The sharing economy and Web 2.0: a consumer perspective

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Abstract
The concept of the sharing economy has gained increased attention among academic research and practitioners alike. The sharing economy presents a shift from the traditional commerce way of business to a more collaborative sharing of resources. Companies such as Uber, Airbnb and TaskRabbit have contributed to the raising popularity of sharing services, by providing consumers with a platform to engage in peer-to-peer sharing. In addition, Web 2.0 has proven to be an essential factor in the rigorous growth of the sharing economy among consumers, by connecting them and enabling consumer engagement. Despite academic researchers devoting more attention to the sharing economy, there has been a lack of research addressing specific influences that Web 2.0 has on the consumer in the sharing economy.

In order to fill this gap, this research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the consumer perspective by providing valuable insights into how Web 2.0 affects consumer behavior within the sharing economy. Therefore, this research first aims to identify the aspects that drive consumers to consider the sharing economy as an alternative to traditional options. Following this, the research intends to uncover how both companies and peer consumers in the sharing economy attempt to influence potential consumers’ consideration of a sharing option. Finally, it is equally important to highlight how participation and Web 2.0 affects the outcomes.

To fulfill this purpose, a qualitative study has been conducted among users of the sharing economy. The sample group for the semi-structured interviews was selected based on their shared characteristic of belonging to Generation Y and having used a sharing option in the past. In order to add a degree of credibility to our findings, a product manager from the sharing economy shared comments and insights in regards to the data gathered during the interviews.

Several themes were derived from the gathered data through the analysis and discussion in regards to the drivers, influencing factors and outcomes of the participation in the sharing economy. In terms of the drivers, the first theme is financial considerations, whose importance is dependent on the nature of the sharing option. The second theme is the need for experience, which includes authentic and local experiences. Finally, the theme of security considerations is concerned with the perception of risk of participation in the sharing economy. Within the company influencing factors, the first theme of online marketing is subjected to factors such as presentation and delivery which affect the credibility of these activities. Meanwhile, the second theme of consumer referral systems enjoys more credibility due to the overwhelming involvement of peers. On the other hand, influences by other consumers show the importance of trust in peers through eWOM, including reviews and recommendations, as part of the identified receiving consumer engagement theme. The final influencing factors are part of the third-party theme, which includes the importance of online news and pop culture as a source of awareness. Lastly, the identified themes in terms of outcomes after participating in the sharing economy revolve around the change in concerns regarding risk and uncertainty, which affect the degree of online trust. Finally, the creating consumer engagement theme shows that the quality of the sharing experience motivates the consideration to engage in eWOM and in turn become an advocate for sharing options.
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1 INTRODUCTION

To introduce the subject of this research, we first provide an insight into the sharing economy and argue for the choice of subject and theories. In the next step, we elaborate on the problem background of the research to clarify its relevance for the field. By highlighting previous research, we introduce the theoretical background and in particular the gap that this research intends to fill. The introductory chapter concludes with the research question and the purpose that acts as a guideline for this thesis.

1.1 Choice of subject
When the designers Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia were having trouble with paying the rent for their apartment in San Francisco in 2007, they decided to turn it into a lodging space (Brown, n.d.). The impersonal feel of a marketplace such as Craigslist motivated them to create their own website to advertise their three air mattresses and a home-cooked meal in the morning (Brown, n.d.). Little did they know at the time that these were the first steps of creating a company that was set to surpass established names in the hotel industry, such as Hilton Hotels, in nights booked a mere 7 years later (Brown, n.d.).

Contrary to the traditional market model, which is based on ownership, the sharing economy model is built on using and sharing of products and services among others (Puschmann & Alt, 2016, p. 93). Airbnb and Uber are two of the most recognized and influential market leaders that have made the sharing economy a global trend that caused a shift in consumer consumption patterns. Consumers refrain from buying services and ownership and tend to prefer swapping, borrowing or renting from one another (Möller, 2016). Whether renting homes, borrowing goods or serving up micro-skills in exchange for access or money, consumers are showing a robust appetite for the sharing-based economy (PriceWaterhouseCoopers [PWC], 2015, p. 4).

What made us choose the sharing economy as the subject of our study is that it is a current trend and something relatively new and unique to industries. Not new in terms of availability of services or products, because those have been ever present, but new in terms of the way the Internet is allowing consumers to reach each other and, in some cases, cut out companies as middle men. As marketing master students, we have both worked together on projects that touched upon Web 2.0, meaning that the prospect of researching this current trend and its relation to Web 2.0 was very attractive to us. Due to its consumer focus and the increasing importance of Web 2.0, it is highly related to the field of marketing and the current spirit of the age. What further motivated us was the challenge of approaching a topic that is relatively new, which means that we can contribute significantly with our work. This topic is worthy of further exploration, since we firmly believe that the sharing economy will continue to gain importance in the future and continue to impact the marketing field.

In regards to the theories that we chose for this research, we initially introduce the sharing economy and the theories that explain its different forms. Following the theory on the sharing economy, we moved on to the concept of Web 2.0, more specifically what has changed from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. Herein, we included electronic word-of-mouth because it has become very easy within Web 2.0 to create and share user generated content, including reviews, products and services via social media platforms. Following this, this research investigates what motivates consumers to participate in the sharing
economy, touching upon concepts such as ownership, financial considerations and the need for belonging in a community. Next we looked at how consumer behavior is affected by company and consumer efforts utilizing Web 2.0. Among others, this includes the concepts of trust, electronic word-of-mouth, viral marketing and consumer engagement. Finally we observed how participation in the sharing economy and the availability of Web 2.0 affects the consumer behavior and online trust after using the sharing option.

1.2 Problem background
Sharing has been a part of human society since the beginning of time. According to Belk (2010, pp. 715, 730), sharing is considered a fundamental and critical type of consumer behavior, and most likely is the oldest type of consumption that can be found in today’s online environment. Thus, the author suggests that sharing has been a part of human society and trade many decades, or even centuries, before the emergence of the Internet or e-commercialization. Furthermore, basic human needs like the wish for commonality play a very important role in a consumer’s decision to participate in sharing (Belk, 2010, pp. 715, 730). According to Reynolds (2015), sharing has deep roots in bartering, which is one of the oldest forms of human trade. However, it has taken over two decades for the online world to develop a significant level of social sharing because the infrastructure has not really been fully evolved until peer-to-peer economies emerged (Reynolds, 2015).

Over the past few years the sharing economy has tremendously grown and is currently becoming an everyday feature within our own society. It is defined as a concept in which two different parties engage in a transaction and one party allows the other party to share and utilize an asset or service in a way that is mutually beneficial for everyone (Quinones & Augustine, 2015, p. 1). Contrary to traditional business models, the sharing economy is focused on collaborative consumption built on shared resources, which represents a new economic model perceived as an outlasting global trend (Newlands, 2015). The sharing economy is therefore considered a departure from traditional e-commerce to collaborative consumption, comparable to the shift from traditional commerce to e-commerce about a decade ago (Hughes, 2015). In other words: consumption patterns have experienced a trend away from traditional business models and towards a joint consumer experience that involves sharing goods, skills, expertise and services with fellow consumers. It is noteworthy that this trend is seemingly not of short-dated nature but is assumed to become even more important over the next couple of years.

In a recent report by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC, 2015, p. 8), it is evident that 44% of US consumers are familiar with the sharing economy, and that 19% of the total US adult population has partaken in a transaction with a sharing economy firm. While our research is not focused on the US market, it is still noteworthy that the sharing economy is able to attract that percentage of US consumers. The PWC study (2015, p.8) suggests that the sharing economy has indeed gained a lot of attention and has increased its awareness immensely over the last couple of years. In addition to that, companies in the sharing economy have branched out to a large number of industries, such as traveling (Airbnb), mobility (Uber), the financial sector (Kickstarter), media and entertainment (Spotify) and food (instacart) (PWC, 2015, p. 8). Indeed, among the US adults engaged in the sharing economy, 9% fall within the entertainment and media industry, 8% the automotive and transportation industry, 6% in hospitality and dining and 2% in retail (PWC, 2015, p. 8).
These results show that the sharing economy has spread over numerous industries, especially in the US. In addition to that, 83% of US adults familiar with the sharing economy state that it increases convenience and efficiency in their lives and 76% agree that it is beneficial for the environment (PWC, 2015, p. 9). Furthermore, PWC (2015, p. 9) state that 63% of the respondents suggest that it is more entertaining to engage with sharing economies than it is with traditional companies, and 86% state that it is also more affordable. These percentages are evidence for the many benefits that consumers derive from engaging in sharing economy transactions and how much it is part of their everyday life. However, the same study suggests that 69% of consumers will not trust sharing economy companies unless they are recommended by someone they trust, for example a friend or family member (PWC, 2015, p. 9). Thus, the risks or doubts that consumers have when participating in the sharing economy have to be taken into account when conducting the research and formulating a theoretical framework. Interestingly, nearly half of the respondents in the PWC report state that owning feels like a burden and that access has taken the place of ownership (PWC, 2015, p. 9).

The Internet, in particular Web 2.0, has lead to an explosive expansion of dynamic sharing (Stephan, 2016). Thereby, it goes beyond sharing photos on social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, but embodies a new mindset that focuses on collective intelligence (Visser, 2015). Furthermore, Visser (2015) describes it as a disruptive way of business that challenges traditional organizational structures and is likely going to influence the future of sustainable business. It is the ability to share and guide information through user collaboration with prospect of transparency by firms in return (Visser, 2015). Naturally, this trend towards sharing things online and participating in this behavior is closely related to the rise of sharing economy companies. This is supported by John (2012, p. 179), who states that the sharing economy appears to interface with sharing in Web 2.0 in interesting ways.

The main problem that we have identified during our literature review is that there is no significant research focused on how the presence of Web 2.0, within the sharing economy, affects the consumer behavior before and after participation. We believe that addressing this problem will benefit companies within the sharing economy, as it will provide them with insights regarding the consumer perspective. Based on the presented problem background, we continued our work with searching for relevant theories that help to understand the problem in more detail. A thorough review of prior research has led to the discovery of a research gap that will be elaborated in the following sub-section.

1.3 Theoretical background and research gap

The sharing economy has become a matter of debate over the last couple of years and is the subject of many renowned publications (e.g. Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Belk, 2014a; Lamberton & Rose, 2012), but they lack to provide a complete overview of the different drivers of participation, influencing factors by both companies and other consumers and the outcomes of participation. Thus, we believe this requires a deeper understanding of the consumer perspective in regards to the sharing economy.

Terms such as “collaborative consumption” (Botsman & Rogers, 2010), “the sharing economy” (Belk, 2014a) and “access-based consumption” (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012) seem to gain more and more attention. In fact, our literature review reveals that the term “sharing economy” is only one of many expressions for the sharing of resources. Sharing is a phenomenon that can be traced back to the beginnings of humankind, while the
sharing economy and collaborative consumption are phenomena that surfaced during the Internet era (Belk, 2014a, p. 1595). Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 881) argue that many consumers today gravitate towards accessing goods and paying for the temporary experience instead of buying things and gaining ownership.

This is related to the so-called “access-based consumption”, which was first introduced by Rifkin (2000). Rifkin’s (2000) main findings revolve around the shift from property regimes to access regimes and consequently a temporary, not unlimited use of resources. Companies like Airbnb, Spotify, Zipcar, TaskRabbit and Uber are evidence for the shift away from ownership and towards the concept of access-based consumption. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) identified the global economic crisis as a further reason for this paradigm shift towards access-based consumption. Consumers are redefining their consumption habits and values, which include the relationship between ownership and well-being (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 883). In addition to that, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 883) explain that the rapid growth of technology facilitated the organization of access-based systems online. In line with Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012, p. 883) findings, Belk (2014a, p. 1599) suggests that consumers are becoming more sensitive to price, which means that financial considerations play a certain role in the sharing economy. In addition to that, Belk (2014a, p. 1597) associates sharing services with a very strong sense of community between the participants, as resources are shared and brought together. Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation is one of the most notable studies on the topic of belongingness, in which he names love needs and the desire to form affectionate relationships as a basic human need.

A further term to describe the temporary sharing of resources is “collaborative consumption”. According to Möhlmann (2015, pp. 193-194), it is a term that is often used in conjunction with the sharing economy and takes place in organized sharing systems in which both parties share activities in form of renting, lending, trading or swapping. However, Möhlmann (2015, pp. 193-194) further states that collaborative consumption excludes sharing activities that involve no compensation and the exchange of gifts. In fact, collaborative consumption is defined as the process of people distributing resources in exchange for a fee or compensation (Belk, 2014a, p. 1597). After our literature review, it became clear that the terminology in this research field remains ambiguous and requires further development. Thus, we think that it is reasonable to use the term sharing economy as a collective term.

The participation of individuals within the sharing economy comes along with the requirement of a certain degree of exposure to risk. Santana and Parigi (2015, p. 562) further elaborate on this process. Firstly, activities within the sharing economy require the exchange of a good or a service in return for a monetary compensation in most situations (Santana & Parigi, 2015, p. 562). The person that initiates the exchange between the parties most likely incurs the highest amount of risk in the form of the recipient not reciprocating (Santana & Parigi, 2015, p. 562). Second of all, the items of the trade, such as the services or goods that are being exchanged, are very often of a more intimate nature than the items of trade in a normal, non-sharing, market (Santana & Parigi, 2015, p. 562). The exchange within a sharing economy transaction often includes items that are normally purchased for personal usage only, which can include cars, houses or even clothing (Santana & Parigi, 2015, p. 562). On the others hand, the services are usually done within a family environment such as childcare and babysitting or activities such as carpooling, which means that the participation within the sharing economy requires at the least a
minimum tolerance for risk (Santana & Parigi, 2015, p. 562). Risk aversion is one of the most fundamental properties of human behavior and includes two of the most well known theories, namely utility theory and the prospect theory (R. Zhang et al., 2014, p. 17777). The expected utility theory is an axiomatic formulation of rational behavior under uncertainty, while the prospect theory is a behavioral theory of decision making under uncertainty (R. Zhang et al., 2014, p. 17777).

The definition of trust, as proposed by Mayer et al. (1995, p. 712), is referenced in several academic articles and literature: “The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectations that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.” Chen and Barnes (2007, p. 22) take it a step further and allocate mechanisms of online trust into three dimensions. The first dimension is technical-based which includes web searching, technology and presentation. Uncertainty of transactions and security is the second dimension, which is concerned with security assurance and the final dimension is competency based, which is about reputation, fulfilment and interactions (Chen and Barnes, 2007, p. 22).

According to Papadopoulou et al. (2001, p. 322), Internet commercialization has created a very intense environment in which companies are forced to extend their regular marketing methods and focus on developing important long-term relationships to increase the prospects of customer retention, loyalty and reducing risk. In addition, the factor of trust is very important for the purchase intentions of customers (Gefen & Straub, 2004, p. 408). A low level of trust acts as the main reasons for customers to not engage in online shopping (Gefen & Straub, 2004, p. 408). However, according to Jones and Leonard (2008, pp. 91, 94) trust in e-commerce between C2C (customer-to-customer) is different than e-commerce between B2C (business-to-customer), since the presence and recognition of a third party or intermediary can provide the consumers with a certain sense of security when they engage in online shopping. The importance of trust lies in helping consumers overcoming the present perceptions of uncertainty and risk when sharing personal information or making purchases from an online seller (McKnight et al., 2002, p. 335). Salo and Karjaluoto (2007, p. 608) state that the most common complaint the Internet Fraud Watch received in 2005 was that the products or services that were purchased by the consumers were not up to par with what the selling party had promised.

After the introduction of the sharing economy concept and the accompanying factor of online trust and risk, the next step is to look at concepts such as Web 2.0, viral marketing, celebrity endorsement and product placement, as well as electronic word-of-mouth.

Traditional word-of-mouth, henceforth referred to as WOM, represents a special type of social influence in consumer behavior and is known as one of the prevalent approaches to obtain product information. In this case, information is spread without the involvement of a company and thus moves much more quickly from one end to the other. According to Lis and Neßler (2014, p. 63), the phenomenon of WOM is a special form of social influence in modern consumer behavior theory and is one of the most established manners of providing and receiving product information. Furthermore, the authors emphasize the role of subjectivity in recommendations, since information is provided by other consumers, meaning that WOM can be seen as an informal communication between prospective customers (Lis & Neßler, 2014, p. 63).
Utilizing and expanding on previous literature research, Lovett et al. (2013, p. 428) argue that WOM about brands is spread for three fundamental purposes of which the first is the *Social driver*, which is the need to express a person's desire to showcase their expertise, uniqueness and social status (Lovett et al., 2013, p. 428). The second purpose is the *motional driver*, which encompasses the need to share positive or negative feelings about brands to balance emotional arousal (Lovett et al., 2013, p. 428). The final purpose is the *Functional driver*, which simply motivates people to provide and supply information (Lovett et al., 2013, p. 428).

One core function of the Internet, and social media in particular, is to enable interpersonal communication, which includes sharing videos, pictures and articles via social media pages or emails (Riegner, 2007, p. 436). These sharing activities are fundamentally driven by community-related motives (Riegner, 2007, p. 436). In a way the Internet is a cluster of shared content that is not bound by geographical location or time differences. This reality has led to the development of Web 2.0, which is, contrary to Web 1.0, primarily characterized by the two-directional exchange of information (Belk, 2014a, p. 1595). Spotify, Wikipedia and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn depend on content sharing activities. Evidently, the rise of the Internet plays a key role in the enablement of collaborative consumption, as it allows the formation of online communities for little transaction costs (Möhlmann, 2015, p. 194).

There is a considerable amount of research papers discussing electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in relation to online activities and shared content. eWOM is the digital form of traditional WOM and commonly known to allow an increased diffusion of information (Lis & Neßler, 2014, p. 63). Due to the increased use of the Internet and digital communication platforms, the use of eWOM has spread to email traffic, online communities, blogs, forums, websites and social networks (Lis & Neßler, 2014, p. 63).

A study by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 39) found out that the key drivers of consumers engaging in eWOM are the desire for social interaction, economic incentives, concern for other consumers and the opportunity to enhance their own self-worth. Social interaction is a core function of social media and Web 2.0 platforms, while economic rewards occur, for example, in the form of referrals (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 43). The self-enhancement motivation refers to being viewed as a consumption expert or an intelligent shopper by fellow consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 43). Thus, consumers are either motivated by the need for social interaction, monetary rewards or self-interest.

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Research on eWOM has shown that information discussed in the digital world is more powerful than marketer-generated content (Bickart & Schindler, 2001, p. 37). In other words: It can be assumed that consumers are more likely to respond to messages that their friends share or recommend than when the message is initiated by company. We believe that eWom is highly relevant to study in the context of the sharing economy, as it also involves social interaction, content sharing and recommendation/referral systems.

Drawing on Hennig-Thurau et al.’s work (2004, p. 39), we define eWOM as a positive or negative statement made by consumers about a product or company that is made available...
to a great number of user via the Internet, which implies Web 2.0 and social media platforms.

In literature, eWOM is often associated with viral marketing (Lis & Neßler, 2014, p. 63). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 39) define viral marketing as “using consumer communications as a means of multiplying a brand’s popularity through customers spreading the brand name of a product or name of a company”. This definition closely resembles the concept of eWOM. The diffusion of marketing-messages or information can either be intentional or unintentional (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008, p. 151). An example for unintentional diffusion is that every email sent from a Hotmail account contains a promotional line that is automatically included when an email is sent (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008, p. 151). Thus, every user of Hotmail promotes the email service to the email recipients. Intentional message dissemination is for example the aforementioned voluntary advocacy for products or brands motivated by non-monetary or monetary incentives (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008, p. 151). In a general sense, viral marketing acts as an effective tool to transform communication networks into influential networks that can increase user attention, interest and sales (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008, p. 152). Even though viral marketing can spread the word of new products at light speed, can generate a thrilling buzz and turn customers into loyal brand evangelists, it is not effective if done wrong (Ferguson, 2008, p. 181). In order to build customer loyalty, viral campaigns have to connect at the front end of the customer strategy, lead to data collection and connect to the back end to engage most valuable segments (Ferguson, 2008, p. 181). Thus, viral marketing is not the mere spreading of a marketing message, but involves a strategic marketing campaign that generates customer loyalty.

Increased interest in consumer engagement has paralleled the continued evolution of the Internet and the emergence of new digital technologies and tools that have been dubbed as Web 2.0, especially social media (Sashi, 2012, p. 254). Following the elaboration on the concepts of WOM and eWOM, it is equally important to shed light on the connected process of consumer engagement, since WOM is a form of consumer engagement. Kumar et al. (2010, p. 298) define customer engagement as a customer’s behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, which results from motivational drivers. According to Möhlmann (2015, p. 195) there has been emphasis on the emerging role of collective co-production and community belonging on consumption behavior. Möhlmann (2015, p. 195) continues by stating that community membership or the aspiration to be part of a group or community is argued to be one determinant of practicing sharing or collaborative consumption activities. Furthermore, Hammedi et al. (2015, pp. 784, 786) argue that brand communities entail a higher level of consumer engagement with brands in which consumers are connected parties who collaborate to add value to a brand experience. Hammedi et al. (2015, pp. 784, 786) further explain that brand community members can also serve as brand ambassadors who consciously or unconsciously promote the core brand community to other consumers in others context, including other communities in which they are active and connected (Hammeci et al., 2015, pp. 786).

The online world and Web 2.0 has become a very fruitful environment for celebrity endorsement since they can reach a large number of audiences at the same time with a single message (Jin & Phua, 2014, p. 182). It is therefore not surprising that companies utilize these celebrities to promote their products and services as they are another manner of reducing risk in the sharing economy for example. According to Jin and Phua (2014, p. 192), consumer behavior can be influenced in a positive manner by celebrity
endorsements. An alternative to celebrity endorsements are product placements which companies use to promote their products or services. A lot of sharing economy options are promoted in TV shows for example, including Uber and Airbnb.

During our literature review and the theory selection, we have come across several gaps in the research field. Firstly, prior research does not provide a clear overview of how consumer behavior before and after participation in the sharing economy has been affected by Web 2.0. Secondly, in the specific context of the sharing economy, there is no research that focuses on how the consumers perceive potentially influencing factors through Web 2.0 by other consumers and companies and how it affects their consideration of a sharing option. Since the sharing economy has greatly benefitted from the growing importance of Web 2.0, filling these gaps will be of great value to field of consumer behavior. With our results we aim to contribute to the research field by delivering empirical results that can benefit marketing managers and researchers alike in understanding the consumer perspective towards the current trend of the sharing economy.

1.4 Research question

What drives consumers to participate in the sharing economy and how does Web 2.0 influence their behavior during and after using a sharing option?

1.5 Purpose

The main purpose of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of how Web 2.0 affects consumers before and after participation in the sharing economy. Therefore, this research will focus on three elements within the research question, which are drivers of participating in the sharing economy, influencing factors of companies and other consumers on the consideration of a sharing option, as well as the potential outcomes of participation. The first element will look to identify potential aspects that motivate and drive consumers to participate in the sharing economy. Secondly, we will investigate how companies use online marketing activities in Web 2.0 to potentially interact and influence customers. Equally important, we will also investigate the consumer side, by looking at how consumers use Web 2.0 to influence participation through electronic word-of-mouth. Finally, this research aims to investigate the outcomes of participation in the sharing economy. In order to fulfill the purpose of this research, a qualitative study will be conducted, consisting of interviews with consumers of the sharing economy. In addition, we will also look to add managerial insights in regards to the findings, with the aim of adding credibility to the research. As a result this thesis will act as a rich and insightful guide for managers to understand the consumer perspective in a relatively novel field.
2 SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY

The first methodology chapter is concerned with the underlying assumptions and points of departure of the research. We provide a clarification of the research philosophy, namely the ontological and epistemological stances that are appropriate for this research topic. Furthermore, we argue for the choice of research design and approach and discuss our literature search in a critical manner.

2.1 Research philosophy
According to Morgan and Smircich (1980, p. 491), the majority of academic discussion with regards to search methods in the social sciences are directly linked to assumptions about ontology, epistemology, and the human nature. The research philosophy that is adopted showcases the important assumptions about the way the world is viewed, which will be the backbone of the research strategy, including the methods that we choose and can be divided into the ontology and the epistemology (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 108). The structure followed will pose the ontology as the starting point of the research in this thesis, which is followed by the epistemological stance (Grix, 2002, p. 177).

2.1.1 Ontology
Ontology is mainly concerned with the nature of reality and addresses the assumptions that researchers have about the way the world operates and the different commitments held to the particular views (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 110). The assumptions that are made in ontology are in regards to what reality constitutes, in other words what is? (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). Bryman (2012, p. 32) elaborates that the central point of orientation in ontology is the question whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions that are built up from the perceptions and actions of individual social actors. Within ontology there are two main stances that have their own view on the nature of reality, which are objectivism and subjectivism (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 110).

The first of the two positions, objectivism, assumes the standpoint of the natural sciences, meaning that the social reality in which we are conducting our research is external to us and others. In other words, Grix (2002, p. 177), explains that this ontological stance asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. This means that objectivism goes hand in hand with realism, which considers social entities to exist independently of how we think of them and more as physical entities of the natural world (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 128).

The second ontological position is that of subjectivism which asserts that the social reality is made from different perceptions and the consequent actions of the social actors (Saunders, 2016, p. 130). Furthermore, Long et al. (2000, p. 190) elaborate that the subjective position is dependent on the individual experiences of the social actors as well. This position challenges the suggestion that everything is pre-given and therefore confronts social actors as an external reality that they have no role in fashioning (Bryman, 2012, p. 33).

In relation to the chosen qualitative approach for this research, we decide to follow the position of subjectivism. The decision to follow this position lies in the fact that we are interested in researching the consumer behavior of social actors within the sharing
economy and the factors that are influenced by Web 2.0. Our ideas about reality and what it concerns also surrounds these social actors. In the case of the concept of trust in consumer behavior, we believe that trust is something that is individually defined for each social actor. This includes all the effects that Web 2.0 could have on building trust. The actions of social actors can affect the trust within a selling context, in other words the degree of trust would not exist without the social actors. In terms of WOM, we believe that it exists independently from any selling party, be it a big company or a salesman on a market. WOM requires the involvement of social actors in order to exist and is affected by external factors that cannot be observed in the real world. By conducting our research, we as researcher also present our own interpretations of the information and how we define their meaning. These interpretations are also subjective as they cannot be observed objectively in the context of a social world.

2.1.2 Epistemology

The next stance is the epistemology of this research. An epistemological stance concerns the question of what is, or should be, regarded as acceptable knowledge within a discipline (Bryman, 2012, p. 27). In the context of business and management there are different types of knowledge that can be considered legitimate, these include numerical data, textual data, visual data, facts, interpretations, narratives and stories (Saunders, 2016, p. 127). Within epistemology there are three considerations that can be followed, namely positivism, interpretivism and realism (Bryman, 2012, p. 27-32; Saunders, 2009, p. 112-116)

The positivist places importance on what is given and focuses on scientific discovery methods that result in pure data and facts which are not influenced by human interpretation or any form of bias (Saunders, 2016, p. 135-136). It is the view that accepts a correspondence theory of the truth, in which there is a single reality free from any human individuals and that the methods of the natural sciences should be adopted in research on social questions (Mackenzie, 2011, p. 534). This ultimately leads to a greater importance being placed on observation, rather than theory (Bryman, 2012, p. 28).

A second possible stance in the epistemology is realism, meaning that what the senses show us as the reality is the truth and that objects have an existence independent of the human mind (Saunders, 2009, p. 114). Within the concept of realism there is a distinction between direct realism and critical realism, wherein direct realism states that whatever a person sees is what he or she gets (Bryman, 2012, p. 29; Saunders, 2016, p. 138). In other words, what individuals experience through their senses is accurately portraying the world. Critical realism states that reality is seen as external and independent factors, that are not directly accessible through observation and knowledge (Saunders, 2016, p. 139).

The third stance is that of interpretivism, which stands in contrast to positivism. Interpretivists share a common view that the subject matter of social sciences is different from that of the natural sciences (Bryman, 2012, p. 28). Interpretivism has developed as a critique of positivism but from a subjectivist perspective, which emphasizes that human beings are very different from physical phenomena because they create meanings (Saunders, 2016, p. 140). Multiple social realities can exist based on several different interpretations of the world (Saunders, 2016, p. 140). This creates the need for researchers to gather and understand the different social realities and based on that draw their own interpretations of the certain phenomena in relation to their research field and the current theory (Andriopoulos & Slater 2013, p. 386). It is the responsibility of the researcher to
gather and understand these interpretations and then, in a systematic and informed manner, develop their own interpretations of the this specific phenomenon to make sense to the experienced informants, uninformed others and to express the relation to the current theory (Shah & Corley, 2006, p. 1823).

Within our study, we utilize the interpretivist perspective to conduct our research. Since there are no standard thoughts that consumers go through when deciding upon the usage of a service or product, it is important to instead find multiple perspectives from the individuals. Consumers can have unique drivers that fuel their decision to consider a sharing option, which might not be identical to the drivers of someone else. This makes it important to hear from different individuals and not to treat it as a single interpretation of social realities. When looking at the motivational factors of Web 2.0 for consumers, we have to consider the individual understanding of the platform by different individuals and what they actually value as being important in their thought processes and what the reasoning behind this is. By collecting the different understandings on our research elements and topics we will conduct an analysis that is based on the researcher's understanding of the information received.

2.2 Research approach

The level of clarity about the usage of theory prior to starting the research will raise important questions in relation to the design of the research project (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 124). Research can have several different approaches, namely induction, deduction or abduction (Bryman, 2012, p. 24; Saunders et al., 2016, p. 145).

Deduction finds its origins in research in the natural sciences and owes much to what we would think of as scientific research (Saunders et al, 2016, p. 146-147). Researchers that implement the deductive approach, deduce a hypothesis that is based on what is known in a particular domain and theoretical considerations in relation to that specific domain. In turn, this hypothesis needs to be subjected to certain empirical scrutiny. It is important that the hypotheses contain certain concepts that are eligible to be connected and form the basis for researchable entities (Bryman, 2012, p. 24). It is the dominant research approach in which laws present the basis of explanation, which allows the anticipation of phenomena and the production of their occurrence and thus allows them to be controlled (Saunders et al, 2009, p. 124).

With the inductive stance, theory is the outcome of research, which means that the process of induction involves drawing generalizable inferences out of observations (Bryman, 2012, p. 26). With the emergence of social sciences in the twentieth century, researches became wary of deduction, they were critical of the reasoning approach that made way for a cause and effect link between two specific variables without any understanding of how the social actors or humans interpret the social world (Saunders, 2016, p. 147). The development of such an understanding is one of the strengths of the inductive approach in comparison to the deductive approach (Saunders, 2016, p. 147). In line with a qualitative research, the inductive process involves gathering data, which is then analyzed and observations are measured by the researcher in order to formulate a new theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 13).

The final stance that can be chosen as a research approach is abduction. The process of abduction follows the creation of explanatory hypothesis for the facts (Rodrigues, 2011, p. 135). In contrast to flowing from theory to data, as in the case for deduction and moving
from data to theory with induction, the abductive approach moves freely back and forth while essentially combining the inductive and deductive approaches (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 148). Abduction implies looking for and then exploring several potential explanatory patterns within the facts of a certain phenomenon (Åsvoll, 2014, p. 291). These patterns act as a cognitive mean to possible hypotheses, these possible hypotheses reveal the path from certain facts to ideas and theories (Åsvoll, 2014, p. 291).

In line with our decision to follow the interpretivist approach, we will utilize induction to develop our research. Due the scarcity of theory that is specifically linked to the purpose of this research, we cannot simply test previous theories or hypothesis, which makes it hard to follow the deductive approach. Instead, by following the inductive approach we will look to establish a theory on our own based on the analysis of our gathered data.

2.3 Research design
The research design acts as a guide and plan to answer the research question (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 163). Therefore, we assured that the research question was a constant aspect to consider when making methodological choices, such as philosophy, research approach, design or data collection methods. It is crucial to consider the alternative options and how they aid the answering of the research question to make an informed decision. In this subchapter we will present the main research strategy alternatives and argue for our final decision.

Both quantitative and qualitative research have their place in today’s research world. The terms are widely used in business research to differentiate data collection techniques, as well as data analysis procedures (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 151). Qualitative and quantitative research mainly differ in terms of the connection between research and theory, as well as in terms of the philosophical assumptions (ontology and epistemology) (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 26). While qualitative research is commonly used to generate new theory by the use of an inductive research approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 387), quantitative research is associated with a deductive approach that uses data to test theory (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 166).

Quantitative research usually involves any technique or analysis procedure that results in or uses numerical data (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 151). According to Saunders et al. (2016, p. 166), quantitative research is concerned with analyzing relationships between variables and measuring them by the use of statistical techniques. In addition to that, quantitative research commonly results in measurable data (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 163-165). Qualitative research, on the other hand, involves data collection techniques and analysis procedures that generate non-numerical data and makes use of words, videos, pictures and similar material (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 151). In terms of characteristics, qualitative research studies meanings and relationships between participants and uses numerous data collection and analysis techniques to develop a theoretical contribution (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 168). The data collection is not standardized, which means that procedures may differ and take an interactive form (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 168).

Historically, less attention has been paid to qualitative research than to quantitative research (Milliken, 2001, p. 74). The reason for this seems to be the preconception and scepticism towards qualitative research among researchers in terms of generalizability, which is stronger when conducting quantitative research (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007, pp. 66-67). Instead of seizing the rich potential of qualitative research, many researchers rely
on the comfort that quantitative methods provide (Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013, p. 386). Nevertheless, qualitative methods have made considerable contributions to research over the years, which indicates that this impression has started to vanish and that the acceptance of qualitative research has improved (Shah & Corley, 2006, pp. 1824-1825).

Saunders et al. (2016, p. 166), emphasize that quantitative research is associated with a deductive approach, which means that theory is tested. Due to the lack of existing theory that makes distinctive link between the sharing economy and the effects of Web 2.0 on consumer behavior within this context, conducting a qualitative study is the most viable option. One of the main reasons for the use of qualitative methods is the ability to gain deeper insights and understanding of the observed phenomenon (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007, p. 58). It can serve as a lens for understanding and extending knowledge across new and evolving topics in the respective research field (Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013, p. 385). Furthermore, it leads to a better understanding of socio-cultural environments and the effects of environmental forces on consumer decisions (Andriopoulos & Slater, 2013, p. 386). The research question of this thesis is investigating a social phenomenon and addresses consumer behavior, which involves social entities and a subjective perspective. Our main purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of consumer behavior within the sharing economy and Web 2.0, and to contribute to the research field by making valuable connections. Therefore, we believe that a qualitative research method is more suitable for the purpose and research question of this thesis than a quantitative method. In fact, a qualitative methods allows researchers to discover new insights and relationships and understand complex processes in a social context (Shah & Corley, 2006, p. 1824). Furthermore, following the inductive research approach of this thesis, a qualitative method will enable the generation of new theory (Shah & Corley, 2006, p. 1821). Mintzberg (1979, p. 587) argues that systematic data builds the foundation, but anecdotal and rich description generates theory. In addition to that, Mintzberg (1979, p. 587) argues that “hard” data (quantitative) helps to uncover relationships, but only the use of “soft” data (qualitative) will allow “explaining” them. As the research question of this thesis includes the keyword “how”, it intends to explain and not test or describe the problem and circumstances. This matches the qualitative, “soft” data according to Mintzberg (1979, p. 587).

Furthermore, this thesis takes an exploratory approach which means that we are planning to discover and gain insights about our topic and research question. Thus, we want to clarify the understanding of the sharing economy in a Web 2.0 context, as its precise nature is relatively unclear today. An advantage of conducting an exploratory study is its flexibility and adaptability, which, however, also means that we are open to changing the direction as a result of new data that we collect (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 174-175).

2.4 Literature search
Searching for literature and finding valuable and reliable sources is a dynamic process that requires attentive supervision and constant reconsideration (Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson, 2013, p. 197). For the purpose of this thesis, we ensured to start with a broad and thorough literature review, that we narrowed down to specific concepts and research fields that are included in the theoretical framework of this study.

Reviewing the literature in a critical manner is an essential part of conducting research (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 71). We started reviewing the literature in a broader sense to get
an understanding of what has been published in the relevant area and what the state of art is. According to Saunders et al. (2016, p. 71), that is called “critically reviewing the literature”.

We ensure that the majority of the sources we used are from peer-reviewed journals and thus have high levels of validity and objectivity, which will have a positive impact on the quality of this thesis (Patel & Davidson, 2011, p. 69). In addition to that, we considered a high impact factor of journals via SJR (Scientific journal rankings). To find the relevant literature for the field of this research, we searched on the Umeå University Library database (e.g. EBSCO, Emerald or Scopus) and Google Scholar. Furthermore, we made use of the many books at Umeå University library, especially when we made methodological choices. In general, we decided to focus on peer-reviewed articles because they contain the most current knowledge in the dynamic field of Marketing research. When books were used, we assured that they contributed valuable knowledge and that they were relevant for the research question. The very small number of non-scientific or not peer-reviewed sources were only used to emphasize the currency of specific trends or to support theories with statistical data. We acknowledge that secondary referencing should be avoided as far as possible.

As the sharing economy is still a relatively new topic, we explored articles about consumer behavior or online consumption and made use of their reference list for finding relevant sources. This was only done when the results of databases were exhausted. Some of the key search terms include:

sharing economy, collaborative consumption, peer-to-peer, P2P, consumer behavior, Airbnb, Uber, access-based consumption, customer engagement, consumer engagement, brand advocacy, social media marketing, online communities, customer referral programs, online trust, viral marketing, product placement, celebrity endorsement,
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework contains a presentation of relevant prior studies and theories. We related the theories to the context of the sharing economy to avoid a mere repetition of existing knowledge. We start with a presentation of the concepts of the sharing economy and Web 2.0, as they form the basis of the context of this research. To provide a logical structure, we continue with the drivers of the sharing economy and present relevant theories in literature, then discuss prior research and theories concerning consumer and company influences in Web 2.0 and the consumer behavior field and conclude with the presentation of possible outcomes of participation in the sharing economy. Finally, we provide a conceptual model that includes the presented theories and their connections.

3.1 The concept of the sharing economy

In order to understand and examine the sharing economy, this thesis will briefly explain sharing in general and in an online context, then introduce different terminologies of the sharing economy, namely collaborative consumption and access-based consumption, and define the concepts clearly.

Sharing is a core element of consumer behavior that has been often overlooked and ranges from sharing household resources and family possessions to file sharing or intellectual property right exchange (Belk, 2010, p. 715). Furthermore, the basic concept of sharing is motivated by the desire for a feeling of unity and an aggregated sense of self (Belk, 2010, p. 729). The principle of the sharing economy is not new but has been a part of business domains for years (Puschmann & Alt, 2016, p. 93). The sharing economy has been a subject of matter among anthropologists, economists, sociologists and environmental scholars, which all take different perspectives on the phenomenon, either categorizing it as a new economic logic (e.g. sharing economy, peer-to-peer economy, access-based economy) or a techno-social trend in consumer societies (e.g. connected consumption, collaborative consumption, access-based consumption) (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015, p. 289). Sharing resources in business-to-business domains involves the sharing of machinery in agriculture and forestry, while sharing in business-to-consumer domains includes self-service laundries, car rentals or public libraries (Puschmann & Alt, 2016, p. 93). Recently, consumer-to-consumer transactions have emerged and resulted in new business models (Puschmann & Alt, 2016, p. 93). Hence, a change can be observed throughout various business domains that makes the consumer the focus of operations.

In an online environment, sharing is the fundamental and essential activity of participation in Web 2.0 and social network sites especially (John, 2012, pp. 167-168). The Internet lead to an explosive range of the sharing economy and offers an array of new opportunities for sharing everywhere (Lessig, 2008, p. 155). In fact, some may say that the Internet was born a sharing economy, i.e. online commerce was only added later (Lessig, 2008, p. 162). This is supported by John (2012, p. 179), who states that the Internet is fundamentally a sharing technology and that sharing economies of consumption are enabled by network technologies such as Zipcar, Airbnb and eBay.

According to Puschmann and Alt (2016, p. 95), sharing economies can impact consumers, intermediaries and providers likewise. Consumers benefit from choosing sharing options because it enhances their convenience as they can use a specific product for a certain purpose instead of settling for a “one size fits all” option (Puschmann & Alt, 2016, p. 95). In addition to that, providers and intermediaries gain benefits from new business models
and services, i.e. they can position their firms as platforms for sharing goods or provide additional value added services (Puschmann & Alt, 2016, p. 95).

Hamari et al. (2015, p. 4) discusses four aspects (or characteristics) of the sharing economy. Firstly, Hamari et al. (2015, p. 4) introduces collaboration online, which refers to the emergence of peer-to-peer platforms as tools for creating and consuming information online. This is supported by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 59), who state that there is a trend towards social media that plays an important role for companies that are active on the online market. Secondly, Hamari et al. (2015, p. 4) name social commerce as an aspect of the sharing economy. Social commerce is built on peer-to-peer platform interaction and these platforms depend on users and engagement on social networks (Hamari et al., 2015, p. 4). For companies this means that the users become both consumer and producer, thus reducing the role of marketers (Hamari et al., 2015, p. 5). Thirdly, Hamari et al. (2015, p. 5) define sharing online as a characteristic of the sharing economy, which is explained by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 60) as a process where technical advances enable a form of virtual content sharing very different and much more powerful than twenty years ago. Lastly, Hamari et al. (2015, p. 5) determine ideological considerations as an aspect of the sharing economy. Thereby, they explain that green consumption and sustainable behavior in general play an important role in driving collaborative consumption.

These aspects illustrate that the sharing economy is a phenomenon that mostly occurs on social networking sites and facilitates content sharing in a very powerful way. Furthermore, it shows the versatility of the sharing economy, as it addresses social, online and ideological aspects in very unique manners. During our literature review, we have observed that the sharing economy is defined by the use of different terminology, e.g. “collaborative consumption” (Botsman & Rogers, 2010), “peer-to-peer” (Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016) or “access-based consumption” (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). In the following section we will define the terminology of the sharing economy and highlight the main findings that can be found in today’s literature.

3.1.1 Collaborative consumption

Belk (2014a, p. 1597) defines collaborative consumption as “people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation”. The inclusion of other compensation enables the consideration of bartering, trading and swapping, which all involve the giving and receiving of non-monetary compensation (Belk, 2014a, p. 1597). However, this definition excludes activities that do not include compensation and gift giving, which involves the permanent transfer of ownership (Belk, 2014a, p. 1597). Möhlmann (2015, p. 193) states that collaborative consumption takes place in organized networks in which participants conduct sharing activities in the form of renting, lending bartering and swapping goods, services, space or money. Thus, Möhlmann’s (2015) definition of collaborative consumption aligns with Belk’s (2014a) definition as they both exclude sharing activities without any compensation. In addition to that, Möhlmann’s (2015, p. 200) study determines that users are predominantly participating in collaborative consumption because it helps them to save money and shows high levels of utility.

Nevertheless, collaborative consumption also has a social side, as it is enabled through community interaction and the increased use of network technologies (Piscicelli et al., 2015, p. 21). Furthermore, authenticity is considered important in traditional
accommodation services and refers to the fact that tourists often seek an authentic experience with intimate relations, which is a reason why many tourist settings arrange a back region that supports the belief one has entered an authentic experience (MacCannell, 1973, p. 589). In addition, collaborative consumption represents an alternative and sustainable way of consumption that can prevent new purchases (Piscicelli et al., 2015, p. 21). Hence, collaborative consumption includes a communal aspect and embodies an alternative way of consuming that can have sustainable benefits. Similar to Piscicelli et al.’s (2015) definition, Barnes and Mattsson’s (2016, p. 200) include the networking aspect in their definition of collaborative consumption: “The use of online marketplaces and social networking technologies to facilitate peer-to-peer sharing of resources (such as space, money, goods, skills and services) between individuals, who may be both suppliers and consumers”.

Fundamentally, collaborative consumption concerns people sharing and collaborating to meet certain needs, whether in transportation, land or accommodation (Pedersen & Netter, 2015, p. 258). According to Barnes and Mattsson (2016), collaborative consumption, including access-based consumption, is embedded in the sharing economy. In fact, Airbnb, ZipCar are only two of the most prominent examples, whereas the term collaborative consumption covers nearly all types of products and services that involve the sharing of excess resources (Pedersen & Netter, 2015, p. 258) As addressed by Barnes and Mattsson (2016), collaborative consumption, access-based consumption and peer-to-peer sharing of resources are embedded in the sharing economy. Therefore, these concepts will be defined in-depth within this framework to cover the terminology of the sharing economy and to deliver a complete overview of the research topic.

3.1.2. Access-based consumption

Access-based consumption is defined as a transaction where no transfer of ownership takes place (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 881). In addition to that, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 882) suggest that access-based consumption is a unique form of consumption which still lacks understanding of its complex features. In their definition of collaborative consumption, Hamari et al. (2015, p. 3) include the aspect of access, as they state that collaborative consumption is a peer-to-peer activity of obtaining, giving or sharing access to goods and services through community-based online services. Thus, access plays a recurring role in sharing economy research and seems to be a large part of the concept. Access-based consumption plays an especially important role in an online environment because “the Internet itself is a giant pool of shared content that can be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection, a browser, and a government that allows access to most or all web content” (Belk, 2014a, p. 1595). Thus, access seems to be more viable in an online environment as collaborative consumption and the sharing economy are both phenomena born of the Internet age (Belk, 2014a, p. 1595).

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 884) have identified six dimensions on which types of access differ from one another, namely temporality, anonymity, market mediation, consumer involvement, type of accessed object and political consumerism. Temporality refers to the duration of access and usage, where access can be short-term (e.g. one time transaction) or long-term (e.g. community membership) (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 884). In the sharing economy, short-term means that the access is only granted on a one-time basis like renting a car or a designer purse online, while long-term means that users become members of a community like e.g. Netflix (Bardhi & Eckhardt, p. 884). Object usage can vary from long-term use (e.g. traditional car leasing) to limited usage (e.g. car-
sharing) (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 884). In the sharing economy, it can be argued that long-term use involves a longer period staying at, for example, an Airbnb. Limited usage on the other hand is for example the use of an Uber car. The anonymity dimension manifests itself in two different ways, interpersonal anonymity and spatial anonymity (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, pp. 884-885). Interpersonal anonymity refers to private context (e.g. consumers do not want to have interactions with other consumers accessing the same object) and public context (e.g. staying in someone’s house at the same time as the owner resides there) (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 884). Spatial anonymity, on the other hand, refers to the proximity between the object and the consumers that shapes the intimacy of the consumptionscape (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 885). Thereby, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 885) refer to convenience as a motivation to access, because e.g. car sharing services are in closer proximity than traditional car rental hubs.

Convenience goods are defined as “goods for which the probable gain from making price and quality comparisons among alternative sellers is thought to be small relative to the consumer’s appraisal of the searching costs in terms of time, money and effort.” (Holton, 1958, p. 53). Thereby, Holton (1958, p. 53) differentiates between shopping and convenience goods: For convenience goods the ratio for gains resulting from price and quality comparisons relative to searching costs is low, while shopping goods show a higher ratio. More specifically, Feichtinger et al. (1988, p. 187) define convenience goods as goods that are bought without a lot of consideration or effort by consumers, meaning that buyers adapt their choice habits so they can expect good value for money in the long run. Thus, buyers are not willing to spend a lot of time or effort on searching for the most price efficient or affordable alternative, but chose the most convenient one. For the sharing economy this means that users frequently choose a sharing option over a traditional option because it is in close proximity or simply more convenient to access. Market mediation refers to a profit (underlined by economic exchange like car sharing) or nonprofit (peer-to-peer sharing using technology) orientation of access consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 885). Consumer Involvement concerns the level of involvement in the consumption experience, ranging from limited (e.g. traditional rental services) to extensive involvement (e.g. car-sharing) (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 885).

In addition to that, Bardhi & Eckhardt, (2012, p. 885) introduce the Type of Accessed Object dimension, which explains that experiential and functional objects have varying nature of access, and that material or digital objects have differing access consumption scapes. Moreover, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 885) challenge that consumers do not derive value from functional products unless they are owned, and argue that digital access may be more similar to sharing than in consumption scapes in which the accessed object is of material form. Furthermore, Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012, p. 894) findings show that car sharing is motivated by self-interest and utilitarianism, instead of hedonistic value. Lastly, political consumerism means that some consumers use their choice of consumption (ownership vs. access) as a way to promote ideological interests, such as environmental concerns (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 885). These six dimensions show the complexity and multidimensionality of access-based consumption, as well as its relevance in the sharing economy context of this thesis.
3.2 The concept of Web 2.0
In order to facilitate an analysis on how Web 2.0 works and affects the sharing economy, it is necessary to provide a basic understanding of what Web 2.0 is and how it has changed interaction and sharing of content online.

According to Kaletka and Pelka (2011, p. 264), Web 2.0 is widely regarded as one of the most important modern and most influential innovations within the field of ICT and something that is regarded as an innovation itself in which we can also find media innovations such as Wikipedia and YouTube. A common mistake that people make is the simple assumption that concepts such as social media and Web 2.0 are the same, instead of clearly distinguishing them from each other. Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) distinguish between the two concepts by stating that Web 2.0 is a space where individual users are treated as a first class object, but at the same time a platform on which several important innovative technologies have been built in the years that accommodate a variety of highly popular modern social networks such as Facebook.

Kaletka and Pelka (2011, p. 270) argue that the innovation initially introduced by Web 1.0, which resulted in the Internet eruption within the public sphere around 1995, was mainly based on allowing different individuals to interact with content producers and broadcasters through Internet websites and with other users through chatting systems and emails. Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) add that the great majority of users were simply acting as the end consumers of the online content in Web 1.0 because there were not that many content creators, which is the case in Web 2.0 where practically everyone can be a content creator with the availability of numerous technological tools and software. In addition, John (2012, p. 167) argues that sharing is the fundamental aspect and activity of Web 2.0 and the social media platforms that it facilitates, most famously on the Internet services that are based on user generated content such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, wikis and blogs.

John (2012, p. 172) proposes that sharing on social media in Web 2.0 has three main characteristics, which are the appearance of fuzzy objects of sharing, use of the word share with no object at all and deploying the notion of sharing where it was not used before. Fuzzy objects of sharing is used when describing a concrete object that is being shared, it means that it is immediately know what is being shared (John 2012, p. 172). For example Flickr encourages you to share your pictures and YouTube says to share your videos with friends and family (John, 2012, p. 172). However, these have now been joined by so called fuzzy objects of sharing, which extend the scope of what is expected when it comes to sharing, meaning that social networks are now asking you to share your word, life, story or experiences which is turning the scope towards communication rather than keeping it on distribution (John, 2012, p. 172). This second characteristic of sharing in Web 2.0, No object of sharing, is based on the notion that social networks can now even only mention the word “share” without any fuzzy objecting accompanying it and the users will still be able to understand what they are supposed to do (John, 2012, p. 172). In other words the meaning of the word sharing has now taken root and allows for different interpretations of the word. Wasn’t sharing, now it is: The word and notion of sharing has been around for years and so have the activities that one could do on older social networks (John, 2012, p. 172). However now that the word “share” has become such an widespread word for multiple activities and different representation of this word, older social networks that had never used the term sharing are rapidly changing their messaging.
to include it (John, 2012, p. 172). Companies include Bebo and Fotolog that changed their messaging to introduce sharing into their taglines or brand messages (John, 2012, p. 172).

3.3 The drivers of participation in the sharing economy

While conducting the literature review, several drivers emerged as being most prominent in relation to the sharing economy. According to Chen (2009, p. 937), there is a current trend that suggests that ownership is not the main focus of consumers anymore (Chen, 2009, p. 937). Therefore, we have included ownership versus access as one of the drivers of participating in the sharing economy. Furthermore, we included financial considerations as a driver because consumers usually demand products that offer them great benefits at relatively low costs, which is why consumers use sharing services (Lamberton & Rose, 2012, p. 111). Thus, it is important to consider the financial aspect of using a sharing option. Lastly, by researching the websites of the most notable companies in the sharing economy, we noticed that leaders like Airbnb promote the feeling of community. In fact, they promote their service with the slogan “Belong Anywhere”, which lead us to research belongingness and its role in driving participation in the sharing economy.

3.3.1 Ownership versus access

In her study about possession and access, Chen (2009, p. 937) challenges the presumption that possession or ownership are the ultimate focus of consumer desire. The author extends the research and suggests that possession as a consumption mode is not the only driver of value of the extended self (Chen, 2009 p. 937). The extended self is defined as not limited to external objects and possessions, but includes persons, places and group possessions and embodies a metaphor that explains that not only what is seen is “me” (the self), but also which is seen as “mine” (Belk, 1988, p. 140). Indeed, access is also seen as a value adding factor through non-material memories that enrich human sense and life experiences (Chen, 2009, p. 938). These findings show that, contrary to common belief, ownership is not the only driver or motivation of consumption, but that other, much more complex, factors play a role.

Lamberton and Rose (2012, p. 109) state that sharing systems are increasingly challenging ownership as “the dominant means of obtaining product benefits”. This statement is very similar to Chen (2009, p. 937), who states that ownership is no longer the ultimate focus of consumer desire. However, Lamberton and Rose (2012) have included the context of sharing systems, which aligns with the overall context of this thesis. They emphasize the fact that sharing systems are a unique challenge for traditional ownership-based businesses and have led to several traditional ownership-based companies entering the sharing economy (Lamberton & Rose, 2012, p. 109). This showcases the growth that the sharing economy is currently undergoing, as well as the shift from an ownership-based consumer mindset towards a mindset that focuses on sharing in between consumers.

Ownership is defined as a “special relationship which may hold between a person and a physical object” (Snare, 1972, p. 200). Following this definition, it can be said that ownership relates to external objects and their relation to the respective consumer. However, as aforementioned, Chen (2009) challenges the assumption that ownership is the ultimate form of consumer desire and suggest that it is not the only driver of the extended self. According to Belk (1988, p. 140), the extended self is not limited to external objects and possession, but includes places, people and group possessions. This presents a deviance from Snare’s (1972) definition of ownership, which was limited to physical
objects. Moreover, Botsman and Rogers (2010, p. 73) state that access is attained through collaborative lifestyles, which means that consumers share similar interests and less tangible assets such as time, skills, space or money. Belk (1988, p. 141) presents several major categories of the extended self, namely body, internal processes, ideas, experiences and things one feels attached to. Therefore, the extended self embodies everything a human feels any type of attachment for and it expands the self to relatively complex external factors (Belk, 1988, p. 141). According to Belk (1988, p. 143), personalizing a car (e.g. in terms of colour) and taking good care of its maintenance is a simple way of creating and fostering an extended self through an external object. Following this, Ahuvia (2005, p. 182) explains that of the vast number of consumption activities and objects that surround us (e.g. groceries, vacations, clothing, gifts, movies, computers etc.), only a few are loved and play an important role in our understanding of self identity. Thus, consumers choose specific objects and form a type of attachment towards them to explain or understand their self.

In a digital context, the extended self is more present than ever (Belk, 2014b, p. 1105). The mobile industry and especially smartphones have become a large part of today’s everyday life and are an expression of self identity (Belk, 2014b, p. 1105). In addition to that, Belk (2014b, pp. 1105-1106) states that consumers appreciate these devices in a religious manner and show a real attachment towards media such as photos, music, emails, videos, text messages, web pages and virtual realities. Due to the large amount of time spent on using these possessions and activities, it is natural that consumers become attached to the virtual equipment and structures (Belk, 2014b, p. 1106). Solomon et al. (2010, p. 148) explain that “symbolic interactionism” plays a crucial role in the “online self”, as it means that people exist in a symbolic environment and the meanings of consumers themselves are determined by social consensus. Furthermore, Solomon et al. (2010) suggest that consumers interpret their own identity and continually evolve as they face new situations and people. Thus, meeting other people and encountering new situations plays an important role in how individuals form and assess their selves online. Belk (2014b, p. 1107) explains that consumers increasingly express themselves to a far larger audience when using digital devices than using non-digital media and extend the self via digital expressions. Even though such digital possessions may not be as important to consumers as physical possessions, they still play a major role in their sense of self and might change the nature of humans, non-human things and their relationship (Belk, 2014b, p. 1107).

In an attempt to explain why consumers refrain from gaining ownership, Moeller and Wittkowski (2010) found several determinants for the preference of renting as opposed to gaining ownership of items. The determinants for preferring non-ownership services can be found when looking at the trend- and convenience orientation (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). The trend orientation refers to the novelty-seeking consumer, who is constantly looking to obtain the newest products and wants to follow current trends and innovative products (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010, p. 181). This orientation is relevant for many industries in the sharing economy, such as designer bag rental services because they are accompanied by high monetary investments (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010, p. 182). Thus, consumers turn to sharing services to obtain products they cannot afford or that are considered perishable. The convenience orientation refers to consumers that wish to accomplish tasks in the least amount of time and energy (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010, p. 181). Thus, both orientations (convenience and trend) play an important role in the restraint from gaining full ownership of something and encourages the participation in
sharing systems such as renting (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010, p. 186). Experience orientation, price consciousness and environmentalism however did not show to influence the preference for non-ownership modes of consumption (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010, p. 176).

In contrast to Moeller and Wittkowski’s (2010) findings, Kumar et al. (2014, p. 1924) state that experiential purchases are more likely to lead to happiness than material purchases, which means that consumers are more likely to be satisfied with a purchase if they spend money on “doing”, instead of “owning”. Furthermore, Kumar et al. (2014, p. 1929) found out that waiting for an experience leads to significantly more happiness than waiting for a material item. Following these varying findings, the experience orientation is still an ambiguous concept in the context of consumer research. Rosenzweig and Gilovich (2011, p. 215) define a material good as “made to be kept in one’s possession”. Therefore, it can be argued that material goods are usually linked to ownership, whereas experiential goods are associated with, for example, vacations. However, a study by Nicolao et al. (2009, p. 197) notes that a lifetime of negative experiential purchases might lead to unhappy results and that negative material purchases might not lead to such negative results. According to this, consumers regret buying negative experiences more than they regret buying material goods.

It is apparent that there are different results and opinions about experiential consumption, but the bottom line is that buying experiences instead of owning goods can lead to much higher levels of happiness than material possessions (Kumar et al., 2014), which potentially also applies to the sharing economy context.

It can be said that there are many factors that influence the consumer decision to refrain from mere ownership and to turn towards access-based consumption instead. The drivers range from the extended self, novelty-seeking, convenience, experiential consumption to pure economic reasons. However, it is certain that sharing systems present a challenge to ownership-based companies that no longer represent the ultimate consumer desire (Chen, 2009, p. 937; Lamberton & Rose, 2012, p. 109). In addition to that, Web 2.0 is the optimal environment for sharing economy companies, especially because digital possessions play an increasingly important role in consumer’s sense of self (Belk, 2014b, p. 1107). Including access-based consumption as a theory in this framework is relevant as it helps to gain a deeper understanding of the motivation that lies behind consumers’ participation in the sharing economy in Web 2.0. Thus, it serves the research question and the purpose of this thesis because it builds a base for formulating interview questions during the data collection process.

### 3.3.2 Financial considerations

Belk (2014a, p. 1599) suggests that many companies that partake in the sharing economy today have benefitted from the economic crisis because it resulted in a more price sensitive consumer mindset. This is further supported by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 883) who explain that the tendency to prefer access to ownership has increased with the global economic crisis. Many consumers are redefining their spending habits and values, which ultimately influences the relationship between ownership and well-being (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 883). Thus, calculative reasons (e.g. shortage of money) play an important role in turning away from ownership and towards access-consumption.
Lamberton and Rose (2012, p. 111) suggest that consumers seek products that offer the greatest benefit at the lowest cost, which serves as a base for understanding why consumers are driven to participate in sharing activities. Silverstein (2014) explains that the car sharing service Uber’s rates do in fact beat taxi fares in most US cities, especially when there is not a lot of traffic. Hence, participants benefit from saving costs when taking an Uber car instead of a regular taxi cab. In addition to that, Uber has incorporated the option of “carpooling” (uberPOOL), which they promote as “always cheap, always convenient, always quality” (Uber, 2016). According to the Uber website, uberPOOL matches riders that head in the same direction, which makes the trip fares up to 50% less expensive than regular Uber rides. Thus, Uber users can save a significant amount of money when traveling, which matches the economic drive of participating in the sharing economy.

Lamberton and Rose (2012, p. 111) define three types of costs that tend to influence consumer perception of a sharing option: First, a sharing system may be accompanied by a “membership costs”. An example for this is Breeze, a car leasing firm that offers week-to-week leases for Uber and Lyft drivers. They require a one-time membership fee that covers the background check of participants. Second, so called “technical costs” play a role in consumer perception because they represent the costs associated with learning how to use unfamiliar products, which can be especially high with shared products (Lamberton & Rose, 2012, p. 111). Third, consumers are influenced by “search costs”, which are determined by the effort needed to decide which product or program to enter (Lamberton & Rose, 2012, p. 111). All these cost factors fit within the Web 2.0 context, as sharing platforms exist online and payments are made via online transfer or credit card.

3.3.3 The need for belonging

The travel sharing service website Airbnb, has made “Belong anywhere” their slogan. The company emphasizes the importance of belonging as part of their shared vision and even created a universal symbol, named Bélo, that represents the concept of belonging no matter where a person might be (Chesky, 2014). This symbol is a thread that represents everything Airbnb stands for and weaves through every touchpoint of the website (Chesky, 2014). Following this, it can be argued that examining the concept of belongingness as a potential driver of participating in the sharing economy is relevant for understanding why consumers feel the need to be part of the sharing economy. This can aid the answering of the research question, as it touches upon the sharing economy in Web 2.0, consumer motivation to participate and their behavior in the process.

There are numerous academic articles that address the theory of belongingness (e.g. Baumeister & Leary, 1995; DeWall, 2011; Maslow, 1943). Baumeister and Leary (1995, p. 497) describe the belongingness hypothesis as a drive within human beings to form and sustain lasting, positive and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, Baumeister and Leary (1995, p. 497) suggest that lacking belongingness should lead to deprivation and that human behavior, emotion and thought is caused by this basic interpersonal motive. Thus, belongingness is a concept that is very influential, especially in human behavior and interpersonal relationships. In fact, the belongingness hypothesis is seen as a core element of human functioning and evolutionary history (DeWall et al., 2011, p. 1281). They suggest that people naturally seek social acceptance and experience significant benefits for their physical and mental well-being when they satisfy their need to belong (DeWall et al., 2011, p. 1307). This is further supported by Newman et al. (2007, pp. 241-
242), who suggest that people are happier when they experience social belonging and might change their behavior based on their desire to belong to a group.

One of the most recognized works on the concept of belongingness was introduced by Maslow (1943). He formulated a positive theory of human motivation in the form of a hierarchy, which explains the human basic needs, namely physiological needs, safety needs, love needs, esteem needs and the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). In his work he suggests that love needs emerge when both physiological and safety needs are satisfied (Maslow, 1943, p. 380). This need for love, affection and belongingness describes the desire of affectionate relationships, a place in a group and the strive to achieve this goal (Maslow, 1943, p. 381). This theory illustrates the importance of belongingness and the role it plays in human behavior and the desire to become part of a group and form relationships. Wang et al. (2015, p. 578) argue that seeking belongingness and maintaining interpersonal interactivity and social enhancement, can be described as interdependence-related motivations, which are related to building and developing relationships and affiliation with others. In contrast to that, independence-related motivation is described as a concern about internal traits and intrinsic motivation, e.g. identity, self-discovery or self-image (Wang, 2015, p. 578).

The need to belong can be found in the sharing economy and Web 2.0 context in all its facets. Sharing services that bring together different resources, such as washing machines, electric drills, bicycles etc., have emerged all over the globe and have not only saved neighborhoods from having redundant possessions but also encouraged a very strong sense of community in between the participants (Belk, 2014a, p. 1597). In addition to that, Möhlmann (2015, p. 198) has found a positive and significant correlation between community belonging and the likelihood of using a sharing option again. Thus, the desire to be part of a group or community influences the decision to participate in a sharing service positively (Möhlmann, 2015, p. 198). Web 2.0, and in particular social media, is based on communication and depends on social interpersonal interactions. Therefore, such channels function as an ideal platform for building interpersonal connections and relationships.

Especially brand communities show that consumers seek a communal affiliation and try to maintain it in any possible way (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 426). A brand community is defined as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412). While not all sharing economy options can be considered brand communities, services like Airbnb or Uber show a strong indication of such. Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001, p. 412) definition of brand communities aligns with the context of Web 2.0, as it breaks physical barriers and is based on social relations among consumers.

As an online market-place built on the principle of the sharing economy, companies like Airbnb provide consumers with the opportunity to interact with fellow members from all over the globe and at any time of the day. In order to book or offer an accommodation, users have to register on the Airbnb website and hence become members of the online community. In addition to that, Airbnb utilizes social media channels (e.g. Facebook with close to 3 million followers) and local offline marketing activities (e.g. meetups and conferences). Festinger et al. (1950, cited in Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 501) found that close proximity is a significant factor in relationship formation, or, in other words, people develop social bonds with each other merely because they live close to each other.
According to Airbnb, their visitors stay 2.1 times longer than traditional visitors and on average Airbnb visitors stay more than six nights (Airbnb, n.d.a). This can be considered a high level of proximity as it allows guests and host to develop social bonds. Thus, they feel like they are part of a community with personal bonds, which ultimately creates the feeling of belongingness inside the consumer’s mind. Naturally, this is not the case for stays where the Airbnb host rents out his accommodation without being present.

As aforementioned, DeWall et al. (2011, p. 1307) suggests that it is natural that people desire social acceptance and derive benefits from satisfying that need. This is closely related to Maslow’s (1943) theory of human motivation and the need to belong to a group or form deep and personal relationships. The close proximity that is formed during an Airbnb stay, the community that people become a part of when joining a sharing service, as well as the personal interaction that is required when using a sharing option, are all factors that contribute to the satisfaction of belongingness needs and the desire to form interpersonal relationships and social bonds. Thus, we argue that the need to belong is a human instinct that plays a very important role in choosing a sharing option over a non-sharing option, which might make it an important driver of sharing economy participation. Furthermore, it is relevant for consumer behavior because, according to Newman et al. (2007, pp. 241-242) people are happier when they experience social belonging and are likely to change their behavior based on their desire to belong to a group.

3.4 Influences by companies through Web 2.0

After introducing theories concerning the drivers of participation in the sharing economy, we will continue with theories that discuss the influences by companies and their online marketing activities, namely viral marketing, celebrity endorsements and product placement. These practices and theories are included because they are relevant for answering the research question, as they are used by sharing economy companies frequently and play an important role, especially in Web 2.0. Viral marketing is emerging as one of the most promising communication strategies, due to minimum cost and the immense results it can lead to (Camarero & José, 2011, p. 2292). A lot of the companies within the sharing economy promote their services through social media nowadays, which makes it a viable option to research further and establish its effect on the consideration of a sharing option for consumers. In addition, according to Jin and Phua (2014, p. 192) state that celebrity endorsement is another tool that can have a potential positive effect on consumer behavior due to their large following.

3.4.1 Viral marketing

Viral marketing utilizes established social media networks to spur the sharing of product information with fellow users (Leskovec et al., 2007, p. 2). Communication is no longer restricted to traditional one-way streams but now flows in a variety of ways, especially through the relations individuals have in IT. The second generation of the Web has led to a monumental change of traditional WOM, especially through social media channels like Facebook, Twitter and Blogs (Camarero & José, 2011, p. 2292).

The term viral marketing is defined by exponential growth and the passing on of a marketing message to others (Camarero & José, 2011, p. 2296). Vilpponen et al. (2006, p. 66) define the term viral marketing as a “word-of-mouth communication in situations where positive network effects prevail and where the role of the influencer is active due to positive network effects”. In other words: viral marketing is a type of gigantic eWOM communication that benefits from the large amount of users the Internet has today.
Consumers themselves are the active parts in viral marketing and pass on a message to e.g. friends, family, work mates and other acquaintances. The recipient is more willing to open a source from a friend than from an unknown source (Camarero & José, 2011, p. 2298). Supporting this, Phelps et al. (2004, p. 334) suggest that consumers are more likely to delete a message coming from a marketer, than deleting a message from a familiar person. Even though viral marketing and WOM are closely related concepts, it has to be noted that they are not always used interchangeably due to the positive network effect that accompanies viral marketing (Vilpponen et al., 2006, p. 72). Furthermore, viral marketing occurs in computer-mediated settings and differs from traditional settings in several ways: e.g. a much larger number of people are connected and reached than through traditional methods and individuals are available in a much broader sense (Subramani & Rajagopalan, p. 301). Moreover, of the most intriguing benefits of viral marketing is that the scale of a campaign is quasi limitless in terms of geography or time (Camarero & José, 2011, p. 2298). In addition to that, the consumers themselves bear the costs, which are close to zero in the case of, for example, emails (Camarero & José, 2011, p. 2298).

Uber’s CEO Travis Kalanick (2011) explains that Uber spends “virtually zero dollars on marketing, spreading almost exclusively via word of mouth” (Kalanick, 2011). Kalanick (2011) further states that their virality is outstanding as 95% of all customers have heard about Uber from other rides. Uber is a sharing service that is very engaged with viral marketing campaigns. They have started several successful viral marketing campaigns with very creative strategies to appeal to their consumer base and utilize social media channels and the passion for sharing. The San Francisco based online car sharing company started a Hashtag campaign in 2012 called #OMGUBERICECREAM, where riders could order on-demand ice cream delivery to their house. However, in today's high competitive environment, viral marketing is only effective as long as it prompts consumer action as a result of the message (Dobele et al., 2007, p. 302). In addition to this: messages that are in some way memorable and interesting enough are more likely to be passed on to others (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011, p. 256).

Following this, Uber asked their riders to capture their experience on video and upload it to social media to get the chance to win Uber weekend passes (Uber, 2012). In 2015, Uber planned a similar campaign, but instead of ice cream the company was delivering kittens to play with for 15 minutes in exchange for a “snuggle fee” that supported participating shelters (Haydu, 2015). By using hashtags, it was very convenient for users to spread the message through social media channels like Instagram and Twitter. These type of marketing campaigns qualify as viral marketing campaigns as they are defined by exponential growth and the passing on of a marketing message to others (Camarero & José, 2011, p. 2296) in an online environment. Even though the original campaign was initiated by the company, the users where the active sharers.

Similar marketing campaigns can be observed at the hand of Airbnb. The website has started several marketing campaigns with viral marketing characteristics. In 2015, Airbnb launched a contest on their website to spend a couple of nights at a penthouse in a Norwegian area (Airbnb, 2015a). This lead to a lot of attention and “buzz” from online media (e.g. Wired, Dailymail) and social networks. Similar to this, Airbnb started another campaign, this time in collaboration with the Chicago bulls basketball team where the contest winner was given the chance to spend the night at the United center, followed by tours and activities (Airbnb, 2015b). This contest did not only reach Airbnb users, but reached beyond their customer base and targeted sport fans. Similar to the ski contest, this
created significant buzz (e.g. Espn, NBA.com). One of the most buzzing campaigns started when Airbnb and KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines) entered into a long term partnership, where KLM transformed an airplane into an apartment listed on Airbnb (KLM, 2014). This cooperation between two large firms has generated buzz and led to online sharing throughout social media. In fact, KLM has uploaded a video on the company's YouTube channel that has over one million views. It is important that firms appeal to consumers on an emotional level that encourages a response to the message (Dobele et al, 2007, p. 303). Furthermore, marketers have to differentiate their message from other messages and target cleverly (Dobele et al., 2007, p. 303).

It can be said that viral marketing campaigns are frequently used by sharing economy firms because they can generate a lot of buzz around a product or a campaign. As the sharing economy is in contact with Web 2.0, viral marketing presents an ideal way of reaching out to users and driving marketing campaigns at very low cost. This is supported by Dobele et al. (2007, p. 303), who state that viral marketing presents a mean of communicating marketing messages at low-cost with less response time and increased potential. The examples provided here are only two of many, but are especially creative (in terms of content) because they awaken interest in online media and users alike. In terms of the research question, viral marketing theory is highly relevant because it touches upon consumers, sharing and, most importantly, the context of Web 2.0.

3.4.2 Online celebrity endorsements and product placements

As celebrity endorsements and product placements are a reoccurring topic in the sharing economy, we decided to include the relevant theories in the theoretical framework and discuss them in detail. They will aid the answering of the research question because they represent a marketing tool for sharing economy companies via Web 2.0. Furthermore, consumer behavior is positively influenced by celebrity endorsement through online influencers with a large follower base (Jin & Phua, 2014, p. 192), which emphasizes the importance of endorsement as a marketing tool in social media. In terms of product placement, companies in the sharing economy have been appearing on social media platforms, especially YouTube, more frequently in the recent years. Product placement has become a significant part of marketing, as managers use it to support promotional campaigns (Karrh et al., 2003, p. 138). Therefore, it is a theory that is relevant for the context of Web 2.0 and companies in the sharing economy and marketing managers alike.

A celebrity endorser is defined as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989, p. 310). Endorsement marketing includes people with expertise or a good reputation recommending a product to others as part of a marketing strategy (Li et al., 2012, p. 119). The online world has been a fruitful environment for celebrity endorsement marketing because celebrities can broadcast the marketing message simultaneously to millions of followers, which ensures a maximum exposure for brand messages (Jin & Phua, 2014, p. 182). In fact, Jin and Phua (2014) have found a positive relationship between a celebrity endorser with a high number of followers and credibility, trustworthiness and competence. Furthermore, positive tweets by a celebrity with a large follower base resulted in higher product involvement and buying intention on the consumer side (Jin & Phua, 2014, p. 192). In other words: The more follower a celebrity has online, the more likely he is to trust that opinion and intend to purchase a product or service. In addition to that, endorsers in social networking communities present an ideal starting point for viral advertising and WOM marketing (Li et al., 2012, p. 146). Following
this, it can be argued that celebrity endorsement is a practice that is especially convenient in Web 2.0, and hence relevant for the context of this thesis. When observing the sharing economy, firms show active behaviour in terms of endorsement marketing. Influential people like Beyoncé (Facebook), Warren Buffett (Kusek, 2015) and Rugby player Lewis Moody are only a few examples of Airbnb’s endorsement efforts.

Uber is one of the sharing economy companies that understands how to meet today’s spirit of age and how to use endorsements, collaborations and product placements to increase brand awareness or reach. According to Gupta and Gould (1997, p. 37), product placement (in movies) is a growing promotional area that “involves incorporating brands in movies in return for money or for some promotional or other consideration”. Balasubramanian (1994, p. 31) took a broader perspective and defined product placement as a paid message that aims to influence movie (or TV) audiences through the planned placement of a branded product in a movie (or TV). The car sharing service has been a buzzword in many TV shows (e.g. Entourage, Shameless, Ray Donovan) and gotten attention from many celebrities, including actor Edward Norton (Weisman, 2014), Jimmy Kimmel (YouTube) or Jason Derulo (Uber, 2015). Similarly, Airbnb has been subject to various TV shows (e.g. Modern Family, Two broke girls). As the use of product placement offers a “populartulture setting for a promotional message that may prove powerful in influencing subsequent consumer or business-to-business behavior” (Karrh et al., 2003, p. 146), firms in the sharing economy can benefit to a great extent from following this type of marketing strategy in Web 2.0. The verbal and visual cues off products placements can also lead to a degree of brand recall and have the potential for a larger memory effect is the product is more prominent (Lee and Faber 2007, p. 76). Cowley and Barron (2013, p. 91) describe the concept of program liking, in which people with higher program liking are more likely to notice the product placement which might cause disengagement from program reality.

3.5 Influences by other consumers through Web 2.0

In order to understand the influences by other consumers in the sharing economy, we researched consumer behavior theory and identified eWOM as a highly discussed topic. In fact, Web 2.0 provides the opportunity to participate, as it allows every user to create content (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008).

3.5.1 eWOM in Web 2.0

Social networks are one of the defining features of our modern electronic landscape and with the growth and evolution of the Internet, electronic peer-to-peer referrals have become an evermore important phenomenon (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). eWOM takes place through communication channels of the Internet, which makes it possible in emails, blogs, chat rooms, discussion boards, online communities, social networks and commerce websites (Lis & Neßler, 2013, p. 63). It is becoming more common within social networks for individuals to exchange information and an informal form of advice pertaining certain products, services or brands which is usually referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Abrantes et al., 2013, p. 1068). Li and Wang (2013, p. 1351) define eWOM as the informal communication about products or services between two or more individuals, none of which are a representative or marketing source. Bickart and Schindler (2001, p. 36) add that the nature of information presented through eWOM has a greater credibility, relevance and ability to generate empathy in comparison to marketer-provided information. Tsao and Hsieh (2015, p. 514) state that eWOM is distinguishable from traditional offline word-of-mouth in four ways, since eWOM provides a greater
diffusibility and potential for publicity, it is more persistent and accessible, it is easier to measure and it is less dependent on social cues.

In addition, Bickart and Schindler (2001, p. 37) touch upon an important difference between online discussions and the traditional WOM communications. A traditional WOM scenario would involve the spoken word, in which the product information is shared in a face-to-face scenario, which is in contrast to the written word that is communicated through the use of eWOM (Bickart & Schindler, 2001, p. 37). The spoken word is regularly more powerful and immediate, but the written word holds its own advantages as well (Bickart & Schindler, 2001, p. 37). First of all, the consumer is able to come back and reread online discussions that can assist the consumer in absorbing even more -personal information and with greater detail than would be the case in a spoken word situation (Bickart & Schindler, 2001, p. 37).

Participation within eWOM and their willingness to receive and send market information will vary among different individuals, therefore the participation is classified as two specific behaviors. These behaviors are opinion-seeking and opinion-giving (López & Sicilia, 2014, p. 87). Balasubramanian & Mahajan (2001, p. 125) look deeper at the motivations of engaging in online eWOM and recognized three types of social interaction utilities which are focus-related utility, consumption utility and approval utility. The focus-related utility is derived from the belief of the participants that the contribution of all the participants strengthen and advance the purpose of the community (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001, p. 125). In addition, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 42) add that in a web-based context these utilities are received through the contributions to the community by adding value, which is considered as an important individual goal for the participants and members. The second utility is the consumption utility that derives from utilizing the contributions of other participants in the community (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001, p. 125). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p. 43) elaborate that the web-based context is in the reading of product reviews and comments that are shared and written by others, which in turn can also motivate the reader to share and write new comments.

The third and final utility is the approval utility, which derives satisfaction from other participants consuming and showing their approval of the individual’s own contributions to the community (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001, p. 126). In a web-based context feedback can be provided in either a formal or informal manner, in which the formal manner can encompass other individuals praising the information and the informal manner can include rankings provided by operators (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 43). In addition to these three utilities that were defined by Balasubramanian and Mahajan (2001), Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) introduced two additional utilities, which are moderator-related utility and homeostase utility. The moderator-related utility comes to play in an online context when a third-party simplifies the complaint process and act for the individuals (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 43). The platform staff could communicate with the company on behalf of the individual consumer (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 43). The final homeostase utility is based on the notion that every individual wants balance in their lives, which in the online context can be found in positive or negative product experiences after which the balance can be restored by writing a comment on the online platform or community (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 44).

Tsao and Hsieh (2015, p. 509) suggest that eWOM credibility is a partial mediator between eWOM quality and purchase intentions. In addition to that, positive reviews of
products with higher quality can improve eWOM credibility and purchase intentions (Tsao & Hsieh, 2015, p. 528). Thereby, Tsao and Hsieh (2015, p. 528) note that very detailed online reviews that include photos and specific descriptions enhance trust and purchase intention. Supporting this, online reviews are considered as a guide to customer choice and improve the possibility of an online transaction (Fagerstrøm et al., 2016, p. 125), which emphasizes their importance for companies operating online.

Products that are associated with promotion consumption goals lead to a positivity bias which means that consumers rate positive reviews as more persuasive than negative reviews, while the negativity bias refers to products associated with prevention consumption goals, in which negative reviews are perceived as more persuasive (Zhang et al., 2010, p. 1340). Low-quality eWOM on independent platforms (contrary to corporate platforms) can reduce eWOM credibility and purchase intentions significantly (Tsao & Hsieh, 2015, pp. 528-529). Thus, eWOM published on independent platforms such as online forums or social media (Tsao & Hsieh, 2015, p. 515) can reduce credibility and purchase intentions when it is of low-quality. High-quality and positive eWOM on the other hand influences eWOM credibility and purchase intentions positively (Tsao & Hsieh, 2015, p. 523). Supporting this, Casaló et al. (2015, p. 1829) explain that high risk-averse travelers perceive positive expert reviews and travel product pictures as useful, while still perceiving negative online reviews as more useful than positive online reviews overall. Thus, it is becoming increasingly important for companies to consider and encourage positive word of mouth (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2015, p. 229).

Within the current online landscape, online product reviews are considered as one of the most influential types of eWOM, as they are able to shape consumer attitudes and to facilitate their purchase decisions (Shan, 2016, p. 633). Product reviews are perceived as the second most trusted source of product information online, while recommendations from friends and family follow on a third place (Shan, 2016, p. 633). In fact, a study by Smith et al. (2005, p. 32) has revealed that consumers may think that recommendations are in some way more trustworthy than ads that may appear during their shopping task.

3.5.2. Negative aspects of eWOM

eWOM does not only hold positive opportunities for companies and consumers alike, instead it also poses a new challenge since negative messages cannot be controlled by the companies (Kim et al., 2016, p. 511). According to Skowronski and Carlston (1989) negative information, rather than positive information, affects the formulation of the consumers evaluations the most. The evaluation of so called experience goods, which require consumption for their service characteristics to be observed, may suffer more from negative eWOM due to the negative information that will help in increasing the uncertainty and fear of the consumer that they have because of the poor knowledge of the product (Park & Lee, 2009, p.63). Not only does negative eWOM affect evaluations, but it can potentially also have its effect on consumer attitudes and behaviors toward this service or good (Kim et al., 2016, p. 512). Park and Lee (2009, p. 66) deduced that in comparison with offline purchases, online purchases have a greater uncertainty due to the limited availability of cues for information searching. Anonymity of the individuals in an online environment is one of the main reasons why negativity occurs on the Internet, people can express their true feelings under the cloak of this anonymity (Joinson, 2001, p. 179). Consumers share negative eWOM for a different number of reasons according to Verhagen et al. (2013, p. 1431). The first reason is that they utilize the opportunity to share negative eWOM for themselves, this can be done to draw attention to their
dissatisfaction with a product or service and in turn get a solution or to simply vent their irritations and to reduce their anxiety (Thøgersen et al., 2009, p. 764; Verhagen et al., 2013, p. 1431). The second reasoning is found in need for individuals to express their dissatisfaction experiences in order to make sure others do not have to go through the same experience, in this situation the individual is usually involved in an online community where social relationships could have been developed over time through sharing and discussing products or services (Verhagen et al. 2013, p. 1431). The final reasoning for sharing negative eWOM can be to express dissatisfaction with a service or product with the goal to motivate and encourage the, service providers or companies to take note of their bad experiences and utilize this information to improve their practices (Verhagen et al., 2013, p. 1431).

It is not all positive and beneficial messages that make the news headlines when it comes to brands within the sharing economy. News messages or horror stories by users of services such as Airbnb, Uber and Lyft can quickly be shared. During New year’s eve in 2013 an off-duty driver of the transportation sharing company Uber killed a pedestrian while on the hunt for fares that night (Malhotra & Van Alstyn, 2014, p. 26). Other news outlets such as Fox News (Hobica, 2014) often have news reports about Airbnb rentals that turn out into a disasters which then quickly find their way into social media through the viral nature of these stories.

3.6 Outcomes of participation in the sharing economy

Sharing economy practices in Web 2.0 have many outcomes, positive, as well as negative. In this subchapter we will explore theories that are related to peer-to-peer interaction, consumer behavioral concepts and Web 2.0 practices. All theories will be applied to the sharing economy context and are based upon previous research. Because Santana and Parigi (2015, p. 562) established that participating in the sharing economy brings along certain risks and a degree of uncertainty, we find it important to research how the experience and the previously mentioned consumer and company influences affect online trust after participation. Following the consumer engagement cycle by (Sashi, 2012, p. 264), the final step of engagement turns consumers into value adding partners, which makes it a necessary part of the outcomes. In fact, Brodie et al. (2013, p. 111) explain that advocacy is an expression of consumer engagement and involves active recommendation of products, brands or services. Therefore, we have considered consumer engagement as a possible outcome of participating in the sharing economy. The subchapter will be concluded by a summarizing conceptual model that serves as a base for the data collection and further explorations.

3.6.1 Change in online trust

Trust is an extensively studied concept throughout accounting, information systems, communication, marketing and many more research areas (Shankar et al., 2002, p. 327). According to T. Zhang et al. (2014b, p. 252), trust consists of three core elements, namely affective, cognitive and conative. The cognitive element of trust refers to rational characteristics (e.g. reliability, competence), the affective component refers to emotional elements and social skills, and the conative element describes behavioral intentions to depend on other parties (T. Zhang et al., 2014b, p. 252). This shows that trust is a very complex concept that can be observed from many different perspectives, depending on the field or purpose. As research has found a positive relationship between trust and the satisfaction with a sharing option (Möhlmann, 2015, p. 198) it is important to incorporate it in this theoretical framework.
Trust in online settings has been the subject of many publications in the marketing field (e.g. Aiken, 2006; Kozinet et al., 2010; Shukla, 2014). Shankar et al. (2002, p. 326) argue that trust has become very important in an online context because customers and stakeholders have access to more information and alternatives on the Web, which means that firms have to generate and build trust with their current or prospective customers. Furthermore, building online trust can lead to improved websites, profits, revenues and shareholder value (Shankar et al., 2002, p. 326). Similarly, website quality is an important aspect that facilitates trust through product information of high quality (Chen & Dibb, 2010, pp. 323, 340). Following this, it can be argued that the online world offers consumers a large amount of information and options to choose from which leads to a greater need for trust building. When trust building efforts are successful, it can lead to many benefits that influence profits and website performance. Nevertheless, trust is also a relatively risky concept, as one major failure or negative experience could destroy it altogether. If firms reinforce online encounters, trust can be built incrementally (Shankar et al., 2002, p. 338). Johnson and Grayson (2005, p. 501) state that affective trust represents the confidence which people have in regards to a partner based on the feeling that is created by the care and concern that partners show. Additionally, cognitive trust is based on the collected amount of knowledge that allows consumers to make predictions in regards to the expectations and obligations (Johnson and Grayson, 2005, p. 501).

In the sharing economy, many companies have started to include trust building efforts into their strategy. Möhlmann (2015, p. 200) suggests that trust plays an essential role in the sharing economy, especially in relation to satisfaction. Thus, trust is very influential when it comes to consumer satisfaction with a sharing option. Transportation network companies like Uber or Lyft, accommodation websites like Airbnb and online marketplaces like TaskRabbit have all started incorporating safety information and trust systems on their websites. Lyft has dedicated a section of their website to list all the efforts they take to ensure safety, such as a critical response phone line, driver background checks, vehicle inspection, insurance and a two-way rating system (Lyft, n.d.). After each ride, drivers and passengers rate each other and, depending on the rating, they are matched again in the future. Similar precautions are taken by Airbnb, as they verify every account by scanning the official ID and offer an insurance up to 1 mil. $ (Airbnb, n.d.b). Their key trust mechanism is the review feature which allows public reviews under listings and the direct messaging communication through user profiles (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1195). Uber offers an end-to-end insurance, a code of conduct, anonymous feedback options after each ride and driver profiles including name, license plate number, photo and rating (Uber, n.d.).

Incorporating feedback options, assurance mechanisms or additional features helps to build confidence and trust among users (Piscicelli et al., 2015, p. 25). These efforts show that security concerns are very important in a Web 2.0 setting. In fact, a study by Narayanan et al. (2012) has found out that consumers and their online purchase decisions are negatively influenced by fraud concerns, meaning that users refrain from purchasing products because of concerns about their credit card information or finances. Furthermore, Kim et al.’s (2008, p. 40) study about purchasing airline tickets online suggests that the main concern are security risk related. In addition, Salisbury et al. (2001, p. 173) have found out that customers will only shop online if they are sure that their credit card numbers and sensitive information is safe. Even though trust is still an issue in peer-to-peer economies, Airbnb’s Web 2.0 features, e.g. their review system, have allowed the
establishment of trust between hosts and guests (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1195). Building trust is a key element of the acceptance of peer-to-peer accommodation because it involves trusting a stranger, be it hosting them in your home, staying at a stranger’s house or sharing a car with them (Guttentag, 2015, p. 1195).

The concept of trust is very relevant to answer the research question because it plays a crucial role in the acceptance of sharing economy options (Guttentag, 2015) and user satisfaction (Möhlmann, 2015). Furthermore, the incorporation of Web 2.0 tools like review systems and safety hotlines on sharing economy websites show that firms take it very seriously and know that it is one of the crucial factors that hinders or motivates users to participate in the sharing economy (again). Based on the literature review, it becomes clear that trust is not only a outcome of the sharing economy, but might also be a driver. Users that had a pleasant experience with, e.g. Airbnb stay or Uber ride, feel trust towards the service which may lead to an increased interest or participation in the future.

3.6.2 Consumer engagement and brand advocacy
Due to the research being focused on the online context of the sharing economy and the effects of Web 2.0, we will start by looking at the general concept of consumer engagement. The concept of consumer engagement has been researched by different authors, which resulted in several definitions. Brodie et al. (2011, p. 106) define consumer engagement as a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (such as a brand) in focal relationships. An alternate conceptualization of customer engagement is provided as “a psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service brand as well as the mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand.” (Bowden, 2009, p. 65).

Sashi (2012, p. 260) developed a customer engagement cycle, which details the different stages of customer engagement to be connection, interaction, satisfaction, retention, commitment, advocacy and engagement.

The first stage of connection refers to necessary emotional bonds between sellers and customers in order to connect with each other, which is greatly facilitated through social media by connecting a large number of individuals (Sashi, 2012, p. 261). Adding to this, Brodie et al. (2013, p. 110) argues that emotional aspects of consumer engagement stems from e.g. empathy, trust, feeling safe and belonging to a group, which emphasizes the social aspect that consumer engagement entails. After the successful connection between sellers and buyers, both can start to interact with each other (Sashi, 2012, pp. 261-262). These interaction processes were limited to WOM or telephone before the emergence of the Internet, but gained velocity due to Web 2.0, which enables real-time interaction (Sashi, 2012, p. 262).

The third step in the cycle is that of satisfaction, which states that a satisfactory interaction between seller and customer is required in order to result in continued interaction towards engagement (Sashi, 2012, p. 262). The next consecutive step is retention which results from satisfaction over a longer period of time or due to highly positive emotions (Sashi, 2012, p. 262). What follows is the fifth step of commitment which has two major dimensions in a relationship (Sashi, 2012, p. 263). These two dimensions are calculative commitment, which is more rational and is result of a lack of choice and the amount of switching costs, and affective commitment which is more emotional and the result of
some form of trust in a relationship (Gustafsson et al., 2005, p. 211). Building on these two dimensions, Bowden (2009, pp. 68, 71) argues that calculative commitment is the starting point that has to be further developed into affective commitment, which ultimately embodies a desire to become a repeat customer and drives loyalty. In addition to loyalty, affective commitment was shown to positively influence word-of-mouth (Harrison-Walker, 2001, p. 60), which is an important aspect to consider in the sharing economy. The second to last step in the engagement cycle is that of advocacy in which satisfied and delighted customers can either choose to stay silent about their satisfaction or interact on social networks to spread the positive experience with a product, service, brand or company (Sashi, 2012, p. 263). While affective commitment is positively related to advocacy, continuance commitment (related to scarcity of alternatives or switching costs) is likely keeping consumers from participating in such behaviour (Fullerton, 2011, pp. 95, 97). The final step is engagement which expands the role of customers to the point where they are included in the value adding process, while at the same time building connections to advocate the brand (Sashi, 2012, p. 264). This stage represents the union of affective and calculative commitment, wherein high levels of relational exchange and emotional bonds lead to new connections and interactions, which result in a cyclical movement (Sashi, 2012, p. 264). Engaged customers tend to recommend products to others via, for example, WOM, blogs, social media or comments (Sashi, 2012, p. 258).

Following this, it can be argued that eWOM, in particular recommendations and online reviews, are a type of consumer engagement activity, which is also suggested by Sashi (2012, p. 256). This is showcased in stage of advocacy, where delighted customers interact with others in their social networks to spread the word about their positive experiences with a product or brand (Sashi, 2012, p. 263).

Brand advocacy has gained attention in Marketing research (e.g. Jillapalli, 2010; Sashi, 2012; Wallace, 2012). Advocacy is defined as becoming delighted advocates for a brand's product and interacting on a peer-to-peer basis to influence purchase decisions (Sashi, 2012, p. 255). Furthermore, brand advocacy is one stage in the customer engagement cycle by Sashi (2012), which emphasizes that it is embedded in engagement theory. Interacting with an organization and engaged customers (as well as potential customers) allows for co-created value and user-generated content such as feedbacks, spreading information and becoming advocates for a brand or product among peers (Sashi, 2012, p. 259).

Web 2.0 plays an especially important role in this scenario, as social media allows users to connect and interact with fellow users, which increases satisfaction and advocacy on both ends. Furthermore, advocates communicate with non-customers and have the ability to turn them into new customers (Sashi, 2012, p. 268). According to Fuggetta (2012, p. 10), brand advocates are so powerful online because recommendations from friends or families are the most trusted form of advertising in the world. In other words: a family member or friend that recommends a product or service online seems to be much more trustworthy and successful than a brand or marketer. In the sharing economy, many firms implement referral programs, where advocates communicate with non-customers and have the ability to turn them into new customers, as well as recommending the firms to friends and families. The online marketplace TaskRabbit offers a referral program on their website where users can collect $100 worth of rewards when they successfully motivated another person to participate in the marketplace (TaskRabbit, 2016). Today, the terms “fans”, “followers” and “brand advocate” are often used synonymously, but in fact,
following a page is not equal to recommending the product to others (Fuggetta, 2012, pp. 11-12).

Including engagement, and in particular advocacy, as a possible outcome in this theoretical framework aids the process of answering the research question because the sharing economy is a business model that thrives on WOM and peer-to-peer communication. Furthermore, the importance of Web 2.0 in brand advocacy emphasizes the relevance of including this theory in this thesis. Looking back at the consumer engagement cycle of Sashi (2012, p. 613), he explains that the second to last stage of advocacy is where consumers start engaging with other consumers or employees, utilizing social media and eWOM. We perceive this as an outcome within our conceptual model. The final step of the consumer engagement cycle (Sashi, 2012) refers to the value adding role of consumers that goes beyond advocacy, which supports the development of our conceptual model and in particular the outcomes and how it can influence future consumers through eWOM.

### 3.7 Conceptual model for the sharing economy in Web 2.0

Based on the theoretical framework, we have created an illustrative conceptual model that incorporates the theories that we have identified as essential to the purpose of this research. The model firstly presents the drivers that have been identified based on the existing theory. These drivers represent the considerations that consumers contemplate prior to participation in the sharing economy. The drivers of this model are followed by the influential factors that are exercised by both companies and other consumers. These influential factors might affect the consideration to participate in the sharing economy. In terms of influences by companies, theory identifies that these are viral marketing, celebrity endorsement and product placement. The influences by other consumers illustrate the concept of eWOM, which includes sharing experiences and interaction between consumers. Following the influential activities by companies and other consumers, the consumer can choose to participate in the sharing economy. Using a sharing option will lead to certain outcomes, in our theoretical framework these have been identified as online trust and consumer engagement.

![The Sharing Economy in the context of Web 2.0](image-url)
4 PRACTICAL METHODOLOGY

The second methodology chapter seeks to provide an understanding of how we practically access the data and motivate the processes that are part of collecting and analyzing the data. Therefore, this chapter starts with a discussion of the data collection method and qualitative data collection, including the sample size, interview guide, the conduction of the interviews and the relevant analysis technique. To conclude this chapter, we discuss the ethical considerations in relation to the practical methodological choices.

4.1 Data collection method
According to Saunders et al. (2016, p. 316), there are two types of data that can be collected in research projects, namely secondary data and primary data. Secondary data is usually collected in descriptive and explanatory research and is defined as the data that was initially collected for another purpose and includes raw data and published summaries (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 312; Saunders et al., 2016, p. 316). Secondary data can come from sources such as notices, minutes of meetings, reports, transcripts or public records (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 319). Primary data, on the other hand, is the data that researchers collect themselves with a specific purpose in mind, such as answering research questions and meeting objectives (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 332). Using secondary data can be much less expensive or time consuming than primary data, especially because it can often be downloaded as a file (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 330). However, when data was collected for commercial reasons, gaining access can be very difficult or costly (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 333). In addition to that, secondary data may have been collected for a purpose that does not match the research need and thus will be inappropriate to answer the research question, which means researchers have to collect the data themselves (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 332, Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 320). Due to said reasons, we decided to collect primary data because it enabled the answering of our research question. Furthermore, we do not think that secondary data is suitable for the purpose of this thesis because we are conducting an exploratory research that aims to gain a deeper understanding on an individual basis. Secondary data is collected in descriptive and explanatory research (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 316), which is not in alignment with the research purpose and question of this thesis.

4.2 Qualitative data collection
After careful consideration, we decided to collect primary data with interviews. The use of interviews is one alternative to collect primary data and can help to collect reliable data that is relevant to the research question and objectives (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 388). According to Saunders et al. (2016, p. 390), interviews can vary highly from each other in terms of structures, namely they can be categorized as being either structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews. The structured interview usually entails a specific interview guide that the interviewer follows, containing very specific questions that mainly result in a selection of fixed answers (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 202). While some interaction exists between the interviewer and the interviewee, the questions should be presented in the same manner and tone of voice as they are written in the interview guide to dismiss any indication of bias, which adds to the fact that this interview form is mostly used to collect quantifiable results and are thus named quantitative research interviews (Saunders, 2016, p. 391). In addition, the order of the questions that will be asked are also predetermined prior to the interview (Merriam, 2009, p. 89). The second possibility is the unstructured interview which is more informal and is used to gain and research a general area in which the researchers are interested (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 391). The interviewer
usually only brings a list of the topics that can be discussed in the interview without any specific guidelines, this document is usually named the interview guide (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 205). In addition to the open ended questions, this interview method is more a conversation and the researcher does not know enough about the certain phenomenon to establish relevant questions (Merriam, 2009, p. 89). The final option is the semi-structured interview which covers a wider range where the interviewer has a certain number of questions which form the general form of the interview, but do not have to follow that specific sequence of questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 205). In addition to the normal interview guide, in the case of the semi-structured interview it will also be likely to contain a certain comments or questions to prompt further discussion and some comments to close them (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 391).

As we look to understand how Web 2.0 is motivating consumers and affecting their behavior, we are not looking to collect quantifiable results and will thus not utilize the structured interview method. Instead, in line with the qualitative nature of our research, we will utilize the semi-structured interview method in which we will focus on specific topics in order to garner the information we need. By having a list of these specific topics, such as Web 2.0 and eWOM we will have a certain degree of guideline, but through the semi-structured method we will have space for some follow up questions that can be probed by us. According to Merriam (2009, p. 90) this method will also allow and enable us to respond adequately to the situations at hand and to responses from the participants.

Additionally, to increase the quality and credibility of this research we will look towards managers from the leading companies in the sharing economy to share their thoughts and comments on our eventual findings from the interviewees. This will be a valuable addition to our qualitative findings, as it adds a managerial view from someone with a lot of experience within the sharing economy.

4.2.1 Sampling technique and access
Sampling facilitates researchers to consider only a limited amount of data from a subgroup instead of all possible cases and collect more detailed information from them (Saunders et al., 2016, pp. 272-274). There are two types of sampling techniques: probability sampling and nonprobability sampling (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 275). Probability sampling techniques are based on the assumption that the sample will be randomly chosen from a sampling frame (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 296). As probability sampling is usually associated with survey strategies that aim to generalize, it is not appropriate to use in this study (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 277). Furthermore, it is not appropriate to answering the research question because this thesis aims to gain a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in Web 2.0 in the context of the sharing economy, which assumes that the interviewees have already used a sharing option. Choosing a random sample from a frame would therefore not benefit the research purpose. Therefore, the sample has to be pre-selected by using a non-probability sampling technique, namely purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 296). To answer the research question researchers have to conduct an in-depth study that focuses on individual cases selected for a specific purpose and enable the generation of rich information and theoretical insights (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 297). In a purposeful sampling strategy, the inquirer selects certain individuals because they can develop an understanding of the research problem and the core phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007, p. 125).
Researchers have to determine who they want to sample and how many participants they consider sufficient (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). In non-probability sampling, the sample size is still ambiguous and uncertain (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 297). Therefore, the size of the sample is dependent on the research question and purpose and their logical connection to the sample selection technique (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 297). Many researchers recommend continuing to collect data until saturation is reached, while others recommend a sample frame ranging from 5-25 interviews (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 297). For this thesis, we contacted individuals via Facebook and got eight responses of people wanting to participate. After conducting these eight interviews, we felt that data saturation was reached. According to Saunders et al. (2016, p. 714), data saturation is reached when additional data does not provide valuable new insights.

To pre-select the individuals to interview, we used our own judgement in light of answering the research questions and meeting the objectives (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 301). As our research questions investigates how Web 2.0 motivates consumers to participate in the sharing economy and how it affects their behavior, we decided to investigate which age group is most reliant and influenced by Web 2.0 and social networks in specific. According to Mooney et al. (2010, p. 65), Generation Y is especially engaged with social media networking and is more comfortable with virtual relationships than face-to-face interactions. Generation Y consists of the group of people who were born between the mid 1980s and 2000 and have grown up with the technology and rely it to certain extent (Mooney et al., 2010, p. 64; Sukhu & Bilgihan, 2014, p. 118). As established in the theoretical framework of this research, social networks are the most popular innovations of Web 2.0, which supports the choice of Generation Y as a sample for this thesis since they are the primary users. We believe that individuals from Generation Y that have used a sharing option multiple times will be able to answer our questions in rich detail, leading to an in-depth insight into topic and the answering of the research question. Additionally, experienced sharing economy consumers will be able to understand the terms we are using and share stories (positive or even negative) about their Airbnb stays or Uber rides that can be of high value for the purpose of this research. Based on this reasoning, we decided to publish a post on our personal Facebook profiles that included a clear statement of the requirements in order to be a viable interviewee, namely having used a sharing service and being in the Generation Y age bracket. A screenshot of these posts can be found in appendix 1.

In terms of the managerial view, we contacted several companies within the sharing economy via LinkedIn and e-mail, which include Uber, TaskRabbit and Airbnb. The template for this e-mail can be found in appendix 2. In this e-mail we invited the managers to provide us with some comments and insights on the findings that we garnered from out interviewees. These comments and findings would then be sent back to us by e-mail. As a result, a senior product manager from one of the contacted companies responded positively to our request and agreed to provide comments, opinions and insights on the findings that we gathered from the data. Shortly after, the manager provided us with the necessary insights to further evolve our research and enabled us to integrate a managerial perspective in the analysis.

4.2.2 Interview guide

Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 467) state that an interview guide is often used when semi-structured interviews are conducted. An interview guide serves as a sense of direction and purpose that gives more focus to the study (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 402). Our interview...
guide is anchored in our theoretical framework and developed on base of the research question. We started constructing the interview guide by determining several themes and sub-themes and formulating relevant questions for each theme. The themes in the interview guide are “drivers of participating in the sharing economy”, “Web 2.0”, as well as “Outcomes of participating in the sharing economy”. Each question is accompanied by a follow-up question and the link to the theory and respective concept. This set of themes reflects the studied concepts and relates to the research topic (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 402). We assured a logical order and comprehensible language when formulating the interview guide (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 402). However, the interview guide allows flexibility, which means the interviewers can ask additional questions not included depending on interviewees’ answers (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 467). We offered a copy of the interview guide to participants to review before starting the interview, which is recommended when conducting an interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 473).

Warm-up question:
#1 How many times have you used a sharing option?
#2 In which industry? (Accommodation, Transportation etc.)
#3 How did you find out about sharing options and when?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drivers of participation in the sharing economy</th>
<th>Link to theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 What do you consider important before you choose a sharing option?</td>
<td>Link to purpose of the research topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Why do you think these are important to you?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 2 When considering participation in the sharing economy, do you consider the financial savings?</td>
<td>Linked to financial considerations (Belk, 2014a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>How important is saving money through a sharing option for you?</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td># 3 What do you consider important before you choose a sharing option?</td>
<td>Linked to The need for belongingness (Maslov, 1934)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Why do you think these are important to you?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 4 When considering participation in the sharing economy, do you consider the financial savings?</td>
<td>Linked to shift from ownership to access (Chen, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>How important is saving money through a sharing option for you?</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Web 2.0 Influences by companies</th>
<th>Link to theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># 5 How important is it for you to feel part of a group or community?</td>
<td>Link to purpose of the research topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Why does it influence your decision to use a sharing option?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 6 How much importance do you place on owning products instead of sharing or renting?</td>
<td>Linked to Celebrity endorsements (McCracken, 1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Can you elaborate on your answer?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 7 How does Web 2.0 product placement affect your consideration of a sharing option?</td>
<td>Linked to Product placement (Gupta &amp; Gould, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <em>Why does it affect your consideration?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### # 8 How aware are you of viral marketing campaigns?
- *How effective do you think they are for the sharing economy?*

**Linked to viral marketing**
(Camarero & José, 2011)

### Influences by other consumers

#### # 9 Which actions by other users motivate you to participate in using a sharing option?
- How much value do you place on these additional efforts?

**Link to purpose of the research topic**

#### # 10 How important do you think consumer reviews are for the sharing economy?
- Do you perceive consumer reviews as more trustworthy than traditional ads and why?

**Linked to Consumer reviews**
(Smith et al, 2015)

#### # 11 How susceptible do you consider yourself to electronic word-of-mouth (e.g. online reviews, recommendations, friends and family)
- Why do you think eWOM has such an impact on your consideration of a sharing option?

**Linked to eWOM**
(De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008)

### Outcomes of participation in the Sharing Economy

#### # 12 Have you engaged in any activities after your sharing option experience?
- What motivated you to continue engaging with this sharing option?

**Link to purpose of the research topic**

#### # 13 Do you think a positive experience is likely to entice future consumer engagement and why?
- How important do you think consumer engagement is for the sharing economy?

**Linked to Consumer engagement**
(Brand et al., 2011)

#### # 14 Did your participation in the company give you a feeling of delight? And are you likely to become an advocate for the brand?
- How do you feel about people promoting (non-paid) sharing services online and does it affect you?

**Linked to Brand advocacy**
(Sashi, 2012)

#### # 15 How likely are you to tell your friends and families about the sharing economy on an online platform?
- Which factors influence your decision to talk about or recommend sharing options online?

**Link to eWOM**
(De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008)

#### # 16 Do you think that the security efforts by companies in the sharing economy are sufficient?
- How did your last experience in the sharing economy affect the level you have trust in the system and would you be likely to participate again?

**Linked to Trust**
(Möhlmann, 2015)

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*Table 1 Interview guide*
4.2.3 Conducting the interviews

The first minutes of an interview are very significant in terms of the possible outcome of the interview (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 405). According to Saunders et al., 2016, p. 405, it is important to shape the conversation and explain the research question, purpose and topic to the participants. We followed this advice and clearly informed the interviewees before the interview about the content, purpose and research question of our study. According to Kvale (2006, p. 482), creating trust can help to disclose the interview subjects’ world when the interviewer creates a personal encounter in a client-centered manner. It is very important to gain interviewees’ trust and confidence and establish yourself as a credible interviewer, as participants often have difficulties and uncertainties when sharing information and how it will be used (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 405). Therefore, we clarified the nature of the study and assured that interviewees felt comfortable. According to Creswell (2007, pp. 133-134) it is important to state the amount of time needed and the plans for using the resulting data. Thus, we ensured that participants knew how their responses were going to be handled and how we would use them. According to Kvale (2006, p. 484), the interviewer has a scientific competence and determines the time, topic, questions, follow-ups and also closes the conversation. We guided the interview, which means we followed our agenda and kept the interview in a one-directional questioning style (Kvale, 2006, p. 484). This supports the focus on answering the research question and following the study objectives. Furthermore, it is important to avoid any sort of bias during the interview to increase the reliability of the data (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 407). Therefore, our questions were phrased clearly and open in nature, which means that we did not suggest possible answers to the interviewees.

We clearly assured anonymity, which increases the trustworthiness and reduces response bias (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 406). In order to keep anonymity, we assured the interviewees that their names would not be published and their privacy maintained. We divided the questions among the two of us and follow-up questions were free to ask regardless. Follow-up questions were used to get back to topic or to elaborate on interesting answers. Creswell (2007, pp. 133-134) states that it is important to stay to the questions, complete the interview within the given time frame and to be respectful and offer advice. We respected these recommendations and followed them throughout the interview. All interviews were conducted together as it allowed us to discuss and analyze the results subsequently.

Creswell (2007, pp. 133-134) suggests to record procedures when conducting them and to protocol the interviews. We made sure that all conducted interviews were recorded and that at least one of us was taking notes in case the records were lost. Furthermore, it is important to decide on a place that is quiet and free from distractions (Creswell, 2007, pp. 133-134). Every interview was conducted in English to avoid translation errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Age &amp; Gender</th>
<th>Interview length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22, female</td>
<td>1h 15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24, female</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>22, male</td>
<td>56 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22, male</td>
<td>1h 20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>25, female</td>
<td>1h 25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>22, male</td>
<td>1h 12 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>21, female</td>
<td>53 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>26, male</td>
<td>1h 30 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Interviewees information

4.2.4 Qualitative analysis technique
One of the generic approaches to analyzing qualitative data is thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 579). In fact, thematic analysis can be applied in most types of qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 572). It embodies a robust and sensitive tool for the systematization and presentation of qualitative analyses (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 385). This approach aims to search for basic themes or patterns that can be found throughout the data and coding the data to identify themes for further analysis (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 579). It is important to analyze data in a systematic and orderly way (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 579), which is why thematic analysis was chosen as the analysis technique for this thesis.

For this research, we followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to a thematic analysis, which consists of six steps:

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

Phase 1 involves the repeated and active reading of the data to identify meanings or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). When working with verbal data like interviews, the data needs to be transcribed into written form to conduct a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). Following this approach, we transcribed the data and then actively read through the entire data set before beginning the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This can help to develop a more detailed understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88).

After familiarizing with the data, the researcher generates initial codes in phase 2 (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). Post data collection we created an initial list of ideas and topics discussed in the interviews, which lead to the production of initial codes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). We applied manual coding, which means that we took notes and highlighted potential patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89).

Phase 3 is followed by searching for broader themes and sorting the different codes into potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). It is suggested to use visual representations (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89), which in this case are mind-maps, to help organize the data into themes. In this phase you start to recognize relationships between codes, themes and build sub-themes within them (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 89-90). This phase is concluded with setting main themes and sub-themes and analyzing the
significance of individual themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 90). We wrote down all keywords from the interview answers and created a mind-map on a white board. After several rounds of rearranging keywords and topics, some initial themes emerged from the coding.

The 4th phase concerns the review of themes, which is set to refine the devised set of candidate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). Within this phase there are two different levels of both reviewing and refining, of which the first level requires the reviewing of coded data extracts and to determine whether they form a coherent pattern, which in the case of a successful pattern would mean moving on to the next theme and repeating the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). The second level involves considering that validity of individual themes in relation to the entity data set, while also checking whether the thematic map is actually reflecting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). By reviewing the initial themes, we were able to identify overarching themes and sub-themes.

Phase 5 is set in motion once a satisfactory map of the data is determined, after which the researchers will define and attempt further refinement of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). Each theme requires analysis and an individual story that they try to convey, which in the end will support the overall story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). By the end of this phase the themes need to have a clear definition and a clear description of what they are and what they are not (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 92). In this step, we ensured that the main components of the sub-themes were all laid out, while also thinking about the story that the sub-themes need to tell in order to add to the overall research.

The final phase (6), starts off with a selection of fully defined themes and involves a final analysis and the start of writing up the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). It is important that the written report of the data is able to provide a concise, coherent and logical representation of the story that is meant to be told (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.93). This written part needs to go beyond just providing the data of the research, instead it needs to be compelling and make an argument in relation to the established research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). In this phase, before writing the report, we finalized the fully developed themes and ensured that they are supported by analytical and theoretical argumentation.

4.3 Ethical considerations
Regardless of the chosen approach to a qualitative study, often ethical issues are still being faced (Creswell, 2007, p. 141). According to Merriam (2009, p. 234), the right way to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of a study is for the researchers to act in a proper manner themselves when conducting the study in an ethical manner. In addition, Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 128) state that the consideration of ethical issues could help improve the quality of the research that is being conducted, which is something a researcher should always strive for. With this in mind, we set out to ensure the ethical considerations are perfectly outlined in this research, in order to present a fair and truthful conclusion and fulfillment of the purpose. In regards to our theoretical discussions we tried to maintain an objective perspective by trying to find multiple sources for certain concepts or parts. We were even able to incorporate very recent academic sources, which helped in proving the actuality of this topic and its relevance.

It is very important that the researchers fully and completely inform the participants of the process and purpose of the research and do not attempt to obtain any information
under any form of deception, duress or manipulation (Bryman, 2012, p. 138). For that reason, in this research the interviewees were fully notified of the subject of the research, the purpose of the research, what the role of the interviewees would be in this research and how the information gathered from them would be used to benefit the study. Following the suggestions of Creswell (2007, p. 141-142), the initial contact through Facebook explained what the background of the researchers is and what the exact purpose of the research was, in order to prove that there is no confusion about the nature of the study and dismissing the any form of potential deception. At the same time the message highlighted the selection criteria, so that the potential interviewees were aware on which basis they were being selected. Upon receiving positive responses with intent of participating in the research, the researchers sent out a personal message which detailed how the interview would be handled, which was through the researchers asking questions and there being space for discussion on certain topics. After getting their confirmation of participating we also ensured that we respected the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell, 2007, p. 123). The interview that we created for this research was tested before the actual interview dates in order to test the quality and relevance of the questions.

Before the interviews started the researchers once again re-introduced themselves and presented the purpose of the study, the basis of selection of the interviewee and what function the information provided by the interviewee would fulfill in the research process. In addition, the researchers specifically requested permission for record the interviewee’s responses and made sure that during the interview to shortly recap what the response was to a certain topic. In line with Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 129) who state the importance of avoiding harm to the respondents in terms of issues regarding confidentiality, we made sure that all interviewees were notified that their contribution would be anonymous. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 62) state that the emphasis of the anonymity of the interviewees can result in them feeling more free and comfortable, we hoped that would ensure the interviewees to speak their mind about any of the research topics in our research. We conducted the interviews in English in order to maintain a degree of consistency in the contributions, while also avoiding the issue of dealing with translation errors from different languages to english. After the interview was conducted, we ensured that the information was treated with discretion and without any hints of bias or prejudice. In line with Creswell (2007, p. 141), we did not actually use the names of the interviewees, instead we decided to refer to them by their interviewee numbers, which guarantees their confidentiality. We made sure not to disclose or share any of the personal information that was provided by the interviewees and in line with our promise we anonymously analyzed their information for our research. In the end the interviewees were informed that they are able to receive any results from our research if they wished so.

In regards to the contacted managers from the sharing economy to contribute to this research, we set out to come across as respectful and grateful for the contributions they might be willing to share with us. We once more explained the purpose and context of this research, while also presenting the research question to allow them to read what they are directly contributing to. Besides that, we also shortly introduced ourselves and our study. The ethical considerations regarding the use of their insights in the research included the right handling of personal and confidential information. The product manager is also not personally named in this research, instead we opted to refer to him using his position. Finally we made sure to share our gratitude to the manager that helped us by sharing his thoughts and insights on our findings.
5 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

To provide a common thread, we mainly follow the structure from the theoretical framework and describe and present the interview data in a logical manner. We are presenting the findings of our interviews and include relevant quotations that firstly, provide a better reading experience, and secondly increase the transparency of our findings. The findings provide the basis for coding the interview data and conducting the thematic analysis.

5.1 Drivers of participation in the sharing economy

To gain a deeper understanding of what drivers consumers to participate in the sharing economy, we asked the interviewees what they perceive as important before using a sharing option and then continued with more specific questions linked to the theories introduced in the theoretical framework. The questions concerning the drivers were linked to three main aspects, namely financial considerations, the need for belongingness and the shift from ownership to access. These are theories that were discussed in depth during the literature review and thus relevant for gaining a deeper understanding of what role they play in the sharing economy context.

5.1.1 Financial considerations

In order to find out if financial considerations were of relevance in driving sharing economy participation, we started with a rather general question about motivation and considerations before using a sharing option. Interestingly, every single individual agreed on the fact that price is very important. In relation to the car sharing service Uber, one participant stated that “the most important consideration for me in relation to Uber is of course the price. Not only in comparison to other taxi services, but also to public transportation... or even renting a car is much more expensive!” (4). When being asked why the price plays an important role before using a sharing option, one interviewee gave a similar response: “Well, with Uber, if it’s really high priced because there aren’t many drivers out there then I’ll consider alternatives cause I don’t want to pay any price” (8). Thus, the price is perceived as crucial, especially in comparison to alternative means of transportation. In fact, another interviewee stated: “I use car sharing because fuel is expensive and as a student you don’t have that much money if you want to take a trip or get home at night. So you just share an Uber with your friends and it’s much cheaper than regular taxis or using your own car” (6). All interviewees agreed that the main reason why they give importance to the price of a sharing option is that they are young students that do not have access to a lot of money.

When being specifically asked if and to what extent they consider financial savings when choosing a sharing option, every single interviewee responded with an affirmative answer. Interviewee 2 stated that cabs are far more expensive than Uber and a hotel of the same quality as a nice Airbnb accommodation is nearly impossible to find at an affordable rate. Additionally, interviewee 4 suggested that saving money through a sharing option is the most important consideration and elaborates that “it is especially cheap because you can share it with friends or acquaintances which makes it even less pricy.” However, interviewee 7 suggested that “obviously price is important when it comes to using a service like Airbnb because I’m on a budget, but for the transportation service I use, the Hailo app, I think it’s not as important because they have set prices, so I guess the saving element is there because I am saving money, but it is not really something I consider that much because I just love using it.” Seemingly, saving money is a crucial factor, but not
always something that is driving participation, as interviewee 7 states that it is just an added bonus and the main reasons for using the sharing option is in fact that she really likes using the service. Interviewee 8 however, states that saving money through a sharing option is only moderately important.

When it comes to experience with Airbnb, interviewee 7 reported that price plays somewhat of an important role, but that the security and locality is what makes him choose Airbnb over hostel, it lets you know that it is a reliable place and the fact that people can rate it so easily adds more credibility too. Following this finding, the price plays an important role but security and locality are the decisive factors. A similar finding is provided by interviewee 1: “If other people have used it before and liked it and if it’s convenient and at a good price. Especially with Airbnb you never know if you actually get value and what you pay for and aren’t being scammed. For Uber I guess convenience is important because you don’t have to wait and there are a lot of Uber drivers out there and it’s a little bit cheaper, and the app makes it easy to share cabs with your contacts online.” Evidently, the drivers differ among types of sharing options as Uber and Airbnb have received very different answers and opinions. According to interviewee 1, Airbnb participation is motivated by security reasons (like interviewee 7), while using Uber is driven by convenience of using the app and availability of drivers. Interviewee 8 also suggested the locality aspect since it allows him to stay wherever he wants and not just where the hotels are located. Furthermore, locality in terms of Airbnb was highlighted by interviewee 4: “For Airbnb of course location is important…. If it is centrally located, if it’s clean, if it’s aesthetically pleasing and of course the price.” Similar to this, interviewee 3 stated that it depends on the sharing option, since Uber would be about the price, but with Airbnb it is also about the authenticity and locality.

The price plays a role in most interviewees’ considerations before choosing a sharing option, but other aspects such as location, cleanliness and security were evaluated as equally important. It is especially prominent that every interviewee found that using car sharing is motivated solely by financial drivers, while they consider several other aspects before booking accommodation via Airbnb.

5.1.2 Ownership versus access

Theory suggest that sharing systems represent a unique challenge for traditional businesses that focus on ownership and play an important role in the shift from an ownership-based consumer mindset to a sharing mindset among peers (Lamberton & Rose, 2012, p. 109). Therefore, we asked the interviewees whether they prefer owning products to sharing or renting. In general, the responses were very similar as everyone stated that it depends on the nature of the product whether they prefer owning or sharing/renting.

According to interviewee 1, the nature of the product determines whether you want to own or share depends on whether it is a product that you will use very often or sporadically. When asking more specifically about sharing an Airbnb apartment with other people or “owning” a hotel room for a specific period of time, interviewee 1 stated: “Well I’d rather stay in a hotel room than a shared house where I share it with the people living there. But Airbnb offers “whole accommodations” so I’d prefer that to hotel rooms. But you know you can also rent designer bags and I would do that because it’s not in my budget so I can only get it through renting.” Thus, depending on the usage of the product, ownership and renting play entirely different roles. Interviewee 2 gave a similar response.
and explained that it depends on the frequency of usage: “I mean if I don’t use it often then I would rent. Many Airbnb apartments are very nice and luxurious so I wouldn’t even be able to afford living like that if I didn’t rent via a sharing option. But when you share it with friends you can afford that lifestyle for your trip. So in that case renting or even sharing would be totally fine. But if it’s something that I really want to keep then I want to own it of course.” Evidently, the price range is crucial when considering sharing or renting over ownership, which is also supported by interviewee 4, who says that he would buy something if he could afford the price. But if he can only buy something with the compromise of having to share it, he would choose the shared option.

Interviewee 7 looked at the issue from a cultural viewpoint and explained that sharing or borrowing is culturally not accepted in Ireland (home country of the interviewee) and that apartments and houses are mostly bought. Furthermore, interviewee 7 added: “Yeah, I’d be quite anxious to share an Airbnb with someone else. I want to feel like I own the place for that time. I had one bad experience with sharing accommodation in Poland and it is not something I want to repeat. In general I’d rather own than share anything because it makes me feel more secure.” Overall, the bottom line of our results is that it depends on the type of product when it comes to preferring ownership to sharing. The type of product is determined by the frequency of using a product, cultural differences, the service- or personal orientation and the price range and affordability.

5.1.3 The need for belongingness
In order to gain a deeper understanding of the role that the need for belongingness plays in the sharing economy, we asked interviewees how important they consider being part of a community or group. Surprisingly, most interviewees did not consider being part of a community as important, neither in general, nor with respect to sharing options.

One interviewee explains “It’s not important at all. Being part of the Uber community is weird, it’s not something I think about. For Airbnb maybe because it’s very “now”, but not for me personally to be honest” (1). Interviewees 2 and 3 suggested that they had never thought about belonging or being part of a community when it comes to sharing options and that it did not influence their decision to use a sharing option. Interestingly, one interviewee first stated that being part of a community did not play an important role, but when being asked about becoming an advocate for a sharing service at a later point, the following response proved the opposite: “Somehow yes because you always hear about Uber, Airbnb and those companies and when you finally experience it for yourself you do kind of feel like you’re part of a group or community” (4).

Interviewee 7 projected the importance of belongingness on the security a community can offer, but that it does not influence the decision to use a sharing option. Additionally, interviewee 7 explained that Airbnb allows for being in a nicer environment that is less “touristy” and that it makes you feel like you are part of the community and not an isolated tourist. Lastly, interviewee 8 stated that it is fairly important to be part of a community and that it influences the decision to use a sharing option: “I think for social reasons. The more people use a sharing option, the less expensive it becomes. So I think for the sharing economy it’s quite important to have a community. Oh, but does it influence me personally before choosing Airbnb et cetera? Not really.”

In general, the findings for this topic were consistent as they all revealed that belonging to a group does not play an important role in choosing a sharing option. However, some
of the answers stated that community can be important in regards of security, social reasons and experiencing the services for the first time. Nevertheless, the need for belonging was not perceived as a decisive factor or motivational driver for participating in the sharing economy.

5.2 Influences by companies
As introduced in the theoretical framework, companies utilize Web 2.0 in terms of marketing in the sharing economy. Thus, our interview questions regarded the main theories that were discussed in the theoretical framework, namely viral marketing, celebrity endorsement and product placement. We started with more general questions and then specifically asked about the relevant theories discussed in the literature review. The findings enable us to draw conclusions and argue for company influences in the sharing economy and how they utilize Web 2.0.

5.2.1 Viral marketing in the sharing economy
We questioned the interviewees about their awareness of viral marketing in general by companies. After we briefly explained the concept of viral marketing, several interviewees mentioned that they are aware of viral marketing campaigns to a certain extent. Interviewee 4 mentioned he was very aware of a specific viral campaign: “Yes, I’m very aware of them. The biggest one that comes to mind is Audible.com’s on YouTube, where they get mentioned in a lot of the shows as a partner or sponsor.” Another interviewee detailed how having any prior knowledge about the brand would help in recognizing viral campaigns: “I guess that if it’s a product I’m interested in then yes, but if I don’t know the product then I don’t pay attention to it. I like when something you know before goes viral, you kind of feel like an insider and then you’re really aware of it” (1). Interviewee 3 said that one can notice the difference between a company viral campaign or a viral video that is just created for fun by people, where he uses the example of Conan O’Brien who had a segment in one of his episodes in which him and two other celebrities ordered a lyft ride and drove around town, which for him obviously set up in cooperation with Lyft. On the other hand, there were also several interviewees that answered that they are not particularly aware of viral marketing campaigns by companies: “No not really, I don’t consciously think that i’m watching a viral campaign from a company or notice that it might be one, but I guess that means that the campaign is doing what it’s supposed to” (7).

We went further into detail by asking whether the concept of viral marketing and this practice would be effective for the sharing economy. The effectiveness of the viral campaigns depends on the quality of the campaign itself as expressed by three of the interviewees. “I don’t know since I’m not aware of any for the sharing coming, however if it’s a very good campaign I can see I think it would be very important” (2). Interviewee 8 added to this sentiment by stating that the effects would be moderate in his opinion, but he supposed it would depend on how good they are for the sharing economy of for a specific brand. Taking it further, interviewee 4 looked at the potential reach of the companies or brands on their online platforms by saying: “Well if they use the appropriate marketing tools, such as a viral video or an impressive campaign, it can be very effective since they have a lot of people they could potentially reach online.” The 1st interviewee did not think that viral campaigns were effective for the sharing economy, which shows the effect of not having a good viral campaign. In contrast to this negative answer, there were also some positive effects that the interviewees saw as to why it could be important for the sharing economy. Interview 5 stated that she see that it can be effective and
important due to the potential brand recall that it can create with the consumer. Interviewee 6 adds to this sentiment by stating that it could have positive effects for the sharing economy, but that it depends on the availability of the sharing options in the local area: “I can imagine it being important for the sharing economy if there are no traditional advertisements for it on TV etc, however it won't be of much use for the company if something like Uber is not even available where I live.”

Several interviews noted that viral marketing can also have a different effect for a brand or product, as exemplified by interviewee 1 who mentions the availability of sources such as social news and entertainment sharing services on social media (e.g. Buzzfeed) and the brand awareness that they can stimulate by sharing content about the sharing services.

5.2.2 Celebrity Endorsements in the sharing economy
The next subject was celebrity endorsements, since companies such as Uber and Lyft use celebrities to spread awareness and to promote their brands. Hence, we aimed at finding out what the feelings towards these activities were among our interviewees.

We started with the question on how affected the interviewees consider themselves by online celebrity endorsements of services or products in the sharing economy. The majority of the interviewees stated that they do feel affected by celebrity endorsements in general but not in relation to sharing options. Interviewee 8 stated: “I would not be influenced by it, not really important. Even if my favorite show would highlight a product, I would not want to buy it just because of that.” In agreement with this, interviewee 5 said that she is not affected, even though she is aware them it does not really add importance for her since she does not really care about these activities. Interviewee 3 was more definite in the answers and simply stated that these celebrities usually have different lifestyles than non-celebrities, which creates a lack of connection between them that in turn causes a lack of affection by anything they say for him. On the complete opposite of the spectrum we had 3 interviewees that actually did feel affected by the promotions of celebrities. “I'm easily influenced and get caught up in people’s opinions haha. So if I see a celebrity with an item that I really want, I would consider wanting it too but would still be weighing the costs first” (7). Interviewee 4 shares this sentiment by stating that he is very affected by these celebrities and that he thinks he would find it important but would still put more importance in what people in her own life tell her. Getting a feeling of satisfaction from following a celebrity is something that interviewee 1 added: “You feel like you did something good, especially if you really follow this celebrity and you buy something that they mentioned or use you feel happy about it. They’re going to love me now.” In the middle of these two stances stands interviewee 2, who states that it would depend on how much she loves the product or service that is being promoted, but that it can affect consumers on an individual basis, but that the personality and nature of following this celebrity are important factors.

The follow-up question focused more on celebrity endorsement in relation to the sharing economy and its importance. Interviewee 4, who said he was very affected by celebrity endorsement priorly, puts the importance of it for the sharing economy in the bonds between the celebrities and the followers: “Because you have a special bond to certain celebrities, they portray a specific value to me and when these values fit mine then I know that if this person is advertising something then it will turn out to be good. So the celebrities should be followed before”. In line with the sentiment of trusting celebrities that one follows, interviewee 1 said that a blogger that uses Airbnb would give her more
confidence that it actually work. Finally, interviewee 5 mentions the lack of traditional media by sharing options in her opinion and how celebrities become important: “Well I can’t remember seeing any commercials on TV for Airbnb, Uber or Hailo, so I can imagine why these celebrity promotions would be important to get these names out to the customers in a different way.”

Thus for the interviewees the degree to which they feel affected by celebrities differs. Following a celebrity and wanting to follow their choices makes you more susceptible to their recommendations and promotions.

5.2.3 Product placement in the sharing economy
The next concept within the company-driven influencing factors in Web 2.0 is product placement, which we presented to the interviewees in order to get some insights on their view of this concept.

Firstly, we asked how the interviewees feel product placement in Web 2.0 affects their consideration of a sharing option. The interviewees highlighted that product placement can have both a positive and negative effect depending on the execution and presentation. Interviewee 8 explained that it would depend on how it is shared, if it is very aggressive (like pop-ups), which would make it a huge turn off. But if it's in a discrete and not very obvious manner then it is fine for me”. Interviewee 7 somewhat agreed with this, but had a more definitive stand: “It does not really affect me, I actually find it rather annoying. It can be very obvious at times and it beats the purpose of watching non corporate content on YouTube for example.” In addition, the novelty of something also plays a role as explained by interviewee 2, who says that it can affect her if it’s a new product that she has never heard about, which could potentially add it to her considerations the next time wants to purchase something or engage with a service. Interviewee 3 supports this since he already would know about the brand, so it would not add anything new for him. This perception of novelty is supported by Interviewee 1 as well, who gives the example of Uber: “Not really as much. When I think of Uber, it is just super common for me now. It is more about the convenience etc and not about the brand itself anymore.” In contrast, we had interviewee 4 who said he actually is affected by product placement, since it especially catches the attention if it’s in a YouTube show for example.

Going more into detail, we asked why it would have that effect on their consideration. Interviewee 8 expanded on his comment that it depends on the nature of the product placement by saying: “Well it depends on the way they do it of course, because people shoving things in my face reminds me of used car salesmen and bad advertisement in general. It won’t do them any favors in my case if they do it that way.” In addition to this, interviewee 3 mentions that it could negatively affect him if it's too much and when it takes over the attention from a scene or a YouTube show. The interviewee that responded positively to product placement, 4, added that it might add more credible when it's a celebrity promoting the product or having it in the video, it is also less likely to be scam at the same time” (4). The concept of brand recall came up once more in this section as well: “It’s more that it makes me remember the brand a bit more perhaps, rather than it being something new and crazy” (1).

So product placement can certainly play a role in the considerations, however it is dependent on the manner in which these are presented. An overly obvious and distracting promotion that drives the attention away from the original content will not likely be
perceived positively, as explained by our interviewees. It does offer different opportunities though, one of which is brand recall which helps relatively new brands, products or services to be recognized by the audience.

5.3 Influences by other consumers
As illustrated in the theoretical framework, other consumers influence the sharing economy in a Web 2.0 setting significantly. Thus, our questions focused on eWOM and the importance of other consumers’ influences in the sharing economy. We approached the interviewees with an open question and moved towards specific questions regarding online reviews, trustworthiness and their susceptibility to eWOM.

5.3.1 Electronic word-of-mouth in the sharing economy
In order to gain a deeper understanding of influences by other consumers in Web 2.0 and the sharing economy, we asked our interviewees questions regarding eWOM and online reviews. All interviewees agreed on the fact that online reviews and recommendations build the basis of the sharing economy and that trust plays an important role when it comes to eWOM and engagement.

When being asked a more general question about which actions by other users motivate participation in the sharing economy, interviewee 8 explained “If a friend of mine posted a positive story about how their experience went on Facebook, that would be interesting to me because it’s my peer group who is saying: hey this works!” The interviewee further explained that he is very interested in social media in general, so reading reviews or comments is something that is very influential. Interviewee 1 suggested a similar opinion and stated that friends recommending sharing services online and talking about them on their social media influences the decision to chose a sharing option. However, interviewee 1 also stated: “It depends because if they say something bad about Uber and I’ve been using it for a long time, it’s just one in a million when something bad happens... so it won’t really change that much for me.” Thus, according to interviewee 1, eWOM plays an important role, but when it is only one negative story (in the case of Uber), it is not a crucial reason to stop using the service. Interviewee 4 stated that positive reviews that show satisfaction are influential. Furthermore, this interviewee added that the type of driver is important when making a decision: “For Uber specifically I think it’s nice to hear stories about experiences with drivers. Some of my friends have told me that the driver they had was very relatable... a young student and a nice conversation” (4).

In addition to that, several interviewees mentioned promotional codes and referrals when being asked which actions by other users motivate them to use a sharing option: “Sometimes there is this thing they offer...when someone has a discount code or you get a discount for yourself like on Uber and also Airbnb I think...” (3). Furthermore, interviewee 1 stated: “Just like if a friend is saying: If you sign up I get something for free, then I will sign up to help out a friend... or on Airbnb I get a discount when one of my friends signs up.” Thus referral systems by companies in the sharing economy play a role in the decision process to use a sharing option, especially if they are connected to social relations (e.g. helping a friend).

Interviewee 7 mentioned social media and the sharing of experiences or reviews on Facebook and brought up an interesting aspect: “If it was on Facebook I think it would be a little strange if one of my friends posted a really enthusiastic update about a sharing experience... but it would still influence me because I value their opinion much more than
let’s say celebrity endorsement or advertisements.” According to this, posts on Facebook that are related to certain sharing experiences can be perceived as “strange”. However, opinions on social media by friends are valued much higher than paid-for advertising according to interviewee 7. Social media is mentioned by every single interviewee when it comes to hearing about sharing options from friends. Interviewee 5 states: “If a friend told me on social media or shared that he had a positive experience, that definitely influences me a lot. I would rather go to an Airbnb that my friend recommends to me or I’ve read good reviews about.” Interviewee 4 is even more specific about the way online recommendations are most effective, which is in the case when people send him pictures of an Airbnb apartment for example, or post pictures of it on Instagram.

In order to investigate how important these activities are in an online environment, we asked how much value the interviewees place on these additional efforts by users. Every interviewee except one answered that it is highly valued, if not the most important part of the sharing economy to read online reviews, recommendations or engage in online word-of-mouth. Interviewee 4 mentions credibility in relation to online reviews for Airbnb: “They are of a lot of value because I spend a lot of time in an Airbnb when I go there, so it’s really important that I have truthful reviews beforehand.” In addition to that, interviewee 7 states that reviews online are the most important thing and that those are the reviews she relies on. Interviewee 2 stated that consumer reviews are of great importance, especially when they come from someone you know and trust who has visited a e.g. Airbnb. However, interviewee 2 also stated that if it is a foreign city where none of her friends have visited, she trusts herself and does not rely on reviews. Similarly, interviewee 3 explained that online reviews or recommendations do not play a significant role when it comes to choosing an Airbnb accommodation, as he likes to decide for himself based on the pictures and description. Both interviewee 5 and 6 place a lot of value on additional consumer efforts.

Several interviewees made it clear that the value they place on these consumer efforts depends on the trustworthiness of the source. Interviewee 1 explained: “Ehm, if I know they are friends I value their opinion... because it’s an honest opinion you know. But if they’re being paid for it I don’t think I would trust it that much and value it less.” Similarly, interviewee 7 stated that friends recommending a sharing option online is much more reliable than celebrity endorsement or product placement. To gain a deeper understanding of this issue, we asked a follow-up question if consumer reviews are perceived as more trustworthy than traditional ads. Every interviewee affirmed that consumer reviews are more trustworthy than traditional ads. Interviewee 8 mentioned the negativity of consumer reviews in contrast to advertising: “An ad is selling you something, a consumer review is giving a story and can be negative. They can be negative and people are often more motivated to write about a horrible experience [...] so if I’m reviewing a service and I see people are really happy that means that the chance I’ll have a negative experience is reduced.” Similar to interviewee 8, interviewee 1 explained that user reviews are definitely more trustworthy because “advertising is usually kind of like lying... they are just highlighting the good things but reviews tell you if something wasn’t good so they are more honest.” This was explained even more specifically by interviewee 6, who states that they are more trustworthy because they are less influenced by the monetary influences and motivations. Thus, consumer reviews are seen as honest, while ads are perceived as being driven by revenues and selling. This was further supported by interviewee 4 who states that ads only show positive sides and reviews are more critical. Another interviewee mentioned celebrity endorsements in relation to the
trustworthiness of online reviews: “We can trust people like us, but we don’t have the same way of life as celebrities. I trust people that live like me” (2).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of consumer reviews for the sharing economy, we asked our interviewees how important reviews were in particular. Interviewee 4 suggested that reviews are the most important factor: “The first thing you do is go online and check the Airbnb website to see what people say about apartments... and if it doesn’t have a lot of reviews then it’s not credible so I won’t go.” Interviewee 1 explained that reviews do not play a crucial role for Uber because you can’t choose a driver in advance, but for Airbnb you can make an informed decision beforehand by reading reviews and comments. Some of the interviewees stated that reviews are indeed very important for the sharing economy, however, reviews can be fake a lot of times and you get disappointed: “I trust regular people more than commercials... but the reviews can be fake so you never know” (5). Interviewee 2 also discusses the possibility of fake reviews and the disappointment of arriving and it not being accurate in comparison to the advertisement and reviews. Interviewee 8 however states that you have to make sure that reviews are real before you decide: “Reviews are the only way for people to know how good something is. Sometimes people will make things up and it will turn out to be a bad experience. But if it’s a lot of reviews that are unlikely written by bots then it’s quite trustworthy.”

Finally, we wanted to examine how susceptible our interviewees were to eWOM and why thought it had an impact on their consideration of a sharing option. Every interviewee stated that he or she is very susceptible to eWOM. While some interviewees related eWOM to trustworthiness, others associate it to making an informed decision before choosing a sharing option. Interviewee 7 mentioned that she is very susceptible to eWOM and that it has a great impact on the consideration of a sharing option: “Even if I don’t know the person and I see someone writing a post about it I’ll be: Well... if they like it I might like it. I don’t think someone would bother to take the time to write a review unless they were genuine about it.” Interviewee 2 gave a similar answer and stated that when it comes to her family, they won’t write fake reviews or lie to her when talking about a negative experience. Additionally, interviewee 4 related the importance of eWOM to trust, as he stated that ads show what a product can do, but reviews give the feedback he trusts. This is supported by interviewee 8, when being asked why eWOM has such an impact on the consideration of a sharing option: “Because it’s like advertising but without a spin. You don’t have to decide if it’s really true what they’re saying or if they only want your money.” These results show that trust plays an important role regarding eWOM and the sharing economy. Interviewee 2 and 3 also mentioned increased trust and security as the most important reasons for the impact of eWOM. Another interviewee laid focus on making an informed decision beforehand: “I’m pretty susceptible to eWOM... when people share something on Facebook I will usually read it and click on it. But if I’m searching for specific information I will find it by chance, not post about it on social media myself” (1).

5.4 Outcomes of participation in the sharing economy
To conclude the interviews, we asked our interviewees to elaborate on their behavior after participating in the sharing economy. Therefore, the questions covered the relevant theories discussed in the framework, namely online trust and creating consumer engagement. More specifically, our questions concerned post participation activities, brand advocacy, eWOM and satisfaction with the sharing option.
5.4.1 Online trust

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, trust within an online context is very important, which is why we questioned the interviews about this subject in relation to their feelings after participating in the sharing economy and their feelings about the trust in the system prior to participation.

We asked the interviewees whether they felt the security efforts by companies within the sharing economy were sufficient in their opinion. This was done in order to gauge their trust in the system and how they perceive the risk prior to participation. Several interviewees shared their wariness of using an online payment for sharing services such as Uber, Hailo or BlaBlaCar: "Hm I have to say I'm a bit suspicious of Uber, like I haven't experienced anything negative, but I don't feel comfortable to register credit card information and stuff like that" (4). Not only security issues concerning money makes the interviewees wary, services that you cannot review priorly such as Uber and Hailo leave room for speculation since you are not sure what you are about to experience: "My friend had a weird experience where she waited for an Uber which was cancelled, but she kept getting anonymous calls from the driver saying that he was there to pick her up, so she ended up having to pay for the cancelled driver and a new driver. So you kind of never know if something can go wrong” (1). On the other hand services that allow you to pay afterwards or upon arrival are perceived more positive in terms of trust: "With Airbnb for example, people get the money once you are there, so there no risk involving money before you arrive” (1). Interviewee 3 added the aspect of a good customer service to the level of trust, by stating that he think Airbnb’s customer service is good enough to not make him worried about booking a room. Another factor that played a role in the trust for the interviewees were customer reviews that provide the interviewees with some degree of trust beforehand but also affects their trust afterwards as explained by interviewee 2.

The follow-up question focused more on the level of trust after their participation in the sharing option. Most of the interviewees said that they were very satisfied after their experience with the sharing option and that their level of trust had been positively affected. Interviewee 8, who initially had his doubts about the sharing options and their security said: "When something this unusual actually works, then it's an incentive to continue to use it so it will continue to work.” Adding to this, interviewee 6 said: “It went really well and I was happy with how everything worked out, so I guess I have a higher level of trust and would do it again.” So it becomes clear that a positive experience with their sharing participation, whether expected or unexpected, gave them more trust in the system and that they will likely participate again because of it. Interviewee 5 had a negative experience the last time she used a sharing option: “For me it was a negative experience the last time, due to a driver not showing up for a long drive out of town so I had to give up on going. I would say that I have a low level of trust now and would not likely try the service again.” However, interviewee 7 who also had a negative experience said: “Airbnb was a great experience and the reviews that I read before booking were accurate. It shows how good the system is, so I would recommend it and participate again. Even with my one bad experience with the Hailo car service, I’ve used it so many times to know that I can rely on it despite this one situation.” This interviewee already had several positive experiences and was satisfied with them, to the extent that this one negative experience did not affect her level of trust in the system or her willingness to participate again in the future.
5.4.2 Consumer engagement
In order to understand what and why the interviewees engage in after their participation in the sharing economy, we asked them about the concept of consumer engagement. Most of the interviewees said that they engaged in some form of activities after participating in the sharing economy. Leaving reviews for accommodations or rating service providers happened quite often: “Yea, I usually rate the Uber driver if he was nice, but also an Airbnb place. You get an email from Airbnb reminding you to review the place you stayed at, as an incentive it allows you to see the review the host left for you as well” (1). Interviewee 2 agreed that the incentive to see your own review persuades to leaving a review for the host. In contrast, interviewee 5 said that a passive attitude stands in the way of placing a review and that not having time for it is also a factor. Another form of engagement, in the form of eWOM to friends and family was mentioned as well: “I told my friends and family about it, but I chose not to review or rate actually. But after talking about it this much, I will do it next time” (8).

Furthermore, we asked the interviewees whether they are likely to tell their friends and families about the sharing economy on an online platform. Most of the interviewees shared the opinion that they would perhaps tell their friends and families through an online chat, like messenger, but that they would not just post something on their Facebook: “I would tell them privately, but I would not share it on my Facebook wall” (3). Interviewee 6 added to this: “I would not really do it openly, because it might seem too pretentious, but via messenger yes. Facebook is more for promoting videos or something but not personal thoughts really”. The factor of satisfaction plays an important role in the decision to share with friends and family: “The satisfaction we had with the deal would determine whether I would share something or not. Seeing as there is so little trustworthy information out there if something was very good or not, I would perhaps look to share it myself” (8). So depending on the satisfaction of the interviewees with the sharing option they participated in, they would tell their friends and family on a certain online platform but not all of them. Sharing publicly on social media that they enjoyed a sharing option or something else is considered to be “weird”, as mentioned by interviewee 1: “Well it depends on the platform, like on Instagram I would share a picture and you’re a bit more anonymous on there as well. But putting it on Facebook, not so much because it’s awkward to post there.”

When asked about how they perceive the importance of consumer engagement for the sharing economy, most of the interviews mentioned that it is an important part of the system: “I think it’s very important because it is very real and not paid for, so it’s nice to see people care about something which reduces suspicion” (8). Interviewee 6 added to this notion by saying it can be perceived as the backbone of the sharing economy since you cannot provide it without good service and that you need trust and security. Going more into detail, interviewee 1 explains the difference between the consumer engagement and the value it adds: “I think it is very important because if you go on a website where these random people just promise you a great accommodation without any reviews then you might not trust it. Like if it’s offered by a company then i would trust it more, but it’s different for Airbnb to a certain extent because of the reviews that are available.” Agreeing with this point interviewee 2 adds the factor of risk reduction by saying that it makes it less likely that there is a false advertisement, since the ratings for the drives or apartment give some sort of proof or credibility.
Finally we asked the interviewees what their feelings were after their participation and whether it could lead to them becoming advocates for a sharing option. Interviewee 2 said she thinks she is an advocate when she tells her friends to look for an Airbnb when she hear that they are travelling. The notion of feeling connected and believing in the concept is something Interviewee 4 touched upon: “Yea, in some way. Because you always hear about sharing services such as Airbnb and Uber and when you experience it yourself you feel delighted and part of a community. I think I’d become an advocate if I really like it and if I relate and believe in their concept. Then I’d tell everyone to use Airbnb for example and not a hotel.” Interviewee 1 said that she might be an advocate without being aware of it. In a similar reaction, interviewee 7 felt really satisfied and would become an advocate after consecutive positive experiences.
ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

The analysis chapter interprets the empirical findings from our interviews by the use of the thematic analysis. To provide a systematic approach, we maintained drivers, consumer and company influences, and outcomes as the main constructs and derived main themes within each construct from the coding process. In order to add credibility to our results, we included the comments that a product manager from the sharing economy provided us regarding our findings. By referring to theories from the theoretical framework and incorporating them in the analysis, we avoided solely repeating empirical findings.

6.1 Drivers of participation in the sharing economy
While conducting the thematic analysis, we were able to derive three themes within this chapter: Financial considerations, the need for experience and security considerations.

6.1.1 Financial considerations
Our findings suggest that price is one of the most important considerations that consumers have in the context of the sharing economy. In order to find out what the interviewees considered the most important consideration before choosing a sharing option, we asked a general question about their precautions at the beginning of the interview. Throughout the interview process it became clear that the price was something that was highly relevant in using a sharing option. These results can be explained by the emergence of a more price sensitive consumer mindset that was caused by the global economic crisis, which adds a benefitting factor for companies in the sharing economy (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 883; Belk, 2014a, p. 1599). Supporting this, interviewee 1 stated that it is important that you get what you pay for, meaning that the quality of the experience has to compensate for the price. Similarly, Lamberton and Rose (2012, p. 111) argue that consumers always seek products that offer the best value at the least amount of money. In response to our findings, the product manager agreed that price is a huge factor in his experience. According to him, companies are often burning through investor cash in order to be so low priced that they drive the competition out of business. In addition to that, he stated that Uber and Lyft rides in San Francisco cost only $4.75, which is incredibly cheap but not financially sustainable in his experience. This provides an interesting managerial perspective, because it highlights the effects it might have on the companies in the sharing economy. For the price sensitive consumer, the price is a major aspect that drives them to participate in the sharing economy, while the price war represents a challenge for sharing services like Uber or Lyft.

However, while the price was a very important consideration for the interviewees, our data also suggest that this depends on an individual basis and on the form of the sharing option. Interviewee 4 stated that the most important aspect for Uber is the price, as it is more affordable than public transportation or cabs, but that other aspects are more important for Airbnb. In fact, most interviewees suggested that financial considerations are of varying importance depending on the service, as exemplified by interviewee 3, who stated that price is mainly important for Uber, while the look and location are additional considerations before choosing Airbnb. Evidently, both services are driven by price, but when it comes to Airbnb, price only plays a minor role. Therefore, we argue that the price is certainly an important consideration when choosing any type of sharing option, however it is not the most prominent deciding factor for every sharing option available.
Interestingly, convenience was associated with Uber several times by our interviewees. Interviewee 1 stated that she considers the convenience of a sharing option, which she defines as not having to wait for an Uber ride very long. In addition to that, interviewee 1 claimed that Uber is a service that has become very common and is less focused on the brand and more on convenience. The product manager added to this discussion that many car services have started offering new services that help to keep cost low and are more convenient and profitable. In his experience, slightly different offerings have entered the market in certain cities where shared car services drive a fixed commute route, similar to a bus service. This is a cheaper alternative for consumers if they are willing to not have a customized route. In fact, he adds that Uber and Lyft offer an array of price and convenience options, such as Uber Pool and Lyft Line (sharing a custom route with another passenger) or regular Uber and Lyft options that offer larger cars.

These findings suggest that a convenience service like Uber is driven by financial aspects because it is something common and without many considerations. This refers to convenience goods which do not involve a lot of consideration and aim to get good value for money (Feichtinger et al., 1988, p. 187). Moreover, it suggests that consumers do not spend a lot of time on searching for alternatives, but choose the most price efficient and convenient option. The effort put into searching for the best alternative aligns with the search costs introduced by Lamberton and Rose (2012, p. 111) that are needed to decide which product to choose. Therefore, this research suggests that a convenience service such as Uber is connected to low search costs. This is supported by the fact that consumers cannot choose an Uber driver and research them prior to the ride, since they are allocated randomly and based on the proximity to the passenger. Furthermore, the findings are in line with Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012, p. 894) study about access-based consumption, which explains that car sharing is mainly motivated by self-interest and utilitarianism and not by hedonistic values.

Supporting this, interviewee 8 mentions availability as a consideration before choosing a sharing option. When being asked to explain what is meant by availability, he stated that it is convenient because Uber always has drivers close by and it is easy to check on the mobile app where they are exactly. This finding meets the spatial anonymity dimension by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 885), in which they argue that access is motivated by convenience and the proximity to the shared object, in this case the Uber driver. Interviewee 8 considered the close proximity of available Uber drivers as a consideration before using a sharing option, thus addressing the spatial anonymity dimension of access-based consumption by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 885). Moreover, interviewee 5 explained that using a car sharing service did not lead to a feeling of delight, but was just a convenient way of getting from A to B. Similarly, interviewee 7 stated that she uses sharing options because they are easier to use and you have many options that might not be available when choosing a regular taxi. This shows similar characteristics to convenience goods because the interviewees choose the closest available cabs that they use on a regular basis and that seem reasonably priced.

These findings illustrate that financial considerations play a very important role before choosing a sharing option but to a varying degree depending on the type of service. According to our interviewees, accommodation services like Airbnb are driven more by location or interior, while car sharing services are mainly driven by financial consideration and availability as they are considered convenience products. This matches Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012, p. 890) findings that young and urban consumers perceive access as a
more affordable and convenient alternative to car ownership. Similarly, our sample (Generation Y) consists of young consumers born between 1980 and 2000, which seem to choose sharing options (access) because they are easily available and more affordable than other alternatives. Furthermore, the managerial perspective has enabled us to add credibility to our findings, as the manager argues that sharing companies have already taken steps towards the price sensitive consumer and offer additional options that serve that demand.

With regard to the research question and purpose of this thesis, these findings allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of financial considerations in the sharing economy. Even though theory suggested that financial considerations play a role in the sharing economy, our empirical data touches upon convenience and makes a clear distinction between different types of sharing options, namely transportation and accommodation. Furthermore, our results show that financial considerations play a much more leading role in choosing a sharing option than initially assumed. Gaining a deeper understanding of the role of financial considerations in the sharing economy supports the answering of our research question because it is part of what motivates consumer to participate in the sharing economy and what they consider before using a sharing option. Thus, it serves the purpose of this thesis, which includes to identify potential aspects that contribute to participation in the sharing economy and their interaction with consumers.

6.1.2 Need for experience

One very prevalent pattern that we observed as a theme throughout the data is the interviewees’ need for experience. When being asked what is important when choosing a sharing option, in particular accommodations, our interviewees argued that it had to be in a great neighbourhood, have a nice interior and be a less tourist-oriented experience. This suggests that the interviewees prefer to experience the local lifestyle and are not satisfied with the generic tourist experience. Choosing a hostel where visitors have to stay in a very small room with several other people is likely going to impair the quality of the trip. Furthermore, staying in a shared accommodation will enable visitors to cook their own local food, to explore the neighbourhood, and to potentially meet local people and get to experience their culture.

As part of experience, locality was an aspect that gained significant amount of attention among our interviewees with regards to shared accommodation services. Interviewee 4 stated that the location, cleanliness and aesthetics of the accommodation are the most important considerations. Staying at a hotel outside the city will unlikely provide a convenient and pleasant experience because visitors have to travel far to do sightseeing. Furthermore, staying at a low-cost hostel is mainly considered as an unreliable and lower standard experience by our interviewees. In relation to the shift from ownership to access (Chen, 2009, p. 937), interviewee 2 gave valuable insights about the luxury of some Airbnb accommodations and the fact the she would not be able to afford a hotel of the same standard. For this reason, interviewee 2 considers renting or even sharing an Airbnb accommodation as an acceptable option. This was supported by the majority of our interviewees, as they explained that the desire for ownership in general depends on the type of product. This adds to Lamberton and Rose's (2012, p. 109) findings of a trend away from ownership towards a shared mindset. Furthermore, our interviewees emphasized their willingness to participate in sharing activities if something is expensive and not obtainable in another way.
Interestingly, interviewee 1 considers ownership important when it is a status symbol. The product manager argued that he disagrees with interviewee 1, as luxury is transforming to experiences rather than possessions. In addition, he suggests that many companies cater to unique experiences for younger and older people alike. Thus, he indicates that there is a current trend in the industry that strives for experience and moves away from possessions. This adds to our research question and confirms the need for experience as a driver of the sharing economy. This shows that ownership and access are very specific to what value a person attributes to a product on an individual basis. To draw a line back to experiential goods, it can be argued that using a sharing option in the accommodation industry is affected by the wish to experience a specific and local lifestyle that may be inaccessible when visitors book a hotel or hostel instead. According to Moeller and Wittkowski (2010, p. 180), non-ownership models allow consumers to access experiential products for a specific period of time. However, they found that the experience orientation does not influence the preference for access modes of consumption (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010, p. 176), which does not coincide with our empirical findings as our interviewees considered the need for experience a very important part of the sharing economy and their participation.

Our interviewees emphasized the importance of an authentic and unique experience that differs from traditional hotel traveling. Thus, we can derive from our data that experience plays a very significant role in the sharing economy, because it enables a special experience that involves different considerations, such as look, location, interior and experiencing the local lifestyle. This strive for unique experiences explains why sharing systems like Airbnb are as successful as they are today. Web 2.0 embodies the ideal platform for sharing experiences (e.g. social media), reading other people’s experience reports (e.g. Tripadvisor) or planning one’s own experiences based on other people’s recommendations. This corresponds to MacCannell’s (1987, p. 589) findings that tourists seek an authentic experience, as our interviewees affirmed that they preferred avoiding tourist neighbourhoods and experience the local culture and people. However, it has to be noted that not every sharing system has the purpose of delivering an experience to the consumer, as the interviewees considered Uber as a convenient service with less focus on a unique experience. Nevertheless, interviewee 4 stated that he considers it important that the Uber drivers are relatable and create a nice conversation during the ride. Thus, experience plays a role for using a car sharing service like Uber on an individual basis, but the majority of our interviewees did not consider it important in their answers.

These findings contribute to the answering of the research question and allow us to follow the purpose of this thesis. Experience was a dominant aspect of what drives our interviewees to participate in the sharing economy and something they considered before choosing a sharing option. As part of our research question seeks to understand what motivates consumers to participate in the sharing economy and how it affects their behavior, the need for experience plays an important role because it has affected our interviewees significantly in terms of choosing an option. The desire to experience a lifestyle that is different, and possibly more luxurious, is something that has not been part of previous research, but shows a valuable and deeper insight in the sharing economy and consumer behavior. Web 2.0 plays an important role for this topic because the sharing economy takes place in an online and social environment. Gaining a deeper understanding of the need to experience, supports the purpose of this thesis and provides further insight in consumer behavior in the sharing economy.
6.1.3 Security considerations

The third theme we identified within the driver chapter is that our interviewees considered security as a very important aspect before choosing a sharing option. While we included safety as a part of online trust, mostly initiated by companies, it actually appears to be one of the most important precautions that occurs.

As aforementioned, sharing economy companies have put a lot of effort into building trust by employing trust systems and offering insurances to drivers, users and renters. Airbnb emphasizes credibility by verifying every user account, Lyft employs a critical response phone line and Uber offers an instant rating system via their mobile app. All these efforts were taken by the companies in the sharing economy in order to decrease risk and increase consumer trust. Following this, our findings suggest that security is one of the main considerations that drives consumers to participate in the sharing economy. Interviewee 7 argued that security is a reason to choose Airbnb over hostels because of the rating system that they provide. In the context of accommodation services, this suggests that rating systems that are employed by firms in the sharing economy are very important when it comes to choosing a sharing option over a traditional hostel. However, some interviewees specifically suggested that they have concerns before using sharing options, for example interviewee 1 argued that she is unsure about the value an Airbnb stay can deliver and if it will be equal to the money spent. Similar to this, interviewee 7 explains that she would rather “own” an apartment or a hotel room for a period of time than sharing it because it makes her feel more secure. This statement is important for the sharing economy, as there are usually two options for visitors to choose from when using Airbnb: Sharing the accommodation with the host or having the apartment for yourself for the stay. Interviewee 1 also explains that she would rather book a whole accommodation for Airbnb to have her own space and interviewee and interviewee 7 stated she is too anxious to stay with strangers in an Airbnb accommodation. In addition to that, interviewee 3 stated that he would never stay in the same apartment with people he has never met, even if it was for a short period of time. This refers to interpersonal anonymity in a private context, which stands for situations in which users are part of social access, meaning staying at a host's house at the same time as he or she resides there (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p. 884). Our findings suggest that the interviewees do not want to share an accommodation with a stranger because it increases their security concerns. Thus, we add to Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) dimension of access-consumption and provide a deeper understanding of this aspect. For the sharing economy, these findings arguably show that the security efforts taken by, in this case Airbnb, are not developed enough because users are still suspicious and feel insecure when using sharing options.

In the context of Uber, the security concerns mainly regarded credit card information and the disclosure of information in general. Interviewee 4 explained that he is suspicious before using Uber because he does not feel comfortable to provide them with credit card information even though he has never had a negative experience. Interviewee 2 however said that she trusts BlaBlaCar but finds Uber untrustworthy. Interviewee 8 showed no trust in any of the sharing options because of the disclosure of information or the accountability in case something goes wrong. According to these statements, the main issue in terms of security for Uber is the disclosure of information to an unknown source via an app and the lack of trust in the security efforts sharing services provide. These results add to Narayanan et al.’s (2012) findings, which argue that consumers are negatively influenced by the possibility of fraud when it comes to their purchase decision. Additionally, our interviews give further insight into security risks, which are considered
as a main concern when purchasing online (Kim et al., 2008, p. 40) and translated them into the sharing economy context.

The product manager provided a company perspective on security concerns and explained that he does not perceive them as a major concern for consumer because they are getting more comfortable and used to paying for on demand services. This does not coincide with the findings from the interviews, which suggested that our disclosing financial information is an important consideration. According to the product manager, the reason for this discrepancy of data could be attributed to the fact that his company offers full background checks on all users and insures each job to $1 million in order to gain consumer trust, which is a relatively high number in the sharing industry. By employing such measures, they aid the consumers in overcoming potential uncertainty and risk that comes naturally with making online purchases (McKnight et al., 2002, p. 335). Instead of security considerations, he highlighted that the key issue for consumers is that they want to go through the least amount of effort when providing and saving payment information, which refers to the convenience aspect of the sharing economy that we discussed earlier. He further explains that fraud worries mostly exist on the company end, e.g. stolen cards or large purchases made on low value prepaid cards. At his company he experienced this on many occasions, as authorization checks only run for a couple of dollars to verify the card but when full payment has to go through it fails. In his opinion, Apple Pay represents a great and frictionless way to pay. These comments add another dimension to our findings, which exemplifies that the consumer and company perspectives are not always in sync. While he argues that security considerations are not a major issue for consumers at his company, many companies make these security efforts to reduce the perception of risk. Due to the popularity of security systems, security considerations might play a smaller role for some consumers.

These findings show the great importance of security, especially of financial nature, in an online setting and in Web 2.0 and confirm Salisbury et al.’s (2001, p. 173) finding that consumers tend to only shop online when sensitive information is safe. While several interviewees had major doubts before using a car sharing service like Uber because users pay via the app beforehand, they had less concerns about privacy and credit card information disclosure for accommodation services. For Airbnb the main issue concerns staying in close proximity with strangers in one apartment, whereas the security concerns are low when guests have the apartment for themselves. In addition to that, the interviewees stated that you pay the accommodation once you arrive, which might explain why financial disclosure of information is not a main concern for Airbnb users. Additionally, the managerial perspective shows that consumers might be influenced by background checks and insurances that companies offer and thus trust these services more.

In relation to our research question and the purpose of this thesis, this is of high relevance because security issues are a major concern for our interviewees, as well as for businesses online. It allows us to develop a deep understanding of the role of security and privacy in the sharing economy in the context of Web 2.0. Additionally, it is closely related to consumer behavior because security issues influence the consumer’s purchase decision (Narayanan et al., 2012) and, according to our qualitative data, it is a very important aspect that decides whether our interviewees choose a sharing option over a traditional hotel.
6.2 Influences by companies
In terms of influences by companies we focused on advertising in an online context through Web 2.0. Through our thematic analysis we were able to identify 2 themes which are online marketing and customer referral programs.

In addition to the fact that several themes were recurring very often in our thematic analysis, it became clear that certain activities held more credibility in the mind of the interviewees than others. The notion of credibility is in relation to the extent to which the consumers perceive the claims about the brand, product or service as believable (Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989, p. 51). This has lead us to separate and analyze online marketing and consumer referral programs as two different activities, since they differ in their credibility in the mind of the interviewees. The consumer referral programs were positively regarded by the interviewees, which state the influence of consumer engagement and eWOM from peers as an important element of its attraction. This adds a spin to the claim by Phelps et al. (2004, p. 334) that consumers are more likely to delete a message coming from a marketer than from a familiar person, since these marketing efforts can now also include a factor of consumer engagement in the form of these referral programs.

6.2.1 Online Marketing activities
When it comes to viral marketing, the awareness of campaigns was divided, but leaned more towards being unaware of them. The awareness ranged from recognizing a certain brand being mentioned to not consciously being aware of watching a viral video. Interviewee 1 said that her awareness depends on her interest in the product or service that is being promoted, while interviewee 3 added to this that his interest is more focused on products that he might not be aware of yet. The interviewees gave insights as to what would make them notice and share a viral marketing campaign, adding the factor of novelty of the product they are seeing in the campaign to the claims by Kaplan and Haenlein (2011, p. 256), who state that only messages that are both memorable and sufficiently interesting to be passed onto others have the potential to spur a viral marketing phenomenon. The combination of something new being more memorable and more prone to being remembered by consumers is something that was mentioned more than once by the interviewees.

Companies in the sharing economy, such as Airbnb and Uber, do not rely on traditional marketing in the same way as other companies do. A group of interviewees felt that the benefit for the sharing economy would depend on the execution of the viral campaigns, interviewee 4 for example mentioned that he believes that if the proper marketing tools are utilized, the viral campaigns can be very efficient for the sharing economy. These thoughts are confirmed by Uber CEO Kalanick (2011), who shared that they rely heavily on viral marketing rather than traditional marketing, as exemplified by the statement that 95 % of their consumers have heard about Uber from other consumers. This topic highlights that it is important for companies to consider which manner of viral marketing they want to utilize to reach consumers. While all marketers want to see their campaigns go viral, there is actually a big difference in the number that actually do in the end according to the questioned product manager. He adds that companies actually certain “growth hacking” techniques to amplify the growth of their campaigns, which he described as deliberate marketing tactics that are intended to amplify growth.
The topic of celebrity endorsement resulted in some mixed reactions as to how it affects the interviewees’ behavior or considerations of sharing options. When questioned about which form of online marketing affects interviewee 4 the most when considering a sharing option, he answered that celebrity endorsement and product placement on YouTube and Instagram were most important to him. He explains that he is very affected by celebrity endorsement because of the special connection to certain celebrities and that he believes in the value of something that is being promoted by this celebrity. We argue that new social networks within Web 2.0 improve the potential of celebrity endorsement affecting the consumer, which adds to the claim that consumer behavior is positively influenced by celebrity endorsement through online influencers with a large follower base (Jin & Phua, 2014, p. 192). Interviewees 7 and 1 agreed that it has the potential to affect their considerations if celebrities would promote a product on an online platform to their followers. Additionally, interviewee 7 stated that seeing a celebrity using a product that she really wants would spark her consideration to purchase it. This behavior confirms that consumers are much more attracted to a product if they believe that a certain celebrity is being used in some way that reflects their personality. The product manager commends modern consumers for their savviness, which makes the connection between the consumer and the brand necessary for the celebrity endorsement to have effect. On the other hand the celebrity that is selected for the endorsement needs to be chosen well and in alignment with the brand image. The effects of utilizing celebrity endorsement differs between our interviewees, but the social media channels and reach of celebrities as means of promoting can certainly have a positive effects.

What is important to note here is that the interviewees that responded positively to celebrity endorsement were already regularly following these celebrities on their platforms. However, not all the interviewees were affected by celebrity endorsement, which shows that the high costs of utilizing celebrity endorsements does not always automatically result in a successful marketing campaign (Wei & Wu, 2013, p.2). The interviewees that did not feel affected by celebrity endorsement felt either out of touch with the celebrities’ realities like interviewee 3, or did not feel any urges to consider a product or service. In addition, the product manager shared that an additional negative outcome follows from the consumers finding out that a celebrity is being paid to promote a certain product without disclosing this information priorly. He mentions that they are really transparent at his company when it comes to these situations, since the followers appreciate transparency.

The third in the set of marketing activities that we researched is that of product placement. With the developments of Web 2.0 came more possibilities for marketers in terms of product placement. They can now be found in YouTube shows, viral videos, music streaming services or smartphone applications. Similar to our data on viral marketing, the interviews highlighted that the execution and presentation of product placement would be the biggest determinant of whether it would affect their considerations. Being exposed to very heavy and aggressive product placement would be a huge annoyance to the consumers, as explained by interviewee 8 and 7, especially if it distracts the consumer from the main content. These statements illustrate the concept of program liking which is related to the attentive program viewers that schedule time to watch something (Cowley and Barron, 2013, p. 91). These viewers who are higher in program liking are more attentive and might realize that a brand has been placed in a program and might disengage the viewer from the reality created by the program (Cowley and Barron, 2013, p. 91). This will have a negative impact on the consumer’s mind and can affect their considerations of
the service, product or brand in a similarly negative way. On the other hand, when executed properly, product placement can have a positive impact on the consumer’s consideration of a sharing option. Lee and Faber (2007, p. 76) explain that studies in the past have shown that visual and verbal placements lead to greater recall of brands and that more prominent product placements lead to greater memory effect. Interviewees 1, 2 and 3 were able to connect to this theory and the concept of brand recall, but they primarily connected it to the novelty of a product. Interviewee 2 suggested that she is only affected if she is not aware of the product before and might consider it in the future. Thus, product placement can certainly play a role in the considerations, however it is dependent on the manner in which these are presented. An overly obvious and distracting promotion that drives the attention away from the original content will not likely be perceived positively, as explained by our interviewees. It does offer different opportunities though, one of which is brand recall which helps relatively new brands, products or services to be recognized by the audience. The product manager added that companies often look for partnerships that actually make sense and work rather well. Uber, for example, would not be looking for promotion from a library or a bike manufacturer.

These marketing efforts have shown that companies are utilizing Web 2.0 to promote the product or service that they provide. They are using new ways to reach their potential consumers, which highlights the fact that companies need to keep up with technological trends, especially when it comes to Web 2.0 and the opportunities that it offers in terms of marketing. Our interviewees showed that several factors can influence the reception of these marketing activities by companies, but that they can certainly have a positive effect. With these insights we have followed the purpose of the study and established a deeper knowledge in regards to this aspect of influences by companies.

6.2.2 Customer referral systems
Besides the previously discussed online marketing activities, there are other means to motivate people to get involved in the sharing economy. The first of which is a referral reward system in which existing users can invite a friend, a family member or anyone they want to join the service, in return the inviting member can receive either some form of monetary reward or gifts. In our theoretical framework we only very briefly touched upon the concept of referrals, because we considered it as a part of eWOM and not as a separate potential influencing factor. However, the data that we have gathered from our interviewees has shown that these systems can be perceived as an individual influencing factor. Interviewees 1 and 3 touched upon the availability of these referral systems and promotional codes that are gained as a reward in some cases, interviewee 1 said that a friend asking her to sign up would motivate her to sign up in order to help out this friend and to earn rewards for that friend or for both of them in some cases.

In the theoretical framework we mentioned the referral program that is set in place by TaskRabbit, which enables customers to collect $100 worth of rewards by making other people sign up to their marketplace (TaskRabbit, 2016). Economic incentives are a key driver of consumer engagement through eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 43), which illustrates the potential effects of this marketing method. This is only one example of a referral system in place for sharing options, but the theory in combination with the data from our interviewees make it clear that these referral reward systems cannot exist without the initiative by the company in the first place. Surely the consumers are
responsible for carrying out the referral and inviting their friends or family members, but without the incentive by the company in the form of a reward, the consumers would just be engaging in regular WOM. Stein and Ramaseshan (2015, p. 229) state that it is increasingly easier for users to become opinion leaders and to encourage their peers to try or buy various product and services. We believe companies can certainly motivate positive word of mouth by offering these customer referral systems in order to convince more customers to use their sharing services or options.

This system allows the company to utilize positive eWOM to attract new consumers, while it motivates existing consumers to talk about the sharing option. Our interviewees highlighted the tendency of consumers to share information when an incentive is being offered in return, which is an excellent opportunity for companies in the sharing economy. Besides the motivation to join for a reward, it can also push potential consumers to joining despite the lack of trust or risk that they associate with the sharing economy. Having this incentive can persuade them to jump into the sharing option despite these doubts. This final influencing factor by companies, allows us to answer the research question in regards to the company side.

6.3 Influences by other consumers
We identified two main themes for influences by other consumers in the sharing economy, namely trust in eWOM by peers and the factors that shape eWOM.

6.3.1 Trust in eWOM by peers
In order to find out what role eWOM plays in the sharing economy, we asked our interviewees whether they consider consumer reviews more trustworthy than traditional ads, how susceptible they are to eWOM and which actions motivate them to participate in using a sharing option. More or less all of the answers contained some type of distinction between the sources of eWOM and their credibility.

When we initially asked our interviewees what they considered important before choosing a sharing option, several made reference to eWOM by other users and their experiences. Thereby, interviewee 1 referred to positive experiences that peers had in the past that left them satisfied. In addition to that, the same interviewee suggests that a friend telling her a product is great will lead her to try it herself. Every interviewee referred to experience reviews from friends, family or other users, but hardly any responses concerned actions by companies or their social media channels. Thus, peers are usually the focal point for users to gain access to information or experience reviews. Many of our interviewees mentioned the term trust in relation to consumer efforts, e.g. interviewee 2 emphasizes that she will listen to someone she trusts if they recommend a sharing option. Moreover, interviewee 8 explains more specifically that consumer reviews are so important because they are trustworthy, especially if there is a large number of reviews and not only a few. Interviewee 7 made it clear that she relies much more on friends recommendations than on something that is paid advertising. These findings confirm Shan’s (2016, p. 633) findings, which suggest that online product reviews and recommendations from friends and family are among the most trusted sources. Thus, trust occupies an important place in the sharing economy, especially from a consumer’s point of view. Trust in this case is mainly addressing the peer group and past experiences with the respective service.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the different levels of trustworthiness, we asked our interviewees a more specific question concerning if they consider consumer reviews
as more trustworthy than traditional ads. Each individual we interviewed answered that consumer reviews were much more trustworthy than traditional ads. In fact, most interviewees already addressed the difference between these two sources before we asked a more specific question, which shows how prevalent it is in the user’s mind. Interviewee 6 stated that consumer reviews are much more realistic, while interviewee 5 suggested that they are less influenced by revenues and thus much more reliable. All responses revolved around the issue that companies want to deceive their customers in order to increase their revenues and focus on selling even though the quality might not be good. In terms of consumer reviews, they were perceived to be trustworthy, credible and sincere, especially if there is already an emotional bond between the parties, such as a family member or good friend. The perceived difference between the trustworthiness of eWOM sources adds to Smith et al.’s (2005, p. 32) findings, which revolve around the fact that consumers consider recommendations as more trustworthy than ads appearing in their shopping task, and give insights how eWOM among peers is perceived in the sharing economy. Furthermore, our findings support Bickart and Schindler’s (2001, p.36) results which suggest that eWOM is more credible, relevant and empathetic than company-driven information. As our interviewees relied much more on peers than on traditional ads, our interviews provide a deeper understanding of why brand advocates are the most trusted source of advertising, which was proposed by Fuggetta (2012, p. 10).

Additionally, a lot of value was attributed to an established level of trust for the information source beforehand, which shows how much more effective eWOM is. Our findings enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the differences between eWOM and traditional ads in Web 2.0., and, most importantly, in the sharing economy. While other studies touched upon Web 2.0, eWOM credibility and trustworthiness, we combine several of these consumer issues on an individual basis and give an indication of how they interact in the context of the sharing economy. This is highly relevant in the context of our research question and the purpose of this thesis, because our data suggests that peer-to-peer interaction plays an important role in Web 2.0 and the sharing economy because trust among peers is much more effective than traditional ads are. By looking at the consumer side, we follow the purpose of this thesis, which includes to gain insights into how consumers influence each other online in the sharing economy context and what role trust among peers plays thereby.

6.3.2 Factors shaping Electronic word-of-mouth
While the first theme in consumer influences mainly concerns trust and credibility of the source, the second global theme we derived from our analysis are the factors that shape eWOM. Our interviews suggest that eWOM differs according to the quality and quantity of reviews and whether it is negative or positive.

When being asked how she felt about other consumers participating in eWOM, interviewee 1 stated that she found it interesting, especially when reading negative reviews or experiences because she is much more likely to listen or pay attention to negative stories than to positive ones. Similarly, interviewee 8 suggests that people are much more motivated to write negative reviews than positive, which makes him perceive consumer reviews as more trustworthy than ads because reviews tend to be much more critical. Therefore, we can derive from our data that some users are more motivated to leave negative reviews and negative reviews catch more attention among people. The questioned product manager stated that the most detailed reviews are usually written by people that are not happy with a service. This finding presents a problem for many firms
because negative messages cannot be controlled (Kim et al., 2016, p. 511). When consumers are more susceptible to negative reviews, and also more likely to write negative reviews than positive ones, then firms suffer the risk of scandals, bad publicity and image loss even more than initially assumed. These results add value to Park and Lee’s (2009, p. 63) insights, in which they argue that the evaluation of experience goods might suffer from negative reviews.

Interestingly, when being asked how a negative review influences her choice of a using a sharing option, interviewee 1 also reported that she would not stop using Uber after a negative experience because she has been using it for a long time. This suggests that in certain situations, negative eWOM does not influence a person to the extent that they stop using the service altogether. Such situations are affected by using the service previously and over a long period of time. This could be attributed to the fact that Uber has become super common and is less about the brand and more about the convenience and cabs (Interviewee 1), which matches our previous findings that convenience goods play a unique role in the sharing economy. These findings slightly differ from Kim et al.’s (2016, p. 512) results, which illustrate that negative eWOM potentially affects consumer behavior towards a service, as some of our interviewees did not change their behavior based on a negative experience or review when using a car sharing service.

Many of our interviewees referred to the quality and quantity of reviews as an important aspect of eWOM. Interviewee 6 suggests that his trust in online reviews depends on how many reviews were left under an Airbnb offer, meaning the more reviews, the less fake the offer seems. Similarly, interviewee 4 stated that he would refrain from booking a sharing option if there were only few reviews and that he deems five stars and hundreds of reviews necessary to gain trust and make a decision. Furthermore, interviewee 1 referred to the quantity of reviews when stating that she trusts a website or service less if there are no reviews but a great accommodation is promised. In addition to that, interviewee 8 stated that a large amount of reviews are unlikely written by bots and thus increase trustworthiness. These responses all indicate that the quantity of reviews about a sharing option increase the offering’s credibility and trustworthiness. The more reviews an option has, the less likely reviews are fake and the higher the trustworthiness.

Aside from the quantity of reviews, our interviewees also referred to the quality of reviews. Interviewee 1 was the first to mention photos in relation to reviews and eWOM of Airbnb. When being asked about online marketing and how much value she places on consumer efforts, interviewee 1 answered that she considers pictures of Airbnb posted on social media as very important, either from online influencers or friends and family. Similarly, interviewee 4 mentioned pictures included in reviews and states that they are important to compare the actual product to the picture once you are there to evaluate if you were misled. This aligns with interviewee 1’s statement about photos in reviews and that they are sometimes different to what you actually experience. Interviewee 3 also referred to photos included in social media posts as being very influential before using a sharing option. These references to photos in reviews show that the content and persuasiveness of reviews affect each other. These findings match Tsao and Hsieh (2015, p. 528), who suggest that eWOM credibility is a mediator between eWOM quality and purchase intentions, as higher quality reviews with detailed descriptions and photos enhance trust and purchase intentions. Our results suggest that high quality reviews that include pictures are perceived as more trustworthy because users can see what the e.g. accommodation looks like and minimize the risk of fraud or being deceived. However,
the product manager states that honesty is not always the norm when it comes to consumer reviews, especially when aspects such as closeness and avoidance of conflicts between the host and user are in play. Furthermore, a lot of consumers do not want to get service providers in trouble, so they might rate something 5 stars when the service was actually only worth 3 or 4 stars. He illustrates this with the example that among Uber users, it is widely known that drivers with a rating lower than 4.5 stars get kicked off the platform.

In relation to our research questions, these findings offer a very valuable insight because they describe how exactly eWOM by other consumers is perceived and how they are most effective. Our research question includes the examination of consumer behavior in Web 2.0 and its influence on participation. Our data gives an indication that there is a clear difference between negative and positive reviews when it comes to consumer behavior, and that sometimes negative reviews do not play an immediately negative role, especially when it comes to convenience products like Uber. In addition to that, we have found out that a high quantity of reviews speaks for the trustworthiness of a product, and high quality of reviews including photos is similarly perceived as a sign of credibility because users can determine whether the photos in the offer are trustworthy or misleading. These findings are in line with our purpose, as we want to examine the consumer perspective and how consumers use Web 2.0, and especially eWOM in the sharing economy. Reviews in the sharing economy are a form of electronic word-of-mouth, which again is part of consumer engagement, thus making it a rich and detailed input that is relevant for following the purpose of this research.

6.4 Influences by third parties

We were able to derive a third theme in terms of influences from our data, namely influences by third parties. As described in our findings chapter, many of our interviewees stated that they did not like to post personal things or reviews on their Facebook timeline, but that Facebook is a platform that is primarily used to share articles, links or videos.

Something similar manifested itself when we asked our interviewees where they have first heard of companies in the sharing economy. All interviewees agreed that they became aware of sharing services online first, but not necessarily through social media networks or company websites. Interviewee 1 mentioned pop culture and especially the social news and entertainment website BuzzFeed.com as her main source. Similarly, interviewee 3 stated online newspapers as his main source of information about the sharing economy and interviewee 8 also mentioned online news in terms of awareness of sharing economy companies.

Thus, our data suggests that there are some influences by third parties, namely online newspapers or media companies that contribute to the awareness of companies in the sharing economy. When talking about sharing economy companies and consumer-driven influences, it is also important to consider the influences by third parties as they do not belong in either of those two groups.

Online news play a very important role in the sharing economy, especially because news messages like the new year’s eve Uber driver horror story that killed a pedestrian (Malhotra and Van Alstyne, 2014, p. 26) can be shared within seconds and go around the world. Therefore, it is important for companies in the sharing economy to consider potential third parties as an information source and something that can be shared worldwide on social media and potentially damage their reputation, or work in their
favour. During our literature search, we were only able to identify company and consumer-driven activities in the context of Web 2.0 and the sharing economy, but our data suggests that they are not only two sides, but that online newspapers and social news also play a role in shaping consumers’ perceptions and participation in the sharing economy, especially when shared on online platforms. This finding supports our research question because it represents a source of information for users to learn about the sharing economy in a Web 2.0 setting. It helps to gain a deeper understanding of new opportunities that the sharing economy entails and how they interact with Web 2.0 activities and consumer behavior.

6.5 Outcomes
The thematic analysis has identified two main themes as part of the outcomes, these are online trust in the sharing economy and consumer engagement.

6.5.1 Online trust in the sharing economy
The importance of the role that trust plays for consumers in an online marketplace and context was already established in the theoretical framework, where Shankar et al. (2002, p. 326) stated that consumers have more access to information and alternatives, making it necessary for companies to create trust and build upon this with their current and potential consumers. The findings of the data gathered from the interviewees justified these findings by proving that the interviewees are aware of their levels of trust prior to choosing a sharing option and the change in that feeling of trust after the participation.

In order to understand how Web 2.0 affects the level of online trust within the context of the sharing economy, we chose to look at the transition of the interviewees in their perception of online trust. Thus, we initially looked into their starting perceptions in terms of online trust within the sharing economy. One of their main concerns was related to the security of their credit card credentials and the interviewees perceiving it as a risk to share this sensitive information. For interviewee 8 the risk comes forward from the prospect of not being able to hold a company responsible in case something goes wrong throughout the sharing option experience, whereas he perceives it less risky if he is dealing with a company that is the other main party in this sharing experience. On the other hand, interviewee 4 is wary of sharing his payment information as well, but is more suspicious of the company behind the service (Uber) and the manner in which the service provision works. These uncertain feelings regarding the trust in the proper and secure handling of their payment information by the company that is organizing the sharing experience between the interviewee and different providing individual, find their roots in the three core elements of trust as discussed by T. Zhang et al. (2014, p. 252), which are affective, cognitive and conative. The perceived risk that stems from not being sure how the credit card credentials will be utilized by the receiving company is what we relate to the cognitive element of trust. This cognitive element of trust refers to the calculative and rational characteristics that are demonstrated by the party that is being trusted, these characteristics include reliability, competence and integrity (T. Zhang et al., 2014, p. 252). The consumers expects the party that is being trusted, in this case companies such as Uber and Airbnb, to behave in a manner that is reliable, which includes following the stated promises that are made to the consumer prior to the sharing experience in regards to the protection of their personal information. These are usually also stated in the terms of service by companies, that explain these security measures. Trust is very important and necessary for sharing economy options because a lot of people will be wary of having a
random person in your own house or sleeping in the house of a stranger (Guttentag, 2015. p. 1195), which is similar to what the product manager said.

While interviewee 4 states that he just feels suspicious of Uber and does not feel comfortable with sharing his credit card information, interviewee 8 elaborated on the inclusion of a third party in the sharing experience and the risk it adds in his perception. His uncertainty regarding the procedures in case something goes wrong during the sharing experience can arguably also be placed in the cognitive element of trust, since it is in relation to characteristics such as reliability and integrity (T. Zhang et al., 2014, p. 252). However, with his focus being on the added uncertainty of dealing with companies in the sharing industry and the consumers that provide the service, there is another aspect that needs to be considered, namely the conative element of trust, which describes the behavioral intentions to depend on other parties (T. Zhang et al. 2014, p. 252). In other words it describes the degree to which individuals are willing to put themselves in a position in which they have to depend on others. Joo (2015, p. 31) emphasizes that the role of trust in C2C is more important than that in B2C because of the vulnerability to sellers opportunistic actions. Therefore, we argue that the C2C element of the sharing industry adds more weight to the conative element than regular B2C, since there is an added uncertainty in the company not directly providing the service. Instead, for new consumers it remains to be seen if the experience will be the same as advertised by the sharing option provider. This increased element of uncertainty explains why several interviewees shared their preference for being able to pay after utilizing a service such as Airbnb, as opposed to paying upfront. On the other hand there were interviewees that had more trust in the systems of sharing companies, like interviewee 3 who stated security efforts by companies such as Airbnb are sufficient and trustworthy.

Following their initial standpoint on online trust within the sharing economy, we were interested in finding out whether their opinions had changed after participating in a sharing option and how it has in turn affected their level of trust. The majority of the interviewees stated that their prior experience with a sharing option was satisfying, which has in turn positively affected their level of trust. The third element of trust not yet discussed in this analysis is the affective element of trust. T. Zhang et al. (2014, p. 252) defines the affective element of trust as a reference to emotional elements and social skills. A clearer elaboration is provided by Johnson and Grayson (2005, p. 501) who state that affective trust is the confidence that someone places in a partner on the basis of feelings that are generated by the level of care and concern that the partner demonstrates, meaning that this is closely related to personal experience with the partner. In the context of this research, this means that participation in the sharing economy can influence the level of affective trust that a consumer can have. Understandably, prior to having experience with the sharing economy, our interviewees had a lower degree of affective trust.

Interviewee 8 shared that it is an incentive to continue using a relatively unusual service to ensure that it will continue to work in the future. This showcases that his positive experience with the sharing option has increased his willingness to continue using it in the future. While his affective trust in the sharing economy might have been low prior to the experience, he has now experienced an increase in this affective trust. Interviewee 6 had a similar experience and shared the desire to participate again in the future. But on the opposite to these positive effects following a satisfying experience, there was interviewee 5 who had a negative experience with a sharing option. She specifically states that she had a low level of trust to prior to her experience, which can linked to her affective
trust. In turn, by experiencing this negative participation, her affective level dropped even more and she is less likely to participate again. Her reaction shows that trust is a risky subject, since one negative experience could destroy the trust between the parties, which is why firms need to reinforce online encounters and work on improving the trust (Shankar et al., 2002, p. 338). Thus, a lot of the companies in the sharing economy explain their system and how their security efforts take away any risk from using their platform for a sharing option. By looking at the story of interviewee 7 it is arguably not necessarily a deal breaker to have a negative experience. When the consumer has had multiple positive experiences that are used to form the affective trust, a single negative experience will not immediately dismiss these prior positive experiences and will not drastically decrease the chances of the consumer participating again in the future.

In order to determine the effects of Web 2.0 on the trust of consumers in the online context of the sharing economy, we will take another look at the cognitive element of trust. In a further elaboration, Johnson and Grayson (2005, p. 501) add that cognitive trust it is based upon accumulated knowledge that allows customers to make some predictions on how likely it is that the partner will live up to the expected obligations. We argue that a low level of cognitive trust, thus based on little or close to none accumulated knowledge makes it difficult for a consumer to make a prediction about the other party of the sharing option. In order to gather valuable information, potential consumers in the sharing economy will have to find reliable sources that contain information about the individual’s service providing parties, such as people that rent out their Airbnb place or an Uber driver. As mentioned earlier in the analysis chapter, consumers look their peers who have experience in the sharing economy for this information. They want to utilize the information gathered from these other consumers to make their prediction of the service providing party of the sharing option less uncertain, thus increasing their level cognitive trust.

### 6.5.2 Consumer engagement

Within the consumer driven influencing factors we have already analyzed the effects of eWOM by others. In the outcomes chapter we will analyze consumer engagement with the consumer as the distributor. The conceptual model that followed the theoretical framework of this research, shows that the eWOM that is received by new consumers within the sharing economy originates from consumers that have already participated and formed consumer engagement. In turn these new consumers will reach the outcomes stage of the conceptual models as well and the cycle can be repeated for newer consumers.

Most of the interviewees engaged in some form of consumer engagement after their experience with a sharing option. The ways in which the interviewees engaged in consumer engagement showed the different approaches that are available. Starting off with leaving consumers reviews and ratings, one of the reasons for leaving them according to interviewees 1 and 2 was the prospect of being able to read the review that the sharing option provider has left for you. This is another example that showcases that offering an incentive online, be it reading a review of yourself or the customer referral systems that were discussed earlier, can often lead to consumer engagement after participation. On the other hand, there were also interviewees that said they do not leave customer reviews and stay passive.

According to Sashi (2012, p. 262), satisfaction is an antecedent to continue interaction, engagement and ultimately brand advocacy. As aforementioned, interviewee 5 encountered a negative experience without positive experiences before, which resulted in
a low level of trust towards this sharing option. The lack of satisfaction with the service possibly leads to a lack of engagement or interaction and a restrained attitude towards advocating these types of services. From these findings, we derive valuable insights of how the consumer engagement cycle (Sashi, 2012, p. 262) acts in the sharing economy. Other interviewees stated that their motivation to share something is positively linked to their satisfaction with the sharing option. This also supports Sashi’s (2012, p. 262) findings regarding brand advocacy, as shown by interviewee 7, who stated that she is likely to become an advocate for a shared service like Hailo because she has had many positive experiences with it, while interviewee 2 stated that her previous Airbnb location was high standard and that she might be an advocate for the service without being aware of it. Due to Web 2.0, advocates are very important for the sharing economy. Fuggetta (2012, p. 10) confirms once more that advocates hold a lot of influential power due to the fact that relatable recommendations are perceived as the most trustworthy.

The analysis of online trust has shown that consumers look to collect information in order to reduce their perception of the risk that is concerned with participating in the sharing economy. This information includes consumer engagement and online reviews, as they intend to add a degree of credibility to the advertising of the sharing option provider. However, our interviewees show that while many of them appreciate and value consumer reviews because of their importance in reducing risk, they themselves do not always write reviews when they are able to do so. While their intentions in regards to customer reviews might not show it, there is a sense of importance of customer engagement for the sharing economy in their opinion. The concepts of trust and risk made their appearance again in the elaborations of the interviewees, where they confirmed the risk reducing aspect of consumer engagement. Interviewee 6 recognized the importance of consumer engagement and considers it the ground for sharing opportunities. While their intention to write a customer review might not be as apparent, the interviewees would be more willing to tell their friends and family about their sharing economy experience. What became apparent is that even Web 2.0 and the social media platforms have evolved over the years. Several interviewees shared their willingness to talk to their friends and families through private messaging on social media, but that they would not use their Facebook profile for example to share their experiences in public. In terms of other social platforms, interviewee 1 stated that he would post a picture on Instagram as he perceives it as more anonymous than Facebook.

This mutual feeling among our interviewees shows that the notion of what is to be shared on social media might have changed, something that John (2012, p. 172) discussed in his research where he presents the three characteristics of sharing on social media in Web 2.0. The characteristic no object of sharing refers to the notion that social network only have to mention the word “share” and the users will be able to understand what they are supposed to do (John, 2012, p. 172). Where the notion of sharing might have been to share more personal stories or comments on one’s Facebook wall in the past, our interviewees show that even this notion of sharing continuously evolves. We argue that, based on our data, the introduction of new social media platforms, such as Snapchat and Instagram, has divided the sharing concept, where each form of sharing is being allocated to a smaller selection of platforms. Through this allocation, each platforms serves a certain purpose in terms of sharing through social media. While LinkedIn has become the prominent business social media network where people connect with others to share business news or to even look for job vacancies, on the other hand you have Instagram where people go to post pictures of their daily lives and share it with their friends. This creates a more
diverse selection of options available for customers to share their stories to their friends and families.

Web 2.0 has played an important part in affecting how consumers behave after participating in the sharing economy. The multiple facets of consumer engagement that have been discussed in this chapter show the importance of consumers using Web 2.0 to improve the sharing economy through quality reassurance and as a mean of promotion through eWOM. By valuing the information that was available to them through Web 2.0, the consumers can evolve into advocates for the sharing economy themselves and become sources of information for new potential customers. Our model confirms the importance and necessity of Web 2.0 to facilitate the flow of peer-to-peer information in an industry where consumers can have a higher degree of doubt in regards to trust and risk. The analysis of the outcomes has enabled the answering of the final aspect of the research question, while also following the purpose. This has been done by gaining a deeper understanding of the outcomes of participation in the sharing economy.

6.6. Revised conceptual model
The analysis and discussion of the empirical findings of this research have led to the revision of the initial conceptual model that illustrates the processes within the sharing economy. The first adjustment has been made to the drivers, where the driver of financial considerations has remained intact, but the drivers of the need for access and the need for belonging have been replaced by the need for experience and security considerations. The company influences have been updated with the addition of customer referral systems, which have been separated from online marketing. In addition, the consumer influences have remained the same in this model and the influences by third parties has entered the model as a new component. Finally, the outcomes following the participation in the sharing economy have equally remained the same.

Figure 2 Revised conceptual model
7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter addresses the purpose of this thesis and clearly answers the research question in the general conclusion. In the following section we emphasize the theoretical contributions of this research in relation to prior studies and emphasize the value our data provides. Furthermore, we provide the practical implications our analysis and data represent for managers in the sharing economy. As a last step, we address the limitations of our study and suggest future research areas.

7.1 General conclusions
The purpose of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding how Web 2.0 affects consumers before and after participation in the sharing economy. More specifically, we focused on three elements, namely what drives and motivates consumers to consider a sharing option, how consumer behavior is affected and influenced by Web 2.0 in terms of company marketing activities and other consumers, and what the outcomes of participation are.

In order to conduct this research, we used a qualitative research design including interviews with Generation Y consumers that have previously participated in the sharing economy. They were questioned in regards to their drivers and motivations to participate, the effects of external influences such as online marketing and eWOM, and ultimately what the outcomes of their participation were in terms of online trust and consumer engagement. By conducting a qualitative study, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of the sharing economy trend and the consumer perspective in this context. To add more credibility to our findings, we were able to find a product manager from one of the leading companies within the sharing economy to share his expertise on the findings of this research. Hence, to fulfill the purpose of this research we posed the question:

What drives consumer to participate in the sharing economy and how does Web 2.0 influence their behavior during and after using a sharing option?

In order to adequately answer the research question, we divided it into three main parts. The first part is concerned with the drivers of the sharing economy. From our qualitative data we derived that financial considerations play a major role for consumers when they are deciding whether to participate in the sharing economy. However, we were able to observe a difference between the importance of the financial considerations between the types of sharing options. Our findings suggest that convenience services such as Uber or Taskrabbit are mainly driven by financial considerations, while accommodation services such as Airbnb are also motivated by the need for experience. The need for experience includes the consideration of aspects such as an authentic lifestyle during the stay and booking an accommodation that is close to the city centre. The third driver is concerned with security considerations, in which the interviewees explain that an adequate security system is a very important aspect when deciding whether they choose a sharing option, especially considering the fact that the sharing economy consists of strangers being the sharing option providers.

The second part of answering the research question is related to how the context of Web 2.0 affects consumer behavior and participation. The research has identified three
influencing parties as opposed to the original two parties that were derived from the theoretical framework. The influences by companies include online marketing activities such as viral marketing, celebrity endorsement and product placement. While the interviewees were more critical about online marketing activities because they depend heavily on proper execution and presentation to be perceived as positive, they were more positive about consumer referral systems in which they receive an incentive for spreading positive eWOM and inviting new members to join. In regards to consumer influences, the research has emphasized the importance of trust in eWOM by peers and the factors shaping eWOM. The interviewees made it clear that they considered reviews by friends or family as much more trustworthy and credible than traditional and online marketing by companies. In terms of eWOM in the sharing economy, quantity and quality of reviews were found to play an important role. The newly identified influences by third parties originate from online newspapers and pop culture, which the interviewees considered as an important source of information.

The final part of the research question regards the outcomes of participating in the sharing economy. We derived two outcomes from our data, namely online trust and consumer engagement, in which the participation by the consumer has lead to the creation and sharing of customer engagement. The majority of interviewees had their concerns in regards to online trust in terms of risk and uncertainty, but their participation has positively affected their level of trust. It became clear that a negative experience does not necessarily result in disregarding sharing options in the future, especially if the consumer has previously had multiple positive experience. According to our interviewees, a positive experience is likely to entice future consumer engagement and potentially transform consumers into advocates. In turn, these consumers will restart the cycle and provide potential new consumers with the necessary peer information to validate their participation in the sharing economy.

7.2 Theoretical contributions

Due to a lack of studies providing a complete overview of the different drivers of participation, influencing factors by both companies and other consumers and the outcomes of participation, we were able to provide a deeper understanding of the consumer perspective. With our qualitative study we were able to gather valuable insights in different theoretical fields and developed a model that can serve as an important guideline to researchers and managers alike.

With regards to the drivers of participating in the sharing economy, this research has found that the drivers differ among accommodation and transportation services (which were the main industries our interviewees used), as our interviewees perceived convenient and experiential products differently in terms of motivational drivers. This contributes to the existing literature on the drivers of participation in the sharing economy by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012), Lamberton and Rose (2012) and Belk (2014a).

While researching the bigger companies within the sharing economy, we noticed that Airbnb places a lot of emphasis on the concept of belonging to a community and holding a shared vision through the sharing economy (Chesky, 2014). This made us consider the need for belongingness as a main driver for participating in the sharing economy. However, a significant majority of our interviewees dismissed this as a consideration when considering a sharing option.
Moeller and Wittkowski (2010, p. 186) did not find a close relationship between experience orientation and the preference of an access-based consumption option. Our research observed that the interviewees considered the need for experience an important driver of participating the sharing economy, as they seek a great neighbourhood, nice interior and less tourist-oriented experience as important. Thereby, the interviewees imply that they desire an authentic experience when choosing an accommodation. Thus, this research has developed a deeper understanding of the role that experience plays in the sharing economy on an individual basis, which contributes to theory in the academic field. The fact that consumers seek an authentic and not tourist-oriented experience was proposed by MacCannell (1973, p. 589). This research translated his findings into the sharing economy and today’s Web 2.0 context, which displays a new perspective.

In terms of Web 2.0, we have linked online marketing activities like viral marketing, celebrity endorsement, consumer referrals and product placement to the context of the sharing economy and discussed their effectiveness. Thereby, we added to existing literature, as this valuable connection was not yet explored. In addition to that, our data suggests that negative reviews do not immediately play a negative role and that quantity and quality of reviews affect the trustworthiness of the option.

### 7.3 Practical implications

The conceptual model of this research provides a deeper understanding of the consumer perspective in the context of the sharing economy. This offers managers an insight into different aspects of the drivers for participation, the influencing factors and the outcomes of participation. Based on the established drivers of participation in the sharing economy, the conceptual model allows managers to potentially modify their service offerings or a certain aspect of the brand in their messaging. Companies can attempt to influence the decision by the consumer through online marketing activities, this research has established how consumers perceive these activities and what they perceive as more credible. The interviewees emphasized the importance of execution and presentation of marketing activities, as these mainly help in deciding how they will be perceived by the consumers. The positive reception of consumer referral programs, for example, shows that consumers in the sharing economy are willing to engage in eWOM if they receive some form of incentive, which enables companies to shape their offerings accordingly.

The importance of eWOM is exemplified in this research as well, which emphasizes the importance of reducing the perception of risk and uncertainty. The fact that consumers collect information prior to participation in the sharing economy in order to reduce the degree of risk, emphasizes the need and importance of the availability of consumer reviews and eWOM. The companies can attempt to promote positive eWOM by utilizing the information from the interviewees of this research in order to gain insight on what they perceive as important information.

In terms of the outcomes of participation in the sharing economy, this research shows that negative experiences do not automatically lead to exiting the sharing economy as a consumer, which allows companies to showcase their willingness to improve service to avoid future negative experiences. Finally, this research emphasizes the need for brand advocates, because of their important role in consumer engagement and generating
reviews, which in turn reduce the perceived risk of participating in the sharing economy by future consumers. Based on this finding, companies should continue looking for ways to encourage consumers engagement.

7.4 Limitations and future research
One limitation of this research is that we have mainly gained deeper insight into the consumer perspective. We were able to include an opinion on the qualitative data from a product manager from a leading company in the sharing economy. However, we believe that it would be very beneficial to gain further insight into the company perspective on the findings of this research. Therefore, we suggest further research to focus on the company perspective, managerial theories and a respective sample. Additionally, the interviewees, as well as the comments by the product manager, showcased a trend towards price sensitivity on the consumer side. Future research could investigate how the price war influences companies in the sharing economy and what actions represent a suitable solution. Furthermore, we suggest further research on experience products in the luxury industry and to what extent ownership plays a role.

As this is a qualitative study, we cannot provide fully generalizable results, because, according to Hanson and Grimmer (2007, pp. 66-67), generalizability is stronger when conducting quantitative research. Thus, we perceive the non-generalizability of our sample as a limitation to our study. For further research, we suggest that researchers conduct a quantitative study that provides more generalizable results and tests the possible relationships that we have suggested in our conceptual model. The relatively small sample size is also something that has to be noted as a limitation of this research. Future research should be conducted based on a larger sample size to analyze the difference in perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, this research focuses on Generation Y as a sample group. We suggest that further research focuses on different target groups, as they might perceive the sharing economy in a different light and the insights might differ from the relatively young sample that this research has chosen. Future research could focus on an older audience that did not grow up with technology, which might result in different findings regarding the drivers of participation in the sharing economy, the influences by companies and consumers and the outcomes of participation.
8 TRUTH CRITERIA

This chapter addresses the truth criteria to determine the quality of the research. Therefore, we chose credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, as they represent suitable criteria to assess the quality of truthfulness in qualitative studies.

Two of the most prevalent criteria for assessing the quality of research are reliability and validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 399). According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982, p. 32), validity and reliability have external and internal functions. External reliability questions if independent researchers would find similar phenomena under very similar settings, while internal reliability defines whether other researchers would match with data in the same way under previously established constructs (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 32). Validity, on the other hand, seeks to evaluate the accuracy of scientific findings (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 32). In this case, internal validity concerns the authenticity of scientific observations and measurements in reality, whereas external validity questions whether such representations can be compared legitimately across groups (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 32).

However, qualitative researchers discuss that these terms have to be altered for qualitative research purposes because they are highly related to measurement, which is not a major aspect of qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 400). In fact, Saunders et al. (2016, p. 205) suggests that there several types of responses to this scenario: Firstly, researchers continue to use reliability and validity and adapt it to their qualitative purpose, secondly, researchers adapt parallel versions that recognize the distinct nature of qualitative research, and lastly, researchers move away from reliability and validity as the main criteria. This research will follow the second option as we consider it important to maintain high quality and credibility and refrain from applying quantitative evaluation criteria to a qualitative study. Guba and Lincoln (1985) introduced four alternative criterions to evaluate qualitative research, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In the following section the general criterion will be introduced and applied to our research process to ensure that the quality of this thesis is accurate.

The first criteria is that of credibility, which mirrors itself with internal validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 400). In order to establish the credibility of the findings of a research, researchers have to ensure that the research is carried out in line with the guidelines for good practice and making sure to show the research findings to the members of the social world that were studied in order to confirm that their understanding of that social world (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 401). Emphasis is placed on making sure that the presentation of information gathered from research participants is accurate, by checking data, analysis and interpretations with participants (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 206). In this research we have taken several actions to ensure the credibility of our understanding of the responses of the interviewees. First of all, during the interviews the responses were recorded and written down simultaneously. In addition, after answering a question, we shortly repeated the information that was given to us in order to confirm our understanding.

The second criteria of transferability is one that finds its parallel with external validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 400). According to Saunders (2016, p. 206), transferability is related to giving the reader of the researcher the opportunity to judge whether this research
is able to be transferred to a study in a different setting. Since a qualitative study usually includes the intensive study of a smaller group or individuals with a certain shared characteristic, qualitative findings usually tend to be screwed towards contextual uniqueness and a certain significance of the social world that is being studied (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 402). We took some actions to enable the readers to judge the transferability of our research. First of all, we tried to explain the important parts of the research as accurate as possible, this includes the research question, context and findings. Our questions for the interview were all presented in an interview guide, which allows readers to check the context in which the questions were asked and how they can interpret the interview findings as well. The research also clearly elaborates on the characteristics on which the interviewees were selected, while also theoretically backing up the choices.

The parallel version to reliability in quantitative research is the dependability criteria to assess trustworthiness (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 206). To ensure dependability, researchers should follow an ‘auditing’ approach, which involves formulating the problem, selecting research participants, taking notes and transcribing the interviews and deciding for an appropriate data analysis method (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 403). This serves as a means to record all changes and generate a reliable and dependable research focus that can be evaluated by others (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 206). In our research, we ensured that we defined the problem in a detailed manner and that it was relevant for the research field. Furthermore, we selected an appropriate sample that would enable us to gather data that answers our research question and deliver results that can be used to contribute to theory. In terms of documentation, we transcribed every interview shortly after and took notes while conducting them. Moreover, we discussed the choice of data analysis method and coding in depth and ensured that they are appropriate for this research study.

The fourth evaluation criteria is confirmability, which is a parallel criterion to objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300). Following confirmability ensures that the researchers are not influenced by personal values or theoretical bias, but that they have acted in good faith (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 400). During our research we were careful to be unbiased and refrained from being influenced by prejudices as they might distort the results. In fact, researchers should be reflexive, which means that they self-critically assess their attitude and to which extent their own preconceptions affect the research (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 154). Thus, as researchers we made sure that we selected objective sources to avoid any form of bias wherever possible.
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APPENDIX 1: SOCIAL MEDIA INTERVIEWEE INVITATIONS

Hello!

Naji Bazzi and I are currently working on our Master thesis in Marketing and we are researching how Web 2.0 motivates consumers to participate in the sharing economy and how it affects their behavior. We are now looking for people to participate in interviews that would last around 1 hour. You have to have used a sharing option (for example Airbnb, Uber, TaskRabbit, Lyft) in the past to participate in this study and you have to be born between 1980 and 2000. Thank you very much in advance! If you are interested please send me a private message!
APPENDIX 2: EMAIL TO MANAGERS FROM SHARING ECONOMY

Dear _____,

We are two marketing master students at Umea University and are currently working on our master thesis about the sharing economy, Web 2.0 and consumer behavior. More specifically we are researching the following research question:

Which drivers influence consumers to participate in the sharing economy and how does Web 2.0 influence their behavior during and after using a sharing option?

From our interviews with consumers, we were able to derive interesting findings, on which we would like you to share your thoughts, comments and opinions. This would prove very valuable for our research, since the addition of an insider perspective would add a credible and trustworthy factor to our analysis which focuses on the consumer perspective. Since your company is a leading participant of the sharing economy, it would be very valuable for our research to gain a managerial perspective for this topic.

We will ensure the ethical process of utilizing your insights on our findings, which includes handling your personal information and that of your employer in a confidential manner. In addition, the email correspondence shall not be shared outside of this relation and only serve the purpose of adding to our research.

In case you are interested in participating and willing to comment on our findings, we would appreciate it if a confirmation can be sent before the 1st May 2016. We would like to thank you for your time and we hope to get in touch with you very soon.

Kind regards,

Christine Opie & Naji Bazzi