whilst also increasing demand for the product or service, which has allowed providers to both increase their price but also, their profit. In similitude, research from Forbes (2014) indicates that 86% of customers are now willing to pay more for better customer experiences, meaning a consumer's propensity to purchase may be positively impacted by price, as a direct reflection of the providers reputation.

Whilst Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan (2016) suggest that there is a positive relationship between price and consumer engagement and propensity to purchase, they also suggest that both businesses and providers in the sharing economy should carefully study consumer behaviour when devising pricing strategies. Subsequently, Fang et al. (2017) have found that these common price fluctuations in the sharing economy have a significant impact on the behaviour of users. Thus, highlighting that the influence of price on customer experience is both subjective and situational, and whilst the literature on pricing in the sharing economy has provided interesting insights, there are also significant gaps in the pricing literature, highlighting that the role of price can be both complex and easily misunderstood.

Critically, there are also markets within the sharing economy that will be subject to high-price sensitivity (Hill et al. 2007), and therefore similar products or services being offered within a sharing economy may primarily compete on price alone with disregard for reputation or word-of-mouth referrals. For example, competition within the traditional hospitality industry is often based on price, with digital platforms enabling consumers to compare lowest price accommodation at their chosen destination. This raises the question around the role of experience and price, within these price-sensitive economy's. Nonetheless, in agreement with Forbes (2014) consumers have often been willing to pay more for premium and luxury experiences with accommodation providers such as hotels.

In summary, Hill et al. (2007) proceed to discuss satisfaction as the most appropriate word to describe the range of emotions and attitudes customers feel during such experiences. Therefore, raising urgent concerns over the role of price and its ability to impact the emotions of consumers. Pine and Gilmore (1999) have critically outlined that no two individuals will ever have identical experiences with a brand, as each

experience is derived from intrinsic factors which may not be shared. Therefore, challenges have been created around the definition of satisfaction and subsequently, an uncertainty around price in the sharing economy. The researcher intends to ask probing questions during the primary research to uncover greater insight around the role of price in customer experience and moreover, the sharing economy.

### Proposed conceptual model

In summary, customer experience and the sharing economy represent areas of considerable crossover and dependencies. However, the fundamental argument from the literature is that we now live in an experience economy (Pine II and Gilmore, 1999), a place where market leading businesses are relentlessly focused on delivering exceptional customer experiences. Whilst Sundararajan (2016) makes a compelling account of the sharing economy and the economic opportunity it presents; the fundamentals of customer experience are the same as those in traditional markets. Critically, there are growing limitations in a brands ability to differentiate and whilst the sharing economy brings disruptive competition, it hasn't eliminated the traditional providers from those industries. The sharing economy firms must focus on the experience first, through authenticity, emotional engagement, trusting relationships and the creation of efficiencies.

From the literature, the researcher proposes a conceptual model which is aimed at supplementing the primary research and providing a visual representation of a potential answer to the research question. The figure 2. below highlights that the sharing economy firms must focus on building trusting relationships, creating both customer and operational efficiencies and the usage data to understand the variable role of price in their ability to deliver of exceptional experiences. Fundamental to the

conceptual model, the peer-to-peer platforms developed by these companies are the bedrock upon which their entire business is built.

### Conceptual Model

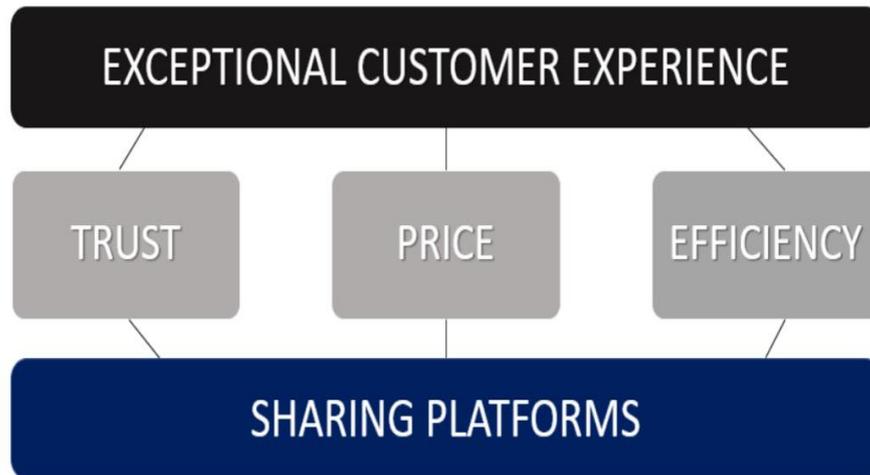


FIGURE 2. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

# Chapter 3 | Methodology

## Introduction

The primary purpose of this chapter is to enable the reader to gain an understanding for how this research was undertaken and the overall rationale behind the study. This research is focused on the sharing economy or more specifically, several different elements of customer experience which can be used by sharing economy companies to help deliver superior customer experiences. To present structure to the research, research objectives and problems will be identified and outlined within this chapter. Followed by an overview of the approach taken to the research and a justification for the selection of that approach. Next, the researcher will discuss the sampling method, how this was implemented, how data was collected and analysed. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion around the ethical considerations and any research limitations encountered throughout the study.

## Research Problem

The research problem identified is as follows:

*How can businesses within the sharing economy gear themselves towards the delivery of enhanced customer experiences.*

Whilst Chapter 2 gave a detailed review of the literature focused on the sharing economy and customer experience, it also highlighted the notable shortage of theory around customer experience in the sharing economy context. In the literature review, Posen (2015) seems to agree with Pine II and Gilmore (1999), that a shift in consumer culture has led the

consumer away from traditional ownership and towards an experience economy where the winners and losers in business are underpinned by their delivery of exceptional customer experiences. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) furthered the argument by highlighting the top executives globally are prioritising customer experience as a leading objective for their management teams. However, whilst there is a body of literature discussing customer experience in a traditional context, and literature exploring the phenomenon of the sharing economy as it emerges, there are shortcomings in academic literature spanning both topics. As outlined by Bachnik (2016), the nature of peer-to-peer transactions in the sharing economy has created a new model of consumption and engagement with a brand, it is therefore worth exploring the way in which positive customer experiences can be delivered in this new model of consumption.

## Research Objectives

**Primary objective** - To identify the components of customer experience in the sharing economy which significantly impact a business's opportunity to deliver exceptional experiences.

What customers truly desire is exceptional experiences, these experiences are unique to every individual and have a cognitive, physical and emotional impact on the customer (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Arnould et al., 2004). The sharing economy represents a fundamental shift in how customers engage with brands, this realm of peer-to-peer transactions not only limits the control a business has over customer experience but also, places responsibility for the sharing economy's growth with the consumer. Customer experiences may therefore strengthen or destroy a sharing economy brand, despite much of the transaction taking place outside the controlled business environment. The research aim is therefore to gauge how importantly customer

experience is considered amongst these companies and to what extent can they exert control over the overall experience.

**Sub-objective 1** - To determine how can trust be established amongst stakeholders within the sharing economy.

Relationships with a brand tend to be based on an emotional connection (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), whether discussing the provider or the consumers relationship with a brand in the sharing economy, trust is what underpins and enables the relationship to flourish. Trust can be related to a social context, a service delivery and most prominently a reputation of the business, provider and consumers. The sharing economy trust model by Chica et al. (2017) was used as a framework to help identify the role of each subject within the research and, enable the researcher to step back and explore a holistic view of the establishment of trust amongst key stakeholders in the sharing economy.

**Sub-objective 2** -To determine the role of efficiency on customer experience in the sharing economy.

Efficiency literature frequently refers to a corporation's ability to reduce costs and maximise profits. However, efficiency in the sharing economy represents several contrasting concepts such as the firm's ability to remove friction and create highly sophisticated customer facing processes which simplify the consumers transaction (Zott and Amit, 2017), or the opportunity to use efficiency as a tool to enhance customer perceptions of experience (Klaus and Maklan, 2011). For example, how can sharing economy companies utilise customer data to increase the velocity at which a consumer engages with their brand, or perhaps reduce the effort required to make a repeat booking through the digital platform.

Nonetheless, the researcher aims to explore both traditional profit maximising efficiency and, customer efficiency through digital platforms.

**Sub-objective 3** - To determine the significance of pricing in influencing customer experiences in the sharing economy.

Price in the sharing economy can be viewed as a determinant of a provider's reputation (Teaubner et al., 2017), and an area in which sharing economy platforms often have limited involvement. The sharing economy provides a platform-based marketplace, which brings peers together for a transaction. These businesses will incorporate services and transaction fees to process the peer-to-peer transaction and as such, not be involved in setting the overall price of the shared product or service. Critically, whilst Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan (2016) highlight the relationship between price and consumer engagement, pricing in the sharing economy could be easily misunderstood given the nature of transactions and the varying roles of responsibilities held by the platform, the provider and the consumer when it comes to setting and accepting a price. This objective will attempt to explore the sentiment around price held by sharing platforms, but also examine the influence of price in determining customer experiences.

### Research approach

Whilst a mixed methods approach to the research topic would provide a thorough view of data-sets from both the consumer and business perspective of customer experience in the sharing economy, the researcher recognises that this research is better geared toward gaining an understanding for the attitudes, behaviours and emotions of those delivering customer experiences (McGivern, 2009). Whilst the evident

structure behind quantitative research is often preferred amongst management researchers, the emergent nature and flexibility of this topic places a rich value in the creation of new knowledge within the research area through the application qualitative methods (Clissett, 2008). Furthermore, gaining the ability to recognise and explain social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them represents a core value proposition in using qualitative methods (Van Den Berg and Struwig, 2017). Critically, Patton (2002) suggests that a qualitative approach can be deemed most appropriate when the nature of research is broad and where previous theories don't exist. As such, whilst a mixed methods approach was considered, a monomethod approach using qualitative research was deemed most appropriate.

### *Qualitative Approach*

Customer experience represents a complex research focus which incorporates a mixture of human behaviour, felt needs and varying social contexts. As such, qualitative research methods enable the researcher to gain an understanding for the views and more importantly, the experiences of participants in the form of natural language and expression (Levitt et al., 2018). A qualitative approach to this research will allow the researcher to analyse descriptions of experiences as legitimate data and ultimately draw a data-set from fewer resources than a quantitative approach, whilst not sacrificing the quality, richness and heavily contextualised descriptive data from each participant (Levitt et al., 2018). The qualitative approach to this research has presented an opportunity for the researcher to become actively involved in the research process through interviewing research participants. These interviews were conversational in nature, whereby participants are presented with the opportunity to share their own opinions, sentiment and experiences with the researcher's guidance and open-ended questioning related to the themes outlined the literature review.

Due to the inceptive nature of this study, the researcher recognised an opportunity to help further develop the small volume of literature already surrounding this topic. As such, the researcher decided to take an inductive approach to the study, to use the primary data to further build existing theory on customer experience in the sharing economy. Inductive and deductive represents two potential approaches to research (Saunders et al., 2016), as outlined, inductive enables the further development of theory, whereas deductive represents an approach used by a researcher trying to test a hypothesis. Whilst there are obvious advantages to both approaches, the scarcity of literature associated to customer experience in the sharing economy led the researcher to adopt an inductive approach.

## Research Design

There are an increasing number of research designs which can be adopted by researchers in determining the best blueprint for their methodology. However, Domegan & Fleming (2007) have outlined a few core research designs considered for this topic. These research designs include causal, descriptive and exploratory. Whilst descriptive and causal designs offer highly structured methods of determining a volume and relationships of variables, exploratory design enables the researcher to build knowledge of a topic and uncover potential issues from within the study (Domegan and Fleming, 2007). Furthermore, this exploratory design lays out a blueprint for the methods needed to accurately collect and analyse data as per the original research objectives (Burns and Bush, 2014). For this qualitative research, an exploratory design was adopted, and this afforded the researcher with the opportunity to relentlessly focus on the prominent research objectives emerging from the literature.

The qualitative research consisted of several semi-structured interviews with participants experienced in the sharing economy and customer

experience. These semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questioning and were carried out over a 3-week period ensuring that consistent levels of preparation were given to each specific interview. This interview structure was far from rigid, and it offered the respondents flexibility in their answers. The researcher followed a short list of questions, with a mixture of open-ended questions, theme/objective based questions and probing questions to trigger natural elaboration at specific points in the interviews. Developing an understanding for effective probing techniques proved vital as part of the semi-structured interviews, as the findings later highlight, at moments during the interviews participants would refer to an objective and fail to elaborate, these probing techniques helped the researcher to delve deeper into a specific area.

The participants for this qualitative research were sourced from within the researchers extended professional network. Whilst the sample size represented in the interviews was small, the researcher was acutely aware of the dependence of this research on extracting adequate insight from the available respondents. Two of the interview candidates are executives in sharing economy businesses with headquarters in Dublin, whilst another two of the respondents were market leading Customer Experience consultants working both in traditional and sharing economy marketplaces. The diverse nature of the sample was another fundamental reason for the selection of a semi-structured interview process.

### Sampling method

Given the relatively small sample size adopted for this research, judgmental or purposive sampling was elected to gather a non-random sample of respondents. Saunders et al. (2016) argue that this sampling is quite common when working with smaller sample size and that it has similarities to snowball sampling, which recognises a participant's

suitability based on their experience within the given topic. To an extent, snowball sampling was used to gain a number of referrals, however only one referred participant fit the criteria set out in the original purposive sampling process. This criterion was set out and used by the researcher to filter down respondents and ensure that the participants engaged in this research would help provide relevant insight and data to the topic. The criteria were simple;

*Filter A)* The respondent must have industry experience within the sharing economy.

*Filter B)* The respondent must hold or have held a customer experience-oriented role in the last 3 years.

*Filter C)* The respondent has experienced the sharing economy as a consumer.

The primary reasoning behind this criterion was to identify practitioners from within the sharing economy that have been both a consumer, provider and recipient of customer experiences. Furthermore, the purposive, or judgemental sampling meant that the researcher could lean on their own experience in the field of customer experience, to select expert respondents that could provide relevant answers and insights to the objectives of the research.

As the overall topic of customer experience in the sharing economy is somewhat specialist and, in its infancy, the researcher employed a method of network sampling. Network sampling refers to the use of the researchers own professional network to gain access to the relevant sample required for this study (Rocha et al., 2017). Using a blend of purposive, network and snowball sampling the researcher ensured that the small sample of respondents represented a core group that would

offer the most in-depth insight into the research topic. Interestingly, the respondents were each at different levels within their businesses and had varying levels of usage as consumers within the sharing economy, this gave the researcher contrasting perspectives on what drives positive customer experiences in the sharing economy.

The researcher did not decide on an optimum sample size prior to commencing the primary research, however, upon completion of the fifth in-depth interview the researcher determined that based on the analysed data which had been gathered, the insight derived proved satisfactory to address the four research objectives. The respondents anonymised information was as follows:

***Respondent A.*** 25 years' experience in customer experience. Director of market leading customer experience consultancy firm working with fortune 500 businesses as well as key companies from the sharing economy across Europe. Responsible for running fully managed Voice of the Customer programs for these clients. An avid user of Uber, MyTaxi and Airbnb.

***Respondent B.*** Chief Operations Officer in an Irish sharing economy firm. Spearheading the company's rapid expansion across Europe and responsible for customer experience across each of their three markets. Also, an active Airbnb host in Dublin and user of Parknp.

***Respondent C.*** Chief Executive and principal CX consultant of globally recognised customer experience consultancy firm. Operates across 35 global markets, delivering consultancy services and CX accreditations to core customer experience teams within client organisations. Spent 17

years as a CX practitioner on the inside of several corporations. An Airbnb advocate and a recent detractor from Uber in the UK.

**Respondent D.** Customer Experience leader at international sharing economy firm. Responsible for a team of 15 CX specialists working across the EMEA region. Corporate user of Lyft services in the United States and frequently uses MyTaxi in Dublin.

**Respondent E.** Senior customer experience Leader responsible for CX strategy & research at multinational firm. Advocate for delivering exceptional experiences to every stakeholder in the sharing economy ecosystem. \* *Not used following late withdrawal from the research, explained further in limitations section.*

## Data Analysis

The analysis stage of qualitative research requires a strategic and systematic approach (Yin, 2014). This stage often represents a challenge for the researcher upon completion of the primary qualitative data collection, as the researcher is now faced with the daunting task of collating banks of text data prior to having an opportunity to analyse the data. Once collated, qualitative data can be exceptionally diverse and challenging to analyse (Holloway & Todres, 2003). However, the researcher transcribed each interview before utilising a thematic analysis on the data collected. As discussed by Holloway and Todres (2003), thematic analysis represents a foundational method for data analysis in the qualitative approach to research.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) method for thematic analysis presents a six-step framework to ensure the efficient and effective analysis of the

primary data. The first step requires the researcher to become acutely familiar with the data by transcribing and repeatedly re-reading the data, interestingly, the researcher found it effective to re-read the data aloud as per the recommendations by Braun and Clarke (2006). Secondly, the researcher coded and labelled some of the common pieces of data which seemed interesting to the overall study. As per Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations, the researcher then began to extract these codes into common themes within the dataset to identify patterns or trends. Once extracted, the researcher then began to validate, review and refine the data. Importantly, this stage in the process provided an opportunity for the researcher to test these themes against the primary research questions of the study. Once validated, the fifth step in Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework was to define and name the themes, by describing each themes relevance to the research in short summaries. The final step was to draw up a report, most importantly, highlighting how the data contributes to the existing theory and research problem (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Step	Description
<b>Familiarise yourself with the data</b>	Transcribe data, read and re-read the data, note down initial ideas.
<b>Generate initial codes</b>	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each potential theme.
<b>Search for themes</b>	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
<b>Review themes</b>	Checking in the themes relate to the coded extracts and generate a thematic map of the analysis.
<b>Define and name themes</b>	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells. Generate clear names and definitions for each theme.
<b>Produce a report</b>	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating analysis back to research question and literature

### FIGURE 3. THEMATIC ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK (BRAUN & CLARKE, 2006)

The Braun and Clarke (2006) framework offered a concise and systematic methodology for analysing the qualitative data and moreover, a coherent presentation of the core themes emerging from the primary research.

#### Ethical considerations

The researcher prepared consent forms and shared these consent forms with the participants following an information brief prior to the interviews. The consent forms highlighted that the respondents would remain anonymous throughout the paper, and that in cases where the researcher has chosen to use direct or indirect quotes, the respondent would be referred to alphabetically i.e. respondent A. As the participants are actively involved within the sharing economy, it is imperative their information remains confidential. Furthermore, the fact that each interview was tape recorded meant that participants may be in danger in an instance whereby this information was not held confidentially (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). As per the recommendations of DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006), the researcher intends to destroy the collected data post research and, in the meantime, has shared relevant contact details in the case that a respondent may wish to view a copy of their transcript or analysed data.

#### Limitations

As in any form of research, this study contained a few constraints and limitations. The most prominent of which was the time limitations in conducting this research. Ideally, the research could have taken a dual-approach using mixed methods to not only interview the perspective of

respondents from within the sharing economy, but also explore quantitative research by surveying a reasonably sized sample of sharing economy consumers. The main disadvantage of this qualitative design is that the findings and data cannot be extended to the wider population with any great degree of certainty, in contrast to quantitative design which can (Atieno, 2009). Nonetheless, the researcher opted to focus the research solely on the role businesses can play in delivering exceptional customer experiences, and as such determined that qualitative approaches would be most appropriate to understand social and emotional sentiment from the respondents.

Another limitation which evolves from the qualitative research is the presence of ambiguity, which can be seen when analysing the human language responses (Atieno, 2009). Whilst the researcher is gathering comparable data across the respondents by following a semi-structured approach to questioning, it limits the opportunities for the participants to share their own entire opinion of the overall topic and the respondents often find themselves censoring or limiting the level of detail in their answers. Critically however, the researcher carefully selected several open-ended questions which for the most part seemed to encourage the participants to share their own individual viewpoints on each of the research objectives.

Finally, in the late stages of data analysis, the researcher was telephoned by a participant in the research and asked to remove their data from the sample and discontinue analysis of their interview. This option had been incorporated into the consent form earlier agreed by the participant, and the researcher granted this request for removal. The nature of qualitative data analysis meant it was a seamless process to remove this participant's data-set from the overall findings. Fortunately, thematic analysis presents a relatively straightforward approach to data extraction, and thus enabled the researcher to continue interpreting the

interview data with no great difficulties. Whilst this anonymity created a minor challenge for the researcher, it did not significantly limit the quality of analysed data and the overall research output. The output and findings of the research proved to be somewhat accessible and theoretically-flexible because of the Braun and Clarke (2006) framework, and these findings will be outlined in the next chapter.

# Chapter 4 | Findings and Analysis

## Introduction

The following section discusses the findings and results from the employed research methodology outlined in Chapter 3. Before delving into the findings from the research, it is worthwhile reminding ourselves of the primary aims of the research.

The main research objective is - *To identify the components of customer experience in the sharing economy which significantly impact a business's opportunity to deliver exceptional experiences.*

This objective is achieved through an exploration into the following sub-objectives:

1. *To determine how can trust be established amongst stakeholders within the sharing economy.*
2. *To determine the role of efficiency on customer experience in the sharing economy.*
3. *To determine the significance of price in influencing customer experiences in the sharing economy.*

Adopting a semi-structured and qualitative approach, the researcher has attempted to probe and solicit insights from the interviewees which will help pin down the core components of customer experience that should be adopted by the businesses within the sharing economy. This findings chapter is therefore about defining the elements, of customer experience, firstly by asking open questions prompted by the literature review and

followed by a number of probing questions focused on the sub-objectives of the research.

In the following section, outlined will be some of the questions asked by the researcher in the interview setting, alongside theme driven excerpts from the participants. Interestingly, upon thematic analysis of the results and findings, the researcher has identified several themes which were previously highlighted within the secondary research, but also a few new elements to be considered which were not part of the original conceptual model or literature review.

### Questions and excerpts

As highlighted in the earlier chapters of this paper, the completion of an extensive literature review enabled the researcher to begin developing a conceptual model for customer experience in the sharing economy. This conceptual model was then considered in the design phase of the interview questions, to trigger insightful and opinion rich conversations amongst the selected sample. The researcher further posed a mixed strategy of open-ended and probing or elaboration questions to gather a greater understanding for the interviewees answers, whilst also using this technique to ensure each of the research objectives would be covered in each interview. This section will highlight some relevant excerpts from the interviews, before addressing the themes which appeared during the application of Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis.

**Open Question:** *What are your thoughts on the sharing economy?*

**Respondent a)**

*“I couldn't say that I have a really good definition for the sharing economy, and to that point I don't think one truly exists. The Sharing*

*economy has changed, and as a result maybe at times it is hard to define. All the same principles should stand to the companies that are considered to be sharing or not. Obviously, they're more digitally focused and because of its very nature I suppose another big trend we're seeing is the renewed focus on digital experiences".*

**Respondent b)**

*"First and foremost, I'm not sure that I am ok with the terminology of the sharing economy. Particularly our background, only a segment of what we do could be considered sharing. I prefer to call our industry, transactional brokerage. We bring parties together to create the transaction, it's simple. Sometimes in our business, one of the parties is already a business, so it's not really sharing".*

**Respondent c)**

*"The sharing economy is not necessarily a term that I personally would use to describe the nature of the way the world has moved on to enable us as consumers to be able to make better informed decisions of what we are going to do as a result of being able to benefit from seeing what others have done, that that's probably the way I would describe it. I would tend to call it that, instead of talking about it as a sharing economy. I tend to talk about the nature of the way experiences, and the components that make them happen, has evolved over time."*

**Respondent d)**

*"So, my first role at the company was in the partner management team which is a very small team looking after our outsourced relationships. I think it's one thing that comes along with the sharing economy that we really look at everybody as partners in business. Our hosts, consumers, contractors and consultants, we call them all our partners."*

**Theme 1: Difficulties faced in definition**

In summary, it has become evident that identifying a clear definition of the sharing economy is more than difficult. In fact, only one participant in this research failed to raise the topic for discussion and place its name under scrutiny. A key finding from the interviews is that through the sharing economy's digital shift, a renewed focus on end-to-end experiences has emerged. Furthermore, these experiences are taking place in a partner environment, rather than a traditional business to consumer transaction. The entire focus in the sharing economy seems to be on transactional brokerage, where successful companies are creating a culture of partnership between their platform, end-users and providers. Critically, the sharing economy extends far beyond a traditional transaction management approach to customer experience.

**Open question:** *Why is customer experience important in the sharing economy?*

**Probing question (if required):** *How can a business gear itself to deliver exceptional experiences?*

**Respondent a)**

*“people are waking up and saying the UX (user experience) isn't enough, we need to put weight on the full end-to-end experience if we're going to get this right ..... similar to the sharing economy, more traditional companies like euro florist can't control the actual floors and the delivery for example. But I still think it's very easy for them to say, 'oh we're not in control of the end user' but there's actually so much they can do to influence that and by giving them the right tools, giving them the robust platform, cultural guidelines and reinforcing how important they are to it (overall cx), this will help them deliver.”*

**Respondent b)**

*“The sharing economy companies represent a culture, take for example Airbnb. Airbnb have created a community-based business model which*

*relies on interactive relationships. Culture is one side of the customer experience coin, we as businesses need to get the culture right as a foundation for experience.”*

**Respondent c)**

*“When I talk about experiences, I will always define it as a combination of three components: the functional, the accessible, and the emotional. What the sharing economy ultimately has enabled, is for the emotional component, which represents the way customers feel. As a result, to their experience with an organisation to be more visible to the world. Basically, so what the sharing economy has made possible is for the emotion of experiences to become commonplace. So, when we make a buying decision, we will leverage the way an organisation made someone else feel not just the way they made us feel.”*

***following probe question:***

*“the functional component represents the product or service. And we now live in a world where it is extremely uncommon for an organization to have a product or service that is completely unique. And so, their ability to differentiate based on the products or services is becoming impossible. So, they now must focus on delivery of exceptional emotional experiences”.*

**Respondent d)**

*“CX in the sharing economy is constantly evolving. CX is positive when we value responsiveness and our availability to the customer. We always need to try and figure out how to better provide support, how to better understand and how to better be available for the users”*

**Theme 2: Customer experience as a differentiator**

Critically, the sharing economy is waking up and customer experience incorporates a new array of customer touch points. As such, the common

argument made by companies within the sharing economy that they have limited control over experiences is fundamentally flawed. Despite the research from Täuscher and Kietzmann (2017) which recognises the correlation between lack of control and negative experiences, this lack of control is evident across every industry to an extent and should not be used as an excuse to avoid criticism surrounding poor customer experiences. As a result, both sharing economy and traditional businesses must recognise that there are three components to customer experience; The functional, accessible and emotional.

With less and less distinction between products and services, these primary findings mirror the theory from Pine II and Gilmore (1999), that consumers are increasingly valuing experiences. As such, and most importantly for CX success in the sharing economy, businesses must deliver experiences which satisfy the emotional needs of consumers alongside the functional and accessible. Interestingly, the importance of emotions in creating customer experiences was first highlighted by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and seems to be growing in relevance according to the findings from this research. Areas such as the development of trust and creation of efficiencies represent the practical components required by businesses to begin delivering exceptional customer experiences.

**Open question:** *How can trust be established in the sharing economy?*

**Probing question (if required):** *What do you think consumers value in the sharing economy?*

**Respondent a)**

*“it could be so easy for them (Sharing company’s) to say, look, we’re not responsible for it, we’re just enablers.... The other big thing for me is*

*their use of data and their access to data. I don't know if, if Netflix falls into the sharing economy, but like the data the Netflix has added to some of the other experiential data is just, like, phenomenal in terms of how long you watch a program, or how quickly you watch one episode to the next all that kind of stuff.. I think that is something that all the sharing economy, companies have a complete disadvantage. It's that stuff that I get very excited about, from a cx perspective, if the sharing economy companies can start to use that data and build real trust in their relationships with the consumer."*

**Following probe question:**

*"no two customers are ever the same. And so, thinking that you can design a strategy that's going to satisfy everyone is just a mugs game. So, I think you have to have the ability to deliver a completely different experience depending on who they are and what they are, and I think we're a long way off for doing that properly".*

**Respondent b)**

*"Customers want responsiveness, and how do we know that? Through feedback, reviews and ratings. It's not just us that find this data useful, customer feedback is the silver bullet for business development. Customers trust you when you are transparent and honest, but they also trust you as a by-product of what your customers are saying about you. The same goes for providers using the sharing economy platforms, they're relentless in their quest for 5-star reviews. This is all down to trust. In our business, reviews and ratings are a trust-based currency."*

**Respondent c)**

*"the way an experience makes us feel is what we are most likely to remember and we will remember one of three things we will remember very good things, we remember very bad things but we will remember absolutely nothing, and then remembering nothing is the worst of the three emotional outcomes because it means there's no emotional connection between your brand and its customer... what brands are also*

*relying on is the feedback that they're soliciting. the sharing economy demonstrates that and what brands need to do is not ignore it, not defend it, but embrace it”*

**Following probing question:**

*“the principle of the sharing economy is that yes, a lot of information is being shared. But how much of it is truly representative of the truth of what's happening?... they have got to start telling the truth. They have got to start being authentic with their customers.”*

**Respondent d)**

*“one of the most important things at our business is how much we care about employees and also how we look after our community.... it's very much black and white in the sharing economy and it can sound cliché, but it is a lot of basic trust. So, we have somebody trusting you to provide their homes to different people. And there are some people trusting us whilst they stay in a stranger's house. it's a very delicate relationship. we need to make sure that we are supporting both parties, and we are making our business sustainable and profitable. But also, to be fair, and to not break that trust is very important. So that's pretty much the base of the training that we give.”*

**Following probing question:**

*“The founders of the company announced that no matter who was affected by the travel ban in the US, we will be supporting them with opened the doors. We are a community, that's how we build trust and thankfully, that's what our customers expect.”*

### **Theme 3: Control**

Perhaps the easiest option for sharing economy companies would be to shy away from any responsibilities for customer experience and doing so by using the argument they are transaction enablers rather than service

providers. However, these findings show that the top performing companies refuse to shy away from it, and in fact, are placing a lot of emphasis on trust as a key driver of satisfaction in the industry. Their use of customer data is helping to fuel the trust building process, customer feedback, reviews and ratings are suggested methods for creating an authentic trusting relationship with and amongst the stakeholders within the sharing economy. The findings argue that the voice of the customer is the key to creating trust and a company's responsiveness to this will help them gain competitive advantage.

Critically, in line with Sieber (2016) and Mazzella et al. (2016), these voices of the customer programs require the business to solicit feedback at multiple touchpoints and cues along the customer journey. It is therefore critical in building trust, that companies utilise data to generate a single view of the customer across the entire customer journey. Fundamentally, understanding your customer and being responsive at every touchpoint is a component to building trust.

**Open question:** *How do you think efficiency can be measured across the sharing economy?*

**Probing question (if required):** *How do you think the sharing economy reduces the cost to serve customers, whilst also increasing profit margins?*

**Respondent a)**

*"there's three elements to CX that businesses need to fundamentally grasp. The first and most important is: Did they do what they say they do? And, the second is how easily or how efficiently did they do it? and then the third is, how did they make the customer feel? But if you don't get the first one right, you can't work on the second and the third"*

**Respondent b)**

*“Efficiency in every sense of the word is related to profit margin. At our company, we aim our efficiencies straight at the customer. We are removing unnecessary touchpoints, listening to the customer effort scores and attempting to create a seamless and cashless customer journey”*

**Following probing question:**

*“Through customer and profit margin enhancement. It has to be technology led efficiencies, simple as that - for example, we are introducing a technology that helps our customers prioritise usage of our product based on the data we already have on them”.*

**Respondent c)**

*“The reality is that brands like Amazon, like Uber, have made our experience so much easier, naturally now has had an effect on everything we do.... The Amazon effect is that, if we do not make it easier to do business with someone, then they will go somewhere where they can get it easier.”*

**Following probing question:**

*“ok, so what every business should now be doing is measuring customer effort alongside satisfaction and recommendation scores, or whatever else they tend to measure. But, you know, customer effort is a very easy thing to measure it, unlike NPS, you can ask it to anyone. But that that is something that businesses should be measuring for efficiency”*

**Respondent d)**

*“So, we have this channel, it's called the customer voice. Where we have a team of like, engineers and product knowledge that checks that feedback that comes in. Thousands a day and they see what trends are coming from the users. The data they're given to us, and what we can be able to be focus on helps drive efficiency in decision making...”*

*we also have the NPS score that we are constantly checking.”*

**Following probing question:**

*“It’s challenge for us to make ourselves available, and to make sure that we have someone on the phone to answer straight away... we're trying to adopt and to detect new ways of like providing a chat or provide a messenger it's more like a live reaction”.*

**Theme 4: Transparency**

According to the findings of this primary research, there are several elements of customer experience, one of which is how efficiently did the company do what they said they’d do. Of course, this requires the ability to be able to deliver what you promise, and once delivered, the focus turns to how easily you do it and how easy you make the customers journey. Many of these efficiencies stem from technology advancements, without ignoring the traditional view of efficiency, which is to increase profits and reduce costs. As outlined by Bratianu (2018), businesses within the sharing economy must focus their energy into making it faster and easier for their customers to share information and knowledge. This shared knowledge is usually represented in property information, service reviews and feedback. However, the core theme of this shared knowledge is transparency, and it is vital that businesses adopt a transparent voice of the customer.

Critically, the businesses must offer the customer an opportunity to communicate with other customers, but also listen to the voice of the customer themselves to deliver operational efficiencies within their platform. Nonetheless, the research findings suggest that not only should this feedback be solicited on the quality of service and relationships, but to create efficiencies, businesses should measure customer effort scores. As a result, a combination of customer effort and relationship metrics will fuel overall customer experience.

**Open question:** *To what extent is price a component of customer experience in the sharing economy?*

**Probing question (if required):** *How do you think customers determine price as a positive or negative factor in the sharing economy?*

**Respondent a)**

*“Price is far too misunderstood and Not explored in enough detail, prices are very sophisticated element of customer experience.... I've done large scale verbatim analysis projects, where we've broken price into 50 different sub-parts and that's for me what price should be.... and it's very important to recognise that price is never by itself.” “You can use your cx to kind of define the right price point and where it delivers. And it's real evidence-based stuff you can see”.*

**Following probing question:**

*“I think is highly sophisticated. And it needs to be understood in the detail... I'm not seeing enough people getting advanced in the modelling and application of price. So, I think it's a really interesting area. And it should be where CX is now, and as far as the customer is concerned, I think companies have a part to play in educating the consumer on price”.*

**Respondent B)**

*“Believe it or not, but price feeds into the trust paradigm of the sharing economy... If we are not upfront and transparent well then, we have little chance of retaining customers irrespective of the rest of the experience.... When it comes to customer perspectives though, there must be an ease focus over price with the customer, it's our responsibility to educate people on this too”*

**Following probing question:**

*“price in this industry is misunderstood, customers perception of price unfortunately impacts brand but brand has the ability to educate on price*

*without setting them. What's more is that our customers must adjust their perceptions to the level at which they wish to purchase.... what I mean by that, is that if a customer uses our filtering option to set a low price which they are willing to pay, they shouldn't expect the same level of quality or service as they would at higher prices”.*

**Respondent C)**

*“so, when it comes to price, price is all about relevance. It isn't just about the lowest price because you know, people still want quality. It's about offering a price that is relevant but combines with meeting the needs and expectations of customers. And so, you know, if the high street is going to compete, then he has got to find a different way of generating an experience that offers what we will see is still being value for money.”*

**Following probing question:**

*“It has got to be an experience that that we perceive as being better value for money in that world of trust”.*

**Respondent D)**

*“As leaders in the sharing economy we try to help a lot and we try to educate the customer, so I think that investing on the on the customer it's really important in the sense that once they get your brand you're good”*

**Following probing question:**

*“Basically, price influence depends on how much you want to invest on the service. That would be pretty much for the for the user side, but I don't think we really understand how the price is working here at the company”.*

## **Theme 5: Price is misunderstood**

First and foremost, from the research it has emerged that price is fundamentally misunderstood by both the business and the customer.

What's more is that, price represents a highly-sophisticated element of customer experience. In line with the primary findings, Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan (2016) have suggested that businesses must seek to gain a greater understanding for consumer behaviour, consumer opinion and the customer's propensity to purchase when working with price in the sharing economy.

Furthermore, there are strong correlations between trust and price in the sharing economy. As such, it is vital that businesses assume the responsibility of educating the customer on price and value, if they wish to gain control over the role price is playing on their ability to deliver exceptional experiences. Educating the customer on price is fundamental in creating strong customer experiences, as Fang et al. (2017) argued actions such as unexplained price fluctuations, will have a significant impact on the behaviour and feelings of customers.

### Further Thematic Analysis

Through the application of Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis, the researcher collated and reviewed the core themes of the research as outlined in the above sections. Interestingly however, whilst defining and naming themes in the fifth step of the thematic analysis framework, the researcher began to identify several sub-themes within the overall story of the data. The systematic nature of the framework allowed the researcher quickly work through the data-set, whilst also ensuring equal attention to each specific data point (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As a result, whilst describing and specifying each theme, the researcher decided that the emerging sub-themes must be recognised as components of the overall research themes and whilst they represented important data points, they are perhaps best served as opportunities for future research in the topic. These sub-themes included emotions, authenticity and

quality. For future research, each of these will be detailed briefly below with qualitative examples of when they emerged during data analysis.

## Emotion

Emotions in customer experience come in many shapes and forms, from dissatisfaction to utter joy (Hill et al., 2007). As highlighted by respondent C during the interviews; *“What the sharing economy has made possible is for the emotion of experiences to become commonplace”*. This triggered the researcher to begin exploring how vast the range of emotions can be in customer experience. Fundamentally, it seems that brands aiming to deliver strong customer experiences must build emotion into their strategy. Critically, having the ability to show emotion in how they market and to understand the emotions of their customers, could prove a competitive advantage for businesses in the sharing economy.

## Authenticity

*“what brands need to do whatever industry they're in, whether its financial services in airlines or whatever, they have got to start telling the truth. They have got to start being authentic with their customers”*. Authenticity emerged as a sub-theme which seems to underpin each of the main themes found in this research. For example, authenticity is fundamental in building trust and being able to deliver on promises to the customer. Alternatively, because of authentic stakeholder relationships, the sharing economy platforms could provide a communication channel for the education of customers on price. Critically, authenticity represents a pivotal data point within the primary research, and perhaps the most significant sub-theme worthy of further research.

## Quality

The sub-theme of quality emerged as respondent C discussed personal research he had carried out over 5-years ago which explored a rating of the key variables that customers considered when measuring their overall experience with a brand. Respondent C briefly brought the researcher through the findings of the study and remarked: *“if I were to re-do that research, five years later, it probably wouldn't be remarkably different. It may well be that ease of doing business has overtaken quality”*. This sentiment prompted the researcher to question the role of quality in customer experience, whilst also making allowance that this research may have been focused on product quality rather than experience quality. Nonetheless, quality represents a sub-topic worthy of further research. Furthermore, as highlighted by respondent A when discussing his experience with MyTaxi app in Ireland, if the quality of service drops on a return experience, it can break the trusting relationship to the point where; *“it got to a stage where I gave up on it”*. Therefore, cementing the argument for future research into the role of this sub-theme in creating customer experiences within the sharing economy.

# Chapter 5 | Conclusions and Recommendations

## Introduction

This final chapter offers a discussion based on the findings of the research as detailed in the previous chapter. Offering a conclusion to this research paper by aligning the primary and secondary findings with the relevant objectives set out by the researcher. The chapter will then seek to briefly outline some of the limitations that have arose throughout the process of completing this paper, alongside recommended areas for future research. The researcher intends to conclude this paper, with a redesign of the conceptual model created following the literature review in chapter 2.

## Discussion

**Objective 1. *To identify the components of customer experience in the sharing economy which significantly impact a business's opportunity to deliver exceptional experiences.***

From an early stage of this research paper several common themes began to emerge from both the literature and later the primary research. Theory from Sieber (2016) clarified that trust and strong stakeholder relationships are a vital part of experience in the sharing economy. Whilst a combination of literature from Heimans and Timms (2014) and later Zott and Amit (2017) explored the efficiency and impact of knowledge sharing amongst peers on digital platforms within the sharing economy. Another key theme which emerged from the literature was price and its influence on customer experience, Al-Salamin and Al-Hassan (2016) and Fang et al. (2017) seemed to firstly clarify the relationship between price

and customer experience, before identifying the components of price which presented the largest risk of impact on customer experience in the sharing economy, namely price fluctuations. From this breadth of literature, the researcher identified these components as critical in the delivery of experiences and decided to use this literature to help shape the research objectives to be explored in the primary research.

Across the qualitative research, the respondents shared their opinions and insight into each of the themes. Critically, trust proved to be a foundational component for businesses to focus on if they wish to deliver exceptional experiences. Efficiency represented a conversation about customer facing efficiencies, profit maximisation and perhaps most importantly the role of customer effort scores in measuring customer experience. Finally, the primary research highlighted that price is commonly misunderstood, and an area where the customer must be educated by the business to avoid negative customer experiences. Whilst the combination of research helped answer the research objectives, it also offered an opportunity to explore other emerging components such as authenticity, emotions and quality. Authenticity is an area of interest for the researcher, as it is acutely linked to each of the main themes from this research.

***Objective 2. To determine how can trust be established amongst stakeholders within the sharing economy.***

The literature from Chica et al. (2017) critically began to develop trust models for the sharing economy, highlighting this theme as a central component which clearly impacts customer experience. Components such as the creation of trust, the persistent measurement of relationships and the businesses ability to use data to drive continuous improvements of customer experience proved fundamental to answering this research

objective. The primary research introduced authenticity at this point, discussing the role of partnerships in the sharing economy and how businesses must focus on different engagements with customers versus the traditional business to customer transaction management.

The interview questions sparked conversations around trust in the sharing economy and saw the introduction of voice of the customer frameworks. The primary findings argued that listening to customers about their experiences and relationships is crucial in the development of trusting relationships. Furthermore, in the sharing economy it is evident that customers value peer-to-peer feedback and reviews. As a result, sharing economy platforms must seek to solicit feedback, ratings and reviews in the public domain, and whilst not directly engaged with the consumer, hosting this type of information will assist in establishing trust.

***Objective 3. To determine the role of efficiency on customer experience in the sharing economy.***

Without a semi-structured approach, it would have been easy for this research to follow and exploit a single view of efficiency. Most of the literature on efficiency in business highlights the primary focus on cost saving or profit maximisation. Kasim et al. (2018) argue however that to drive true efficiencies, businesses must seek to create operational efficiencies, cross-business relationships and customer effort efficiencies. Interestingly, analysis of the primary research mirrored the theory from Kasim et al. (2018), with some of the respondents placing value in understanding how to drive business efficiencies by making the life of a customer easier.

The findings show that technology-led efficiency plays a vital role in delivering experience to customers. Companies should focus on the user and digital experience within their platform, whilst implementing core metrics such as customer effort (CES), relationship metrics (NPS) and overall satisfaction (CSAT) to create universal measurements of efficiency across their business. This metric driven approach fundamentally appeared as part of the wider voice of the customer conversations, which had been brought up by the respondents.

***Objective 4. To determine the significance of price in influencing customer experiences in the sharing economy.***

Given the important role of trust in every element of customer experience, Teaubner et al. (2017) discussed the significance of price as a determinant of reputation and trustworthiness. Vast majorities of the literature explore the relationships between price, ratings and reviews and how these in tandem influence overall customer experience. However, when analysed next to the interview findings, it quickly became clear that price is a severely misunderstood component of customer experience in the sharing economy. Price critically offers an opportunity for businesses to first analyse the sentiment around price and secondly, to educate the customer on the role and reasoning of price within their market.

Price is a component with critical significance on the output of customer experience, and it represents a major risk for businesses that fail to recognise and understand the role it plays in their market. It can make a company compete on multiple fronts, or in contrast, it could give a business competitive advantage in a marketplace saturated with like-for-like products or services. Whilst product or service differentiation can prove difficult in the sharing economy, price is vital in influencing the

customers perception of experiences. In summary, whilst price is misunderstood across the sharing economy by both businesses, providers and customers, it is an area of significance. Businesses should engage actively with pricing to understand, educate and deliver better customer experiences.

## Limitations

Whilst the research objectives have been successfully answered there remains several limitations which have been encountered by the researcher throughout the formulation of this study. The author applied a carefully selected research design to best tackle each of the research objectives. However, upon reflection, the researcher may have perhaps been afforded a simple opportunity to utilise a more diverse research design. For example, there may have been an opportunity for the researcher to build upon the consumer data-set by systematically measuring personal experiences from engaging with sharing economy brands. To elaborate, the researcher recognises that there may have been an opportunity to formulate a quantitative survey focused on consumer experience, and furthermore, measured personal experiences and the experiences of family members following an Airbnb stay for example.

Another limitation experienced by the researcher involves the lack of mixed methods methodology in this research. The author conducted detailed qualitative research to gather insight into the opinions and thoughts of leaders from the sector and recognised customer experience consultants. Because of time constraints, the sample size was relatively small, and perhaps didn't offer an accurate representation of professionals across the entire sharing economy industry. On reflection, it may have offered greater efficiencies and a valuable data-set, if the author carried out a quantitative survey of a consumer, provider and practitioner sample. This sample could have been sourced using

professional networks and a snowball sampling strategy. The application of this mixed methods approach may have offered a richer data-set suitable for analysis, and a different direction for the research objectives.

Finally, whilst the findings of the study should be viewed through the prism of the above-mentioned limitations, the overall research topic presents a limitation for the researcher. The sharing economy is a somewhat recent phenomenon, and whilst it represents a sizable market opportunity for both businesses and consumers, it remains a grey and misunderstood area for most of the population. As a result, every discussion about the sharing economy must first start with the researcher's description of what the sharing economy means. This definition is therefore subject to multiple interpretations and a range of different understandings. The untraditional nature of the marketplace, the varying definitions and understandings and finally, the limited experience within the sharing economy, allows for a large degree of variance and uncertainty from any study associated to the topic.

## Recommendations

Various limitations have been highlighted both in the last section and earlier on in the paper, and with that in mind, the recommendations for future research will seek to address the shortcomings from this paper. Fundamentally, within the sharing economy there are vast variances in customer encounters with a brand. As a result, there are an array of factors which can influence an experience, and dependant on the brand, these factors are increasingly difficult to identify and analyse. Critically, the author recommends an abductive reasoning approach to future research across the sharing economy.

As a direct result of certain findings within this paper, the author recommends future research into the realm of customer co-creation of experiences, and its role in delivering positive customer experience in the sharing economy. As brands recognise the strength of relationship management in the sharing economy, they must also emphasize the value in co-creation of experience amongst both providers and consumers utilising sharing platforms. For example, incentivising an Airbnb host to deliver an exceptional welcome experience to a guest, could potentially enhance the delivery of customer experience and in turn, the perception of the Airbnb brand.

With a focus on the shortcomings of this paper, a quantitative approach to consumer side research would enable a process of data triangulation. Triangulation would enable the author to gather qualitative, quantitative and secondary research from different sources over the course of this study and allow for easily comparable results and findings. Furthermore, a consumer based quantitative approach would enrich the data-set and test the core themes identified by the industry practitioners as important factors in customer experience. With a more in-depth analysis of a consumer data-set, the researcher could attempt to merge and redesign a conceptual framework for the delivery of customer experience in the sharing economy. Unlike the proposed models within this paper, a dual-sided framework would enable the research to explore the influencing factors of experience but also the customers perception of experience.

Finally, a more in-depth exploration into the role of the provider is required. Uniquely, providers within the sharing economy are responsible for delivering elements of customer experience but are also a customer group from within the sharing economy. Future research should explore the impact that provider experience with sharing economy brands has on their output to the end consumer. For example, if an Uber driver is having a negative experience when dealing with Uber

and the application, what is the impact on the consumer who finds themselves in the back of that providers car. The role of the provider is critically significant, and due to obvious time constraints, the researcher chose to focus energy and resource into how businesses can better gear themselves to enhance overall experiences. Nonetheless, as outlined, there are multiple approaches to the exploration of customer experience in the sharing economy. These could include provider experience, customer experience, product experience and brand experience.

### Conclusion and Redesigned Conceptual Model

Bearing the findings of this paper in mind, it has become clear that the original conceptual model from the review of the literature remains solid following primary data analysis. However, to conclude upon the findings within this paper and as a foundation for future research, the author has opted to extend the original conceptual model to include several the emerging sub-themes which became apparent in chapter 4. As modelled in the below diagram, the original conceptual model from the author is now supported by sub-themes such as emotions, authenticity and quality. The findings of this research have shown that each of these subheadings feed the core themes of trust, efficiency and price. As a result, they have been added to the model, which depicts the areas where businesses should consider each sub-theme when creating exceptional customer experiences.

## Conceptual Model Redesign

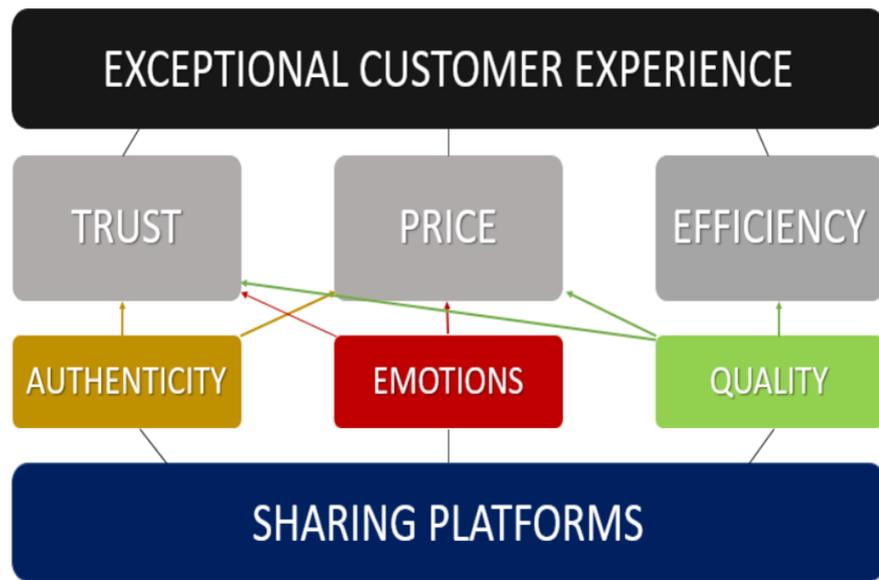


FIGURE 4. CONCEPTUAL MODEL REDESIGNED.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Topic Guide

### Opening questions:

1. Can you tell me a bit about your experience to date?
- 2.. What are your thoughts on the sharing economy?
3. What changes have you seen in the sharing economy?
4. What major changes have you seen in recent years in relation to customer experience?
5. What are your thoughts on cx in the sharing economy?

### Probing questions

1. Elaboration Probe - Could you tell more about that?
2. Clarification Probe - When you said the project was successful, what did you mean by success?

### Objective based questions

**Objective question**– Why is customer experience so important in the sharing economy and how can businesses gear themselves to enhance customer experience?

Prompters:

- \* How important is customer experience in the sharing economy?
- \* What role do the platform providers play?
- \* What influence does the peer-to-peer relationship have on overall customer experience?

**Objective question** – How can trust be established in the sharing economy?

Prompters:

- \*How do you think trust is built in the sharing economy?
- \* What do you think users' value from businesses and service providers?
- \* How do you try to make customers feel?
- \* Who establishes the level of service/product quality within the sharing economy? How so?

**Objective question** – How is efficiency measured across the sharing economy?

Prompters:

- \* How do you get return customers?
- \* What do businesses do to understand the customers likeliness to return?
- \* How can Sharing Economy businesses reduce their cost to serve customers?

**Objective question** –To what extent is price a component of customer experience in the sharing economy?

Prompters:

- \*What is the role of price in creating positive customer experiences?
- \* How do you think customers determine price either positively or negatively?
- \* To what extent does price influence propensity to return as a customer?

## Appendix 2. Consent Form

**Study Title: The role of customer experience in the sharing economy.**

### Consent Form

Thank you for listening to the information brief about the interview sub-study and overall research topic. If you are happy to participate then please complete and sign the form below. Please tick the boxes below to confirm that you agree with each statement:

*Please Tick box:*

I confirm that I have understood the information brief dated \_\_\_\_\_ and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

I agree for this interview to be audio-recorded. I understand that the audio recording made of this interview will be used only for analysis and that extracts from the interview, from which I would not be personally identified, may be used in any conference presentation, report or journal article developed as a result of the research. I understand that no other use will be made of the recording without my written permission, and that no one outside the research team will be allowed access to the original recording.

I agree that my anonymised data will be used solely for this research project and to the use of direct or indirect quotes in this research project only.

I agree to take part in this interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Jordan Farry

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*To be counter-signed and dated electronically for telephone interviews or in the presence of the participant for face to face interviews*

**Copies:** *Once this has been signed by all parties a copy of the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the main project file which must be kept in a secure location.*

### Appendix 3. Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name: Jordan Farry

Student number: X15046613

School: School of Business

Course: Master's in Business Administration

Degree to be awarded: MBA Award

Title of Thesis: An Investigation into how Brands in the Sharing  
Economy can deliver Exceptional Customer Experiences.

One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (<http://trap.ncirl.ie/>), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access. I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.

Signature of Candidate:

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For completion by the School: The aforementioned thesis was received by \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ This signed form must be appended to all hard bound and electronic copies of your thesis submitted to your school