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## **Abstract**

The Master's thesis is a contribution to the knowledge of digitalization of traditional human practices, more precisely gathering to the communities, so the object of the paper is digital communities and belonging phenomenon within.

Starting with an attempt to define the current society based on information flows around the globe and technological developments, the research investigates online and offline settings' correlation and individual's place within. Touching the main spheres of daily life: economy, labour market, social relations, and culture the current networked society is looked through the prism of networking and digital communication.

In the paper, gathering to virtual (digital) communities is seen as a trendy societal practice. Especially in the economic domain since recent occurrence of new economic modes as sharing economy in C2C field reshaped the whole market. The rise of global and successful brands, mainly operating on the digital platforms, influenced consumption patterns of the certain market segments. Using computer-mediated means for consumption patterns made individuals to gather around certain brands forming global digital communities where individuals establish relations, interact, sell and buy mainly in the disembodied they counting on the hi-tech equipment.

In order to understand how it is possible to belong to the community that has no physical construct in the real life, the choice to investigate the first digitally savvy generational: millennials was reached and several in-depth interviews were made with members of GenY trying to understand their place within digital world. In addition, more abstract group not defined in the sense of generational cohorts was analysed using a case of real digital community using netnography as a method to collect data. The named case is virtual community gathering around Airbnb brand, one the most influential companies in C2C field at the given time.

The research follows social constructivism paradigm and interpretivism tradition. The chosen philosophy of science is understood as handy to capture and analyse meaning people carry about digital world and practices within. The purpose of the study was not to find a general definition of belonging phenomenon in the virtual reality but rather explore how electronic communication is expressed following relationship establishment which and creates the communal sense of belonging and being a part of a group. It is important to mention that digital communication was analysed in a

line with traditional one so highlighting uniqueness and specific traits common for virtual interactions.

## Table of content

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Humanity throughout its history evidenced a number of divergent regimes that followed each other and primary were based on developments. From the oldest ages to the current days innovations improved the society and at each stage it was defined by the most influential and hardly irreplaceable novelties that had a power to reshape the whole way of living. The Stone Age, an era, when humanity mastered stone was followed by periods defined by noble metals that improved the quality of living. Better conditions let people to settle, create bigger tribes that grew into the whole communities. Accumulated knowledge led the humanity through divergent political and religious regimes from totally strict to liberating ones. At the same time more tangible developments accompanied and supplemented each other so that humanity faced new forms of economic and social progression: starting with agriculture, going through industrial age, and ending with modern times famous for technological inventions. It is not a coincidence that it is formally accepted to talk about these developments as a catalysts to start the whole social revolution affecting all spheres of life: social relations, economy, culture, politics, and others.

In a broad sense, contemporary society is the society alive at the given moment of the time and distinguished from others by social constructions, tools, and developments unique only for that period. Basically every historical epoch mirrors the best and most knowledgeable society it can be.

Narrowing down to the current contemporary society, it can be described as:

The contemporary society at the moment features great technological dependence and innovations, longer average life spans in people, higher levels of literacy, and such things as greater levels of gender equality. Technological advances have also led to the notion of globalization and a higher awareness of international concerns (Information society, 2017)

All named features defining the society are highly interlinked. Technological innovations facilitated flows of knowledge that modified traditional practices alive throughout humankind history as well as influenced creation of the new ones. Because of the easier circulation of information around the world, lines between local and global dimensions, national and international boundaries became blurrier. All this terminated in the creation of the new networked society.

Fast technological progression transformed perceptions about the world and individuals place within. Traditional physical reality was extended and supplemented by innovative cyberspace: intangible electronic reality simulating the physical reality but not experienced through senses and not framed by physical space and time.

Soon after invasion of technologies, all spheres of life were digitalized by information: from economy to communication, the most prominent practice of humanity. Ability to exist in several realities fragmented human's identity and today it is more common to talk about heterogeneous individual rather than homogenous. On the physical level, people also became way more mobile: travelling regarding personal, recreational, educational, or business reasons is a norm these days.

Cultural and entertainment spheres of life became dual: in one side there is local and authentic culture, in the other global and intended for the masses. International networks made it easier to access and get knowledge about any recreational routines around the globe, so the culture, same as individual's identity, became heterogeneous and blurred.

The most visible shift was made in the economy sector since the market became based on intangible services flows around the globe while tangible products' shifting turned to easily achieved transnational practice. Labour market, so important for people's well-being, also was touched by informatization: physical work lost its importance against work based on creative and innovative thinking.

In general, in a light of globalization, fragmentation, and deterritorialization based on massive flows of industrial, financial, and knowledge capital flows, global migration together with people mobility, and information sharing the notions of space, territory, and traditional human practices have to be rethought (Ribeiro, 1997).

In this thesis, old human practice reshaped by current developments, that is, digital communities gathering around brands, are in the focus. On the abstract level, a community is formed through extension of social relationships, it is abstract enough to be distinguished from intimate face-to-face level of communication (James, 1996) but yet integrating individuals on the basis of similar interests, goals, or worries. Traditional communities are framed by spatial context and require physical appearance at the same time and place. But in the post-modern age of technologies, known for the

fast pace of life and people mobility together with fragmented identification of oneself (Giddens, 1991), the need to find a new and easy way to 'be together' rose and virtual communities gathering in cyberspace developed as an alternative to the traditional ones (Willson, 1997, 145).

Gathering to virtual (digital) communities can be seen as a trendy societal phenomenon (Holmes, 1997, 27). Technologies, and especially computer-mediated means as the Internet, made it easier to connect globally and get needed information fast because digital communities are based on commonality of interests rather than geographic and physical proximity (Reynolds, 1993, 157).

The rise of the ICTs (information and communication technologies) as the Internet also challenged global market and new forms of economy appeared regardless production and services specialization. In this paper the focus is on tourism and hospitality businesses as one of the most vivid, consumable, and profitable markets at the current time.

That tourism is a global phenomenon shows existing numbers. Namely, the latest available data (November 2015) from EU members declares that in 2014 EU residents (aged 15 and above) made 1.2 billion tourism trips regardless personal or business reasons (Eurostat, 2015). Meanwhile, *U.S. International Air Travel Statistics* reports that in 2016 U.S. citizens made almost 73 million air travels (US, 2016). Even though, data do not cover all possible numbers of travels, is not full and made only in 2 regions, it gives an impression that travelling is common for contemporary people.

Regarding market and tourism field, divergent economic models are used by companies: B2C (business to customer), B2B (business to business), or C2C (customer to customer). There are variety of online B2C booking systems that connect certain companies with end users looking for hotels (Booking), flights (Momondo) and other services. Meanwhile, C2C marketplaces operate in a slightly different way because any organization's task is to offer a sharing system which empowers users to share various household appliances (NeighborGood), accommodation (Airbnb), transport means as cars (Uber) or bicycles (Spinlister). The rise of C2C organizations was noticed in 2008-2010 after the Financial crisis. C2C companies became a serious competitor for traditional service providers because of the ability to offer less costly, unique and personal way of consuming (Economist, 2013, March 9<sup>th</sup>).

Idealism respecting sharing economy also carries doubts and risks an end-user might experience. It is not a coincidence that this form of business is also called stranger economy. It mainly rely on trust built by social reviews (positive and negatives) and ratings of existing users who consume services.

A number of platforms are connected with Facebook which let users to see if there are any shared connections with unknown clients. In addition, some platforms do criminal records, driving and credit histories checks of customers to assure safety when a real purchase and money transaction happens. C2C platform has not only to take care of existing customers but and meet legal specific regulations to maintain business (Economist, 2013, March 9<sup>th</sup>). All these measures might strengthen brand's and company's behind reputation in the eyes of users.

Digital C2C or P2P (peer-to-peer) economy mode in tourism and hospitality sector is quite new and successful networking system but there is no ability to claim that it is better or replaceable alternative to traditional providers. Nevertheless, it is obvious that P2P marketplaces have something exciting and new to offer for customers. For example, when Airbnb (at that moment Airbed & Breakfast) entered the market in 2008, it made no revenue, had difficulties to find investors and expand business. Only after 3 years, the start-up was valued at \$1.3million and became globally recognizable brand. How one of the co-founders, Joe Gebbia, mentioned, the platform's success partly depended on good timing when sharing economy was becoming popular. The old market practices as renting, swapping and sharing just were updated and framed by technologies. Nowadays, some conventional accommodation providers are re-launching or expanding their brands to offer services and attributes that travellers are looking for renting via Airbnb (Salter, 2012).

More detailed, Airbnb is a marketplaces offering renting services. From 2008 when the platform was founded, it witnessed a rapid growth and to this day guests finding accommodation via Airbnb number strikes 150,000,000. The company represents itself as:

Airbnb is a trusted community marketplace for people to list, discover, and book unique accommodations around the world — online or from a mobile phone or tablet. Whether an apartment for a night, a castle for a week, or a villa for a month, Airbnb connects people to unique travel experiences, at any price point, in more than 65,000 cities and 191 countries. And with world-class customer service and a growing community of users, Airbnb is the easiest way for people to monetize their extra space and showcase it to an audience of millions. (airbnb, 2017)

Tourism sector is a huge part of the global market, companies are constantly targeting travellers with new opportunities and experiences. To this day, Airbnb platform have expanded its services and offer not only accommodation but and various experiences a client can purchase: from walks around



certain city to dining experiences. The attractiveness of these services depends on the fact, that any tour or event is hosted by local people thus a tourist might expect to get more unique experience in comparison with the one that is proposed by travel firms. Secondly, the held communication between host and guest is more flexible and personalized since involved parties contact directly and can shape offering together.

As Airbnb is global company, it is hard to define a typical user of it. Nevertheless, the platform has a strong community around it connecting thousands of people, blog, forum and constantly released reports about made purchases so general data covering hosts and guests is available. In one of the releases (Airbnb, 2016) it was claimed that at the present time the biggest travelling group using services is millennials. Even though, the report (2016) gives numbers and the evidence that millennials are into travelling (roughly 60% of all orders vis platform made by them), the findings are justified by quantitative data and do not give an answer to the questions why this generation is so into online sharing economy, what both parties (host and guest) included in a purchase expect and how enrich (or not) themselves and how being and consuming online makes one to become a member of the digital and global travellers' community. Having all these doubts above, the following main research question is reached:

- **How belonging to a community is expressed via digital platforms?**

Airbnb as the digital marketplace declares that its core value is 'belonging':

“People thought Airbnb was about renting houses. But really, we’re about home. You see, a house is just a space, but a home is where you belong. And what makes this global community so special is that for the very first time, you can belong anywhere<...> first entered this community, we all know that getting in isn’t a transaction. It’s a connection that can last a lifetime. That’s because the rewards you get from Airbnb aren’t just financial—they’re personal—for hosts and guests alike. At a time when new technologies have made it easier to keep each other at a distance, you’re using them to bring people together. And you’re tapping into the universal human yearning to belong—the desire to feel welcomed, respected, and appreciated for who you are, no matter where you might be (Airbnb, 2017).

Even though, the illustration of core value is oriented to physical reality, it can easily be adjusted to the virtual side of Airbnb since the company operates on digital platform: a customer journey from

initial decision-making process to financial transaction happens online interacting with other community members and only actual purchasing act (renting accommodation) happens offline. So it is possible to claim that belonging online might evolve into belonging offline.

Yet, the feeling of belonging and its achievement in cyberspace is a controversial notion requiring detailed attention. Firstly, being able to access digital community calls for possessing technological means: computers, tables, or smartphones. Owning technologies might be seen as usual practice in developed countries but in developing nation-states access to latest innovations might be limited while technologies seen as luxurious commodities. Secondly, digitalization of daily life routines is relatively new phenomenon requiring certain knowledge and not all individuals might be eager to master it. Even though in this thesis the focus is on Gen Y, which theoretically is accepted as digitally-savvy generation, there is no rule of thumb that all millennials are into technologies. Therefore, the first sub-question helping to answer the main inquiry is:

### **1. How current society is perceived by individuals?**

Answering to the question might give a direction to understanding actual link between physical reality people live within and digital extension (or part) of it. At the same time, it would give a chance to confirm or deny globally accepted hypothesis that millennials are digitally-savvy generation counting on technologies on the daily basis.

Second issue asking for separate consideration is concentrated around virtual communication. In cyberspace all interactions are mainly based on written data which might be supported with visual or interactive content. But the initial communication among agents happen so to say ‘behind the screen’ with no physically real connection. So the second essential sub-question is:

### **2. How communicative acts are shaped by usage of technologies?**

Finding out the way casual communication is maintained in cyberspace should contribute to overall understanding respecting human relationship establishment.

The third problematic concern is directly connected with the latter. Relationships among people are based on inter-trust. In physical world where agents count on five senses and face-to-face interactions the trust is dubious and gradually achieved social construction, so even harder to define in digital world where agents are not present physically so having ability to represent themselves and maintain any desired identity or even identities. However, digital communities exist, online swaps, purchases,

and money transactions happen, so there had to be some features of cyber communication that justify it and make trustworthy. Thus, the third sub-question is:

### **3. How trust mechanism is achieved in digital reality?**

Clarification of the issue of trust should reveal how emotions and feelings to other human beings are built digitally.

In overall, the purpose of the paper is to understand what qualities keep people connected in virtual reality that replicate the real life cases and does not exist physically. Secondly, digital community itself is abstract and intangible construction depending on technologies so, in general, electronically simulated place where people yet spend time and establish relationships. Individual's place within cyber world also calls for a new understanding about one self's identity. All named notions are important to analyse since digitalization of daily life is currently happening and even expanding phenomenon (because of constant developments in the tech-field and consequently more accessible and cheaper technological means) so understanding why and how people experience themselves and connect with others in 'not existing' (at least physically) space is important. Together with that, the researcher expects to see if it is possible to distinguish online and offline worlds as separate realities, or they are interlinked and extending each other. Derived findings might supplement existing knowledge regarding social and consumeristic behaviour.

## **2. Methodology**

The chapter is concentrated and points out a departure of the research. Starting with explanation of philosophy of science: ontological, epistemological, and methodological viewpoints that are seen appropriate for the research. Consequently, the choices of study design and methods for data collection are underlined. And finally, limitations and difficulties that the researcher faced during writing process are elaborated. Overall, the section guides the researcher from one side and shows a reader how the knowledge was built from the other.

### **2.1. Paradigm**

The way the research is conducted depends on chosen paradigm that indicates basic acknowledged belief system (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). In other words, paradigm is a theory of the way of thinking and learning (Jonassen, 1991). It answers to fundamental questions what the world is, how it is constructed, what kind of relationship researcher has with it, and how the knowledge about it is built.

This research follows social constructivism paradigm. Defining simply, constructivism is more subjective rather than objective paradigm and this feature distinguishes it from objectivism paradigm (Cartel et al, 2007). If assuming that pure constructivism is on the left while clear objectivism on the right side of a pole, the basic assumptions about ontology, epistemology, methodology, and an individual's place within the world can vary, therefore, the researcher has to be aware of several possible constructivism approaches (Cartel et al, 2007.; Klotz and Lynch, 2007).

After evaluation of all social realities, knowledge, and constructions touched in this paper, the researcher acknowledged the social constructivism as a leading paradigm which is supplemented and expanded with several assumptions taken from more objectivist perspective. Following Cartel et al. (2007) typology of paradigms, the choice is detailed further.

Advocating on constructivism, reality is understood as a social construction. This indicates that the reality is built as a continuous process, where agents appoint themselves to create meanings on the daily basis. This is done through language and actions, habits and routines that become symbolic modes and constructions that constitute social reality. Symbolic modes might result in creation of shared, but at the same time multiple realities that are constructed personally and cooperated

mutually. So the attempt of every human being is to create subjective realities understandable and interpretable for themselves and others.

On the other side, the research focuses on the information society and analysis of it requires more objective viewpoint. Here the reality is admitted as continuously changing due to the flows of information. If in constructivist approach social *construct* is a key word, than here social *activity* is in the light. All activities in the world are based on exchanges of information, learning, and achieved developments. Human's place within the world is based on non-stop interactions and exchanges within his environment: receiving, interpreting, and creating meanings because of the gained knowledge. The approach claims constant change so naturally an individual is facing perpetual learning followed by evolved adjustment. In the case of adjustment, individual's link to the world might become homogeneous but in all other cases the world is understood as chaotic and never the same.

After definition of dual paradigm, the illustration of analysis case is needed. It is understood that community's phenomenon is an old shared social construct common for a group of people carrying similar symbolic understandings about the world, but every member of any community put divergent meaning to the notion of belonging to it and takes individual role within. Even though the practice to gather into groups is noticed throughout humanity's history, firstly the expression of it have changed, secondly the interpretation of individual's involvement within also altered. Recent technological revolution influenced fast flows of divergent information that a person absorbs and makes sense of. Technologies also modifies the way an individual accepts his identity since he is able to have a number of self-representations. Together with that, relationships among people also get the new expressions since a person is no longer framed by spatial context and face-to-face interaction as the only. In general, an individual is able to handle heterogeneous relationship with others and surroundings.

Overall, combined paradigms are not in their supreme forms: impure constructivism meets not strict objectivism and both approach makes appropriate paradigm to analyse the case of belonging to communities in the digital age. In other words, the decision not to adopt any full and framed paradigm creates subjective-objective continuum (Cartel et al. 497) that leaves space for interpretation but at the same time does not neglect that there are more stable social structures.

### **2.3. Ontology: how the analysis is conceptualized?**

This research follows three-dimensional social constructivism model proposed by Klotz and Lynch which emphasizes inter-subjectivity, context and power in the particular social reality (Klotz and Lynch, 2007).

Intersubjectivity emerges between structures and agents. Intersubjective understandings are norms, rules, meanings, cultures and ideologies that can be called social phenomena and that influence creation of identities and actions. Furthermore, social structures become stable over time because of the particular created meanings and the emerged norms and rules. These guide how the world works as well as what types of behaviour are legitimate for agents. Authors highlight that more than one individual has to accept certain social structures for them to exist (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, 7-8). This in no way means that generalization is possible for social constructivist approach, it just indicates that there are some generally accepted understandings that people can refer to and consequently create meanings about the reality. Here it is possible differentiation between ‘norms’ and ‘presentations’ as the authors put it, the difference between stability and broad acceptance (e.g. norms) and more flexible emerging social constructs that can be contested (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, 8-9). In terms of communities, it is an old social practice, throughout humanity’s history people always gathered to groups just the expression of that changed. In contemporary society, it is possible to talk about divergent networking: both offline and online. The notion of belonging remains the same: the wish to be accepted just the way it can be achieved is different. For instance, individual perceptions respecting communities might divide generational cohorts: the ones born before technological revolution of ICTs (information and communication technologies) and the ones born after. Being or not digitally-savvy may influence subjective understandings of how a person might be a part of bigger group and what conditions have to be met to actually feel as a member of it (e.g. being physically near or not; revealing personal information or not, etc.). Overall, intersubjective understandings vary from individual to individual.

Further, the researched reality is framed by spatial, historical and social contexts (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, 9) that are the second building block of constructivism ontology. In different contexts intersubjective norms and presentations get new forms. The research is concerned around globalized information society in which people are networked more than ever before. Technologies also play a big part in how people might understand and even extend themselves and conduct both old and new

activities. The biggest contextual contrast in the research is between online and offline realities and how a person constructs himself within them. In broad sense, spatial and social expressions in the paper are concerned about the digitalization of the daily life.

The third, power, dimension is relevant in terms of multiple meanings that exist, often in opposition. As agents exercise a particular degree of power, some meanings can be reinforced or undermined in a specific context. Thus, exercising the power gives the ability to reconstruct discourses and change meanings (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, 10-11). In the case of the research, reality and virtuality are seen as separate but linked discourses. Individuals might have multiple identities and constitute practices in both worlds. The constructivist question is which world is more influential and in which social constructions can be understood as genuine and real as well as how they are expressed. As it is elaborated further, the internet can be seen as a liberating means of communication in comparison with other means. So the researcher's role is to capture power relations that exist in the society and see how individuals construct social situations and practices in online discourse.

#### **2.4. Epistemology: how it is known what is known?**

Consequently, the researcher is challenged by the question of how does she know what she knows (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, Jonassen, 1991, Guba, 1990). The answer to the question mirrors epistemological considerations that basically is a theory of knowledge (Cartel et al., 2007). Since the followed paradigm is social constructivism, the researcher engages in the interpretation while collecting data and analysing it. The goal is to explain social world in general terms but as generalization does not present multiple realities and contradicts with fundamental ontological considerations, constructivism often offers complex, multi-layered and context-based explanations for social phenomena. Further drawing on Klotz and Lynch, division is put on constitutive and causal claims. Shortly, constitutive questions should be about 'how possible' followed by causal 'why' questions, or vice versa, (Klotz and Lynch, 2007, 14-15) in this way building knowledge about agents' behaviour. Since the researcher acknowledges her role in construction of 'what is known' and cannot keep aside personal values, thoughts and experiences, subjectivism is a leading part of data interpretation. Seeing reality through subjective prism is common and acceptable for social constructivist (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Jonassen, 1991; Klotz and Lynch, 2007). This means, that the researcher is tightly connected with analysis, data, and informants. As a result, the findings might be

understood as a united construction extracted from both sides: researcher and external data. So the findings are context-specific and applicable for the certain case. The notion of researcher's involvement is detailed next.

## **2.5. Researcher's role**

Since the researcher accept social constructivism paradigm as leading, she also constitutes her place within the study. The researcher is the one who investigates the case, but at the same time is and a learner: the knowledge is gained and interpreted counting on internal experiences together with external sources so the final interpretation is individualistic to some degree. In other words, the researcher is a designer who maps particular reality in a specific context. The researcher assumes that readers are also learners who have capacity to interpret the phenomenon on their own right. Thus, the researcher's stance respecting external world is in a favour for reader to build meanings about it (Jonassen, 1991, 11).

The studied phenomenon of belonging to web communities with a case of Airbnb digital platform on the top, is familiar for the investigator since she has used Airbnb services personally, therefore, already carries certain meanings about it. It is important to mention that researcher has not been an active member of this particular platform's community prior data collection, only interacted with other users while making purchase decisions and renting accommodation. Even though that is far away from being an active member of community, some social relations were built via online means. And as a constructivist she believes that her interpretation is equally fair to the others used at this research and can at some point shape data collection, analysis of it, and finally findings.

## **2.6. Methodology: how the tools for research are selected?**

Used dual paradigm challenges a selection of academic methods to gather data. The researcher is aware that analysed phenomenon respecting communities requires interpretation which is common for constructivism but the society itself in which the phenomenon is vital is seen from more objectivistic angle, thus the process of choosing methodological tools and techniques has to be explained.



To start with, the research is based on qualitative manner. Quantitative analysis was refused as a technique to use due to its nature to measure and see individuals as elements that can be extracted from the context in order to investigate them untouched by external powers (Cartel et al, 2007, 498). In the case, the researcher believes that individuals cannot be totally remoted from the surroundings, they are influenced by the information and developments whereas the technologies are seen as an extension of human activities. At the same time, meanings about social constructions are made individualistically. Narrowing down, the technological revolution is seen as an event that changed the way people interact and identify themselves.

As already mentioned, the leading paradigm here is constructivism, therefore, the most applicable methodology is hermeneutics (Bryman, 2012; Cartel et al, 2007 Guba and Lincoln, 1985). Hermeneutics is chosen due to its capacity for interpretation. The process involves going back and forth respecting gained knowledge with an ability to revise and supplement it so the construction of knowledge is continuous (Thompson et al. 1994). Keeping in mind that current post-modern information society is in the focus of the multiple realities and identities, constructivist's methodology giving the space for researcher's interpretations seems to derive more findings regarding the topic than any homogenous quantitative method.

## **2.7. Research design**

After the explanation of initial understanding about the world, the research design which guides the study further has to be chosen.

To start with, before formulating the final problematic question, the researcher spent quite an amount of time analysing already existing theories about information society, communities and communication within, identity, and others that could help discover possible gap in the field respecting digital communities. After that, narrowed literature review was established which examines the case of this paper: digital platforms from various angles. So the adopted strategy is "theory-then-research" (Henn et al, 2006, 49) or in other words: deductive approach (Bryman, 2012, 24). Set up knowledge regarding phenomenon created theoretical background, highlighted possible problematic topics, and gave a reference about research design: the way how data could be collected and analysed afterwards (Henn et al, 2006, 49; Bryman, 2012, 46).

Because of the nature of the problem formulation and the paradigm which is more constructive than objective, this research embraced case study design. According to R. Yin (2003), a case study can be defined as: “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003, 18). From the first sign the topic “belonging to the digital communities” might look as a large-scale and context-independent research requiring other and probably more objective design (Flyvbjerg, 2006, 391). Nevertheless, problem formulation was reduced to the certain digital platform: Airbnb and the analysed sample focuses on the specific generational cohort: millennials. Counting on the assumption that millennials is the first totally digitally-savvy generation using Airbnb services the most at the present time (Airbnb, 2016), it is understood as a small scale case study research. Some may argue that younger generation (Z) could present digital society better since they were born at the time when the Internet's usage was on the peak. But the exact birth date is on the debate: it varies from 1993 to 2002 (Matthews, 2008; Wikipedia, 2017) so it would be hard to find and define post-millennials as such. Secondly, majority of generation members are teenagers at the given moment, therefore their online consumption patterns are just forming.

The researcher is aware that any derived findings should not be generalized and applicable to all members of generation Y, but expects that the results might supplement overall knowledge about the cohort (Flyvbjerg, 2006, 394). To enhance academic literature regarding millennials is important since at the given time they are the most influential consuming group in the world (Jeff and Garton, 2013).

). Even though the thesis is concerned about belonging to the various digital communities, those communities are based on the similar interests/ goals members have, and often that is connected with consuming goods and services.

Consequently, the used case study type is a critical one because the analysis is built on the theory in a manner to catch specific circumstances and to confirm, challenge or extend the existing theory (Yin, 2003, 40). Belonging to communities is not a new phenomenon but its expression via ICTs differs from the old practices to gather into groups. And since millennials carry certain attitudes to the technologies and their interruption level within daily life, the researcher is aware that findings might approve or deny the traditional way of being a member of any community for this certain generation. In the words of Flyvbjerg one can look for the 'most likely' or contrary the 'most unlikely' case

(Flyvbjerg, 2006, 398). To add, D. de Vaus (2001) also highlights that a case study is applicable design to investigate how a certain tribe behaves on a specific occasion framed by time and place (Vaus, 2001, 50-51). If to conceptualize the whole generation as a tribe having similar characteristics and redefine spatial context (distinguish online and offline settings) approaching the topic as a critical case might be verified as an appropriate one.

## **2.8. Data collection**

In order to answer problem formulation, the data has to be collected. Here both primary and secondary data is used to be able to look at the phenomenon of digital communities fully. Since the object is web communities, the researcher acknowledge two existing realities: real one and virtual. Therefore, applied methods are chosen in a manner to represent both online and offline life:

- Literature review
- Netnography
- Interviews

**Literature review.** In the theoretical sense, a literature review is a: 'systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesising the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners (Fink, 2005). In practical sense, a literature review is a departure point for a researcher to build knowledge about certain phenomena, develop understanding what is already analysed and what are the possible gaps needing additional academic attention in the field.

The researcher was able to find a high number of texts that are somehow related to the digital communities in a broad sense, and Airbnb platform in a narrow. Every previously and academically approved study was understood as a small piece of a total understanding of the phenomenon of web communities. It helped to understand the reviewed subject; identify the ways of possible interpretation and conflicts alive within the field; see what is already covered and what are the implications for future research; map and describe how different studies are connected, and finally place the original analysis within the existing literature (Booth et al., 2012, 7).

From the first sight, the literature review provided here might look fragmented but it gave the researcher a taste of the importance and complexity the current society lives in, challenged her to

think and rethink possible problematic areas and inspired to see common and daily routines in the new light as a source for understanding fundamental human practices going throughout humanity history.

It has to be mentioned that literature review cannot be totally distinguished from theory chapter, controversially, it is seen as a prolongation of it. After presenting grand theories respecting the post-modern information society, the researcher continued and narrowed the problem area to the certain human practice of gathering to the communities and a case of Airbnb digital platform. The latter platform has been analysed from various angles that might be not connected to the specific problem but helped to uncover specification of it and guided the researcher further.

### **Netnography**

In a line with Kozinets (2011), netnography is understood as: "an ethnography on the Internet, a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications. As a marketing research technique, netnography uses the information that is publicly available in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant consumer groups" (Kozinets, 2002, 62). The same as technologies are seen as an extension for new forms of human communication, netnography is recognized as a methodological tool for a reshaped ethnography. In the basic sense, it is an unobtrusive participation and observation within chosen (web) community. Netnography has an advantage in terms of time and finances consumption (in respect to ethnography) since the Internet is an environment which is not framed by spatial context, thus, the researcher is able to access information on personal terms. Nevertheless it seems relatively easier to gather data, some rules how to do valuable and ethical netnography exist. Kozinets (2002) distinguishes five steps a researcher should follow that are elaborated further (Kozinets, 2002).

*Culture entree* consist of two steps: having a specific research question which would guide a search and building a knowledge about the phenomenon one is interested in. In the case of this study, the researcher constituted final problematic question while getting the knowledge about online world and its place within contemporary society. Web communities were in the interest area because the researcher herself is a member of several of them (not in the favour for this thesis). Secondly, the case of Airbnb as an example of alive and global digital platform was chosen since the researcher is a

member of it, have experience communicating with other users as well as purchasing services. It is important to mention, that before doing netnography, the researcher was a passive member of the community: had an account but did not participate in any active discussion or observed others. Yet, being a user of the community simplified the entrée step since time for looking for the possible web platforms was saved, registering step was avoided, and a chance to collect data instantly appeared.

**Data collection and analysis.** The collection consist of one compulsory and one optional steps:

- directly copied data from the computer-mediated context;
- data made by a researcher, e.g. inscribed information helping interpret content.

Even though netnography is handy method to quickly gather information, there exist a chance of data overload (Kozinets, 2002, 64): a case when a researcher gets lost between on-topic and off-topic information. Majority of digital platforms keep informal environment approach which means that a number of topics discussed there touches all spheres of life, thus the difficulty to extract the data that is connected with a research emerges. So, it does not mean that the method guarantees easier way to collect valid data: the researcher has to be prepared to get familiar with forum, its members (active and passive ones), communication style, website's policy, and so on in order to be able to derive needed information. Here the researcher saw an advantage in making inscriptions: comments explaining opinions and attitudes might help quicker orient oneself among data. In the case, the researcher acknowledged that comments justifying data were done only partly: some extracts seemed directly connected with the research while others needed additional explanation. Together with that, Kozinets (2002) recommends to write field notes: personal observations and emotions a researcher carries. In the case of being social constructivist, including subjectivity to an interpretation is understood as a valid and needed thing to do

**Trustworthy interpretation.** As debated, online reality is mostly based on observation of written context (Kozinets, 2002) where users can choose individually what kind of self-image (images) to represent. Therefore, the question if online discourse is a valid landscape to analyse individuals has to be elaborated. Kozinets (2002) suggests to look at a written data as a source to investigate communicative acts and behaviour vivid within web community rather than members' identities (Kozinets, 2002, 64). In this way, textual content might be seen as multiple and actually observable data expressed by the forum, its members, nature of communication (formal or informal), posting aim and frequency, etc. that occur through computer-mediated means. To summarize, the researcher

looks at this data as online communicative acts and expressions. Kozinets (2002) also adds that in order to have full set of observable units and a chance to give more generalized account, several methods might be integrated. The researcher was conscious about limitations of netnography, thus chosen to do the latter proposal to combine several methods to present the phenomenon of online communication that is alive among millennials.

**Ethics.** The online data that a researcher used is publicly available but not consciously given for analysis, so the researcher had to follow several guidelines in order not to create an environment to harm investigated ones (Kozinets, 2002). That was done by revealing researcher's intentions respecting study and informing researched ones if any publicly given data was directly cited; guarantying anonymity and confidentiality for respondents as well as seeking for their feedback. Since Airbnb forum is easily accessible and the researcher is a member of it, the issue of contacting other members was overcome. Because of the amount of data, the researcher had no ability to contact, get to know, and inform every member of community individually. Instead, she started a separated conversation visible for the public, in which presented herself, the topic and goal of thesis, and directly sought for possible interviewees (image x)

**Members check.** In a basic sense, after the research is done, analyst should contact community's members and present findings (Kozinets, 2002). In this way, the ethical issues to use inappropriate information might be avoided. At the same time, the researcher had an ability to exchange information and supplement individual interpretation with new data given by the members (if there was any). The method helped to avoid invalid analysis and increased an opportunity to generalize findings. The feedbacks regarding data and analysis of it were asked from Airbnb users that were interviewed.

**Faced issues.** Even though netnography is estimated as easier to conduct than ethnography, the researcher faced problems while collecting data.

Firstly, the research's topic is broad so data collection was narrowed down to the single case of Airbnb. Nevertheless, on the Internet it is possible to find a high number of platforms/ forums where people discuss this brand in one way or another. Therefore, a choice to extract data from original Airbnb community centre (<https://community.withairbnb.com/t5/Community-Center/ct-p/community-center>) where the content is created by users but which is supervised by the company's representatives was reached. It was assumed that it is focused forum where individuals gather around

similar interests but are free to interact in uncontrolled and unrelated way so analysis of divergent conversations actually could reveal the way of communication. Secondly, the forum is ‘alive’, new topics appear constantly, some of them are discussed highly, others not commented at all. The structure of website is elaborated further.

Secondly, the researcher faced an issue with identifying forum’s users that are members of generation Y because information about agents’ age is not publicly available so the only way to find it out was direct contacting and asking for personal information. Even though the researcher is registered member, the Airbnb platform does not give ability to message users personally and start conversation. The only way to get in touch with users is making an actual booking for services/accommodation they offer as hosts but the researcher felt that relationship building in this way would be inappropriate and ethically unfair since contacted users would expect to discuss booking and purchasing rather than being asked to give personal details. Therefore, the researcher slightly changed approach: data extracted from community forum is used in the cases when analysed topic is linked to overall society, online communication and existing within digital community. Questions that are directly interested in millennials characteristics were not analysed counting on netnographic data.

**Airbnb Community.** Airbnb web application consists of several blocks, one of them is ‘Community’: the forum where registered users can communicate. In the front page, the forum is inviting a person to become a member: “Join the conversation and connect with other hosts who are creating a world where anyone can belong” (Airbnb, 2017).

The forum is easy to browse, in the front page any registered user is greeted with a name (chosen personally), the menu is shown in the right top of the screen introducing separate sections where it is possible to *Discuss*, *Discover*, *Meet up*, and *See personal account*.

Scrolling down a user can see references to *the Top*, *Recent*, and *Unanswered* discussions as well as *Top users* leaving the most comments at a current time and named as contributors. Also one can quickly orient himself finding needed information using fast clicks labelled as *Explore tips and tricks*, *Connect locally*, and *Get support*. From the first sight, it might seem that all needed information to become a belonging member of the community as well as to analyse it can be extracted right away, but data collection on the Internet is tricky because every click might lead to a

number of further options and references, thus the researcher has a risk to be overloaded by both important and unnecessary data (Kozinets, 2002; Xun and Reynolds, 2010).

In order to avoid information overflow but discover the way members communicate, the data was extracted only from *Discussions* section, which is separated to sub-topics (Image x)

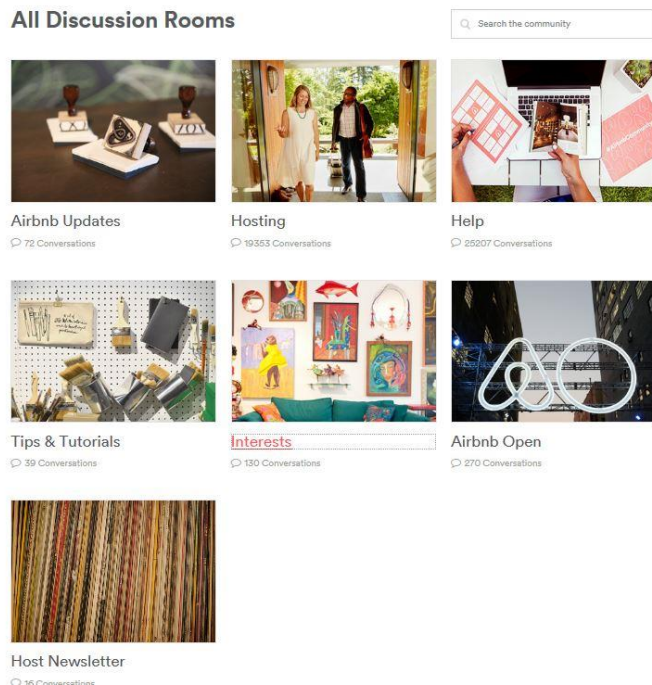


Image x

There are 7 main sub-topics but in a case of fast and direct inquiry, the *Search* option gives ability to make a narrow inquiry and get all discussions connected with the key words (the researcher herself tried it with a key word ‘Copenhagen’ and got 38 search results).

Coming back to the sub-topics (called *Rooms*) and conversations within (in other words discussions), they are\*<sup>1</sup>:

1. Airbnb Updates (72 conversations)
2. Hosting (19313 conversations)
3. Help (25146 conversations)
4. Tips and tutorials (39 conversations)

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<sup>1</sup> \* The data of available conversations was extracted at 15/08/2017. The number of conversations is constantly changing since new posts might appear everyday



5. Interests (130 conversations)
6. Airbnb Open (269 conversations)
7. Host Newsletter (15 conversations)

## **Interviews**


Literature review and netnography gave a space for first impressions and inspired the researcher to continue analyse the phenomenon in depth. Thus, semi-structured interviews were chosen to do with members of Airbnb community that have used platform's services.

Respecting typology of internet users, the researcher got in touch with members that from personal perspective and accessible data seemed to be active users. In Kozinets (2002) words, members were either *Devotees* or *Insiders* within web community having strong social ties with others and trying consumption activities via Airbnb platform (Kozinets, 2002, 64). The researcher sustained a special "individualized to every participant" relationship with interviewees because of the membership in the same community (Yin, 2011, 134). Even though, according to Kozinets' (2002) typology, the researcher would fall under the definition of *Tourist* member (not actively looking for social ties or involved in discussions), only being a member of the community made it easier to get in touch with users and gain their trust. Consequently, the researcher did not hide her aim for collecting data. And the trust between interviewer and interviewee was seen as significant to collect data which represents factual true and lets to avoid problems concerning validity (Seale, 1998, 215).

The interviews were held not in the face-to-face mode but using various digital means and software: the named Airbnb forum, Facebook calls, and emailing. In this paper the virtual world is understood as real as the physical one, therefore, the researcher did not assume that part of valuable data might be lost keeping communication via technologies. Some might argue that an important part of data can be extracted from body language and observation of a person in real time and space. But as mentioned above, communicative acts expressed by written language here are in the focus, therefore, digital interviewing was understood as valid. Secondly, in this way the researcher was not framed by spatial context and could have a global perspective interviewing individuals regardless geographic location.

While observing certain users' behaviour within online Airbnb community, the researcher developed personal opinion about them. The semi-structured in-depth interviews gave a chance to see the world from member's perception and presented their attitudes about belonging to the digital reality (Kvale et al. 2009). Counting on the knowledge gained from literature review and data collected on the web, the researcher established a list of questions connected with the topic of online communities. Central questions were linked to the phenomenon of online communities and the way participant feels within. Additional questions were concentrated around Airbnb case so they also touched consumption patterns of millennials. The strength of semi-structured interviews is that pre-made questions might be answered (or not) in any possible order, a researched one has total freedom to reshape whole conversation, new notions might emerge while exchanging information (Bryman, 2004; Kvale et al. 2009).

**Faced issues.** After initial netnography, the researcher's goal was to contact several community's members and take interview from them but this attempt failed for 2 reasons. Firstly, even though the researcher is registered member, the Airbnb platform does not give ability to message users personally and start conversation. The only way to get in touch with users is making actual booking for services/ accommodation they offer as hosts but the researcher felt that relationship building in this way would be inappropriate and ethically unfair since contacted users would expect to discuss booking and purchasing rather than being asked to hold an interview. So the researcher came with another idea and individually started a new conversation on the platform trying to get in touch with people (image x). The post was viewed 13 times but did not get an actual attention. The exact reasons why this method to contact people failed are not clear but the researcher's guess was that because of the constantly popping-up new conversation this one post was visible in the main page for a short period of time. Secondly, the researcher as a community's member is not active user, thus agents that contribute to the forum a lot might be not interested in newcomer's inquiry.



Kristina

Level 2 in Copenhagen, Denmark

Sunday

Options ▾

Hey all the nice people,


I am Kristina from Lithuania currently living, working, and studying in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Right now I am writing the master thesis focusing on 'belonging to the community' phenomenon in the digital world. From the academic perspective, I'm trying to discover either technological revolution influenced the creation of the new information society or it only reshaped practices alive throughout humanity's history. Together with that, my goal is to understand online-offline realities' connection and individual's identity (or identities) within.


In order to conduct my research, I feel that strict netnography using data extracted from the public forum is not enough, thus I need to make at least 4-5 in-depth interviews. So my question is, are there any people willing to donate their valuable time and conduct an interview respecting being a member of a digital community (via Skype or emails)? If yeah, would be so much thankful and obligated to share the findings.

Have a nice day,  
Kristina

Add a tag

 0

Join the conversation

 0 Comments


 13 Views

Image x

After that, the researcher gave a chance to other digital mean of communication, Facebook, where became a member of a number of Airbnb groups assuming that users there are also interested in Airbnb, interact about divergent issues regarding the brand in a communal way so are valuable respondents as well. Posting the same message gave results and in the end 2 interviews (with interviewee 1 and 2) were recorded. Communication with interviewee nr.3 was held slight different. The interviewee was not held in verbal form (as agreed on the beginning) because of the reasons independent from the researcher and respondent: Typhoon Lannie smashed the Philippines which

resulted in technological issues and lost Internet connection in the named area. Yet the respondent partly answered to questions sent before in a written way so they were used as much as possible. Unfortunately, the researcher had neither ability nor time to wait until storm's ravage will be restored and renew contact with the respondent.

### **Interviewees.**

Interviewee nr.1. Lourenzo, 23 years old male from the Philippines. Using Airbnb services from 2013, former host. Contacted via Facebook group *Airbnb the Philippines*.

Interviewee nr.2 Agne, 26 years old female from Lithuania, living in United Kingdom. Using Airbnb services for several years as a guest (not owning any property). Contacted via Facebook group *Airbnb UK*.

Interviewee nr.3. Vincent, 31 years old male from the Philippines. Current host owning a property in the Philippines. Contacted via Facebook group *Airbnb the Philippines*.

**Interview guide.** The interview guide was created from several blocks (Appendix nr.1). First part was concerned with cognition of participants: age, occupation, family status, abstract inquiries regarding financial situation, hobbies, and so on. The questions were made counting on academic definitions characterizing millennials and helped to select a sample that best represents generation Y.

The second part was estimated in a manner to understand how a respondent understands current society he lives in and by what means describe it. Here the researcher wanted to see if the assumption that humanity is placed in the information age is actual and elaborated by ordinary people. Together with that, the goal was to see how daily practices are impacted by technologies and informational flows.

Airbnb business cover all the world, so the community around it is diverse, and globalization theme was not avoidable. The intention was to see how global and local knowledge and experiences matches and what are the derived meanings from that. Together with that ICTs (**information and communication technologies**) were touched in order to find out how much technologies are involved into everyday life and for what reasons they are used, e.g. work, education, entertainment, etc.

Further, the act of communication in online and offline settings was presented. Respondents were asked to illustrate the manner of interactions using digital platforms and evaluate a level of inclusion: how do they feel and how see others, is it more formal or informal, etc. Through prism of online communication, an interest in technologies usage was presented to see how much individuals substitute physical practices with them and if developed any new habits / routines based on electronic machinery. In addition, it was crucial to find out if agents keep communication with other users only online or put effort to build physical connections.

After finding out agents' relation with digital world, the conversation was aimed to be narrowed down to web communities having Airbnb case, communal sense, and relationship establishment in the mind. Starting with regular knowledge about the frequency of visiting and posting to the forum, relationship with other users, personal account supervision and so on, the researcher tried to guide respondents to the actual sub-topics presented in the theory section: written and visual information, social reviews, accounts, trust and reputation and consequently the feeling of belonging (if there exists one). In a basic sense, the researcher wanted to understand how much members care about their digital identity and world.

Consequently named trust was widen touching the topic of sharing economy and customer-to-customer businesses. Basically, the researcher felt that it is important to figure out how the trust is built on the intimate level with others digitally, how it changes in the case of giving (selling) personalized accommodation with other possessions for strangers. Since traditional and alternative businesses are in the interest area, it seemed appropriate for the researcher to ask questions and hear stories about brands successful and not experiences.

From there, the topic of identity was expanded. The target here was to recognize how respondents feel about their identity: is it homogenous or heterogeneous, do they feel and act the same in real and virtual realities, do they adjust themselves depending on the context, how much they let themselves to be involved and open for others, do they feel the same keeping contact in physical and digital world, etc. All that time the researcher wanted to confirm or neglect hypothesis extracted from postmodernism theory respecting fragmented identity a person can carry.

All named motifs were seen as essential for data collection but there was no intention to follow the guidelines as presented since the interviews were taken more in conversation mode rather than questionnaire.

## 2.9. Validity of the data

One of the most essential issue a researcher faces when doing a research is concentrated around delivery of valid data. In the case of qualitative market and consumption research, there is a tendency to use a term of *trustworthiness* rather than *validity* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Kozinets, 2002), but since consumption patterns was just a part of overall topic of this thesis, the whole inquiry was humanistic, the researcher was curious in understanding one group's (community's) construction of multiple reality, so the set of criteria that were evaluated are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Hirschman, 1986).

Credibility has to be taken into account to show that the findings reveal multiple realities decently. Since the researcher was counting on personal interpretation of respondents and the way they construct those realities, one of the ways to strengthen credibility was asking for a feedback about the interpretations from the researched participants (Hirschman, 1986, Kozinets, 2002; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As for the humanist, feedbacks appeared as a representative mean to guarantee credibility since the researcher believed that selected people are truly genuine and interested in authenticity of any case (Hirschman, 1986, 244). Moreover, the researcher made a deal with interviewees to be able to ask for explanations and help at any needed time after interviews were taken to make a valid analysis from the beginning. Transferability feature represents if the findings can be transferred and applied to other similar interpretations in the same social field about the phenomenon. The researcher has to be aware that even if some derived notions might be applied and used doing further interpretation, every social context is specific and there may emerge lightweights as well as significant differences (Hirschman, 1986, 245) so the results may differ in the comparison. Nevertheless, if the findings are transferable, they contribute to the overall knowledge respecting any phenomenon.

Hirschman (1985) claims that if an interpretation is applicable to the second context in the field, it meets transferability criterion. But in order to apply findings to further analysis, one has to build knowledge about latter on the post-hoc basis. In the research case, information society based on technological revolution is a hot topic to study since the phenomenon is reshaping the society constantly at the present time. So the researcher had an ability to look at literature review and try to

extract repeated patterns concerned about digital communication and communal sense within. In the end, it was expected that at least some findings would go in a line with previous studies.

Dependability criterion is already partly discussed in the chapter since it involves the researcher as an instrument or tool to carry out interpretation (Hirschman, 1986, 246). It is admitted that the findings are influenced by researcher's subjective perception and involvement with digital communities. The engagement within phenomenon might both have both positive and negative effects. The researcher herself is a member of analysed generational cohort, thus possess characteristics common for the generation. Also, being a member of the certain community makes it easier to access individuals. On the other hand, there is a risk to lose the objectivity, the findings might be influenced more by the personal mind-set rather than researched agents'.

Last, confirmability, criterion is directly connected with dependability and concerned with neutrality and objectivity of the findings (Hirschman, 1986, 246). However, in humanistic inquiry researcher is not expected to deliver value-free findings, be totally distant and emotionally neutral regarding phenomenon. The interpretation can be personalized but it is supposed to be logical, non-prejudice, and non-judgmental.

## **2.10 Limitations**

The researcher is aware that the paper is not homogenous and lack of consistency. To start with, the researcher face some serious problems with accessing millennials via digital communities. It was expected to find more respondents fast but the attempt failed and researched stayed with two in-depth interviews recorded in audio form and one partly answered interview in the written form. Consequently, the researcher feels that interview nr.1 was not valuable enough and if not the lack of time and respondents, it could be used as a pilot version to handle next interviews better and extract more credible data from them.

Secondly, issues were faced respecting netnographic analysis because in the end the researcher had no ability to identify and consequently define members of Airbnb online community because of the strict personal data protection policies.

#### 4. Theory

In order to understand how web communities are constructed and maintained the theoretical background of already existing knowledge is needed. Drawing on the theorists of information society (Bell, 1973; Webster, 2006), the theoretical background is understood as having a key role in acquiring knowledge about the contemporary world. *Know-how* principles connecting science and technologies give the foundation for further expertise and probably new findings in the certain field. This study focuses on the digital reality which is a huge part of everyday life in the modern world, therefore, divergent theories examining phenomenon of cyberspace are seen as relevant for the research.

To begin with, a critical question why theories are needed at all, have to be answered. According to Oxford English dictionary (OED) *theory* is: “The conceptual basis of a subject or area of study” (OED, 2017). Drawing on Costley (2006), theories in this research are understood as comprehensive sets of statements that describe and explain any behaviour and are directly depending on cultural values as well as belief systems of the given time (Costley, 2006, 2). So, theories are essential for 2 reasons. Firstly, they guide a researcher: give directions through information collection process and let to know what to look for. Secondly, theories describe meaning of what is seen and it is crucial for a researcher not to lose track and understand researched phenomenon (Costley, 2006, 2). In addition, academic studies examining the same or close phenomenon can become a source for theories and introduce the researcher with various research perspectives as well as inspire.

The first part presents modern world through the lenses of information society’s theory. The term itself is bias and scholars have difficulties defining it and giving argumentation how it differs from the previous types/ systems of the society going throughout history of humanity since information always was there just the expression of it changed. Even though, the theory of information society is mostly concerned about economics and labour market, it also touches other parts of society’s daily life as education, culture, social relations. Secondly, the aim of the paper is to see how technologies are intervening into people lives and how they reconstruct traditional practices of humanity. From the first sign it might look that the chosen theory does not have a lot in common with the research question but it gives a taste of the contemporary society vital these days and is seen as a departure point to understand certain phenomena.



Consequently, the interactions among humans and their expressions using modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) are looked at. Here the internet as the main mean for interacting is elaborated in order to distinguish how technological development changed the way individuals connect and keep relations.

Apparently, the internet is a proper medium for modern communication among people. Therefore further, virtual communities are discussed in comparison with traditional ones so distinguishing main and unique features the digital environment carries.

Together with that, an individual's identity is considered. Even though, in the paper information society's theory is excluded as the main, the researcher does keep in mind that the same society lives in postmodern times that are well-known as the era of numerous choices and fragmented social spheres. But since the focus is more on the identity creation based on technological revolution rather than on the cultural setting, it seems as appropriate approach.

All the theoretical considerations elaborated here are followed by literature review which deepens knowledge about digital communities slowly coming to the case of the paper: sharing economy P2P networking platform Airbnb. Further data helps to understand how digital sharing economy businesses works in general. Together with that, the chosen research sample, millennials are amplified because they are the first digital-savvy generation in the history and, thus, the analysis about their attitudes to digital communities and involvement within might derive some new notions to the phenomenon of belonging to community.

#### **4.1 Information society**

*“It won't take be long before everybody has perhaps half a dozen wires coming into the house, wires they pay for, not just cable TV. The Internet, for example, is not going to be free for very long. There is a very large economic incentive to make people more and more dependent on this technology. Part of propaganda behind it is that you will have more information in your fingertips. Well, it will be different information, not 'more' information.”* (Boal, 1995).

The presumption about the future of the way how the society operates is partly true these days: the internet is not luxury service anymore. Even more, technological developments made it possible to be online and connected everywhere and anytime because of the wireless internet, smartphones, and

tablets. Common activities as communicating, writing, reading, purchasing, transferring money/ texts/ images, and others executed on the computer get new expression but generally serve the same purpose. Current technologies produce new digital domains for analogue predecessors with the main characteristic: computers do not create usual physical spatial constructs that are needed to make an action in the real physical world. Even more, technological developments made it possible for new activities that do not have physical analogues emerge, e.g. online chatting. And it is hard to claim that computer-mediated events are less real or effective than done in the traditional way (Chesher, 1997, 79).

In general, the information needed to conduct one or another action is accessible fast regardless spatial context. Is this enough to say that current population is information society?

Some scholars agree, some disagree. The departing point is the crucial question *what is information?* In the most basic sense, the information is intangible source of instructions, knowledge guiding people. Oxford English dictionary (OED) gives even 6 general definitions of the word *information* that can be used in different fields (sociology, law, or medicine) and contexts. Since this particular research looks at communicative aspect of information society, the most suitable definition might be: “The imparting of knowledge in general: The shaping of the mind or character; communication of instructive knowledge; education, training; Capacity of informing; instructiveness“(OED, 2017).

Regardless the way how it is defined, the information is not new or innovative phenomenon, it always existed and was essential knowledge for humanity to live and develop. So what is that much special about the information that is alive current days that the whole society is defined by it?

The roots of Information society concept are blur but it is assumed that it emerged in 1960s and is linked to *Information industry* (Webster, 2006): the shift from industrial society/ economic mode to the one based on the information and service sector regarding economy. Even though, there is no clear and united description of the information society, the attempts to define, classify and characterise it are vital. For instance Webster (2006) distinguishes 5 possible domains of information society:

1. Technological
2. Economic
3. Occupational

#### 4. Spatial

#### 5. Cultural (Webster, 2006, 9-21)

In a line with the researcher, this study takes into account all 5 definitions since they are interlinked and the society as an object is multi-layered, any case of real/ virtual life activity might carry divergent characteristics. In order to be able to apply any of the descriptions, the primary understanding about every type's features is needed.

**Technological.** As the name suggest, the concept is based on the technological innovations and their intervention in the daily life practices. The revolution that started in 1960s with a peak on 1990s when information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the use of the internet merged with such a speed that reconstructed the modern world and impacted all spheres of life: social, economic, educational, political, etc. Together with that, new notions as information 'superhighway', placeless connectivity, and digital networking that basically signified national, international and global exchange of various information were started to be used when illustrating the society. In the same manner as certain inventions defined Industrial Age, ICTs might specify Information Age. However, certain criticism is given to this paradigm. The issue arises when outlining the relationship between technologies and social reality: firstly technologies are invented and only afterwards impacted to the society which means that machinery is enforced to the humanity from outside. Consequently, it is possible to call technology an asocial phenomenon which, nevertheless, impacts social life highly.

**Economic.** The approach is concerned about the reshape of the economic activities and the increase of gross national product (GNP) influenced by technologies. The change is notified in the nature of business shift from industrial manufacturing to more intangible mode of so called 'knowledge industries' (Machlup, 1962) and information goods and service production. The problematic feature of information economy is that any kind of business often has 2 domains: informational and non-informational, thus, the line between 'thinking' and 'doing' is obscure which makes it hard to distinguish what exactly and how much impacts growth of economy: information or yet traditional physical manufacturing.

**Occupational.** The concept is tightly linked to 'post-industrial' society's term, some scholars, e.g. Daniel Bell (1973) use the notion as synonym to information society. Shortly, it observes how occupational constructions changes over time and patterns. The main figure here is workforce and technological progression respecting the new move to symbolic labour based on ideas, knowledge,

skills, and creativity rather than on physical effort. Tech revolution simplified the shift because of the development of networks and global connectivity as well as fast transfer of knowledge and employers' capacity to manipulate information. Together with that advanced and successful market niches appeared as various digital businesses and platforms. Informational work determined professional nature of workforce which impacts social changes in the society as the whole.

**Spatial.** The approach that draws not on social or economic aspects of the society but on the geographical space in the first place. 'Globalization' and 'networking' are the key words within. Information networks probably influence all the spheres of daily life with established new global and mostly electronic domains: e-commerce, e-communities, virtual (VR) and augmented (AR) realities, etc. In the information age physical space and time become worthless because on the digital reality communication and information exchanges are constant and continuous. In other words, individuals are able to connect and maintain real time relationships regardless day time and geographical location. The development in the speed of global connecting is obvious but at the same time and controversial: people were networked all the times using other means, the practice is rooted in the humans' nature so distinguishing 'networking' as a unique feature only of the information society is too strict.

**Cultural.** The conception is perhaps the most easily acknowledged but yet hard to measure. Cultural approach stresses the patterns of everyday life influenced by circulated information around the globe. It includes available media outputs to the public: magazines and newspapers, books, music, cinema, trends and fashion, etc. The means itself are not new but because of the information accessibility regardless spatial location different lifestyles and cultures mix, supplement each other and create the new cultural phenomena. In other words, culture becomes highly embodied by globalization. Here paradox is seen from the semiotic perspective of culture: all cultural artefacts are signs having certain meanings but these days when the society is overloaded by the informal information the meaning becomes hard to catch and consequently cultural objects lose their identity which might create certain misunderstandings among individuals.

After reviewing all 5 concepts it becomes obvious that they are problematic and underdeveloped to clearly illustrate information society. Nevertheless, the types gives general guidelines to analyse contemporary society.

After the initial description of the information society, the theories helping to understand the evolution of the concept of the contemporary society has to be elaborated. There is an academic

division regarding the longitudinal research of information society: in one pole the emphasis is on change and endorsement of the new, information, regime vital in the society with pioneers as:

1. Post-industrialism
2. Postmodernism
3. The information mode of development)
4. Other relevant theories

On the other side are theorists that sustain persistence or continuity and claim that information society is based only on the '*informatisation*' of previous systems with certain changes:

1. Regulation theory
2. Flexible accumulation
3. Reflexive modernisation
4. The public sphere

Both scientific camps carry different argumentations and definitions of the information society and only after getting the basic taste of all of them, the researcher is able to apply chosen ones for particular research case respecting web communities.

After limited recognition of both theoretical camps, the researcher felt that cannot identify herself with any of them completely, some theories were taken as leading while others left away. Therefore, the theoretical background here is more heterogeneous than homogenous, observations that seem relevant to current web communities are taken interchangeably to have the full and diverse framework to analyse the phenomenon

If to talk about modern era where people are networked more than ever, the term of globalization cannot be avoided. In most general sense, globalization might be defined as a power that strengthens capitalist economy, reduces dominance of the nation-states, and promotes global culture rather than separate local cultures (Kellner, 2002, 76). There exist two controversial attitudes to globalization: positive one celebrating the progression of new economic opportunities, democracy and cultural diversity and negative one concerned about dominance of developed countries over developing ones and homogenization of the culture (Kellner, 2002, 77). Nevertheless which approach is taken,

scholars agree that globalization touches all spheres of daily life: economy, politics, culture, and others (Castells; Kellner, 2002; Giddens, 1991).

Globalization as a phenomenon can be analysed in a line with the rise of networked information society and technological revolution that let global flows of capital, goods, and communication exchanges happen. Talking about economy, new technologies influenced the birth of new innovative and creative forms of business that decreases the dominance of big corporations and gives opportunity for entrepreneurs and small firms to enter the market. Supporters of positive technological impact on economy address global capitalism as more liberating for both free markets and individuals respecting novel developments that affect not only economy but and social relations, culture, and daily life around the globe in general (Kellner, 2002, 79-81).

As already mentioned, globalization touches all spheres of life and here the issue regarding a link between local and global contexts rises. Globalization is dual: it homogenize and unites sameness in the expression of mass culture from one side, from the other it promotes hybridity and differentiation as the means of defence against uniformity (Kellner, 2002, 86). In other words, in the sense of liberated world, local dimension in any form has ability to take as much global context as it is appropriate and in this way encourage diversity and variety. The problem is that to capture exact level of local-global power relations might be hard, therefore, the conceptualization of globalization often is one-sided showing either only advantages of it or criticizing its impacts on the society on the daily basis (Kellner, 2002, 86). In this paper, the globalization is looked at from more positive perspective since the case of the research presents the relationship between local cultures in the global sense and the rise of new economic mode in digitally-savvy and networked society.

If to conceptualize the information society as a networked global community and new living system, Manuel Castells and his life-long trilogy *The information Age* which was reviewed, supplemented and extended several times (publications 1996, 2000, and 2010) is a coherent study representing trends vital in the contemporary society that influence all realms of life: economy, politics, and culture. As the author acknowledges: he tries to avoid futuristic dubious approach, therefore, analyse the contemporary world as a continuity emerging from previous systems with certain essential changes that drastically altered the perception of the life rather than a totally new form of the society. Furthermore, he does not propose systematic theory but gives new concepts and a theoretical approach to analyse current society and main features characterising it (Castells, 2010, xvi ii).

Drawing on Castells, the contemporary, information, society is based on global networks that are the key dimension of every social organization and social practice. Networking is not a new practice for humanity, neither is information. Networks regarding informing is the old form of communication in humanity's experience. But the digital networking based on the technologies and the internet is the one that illustrates the information age (xvi ii). Thus, there exist a general distinction between people born before establishment of the internet (1969) and the ones born after to whom digitalization of the life is understood as naturally occurring (xvi ii). Together with that, in the last edition Castells highlights recent developments that are related to the analysis as the whole and that actually influence the way the society lives.

Regardless the research field, the financial crisis in 2008 is the focal point that shaped the society (e.g. sharing economy rise discussed in the paper later).

The financial market after the crisis was hard to control: investors, governments and other regulatory institutions lost the authority in the field. On the customer level economic difficulties resulted in technological innovations development, new forms of economy and consumption practices, the rise of higher education levels in the work force (all these characteristics are also named as important by generational cohorts scholars describing millennials).

Together with that, the transformation of work and employment practices is a feature of the information society. The changed profile of desired workers from *manufacturing* to *thinking* employments altered the labour market. So called "Professionals" work force became vital together with flows of information facilitated by new technologies (Castells, 2010; Bell, 1973; Webster, 2006) and new careers based on intellectual knowledge rather than on physical work appeared. In the case, fast networking and information as well as labour activities sharing on the globe evolved.

## **4.2 Communication in the age of information society**

Communication, the most prominent social structure among humans also changed drastically in the recent years. As Castells observes, with the 1th edition of his study he just elevated a hypothesis regarding emerging new communicative trends but today it is possible to talk about the whole communication revolution (Castells, 2010, xxxi). Rapid spread of usage of various communication and information technologies (ICTs) as the internet, open source and user-friendly software and especially wireless communication made a demand to connect because of the work and public needs. As Castells (2010) highlights, digital communication (via the internet, the World Wide Web, and

wireless communication) is not media in a traditional sense because of its interactive origin: individuals networked via ICTs can generate content, post and exchange various visual and verbal data on the local and global levels at any given time.

The theorist names the new trends of interacting as *mass self-communication* that transformed traditional means of media because now they combine offline and online expressions and formats multimodal and multichannel system of digital communication that involves all forms of media (xxvii). Overall, interactive communication using ICTs have touched all spheres of life: work, entertainment, public services, consumption, politics, and religion.

Holmes (1997) in his own way agrees with Castells and analyse communication through communities of broadcast and communities of interactivity prism (Holmes, 1997, 31-33) in this way comparing the evolution of ICTs. The internet in his view is: “an example of a comprehensive techno science world which has historically revealed how extended forms of the social world have remade traditional forms of association” (Holmes, 1997, 27). Holmes does not directly use term *networking* but he talks about *social integration* respecting a general societal trend to format abstract communities that connect people on the global scale for one or other purpose. In this way, computer-mediated communication (CMC) can be understood as not only technological simulation carrying old forms of communication but rather as virtual reality having its own separated environment helping to extend potential for networking. Regarding extended communication technologies, he gives an account starting with telecommunications and how they changed the expression of face-to-face interaction following broadcasting and ending with the internet.

In a line with Carkeek and James (1992) model of social integration, it is possible to place social integration into three ‘pure’ levels (Carkeek and James, 1992, 111):

1. Face-to-face (communications and exchanges in a traditional sense, even though there might not exist immediate personal contact);
2. Agency-extended (possible third party as a representative keeping the network united);
3. Disembodied (varying from the previous ones because does not require embodiment respecting spatial context since it can be overcome using technological extensions).

Every level is more abstract than previous one and that lets theorists to talk about abstract digital communities as continuity of the communication development. All levels are highly interlinked



because might go both ways or change each other. Holmes (1997) also agrees that these levels can co-exist within various temporal-spatial-embodied structures (Holmes, 1997, 30). So the purpose (various interests/ activities, exchanges, consumption or information transfer, etc.) of being a member of any abstract virtual community might require multi-dimensional communication, especially in the capitalistic and developing countries (Belk, 1973; Castells, 2010; Carkeek and James, 1992; Holmes, 1997).

Coming back to interactive communication as Holmes (1997) puts it, there is one key feature all ICTs have: an ability to stimulate mutual presence and predominance of reciprocity and recognition (to the certain degree or not, it all depends on the technological mean) (Holmes, 1997, 31). But since telecommunication and broadcasting is not the topics of this research, only the characteristics that differ from previous mentioned communication means and are common for the internet and consequently other digital ICTs are named here (Holmes, 1997, 32):

- Speaking from many to many;
- It is decentred;
- Individual experience of the time and space are digitalized;
- Lack of recognition of the members of digital world;
- On the one side, reciprocity on the high level, on the other, weak identification of the other users.

### **2.3 ICTs and online communities**

In this research, the internet is seen as the main mean where digital communities gather. Drawing on Willson (1997), the internet is understood as liberating technology that empowers to use information: move it, transform it, and communicate it in any form. The given information is often highly accessible and public, many users can use it in the interactive form and handle everyday activities on the web. By liberating Willson (1997) means that the internet is diverse decentralized communications system open for unlimited inputs on the global sense since all users who are connected can participate and contribute information in many ways. Here the issues with the ownership, authorship, and authenticity of the information rise since it is so easy to manipulate

information and hard to control its transferring from one network to the other. (Willson, 1997, 147-150).

Coming back to digital nets and abstract digital communities systems, Castells acknowledges the importance of networking and content sharing: “peer-to-peer (p2p) networks make the circulation, mixing, and reformatting of any digitized content possible” (xxviii). So he talks about the creation of digital communities where members, as he names *young users-turned-producers* connect and generate the flows of information on the divergent websites built around interests that and can be called the means of mass communication. The difference from traditional mass media channels is the lack of strict regulations and censorship since becoming an active user on digital platforms usually is quite easy procedure (xxviii). Furthermore, from the 1980s when first web communities were documented, the phenomenon became so trendy and popular that today it is possible to talk about online communities that are not a part of virtual world but rather a real virtuality incorporated in the daily life (xxix). Even more drastic form of digital networking than web communities is social spaces that also bring individuals together based on the similar interests and simulate the real life in the expression of game. The members are capable to co-create some feature of the society and personal identities in the virtual world (xxx). On the one hand, cyberspace can be seen as a place where individuals co-create reality and communal sense of living, on the other it can be understood as a life-denying simulation (Rheingold, 158).

Returning to communities, in general they are created and maintained as a form of ‘being together’. In the age of information and technological development virtual communities is a form of people gathering and providing communal sense among. As Rheingold (1993) puts it, virtual communities is a way (or a place) of both meeting people and maintaining distance from them (Rheingold, 1993, 159). In other words, it is easy to make a contact with other on the web but a need to participate on the communal level may exist or not.

Online communities have both similarities and differences from traditional ones. They are formed on the basis of similar interests people have respectively. Community in a traditional sense requires members to be physically involved within, that is, interactions inside it are framed by time and space. Secondly, the members usually are communicating in a face-to-face manner using both verbal and visual means as well as body language. Virtual communities, controversially, do not demand physical participation, are not restricted by geographically embodied space and can be reached at any time

without initial agreement. Communication is held primary using written data. So minimizing communicated information to mostly text-based descriptions change the way community attendees represent themselves and correlate among. Identification of a member is way more anonymous than in traditional community since individuals are able to 'hide behind screen' and portray themselves in any desired shape, gender, race and other chosen characteristics (Willson, 1997, 149). Turkle (1995) names cyberspace as a non-threatening environment where a user can play and experiments with a number of social constructions and self-projections. Further, a person is empowered to choose how many identities it wants to have within one online community or can be a member of several different web communities at the same time (Willson, 1997, 152). Entering and leaving these communities is easier than traditional ones because of the wide choice of them and ability to join and interact regardless geographic space and time.

Another important feature that distinguishes real and virtual communities is concerned about the nature of interaction. In digital world, relationships are built more on shared interests rather than on shared social characteristics as sex, social status, appearance and so on (Turkle, 1995; Willson, 1997; Wellman and Gulia, 1997). Wellman and Gulia (1997) provide an account regarding characteristics of digital communities in a comparison with 'real' communities. Authors on the purpose use quotation marks since in their view communication on the web is as much real as face-to-face interaction (the same punctuation seems appropriate and for other scholars, e.g. Turkle, 1995). According to them, online ties that held communities together can be expressed by emotional backing, companionship, services, and a sense of belonging. Only supplying real goods is seen as a feature of traditional communities (Wellman and Gulia, 1997, 187).

One of the noticeable and distinct feature cyberspace communities carry is fast and specialized support (Wellman and Gulia, 186; Rheingold, 1993, 151). People networked by technologies can help and give advice or provide information on the real time and from all around the globe. So social support that is present among members bind them together on the emotional level and actually can create communal sense of belonging. Here the issue respecting intimacy is depicted by theorists. On the one side, in order to receive support often a member has to reveal more personal information, let others know him/ her and in this way be bounded (Rheingold, 1993, 153). On the other side, the question if intimacy can be achieved and powerful enough on so much public domain as the internet is raised. The nature of text-based data which is interpreted afterwards using one's imagination might

be not enough to experience intimacy as well as the feel of closeness and belonging (Willson, 1997, 154).

Overall, the electronic communication through p2p networks is based on the perpetual connectivity and forms the new media reality. Digital mass communication is a global phenomenon and might be reached by diverse audiences. At the same time it is highly interactive: self-generated in content, self-directed in emission and self-selected in reception (Castells, 2010, xxx) - digital communication has a potential to accommodate unlimited amount of autonomous content and production that construct meaning in user's minds and build social networks.

#### **4.4 Personal identity**

Already named personal identity respecting digital world requires separate attention and discussion. In the modern age identity is seen as fragmented (Giddens, 1991; Martin-Barbero, 2002) which indicates that for different social situations a person might have different self-presentations. The phenomenon is even called as 'the crisis of identity' which is justified by disenchantment, liberation and in some cases demoralization influenced by globalization, a lack of social regulations and endless possibilities to express oneself. From the other side, being able to have multiple identities brings new sensibility and chances to redevelop old social practices as gathering to communities to bring more stable meanings to the life (Martin-Barbero, 2002, 140-141).

Technologies and web applications have a capacity to produce and project one's ideas and even fantasies. Virtual world is a medium of simulations where one can anonymously or not construct multiple identities depending on the context, goal, or interests (Turkle, 1995, 5-6). From scientific perspective, digitalization of the daily life rises a number of questions and gives a chance to reconsider the way how human's identity is created and experienced. As already debated, communication in the cyberspace is so vital nowadays that the lines between real and virtual, animate and inanimate, homogeneous and heterogeneous self-understanding are blur.

Further, the nature of users' identities who operate with information on the internet is anonymous in the way that disembodied identity a user carries and represents on the Internet cannot be attributed to the same embodied user and verified without a check on the 'real space' (Willson, 1997, 150). Ullman (1996) in the similar manner talks about dual body modern people might have: the 'real' physical one and the second substitute body that is constructed online. The latter might be seen as an

actual-self in a line with physical body and, consequently, the virtual identity can be incorporated in the real life so tightly that it becomes a part of it (Ullman, 1996, 38).

Meanwhile Giddens (1991) sees body not as a physical object but as an essential component of a coherent sense of self-identity expressed by day-to-day life and practices. In his view, the body and especially its appearance might represent both social and personal identities that are elements of the reflexive project of the self as the whole in modern times (Giddens, 1991, 99-100). However, here he is more concerned about the real life setting where the body takes active role while in virtual worlds its role is passive and often not presented. Nevertheless, Giddens agrees with other theorist respecting ability to maintain multiple self-identities and grounds the argument with phenomenon of plural choices an individual has in post-traditional modern times. If in pre-modern cultures individuals lived with less or more pre-given and stable sets of choices influenced by local systems and communities, nowadays the differentiation is possible way more. The blur lines between local and global settings on the one hand, and obvious contrast of public and private domains on the other, situates an individual to a place where multiple choices can be made and several identities can be chosen (Giddens, 1991, 80-83). In other words, at current times social options and lifestyles are more 'selected and adopted' rather than 'just taken from above'. So a person actually can have several self-understandings and presentations that might be expressed by both offline and online settings. In general, virtual communities can and by some theorists are seen as a solution to restore a traditional communal sense of belonging in segmented individualized modernity.

Coming back to digital reality, to illustrate multiple identities a person might have because of the technologies, Turkle (1995) uses metaphor of the windows: on the internet a person is able to surf through many different web applications (websites) that represent different realities and enable to think about individual as having multiple selves, in Turkle's words this kind of person can be called *distributed system* (Turkle, 1995, 9). An individual does not simply plays different roles in different settings at different times (as in the physical world handling daily practices) but is capable to distribute the self and exists in many virtual worlds at the same time. This kind of diversified experience lets to think about numerous identities and lives: both on-screen and off-screen (Turkle, 1995, 9).

## **5. Literature review**

In order to analyse the phenomenon of digital communities and come closer to the established problem respecting consumption within online world in C2C field, the overall knowledge about current digital economy, tourism and generation Y is needed. So previous studies linked to named themes or having proper theoretical and empirical findings are unfolded here.

The first part presents more general themes behind economy. The section gives a taste for the complexity of the whole phenomenon with the focus on C2C setting. Since the mode of economy and business type afterwards characterizes the core scheme of the way economic exchange happens, it is crucial to understand attributes typical for the case. Therefore, the sharing economy as the dominant economic tradition in this thesis is introduced to build the basic knowledge about it and understand how it differs from traditional way of consuming. Secondly, exact business mode: C2C is presented with a look at Airbnb P2P market place which and is the main analysed brand in the thesis. Finally, experience economy is brought in to be able to look at travelling patterns through it. By disclosing the actual situation of Airbnb brand, the section provides acknowledgments for a deeper understanding of the interlinked economic traits and dynamics related to tourism and hospitality sector and more precisely to C2C digital accommodation platform. It is important to understand how economy functions in order to be able analyse how branding is done afterwards.

The second part is narrowed down to the phenomenon of this research: digital P2P platform. It represents divergent features the platform can and should carry to be named as customer-to-customer business mode. At the same time, it focuses on the traits that platform existing on the internet has and what are the tools consumers might expect to be able to use in order to reduce risks and increase the trust during decision-making process to consume and make actual connection and purchase afterwards. So both verbal and visual dimensions as well as the main services majority digital businesses have (social reviews or users' profiles) and their importance are also presented.

The third part focuses on the researched sample, specific generational cohort: millennials. The generation is shortly presented naming the main characteristics it carries, the main events that might influence their world-view and consumption choices. Together with that, the separate look is taken at millennials and brands relationship. That is done in order to have general and full understanding about the Gen Y and be allowed to analyse the certain case and brand of Airbnb.

## **5.1 The sharing economy**

The sharing economy phenomenon is vital and involving various services/ products trade in today's global market. It is also a bit complicated term, thus scholars are tempting to analyze it as not homogenous practice but as a complex of different related economic models to exchange goods and services (Franken & Schor, 2017, 2). Frenken et al. (2015) distinguish 3 characteristics common for the sharing economy: it evidences in customer-to-customer (C2C) market; it provides only temporary access to a product/ service but not the ownership; a physical asset is a valuable good that can be used (Frenken et al, 2015). Further differentiation of economic forms relies on an aim and way of sharing (Figure 1)

Sharing economy is not a new practice for the humanity but it is common to see it as a novel trend which flourished after a digital revolution and technology-based sharing platforms rise (Franken & Schor, 2015, 2017). Digital platforms are understood as a third party involved in the exchange after a customer who gives/ sells/ rents something and the one who receives service/ product/ favour on the agreed circumstances and for this reason the share economy falls under C2C market trades. The most known and globally used platforms having strong brands (Amazon, Ebay, Airbnb, Uber) are successful examples of share economy business. Because of the involvement of a third party this type e-commerce platforms are called peer-to-peer (P2P) marketplaces. Peer-to-peer marketing is a byproduct of sharing economy and covers different property rental services (Pizam, 2014, 118)

## **5.2 Experience economy**

Experience economy is not neglected as an unimportant both by academics and industry people. Even though the phenomenon is not new and can be traced throughout humanity's history, the term and theory behind have been conceptualized quite recently with Pine and Gilmore (1999) insights in the front.

Drawing on Pine and Gilmore study (1999) it is possible to seek how economic value can be created, progressed and expanded to deliver the best product/ service on the highest price counting on 4 economic distinctions :commodities -> goods -> services -> experiences (Figure x).

The experience differs from others economic offerings by its nature: it has to be memorable (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, 12). In order to create the memorable atmosphere, the company has to offer a

client goods and services that would be personalized, full of sensations created together with a customer and resulting in perceived experience. The level of perceived experience might have emotional, physical, intellectual, and finally spiritual degrees but since every individual is unique, it may highly vary (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, 12-13). So any company which wants to sell goods and services wrapped by the experience have to rise a question not only about the performance of economic offering but and how a client who uses it feels and is engaged into the process (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, 15).

Experience economy concept as proposed in the field of hospitality can become the central. Various companies today are selling not only tangible goods and services (e.g. accommodation or transport) but and intangible memories coming together.. Authors' prediction that in the near future companies will have to either change their approach and wrap traditional services with innovative experiences or will have difficulties being competitive in the market (Pine & Gilmore, 2002, 89) has become the truth. Nowadays, the rise of companies offering the same services as old-school approach hotels but in a different form have impacted the whole hospitality business scene.

One of the ways a company can differentiate itself is proposed theme which from the beginning promises some kind of experience. Depending on the market segment which should be engaged, a theme can strengthen company's brand and reputation, or controversially, weaken that. If a theme is applied to the business as an underlying concept, a service automatically turns into an experience (Pine and Gilmore, 2002, 92). Coming back to innovative, new approach organizations, Airbnb digital platform is an example of themed case. In a broad sense, the company is a platform which connects travellers wishing local experience, therefore, the communicated key word or theme is uniqueness. In a narrow sense, every user can become a host (direct service provider) and express the theme by motifs that differ from case to case. Generally, any local accommodation is not the same so a guest might get totally different experience in the same geographic space. Drawing on Pine & Gilmore (2002), Airbnb develops its theme strategy on *Self-explanatory motifs* approach: "the theme is explicitly stated, but applied as differing motifs at each location within the hotel brand or chain" (Pine & Gilmore, 2002, 93-95). So the offerings on Airbnb platform are differentiated by the place in the world (local dimension understood as a theme) and a host (personal level seen as a motif).

Overall, this experience economy model can be applied to research Airbnb marketplace but with several limitations. Pine and Gilmore (1999, 2002) talk about proposed experience as a mean to



increase revenue and be able to ask additional fees for experiences from the company's economic perspective. However, Airbnb grows its revenue only from standard fees. Any other supplementary charges depend on a host and the deal between him and guest. The platform even gives an ability to host only events in the particular place without accommodation (see Airbnb website, 'Experiences' section):

## Shop with a style insider

London · Discover vintage to high end fashion with Lucy

Fashion experience  
Hosted by Lucy



🕒 5 hours total

🍹 Drinks

🗣️ Offered in English

535 people are also looking at this experience. We recommend booking a spot soon.

What we'll do

Our day together will give you an insider's view of the best of London's inspirational fashion scene, from vintage to current. We'll start with a



680kr per person  
New experience

See dates

Figure 1. Extract from Airbnb "Experiences" section and particular example.

It is important not to forget, that Pine and Gilmore gave their account on the issue in different social and economic setting. Airbnb is known as often quite cheap alternative for travellers and might want to remain this way since was established after Financial crisis in 2008 with a goal to let people travel even when the market is not stable.

### 5.3 P2P business

P2P becomes a trendy phenomenon in the tourism and hospitality field and the number of customers choosing P2P platforms to fulfil travelling needs is growing (Pizam, 2014, 118). For example, Airbnb platform offering housing rental solutions and connecting strangers from all around the world is seen as a demonstrative example of a good P2P business. A prove of that might be organization's constantly released official reports with the numbers of consumers using their services in any form. For example, in the report covering summer 2015 it is registered that during 5 years period from

2010 the summer travel on Airbnb grew 353 times to the total number of 17 million users in summer 2015 (Airbnb, 2015, 3).

Together with that, Airbnb digital housing platform can be called mode of on-demand economy. Franken & Schor (2017) explain this as an act of exchange when one party (host) has an ability to offer space which otherwise would not be used (the authors use term of under-utilization for the case). Here term of *stranger sharing* (Schor, 2014, 7) comes to the field because Airbnb as well as other digital platforms connect unknown users from global social network of strangers. Since both parties are involved in the exchange process take some kind of risks, e.g. giving permission to use personal real estate for a stranger who at the same time risks transiting money to unknown host, the platform itself has to keep high level of safe procedures and regulations for transactions in order to maintain trustworthy outlook of a brand.

Another Airbnb report covers travelling patterns of narrowed market segment: millennials (Airbnb, 2016). To have as much global and reliable view as it is possible, data was gathered among millennials (aged 18-35) in UK, China and the US. According to the data, platform's popularity among millennials is one of the reasons for such a rapid growth of Airbnb. Together with that, the survey examining GenY's motivations regarding travelling is introduced. The key findings constitute that this generational group understands travelling as highly important and a part of their identity (majority of respondents agreed that they prioritize travelling over purchasing home/ car or paying off debt). Second discovery shows that millennials are looking for unique experience: more local, more personal and more adventurous than scripted or planned trip. Finally, generation Y's tourists trust in Airbnb and are the biggest user group (roughly 60% of all consumers ordering via platform), are familiar with home sharing practice and sustain it against hotels/ hostels booking because Airbnb services offer travel experience that they are interested in (Airbnb, 2016, 2-9).

## **5.4 Social reviews**

In order to create trust and reduce perceived risks, platforms use and post information available for the public created by other users, e.g. feedbacks and ratings (Schor, 2014, 7). Scholars have analysed how social reviews on the internet impact new users' decision-making process (Ye et al. 2009; Glynn Mangold & Taken Smith, 2012; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2008). Even though the studies do not focus directly on Airbnb they examine the field of tourism and online word-of-mouth (WOM) importance

to digitally savvy consumers. Ye et al. (2009) quantitative study support the notion that online reviews of previous customers influence online hotel bookings. Vermeulen & Seegers (2008) analyse online reviews of tourism facilities deeper and distinguishes positive and negative feedbacks and their role in a purchasing decision-making process. The findings goes together with Ye et al. (2009) results with additional conclusion that negative expert reviews are the least persuasive for an end-user. In a line with latter study, Glynn Mangold & Taken Smith (2012) examined strictly millennials who are digitally connected and found that this group of consumers are more likely to post positive than negatives feedbacks.

The reason for more common positive reviews might be connected with the origin of business and services itself. The regulatory focus theory proposed by Higgins (1997) illustrates motivation by promotion and prevention propositions that influence emotions regarding consumption. Shortly, if a service somehow beneficially facilitate a user, the positive reviews have a higher relevance. On the contrary, if a service somehow prevents a user from damage, e.g. life insurance, the negative opinions are taken into account more (Higgins, 1997, 1280 - 1296). So, if tourism and hospitality industries are used by people as a mean to travel, relax and entertain oneself, the positive WOM might increase persuasiveness to become a client of a certain provider.

## **5.5 Visual data**

Even though social reviews are seen as the main mean creating trust, another approach stresses importance of visual data. In general, profile pictures on social media are seen as a tool to represent oneself. The key feature is gender of a user while other visual components as person's facial expression, stance and overall composition also might portray personal characteristics about a consumer (Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014). For example, men are tended to post adventurous photos while women often display images involving family. Small details as eye contact, smile and even sunglasses might be used to express emotions and openness (Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014).

Even though Airbnb is not pure social media channel it carries some traits of it. Moreover, users have ability to connect Airbnb account with Facebook. Ert et al. (2016) in their study examined to what extent personal users' photos contribute to credibility when choosing a host on Airbnb platform. The findings revealed that personal information (photos) presence identifying host is equally important to the reviews about rented place. Authors also discuss a possible gender bias but do not analyse it

deeply just give a notion that gender might not end in a premium price but influence a direct choice of a host.

In a similar manner, [Fagerström](#) et al. (2017) investigated personal profile images with a focus on facial expressions. Findings reprove that images of a host are affecting user's choice to skip or open personal page of rented place on Airbnb. Consequently authors distinguish 3 main facial expressions (negative, neutral, positive) with a discovery that all of them presence can decrease or increase a likelihood to choose a renter. Talking about gender, personal images were found more important for women rather than men user profiles.

## **5.6 Trust & reputation**

In the age of internet which globalized the market, consumers are empowered to access and choose from numerous providers regardless their location in the world and time of a day. This consumer's independence from limited number of retailers, increases the importance of trust (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007, 1175). At the same time, the internet led to interactive, many-to-many communication and exchange model which means that buyers can connect with companies, other consumers and technological environment in general (Hoffman and Novak, 1996, 50). So trust as a needed feature for exchange to happen is different in a traditional offline and innovative online settings. Narrowing down to online trust (Yoon, 2002) and reputation (Malaga, 2001, 403) in the electronic environment, there are significant features separating them from offline trust: absence of physical, face-to-face communication between vendor and buyer and absence of salespeople in the middle

Following that, scholars agree that stranger sharing economy is based on perceived trustworthiness and offeror's reputation (Guttentag, 2013; Mukherjee & Nath, 2007; Wang & Vassileva, 2007). These 2 notions are connected but not identical and can be called a mechanism which uses customers' reviews to divide and identify good services from bad ones (Wang & Vassileva, 2007, 1). Shortly, the reputation is an objective characteristic representing collective assessment of a group about any entity regardless it is a person, a product or a service while trust is subjective representing individual's attitude to something. In the end, trustworthiness is created by both personal trust and collective reputation. Finally, the mechanism is dynamic which means that an overall trustworthiness may rise or decline depending on further personal and collective experiences (Wang & Vassileva, 2007, 3).

Coming back to peer-to-peer marketplaces as Airbnb, in a line with Wang & Vassileva (2007) it is possible to deploy a system for trust and reputation analysis on the digital platform. To start with, it is possible to talk about centralized and decentralized systems. It depends on whoever is in charge of managing reputations for all the members: is it central node or members collectively cooperate and share responsibilities while handling reputations. For instance, Airbnb marketplace platform is decentralized (common for P2P markets) which means that trust and reputation mechanism is maintained by peers or real customers. The power regarding publicly available feedbacks content is maintained by networked digital platform users. Second differentiation is classified as a person/agent in contradiction to resource system. Generally, the first system is focused on reputation of people or agents while in the resource system the focus is on offered products or services. People/ agent and resource systems may be interlinked to create the overall reputation. Wang & Vassileva (2007) also identify the third party which needs to have reputation: service provider since a good and positive reputation of a provider might accelerate the higher degree of users' confidence in provided products or services. Together with that, provider that already has a favourable reputation can easier gain consumers' trust when a new product or service is proposed for the market. So reputation of a provider can be seen as important trait of a strong brand. Finally, authors separate global and personalized reputational systems. The difference is based on the nature of reputation, either it is created by the general populations and opinions are available and visible for all population or it is reputation constituted by a particular consumer or a group of consumers chosen by that particular individual. Therefore, social networking becomes essentially important because through particular connections it is possible to build personalized reputation. Talking about global reputation, it is hard to influence its creation, especially in a decentralized setting (Wang & Vassileva, 2007, 5-7) as with Airbnb case. So, trust and reputation mechanism is multi-dimensional and having many aspects. Overall, trustworthiness of an entity which might be express by agent, service, provider and opinions is critical feature for any digital platform and its success. Secondly, trust and reputation can be created and maintained by both verbal and visual content generated by users or other parties.

## **5.7 Host and guest relationship**

Airbnb is a P2P network which means that peers are the main figure within. From the first sight the communication between peers is held simply: every user can be both host who rents out his property

or a guest who pays money for ability to stay in the owner's place. But in the stranger economy case, the trust has to be built before actual purchase. There are mechanisms that contribute to trust building among strangers and they can be called disruptive innovations. Following Clayton Christensen (1997) proposed theory, disruptive innovation is described as a new to the market proposed technology unknown before (for conventional providers and distribution channels). Shortly, disruptive mechanism has features that might change customer value's proposition. Services that include these innovation often are understood as cheaper, simpler and contradicting to traditional market offerings (Christensen 1997). With a time, disruptive products and services might create totally new, profitable and competitive market from which old-school approach leading companies might take example (Guttentag, 2013, 1194). In a case of Airbnb, disruptive mechanism which assures trust building between users is a new digital attribute: the rule for a guest to ask a host for permission to secure accommodation before purchase. This is a new facility that have not appeared previously in hospitality industry and is common for C2C field. Karlsson et al. (2017) focused on the latter issue and found out that rejecting a booking is quite often. The collected data (material from 192 hosts in Australia, 2015) shows that in total 22% of requests are rejected. Looking at the reasons, authors distinguish key factors affecting possible rejection: motivation and a length of a trip together with other direct circumstances, personal characteristics including gender, profile pictures and their composition, and other. This indicates 2 important notions about P2P setting differentiating it from traditional approach companies: a vendor is less financially depended on renting incomes and able choose according personal insights while a buyer is in charge of representing and 'selling' himself to be guaranteed a place (Karlsson et al., 2017). This disruptive innovation's appearance is a critical addition to hospitality business separating C2C and B2C settings offering similar services. Secondly, the improvement demonstrates that P2P field actually is based on more personal communication.

## **5.8 Gen Y**

Generally millennials distinguish from other generations as (Young & Hinesly, 2009; Benckendorff et al, 2010, Knittel et al 2009, other):

- Being digitally/ technology savvy;
- Socially networked, preferring teamwork and collaboration;
- Diverse and flexible multitaskers seeking for fast information;

- Narcissists and looking for uniqueness;
- Connected to a family more (than previous generations);
- Well educated and having big expectations placed on them;
- Having financial issues.

All the main characteristics are seen as more or less stable and influenced by divergent factors that occurred during the formative years of the generation (the years when a cohort is the most affected by cultural environmental), social as well as economic conditions, an impact from previous generations and the way policies and communal practices were developed then (Benckendorff et al., 2010, 6).

Young & Hinesly (2012) also agree that experiences gained in the childhood can influence the way how generation acts in the young adolescent/ adulthood. Authors provide an account that millennials' current consumption choices depend on cultural knowledge and vivid archetypes gained in early childhood. Namely, genY women key influencer might be *pretty pink princess* archetype while for men it is *the iron warrior as savior* archetype (Young & Hinesly, 2012, 150-151). The images and attributes these archetypes carry can be transformed through life cycle to meet modern criteria of that time and place. Consumption as a day-to-day practice might also be influenced by certain prototypes. With their study, authors appeal to marketers saying that it is important to look at a generation in a broad sense focusing on the past to attract a cohort in the present day and create guidelines for future business (Young & Hinesly, 2012, 151).

Benckendorff et al. (2010), Morton (2002) and other scholars detect several central societal events that are likely to impact generation Y's current stance:

- The digital revolution (internet, e-mail, SMS, blogs, etc.);
- Terrorism (e.g. World Trade Center attacks)
- Financial uncertainty (e.g. Finances crisis)

Tourism and hospitality industry is not an exception and millennials' choices to travel instead of settling down or choosing local housing instead of luxurious hotels also might be shaped by mentioned or other cultural and social context witnessed in the early childhood. In order to find out

key influencers for millennials travelling patterns, a narrowed research regarding tourism and values has to be done.

## 5.9 Brand avoidance

Even though there are many similar hospitality platforms, the Airbnb brand is the most attractive to GenY. Generally, it is common to look at successful brands that customers are loyal to and positive relationship is held between a user and a brand. But Knittel et al. (2016) took controversial stance and looked into brand avoidance among millennials. The authors claim that contradictory associations with brands are equally important to positive ones. Moreover, the reasons behind avoiding certain brands might become indicators why choosing other. Lee et al. (2009) pinpointed 4 types of brand avoidance: experiential, identity, moral and deficit-value avoidance. Knittel et al. (2009) adds 5<sup>th</sup> type linked to advertising in any form. Since every purchasing situation is different, the avoidance may differ regarding industry. Knittel *et al.* (2009) in their study looked how millennials avoid brands with no dominant product category thus examples of given brands varied in many industries.

Coming back to Airbnb report examining GenY (2016) the claim that Airbnb services meets millennials' values and expectations goes in a line with *brand identity* avoidance type in terms of choosing other tourism facilities, e.g. hotels/ hostels, in prior planned trips. Lee et al. (2009) introduce a term of *symbolically unappealing promise* (Lee et al. 2009, 423) which means that brand might be avoided because a consumer feels like it would bring him closer to undesired self. Here brand identity avoidance might become catalyst for changing branding approach where wished "to be" prototype exists. For example, global hotel chains are changing their approaches to become more similar to Airbnb:

*"We did tons of research to find out what millennials wanted, and the ideas of authenticity and communal spaces were very important. The idea is to create a living room where you can hang out with people and also always be plugged in," said Vicki Poulos, global brand director of Moxy Hotels. "It's like a boutique hotel that has the social heart of a hostel. That's why people stay at an Airbnb, so we built a brand that had that same communal spirit."* (<http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/how-hotels-are-luring-millennials-era-airbnb-172136/>)



Meanwhile, Knittel et al. (2016) in their study found that identity avoidance is connected with associations with a certain group of people that is seen as undesired or not meeting respondents' self-concept.

Secondly, marketers agree, that an outlook of a hotel or other facility is essential for millennials. They also acknowledge that hotel's brand avoidance may be *experiential* reasoned by monetary considerations or poor design (Lee et al., 2009, 423):

*"Millennial-targeted hotel chains are value-brand hotels, but what they're doing differently than old-school budget brands is, they're focusing on the design aspect, which is huge for millennials," said Fiona O'Donnell, director of travel and leisure research at Mintel. (<http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/how-hotels-are-luring-millennials-era-airbnb-172136/>)*

At the same time, a brand can anticipate user's self-esteem. Here self-congruity theory is valid to explain how individual develop certain attitudes and consequently actions that may be expressed by consumption. Self-concept is explained differently by scholars, some of them use dual definition which means that self-concept is made from two components: the actual self-concept and the ideal self-concept (Sirgy, 1982, 288). Another theory concerning self-congruity is linked to self-image and product image (Sirgy, 1982, 289). Here integrity may be achieved between particular product feature and images it creates and a self-schema involving the same images (Sirgy, 1982, 289). So choosing one brand over others may be connected with personal values (existing or desired) and the way they match with certain brand's claimed identity and value proposition.

In the case of Airbnb, it promises a unique travel experience at any price rate (Airbnb website) and as it is noted by scholars, one of the main genY's characteristics is wish for authenticity. Overall, an analysis of negative aspects of any brand for a certain generational cohort might challenge businesses for a change and indicate what are the real values attracting customers. Furthermore, Knittel et al. (2016) after investigation of millennials' reasoning for brand avoidance, claim that general approach with no focus on specific product category or industry limits the findings and cannot uncover narrow meanings GenY consumers give to a certain market. In a case of tourism and hospitality, only after focused analysis it would be possible to provide answers regarding generation's travelling patterns.

## **6. Analysis**

In this chapter, the researcher investigates empirical data gathered from the Internet and interviews interchangeably. The goal was to analyse the nature of digital communication alive in the community and obtain the knowledge how communal sense is expressed and felt by online users. Theories and literature review amplified previously guided the analysis because counting on them the initial thematic blocks were made that were supported by data later.

### **6.1 Information society**

All data produced here represents current reality, therefore, descriptions and illustrations of daily life routines, habits, used equipment, free time activities or hobbies give an overall understanding how community's members perceive reality (both online and offline). Neither netnographically collected data nor interviews directly address exact characteristics of present society but casual communication held within divergent online discussions reveal practices that individuals consciously or not handle on the daily basis and that theoretically can be applied as common actions to the information society. Regarding interviews, respondents were not directly presented with a goal to gain knowledge how they comprehend the society they live within. In a line with Webster (2006) the focus is on 5 domains typical for the information society.

#### **Technological domain.**

Technological intervention in the daily life practices is obvious. Counting on netnographic data (Appendix nr.2), community's members all technologies divide into old and new ones. The differentiation is not based on any specific features, except the fact how common in households they are:

*“To help me hosting I use the following modern technologies: a vacuum-cleaner. Much faster than with a broom. A washing machine helps with the massive amount of linen to be washed. Also the washboard was getting a bit worn. My guests also appreciate the electric kettles in the room much more than having to heat their water in the fireplace.” (Mariann)*

Given in a joke form, the division clearly separates ordinary technologies and innovative ones. So it is possible to assume that, if technologies can define the current society that would be hi-tech developments, often expensive and not owned by everyone:

*“I have yet to complete my technology upgrade. Still looking for improvement.*

- 1. Ring doorbell - Will be great to have this to ensure who walks into the house and out. It also sensor that sense delivery guys or answer the door when someone ring the bell.*
- 2. Wireless lights - I am still looking in the area how i can control house lights as i noticed a lot of time my guest leave the lights on when they are not in the house and during daytime. Any suggestion will be great.*
- 3. R2D2 or CP03 - Robot to clean the house and translate any language to my guest. :)” (Kenneth)*

Additional notion can be extracted from the citation. The member names equipment which can be controlled in the wireless way using the Internet. Webster (2006) distinguish wireless tools’ usage as one of the characteristics of technological domain expressed by, in his words ‘placeless connectivity’ which means that a user can use technologies not framed by space and time (without certain spatial context).

If to define the society by technologies usage, not all individuals of it would fall under definition of ‘member of Information society defined by technologies’ since that requires certain knowledge of ‘know-how’ in order to use hi-tech innovations:

*“To help me manage my listings and the requirements and wishes of each guest, breakfast requests and checkin/out times in our 2 rooms I use what is probably 19th century technology - a week to a page diary and a pencil!” (Victoria)*

Comment (again given in a joke form) disclose that a member of technological society should be digitally-savvy to master newest inventions. The latter assumption explains why the initial goal of the paper is to analyse millennials: the first generation which grew up with technologies intervening in their life. Therefore, from here analyzed empirical data is taken from interviews with respondents who all are members of GenY.

To start with, millennials do not joke about technologies, they accept them as an inherent part of daily life. Interviewee nr.3 to the question respecting amount of time using technologies in general,

replied: *“most of my life”*. Interviewees nr2. And nr.3 agreed with the notion that they are digitally-savvy and uses technologies on the daily basis. Together with that, this generation do not see problems in mastering new innovative tools:

*“I think comes naturally... everybody is using them... and no problems to face... I think it’s natural practice, you learn everyday...”* (interviewee nr.2)

The technologies’ impact on gen Y is obvious from their inability to imagine life without these developments:

*“It will be difficult for those people who rely on technologies or were born in technologies.”* (interviewee nr.3)

Others respondents reactions were similar, for instance, interviewee nr.2 even started to laugh from the question and assured that he could not live in technologies-free world.

### **Economic and Labour domains.**

The domains are analysed together since they are tightly connected. Shortly, economic approach is concentrated around business shift from manufacture-based to services-based and consequently grown GNP. New market influenced the birth of advanced opportunities in professional life and since Gen Y members (interviewed here) are relatively young and had entered the labour market not so long time ago, it was expected that their account will explain how the society is seen through economic perspective.

Even though theoretically current economy together with labour market is defined as services-based and respondents themselves work in services sector (explained further in the chapter), they did not fully refused manufacturing service as irrelevant. Yet in a line with Bell (1973) respondents agreed that innovative and creative thinking is important if a person want to succeed in career life:

*“Yeah, I think it’s very important... To have a great idea that nobody ever tried to do... and something like start-up... important. I read about few start-ups, they were great! That innovative thinking that combines your physical work with... <thinking>... And computers, and everything like that... You have a great product in the end”* (interviewee nr.2)

The citation confirms the notion that ability to multitask (be good at both physical and thinking-based work) is a trait required from a member of current working culture.

## **Spatial domain**

Spatial approach highlights the importance of new electronic domains as e-commerce or digital communities that are based on online networking rather than physical connection. Respondents as digitally-savvy representatives of the society endorse the idea of networking importance. For instance, interviewee nr.3 defines digital domain as:

*“Its fast and crazy. If youre working with an environment that evolves in technology you will be crazy if you are so slow. Sometimes, there’s negative impact on it. A lot of people are hooked on social media. They sometimes forget the reality in the social media world.”*

Interviewee nr.1 agrees claiming that regardless discussed sphere of life: *“it’s a necessity to do things online now”*.

Examples demonstrates how much technologies impacts the life of generation Y, both personal and professional. For millennials existence in digital reality is seen as a typical norm of life. Ability to be connected with a global network is understood as a 'must' to keep up with pace of life, work and social needs:

” Networking is an advantage if you are working corporately especially in ad/sales and advertising. For people who used airbnb for business is also advantage to have a vast or wide range of networking.” (interviewee nr.1)

## **Cultural domain**

Cultural domain is analysed in a light of globalization since these phenomena are interlinked and supplement each other. Globalization as an influential power to culture is seen from both positive and negative sides.

To the favour of global culture, it is open for mixing and gives ability to learn about distant cultures without being spatial framed by physical location:

*” You can meet a lot of cultures, see their arts, see their theatres, see their concerts.... It comes to you, you don’t have to go everywhere”* (interviewee nr.2)

Together with that, local authentic cultures are not predicted to disappear:

*“there's n impact that creates to the changes of ones culture. But sometimes culture is too strong that even the most innovated technology wont changed it. For example, the intangible aspects of people's culture like hospitality.”* (interviewee nr.3)

In overall, it seems that respondents presenting Gen Y are more interested in their personal cultural preferences defining them as individualities rather than in global culture and the way it is affected by globalization:

*“Yeah but... But we have that, you know, that cultural globalization from a long time ago...Well and it's still going on, I'm happy for that...”* (interviewee nr.2)

Evaluating the overall data covering the current society, respondents considerations met some theoretically stated notions but just to the extent they touch the personal well-being. Technologies and activities operated using computer-mediated means, on the other hand, was placed as the priority thinking about all the main spheres of life.

## **6.2 Generation Y**

Millennials were chosen to investigate as the main generation using technologies widely at the present time. As the social constructivist, the researcher did not assumed that interviewees should meet all the traits theoretically adjusted to the generation but had a goal to capture at least some to characterise respondents as members of gen Y. Together with that, the knowledge how millennials understand themselves and what is actually important for them (without theoretical background) was built. During interviews the researcher asked question regarding generational choices but did not specified that the goal is to extract characteristics common for millennials. Luckily, data revealed certain features that are applied to the generation.

Starting with occupation and career choices, it is agreed that millennials are well educated and having a lot of expectations regarding professional life (Young & Hinesly, 2009; Benckendorff et al, 2010, Knittel et al 2009). Interviewee nr.1 (Lourenzo) is a working student:

*"I am running my own business right now <...> I am departing shoes from the US and I try to sell here because they are not available in the Philippines so I really have to import"*

Owning personal business at a young age reveals individual's wish to be successful and financially independent. Together with that, millennials are known as multitaskers, thus managing more than one activity at the same time that directly influence person's future is seen as rather typical than extraordinary practice.

If not being so entrepreneur, building successful career in the certain field is another choice:

*"I work as a lawyer's assistant <...> I have a master degree of law"* (interviewee nr.2)

Meanwhile interviewee nr.3 works as Financial Analyst/ Sales Officer.

Millennials are said to be having financial issues but none of the respondents gave such an account. On the contrary, serious concerns respecting earnings were not received: interviewee's nr.3 annual revenue is around 80,000 PhP/ 1600USD while interviewee nr.2 asked about financial situation in a light of ability to travel did not exaggerated money as an obstacle: *"well we trying to travel...I don't know... Once in a 3-4 months... I don't know... In Eu where we can buy cheap tickets"*. Morton (2002) in the contradiction to other theorists also named millennials as having more money than any previous generation. Of course, claiming that gen Y is financially stable generation is not possible since respondents are engaged in divergent works and having different family status.

One of the goals was to capture what respondents value and are looking for in daily situations, therefore questions about interests, hobbies, and consumption patterns were given. Uniqueness and originality were common qualities forming likes/ dislikes and influencing free time activities. Interviewee nr.1 confirmed this notion talking about his business importing exclusive production not common for the local market and divergent interests as astronomy or photography. Interviewee nr.2 claimed that buys clothes online because of bigger and extraordinary assortment and ability to form individualistic style. Interviewee nr.3 excluded new experiences, e.g. dinning as a way to discover unknown. Even though all named examples are different, in a line with Benckendorff et al. (2010) it can be explained by social, cultural, and economic conditions typical for a specific region and consequently influencing daily choices.

Talking in more broad sense, any generation's world-view might be impacted by major societal events, especially the ones that happened in agent's early years (Young & Hinesly, 2012). In the literature, the financial crisis in 2008 is distinguished as significant accident that may affect Gen Y current stance. But only one respondents (interviewee nr.2) named it since it highly affected living

quality in a certain nation state (Lithuania). It was observed that respondents are more interested and worried about current events that might directly influence their well-being than those occurred in the past: interviewee nr.1 mentioned Trump's election for US president; interviewee nr.2 spoke about Brexit. Consequences of both major events are felt at present but theoretically not adjusted to gen Y (in the future they might be fitted to the next generation Z). Meanwhile interviewee nr.3 did show any interest in global politics and economy. In general, contemporary situation of living is seen as important and impacting agents' life rather than historical outcomes.

Absolut consent between theory and empirical data was reached respecting millennials and technologies relations. All interviewees claimed being digitally- savvy:

*"I use my computer every day because I work with it... I use my Iphone... Everyday... My Ipad... <...> my social work and my work combines together... I use computer for work, I use my social networks for, I don't know, communication"* (interviewee nr.2)

*"I actually very technology depended"* (interviewee nr.1)

*"In a scale of 1-10 if 10 is the most digitally-savvy I can consider or rate myself like 7"* (interviewee nr.3)

Respondents also agreed that technological evolution is a constantly changing phenomenon, requiring certain knowledge to master innovative equipment, so being digitally-savvy is more a volatile stance of a person rather than naturally occurring.

### **6.3 Consumption patterns**

As named in theory sector, gen Y is assumed to be the most influential consumeristic segment of the market at the given time, thus the theme regarding consumption patterns was not avoided.

That millennials purchase decisions are influenced by a wish to receive uniqueness is elaborated above but here the topic is expanded to actual consuming practices. Pine and Gilmore (1999) exclude intangible experience (together with a product or service) as an economic value that customers might look for. Interviewees' considerations respecting admired brands confirm the notion. Talking about Airbnb, its services mainly are chosen not because of accommodation itself but additional services proposed by local hosts. In other words, gen Y members are expecting to receive intangible



memories that are personal preferences. For instance, for interviewee nr.1 ‘homey’ and cosy surroundings is a desired feature while interviewee nr. 2 mentioned local souvenirs received from host as a tangible products having persistent value that can be brought home as a reminder of a trip. Together with that, respondents named that divergent new experiences in general are valued by them which indicates that in order to attract the generation marketing offers have to include some degree of originality.

Received originality also might be connected with an economic mode companies use. The rise of sharing businesses, mainly operating online, was noticed after the financial crisis in 2008, the event that is agreed as important for gen Y (even not fully recognized by interviewees) but that does not guarantee that digitally-savvy millennials are amazed by it. Frenken et al. (2015) distinguish that the sharing economy mode is attractive because of an ability to rent a product or service instead of owning it. Respondents agreed that it is an acceptable economic form but just on certain occasions. All respondents as an example named Airbnb for travelling purposes, interviewee nr.2 also added Uber. From data it looks like sharing economy is an option but not the main economic model defining gen Y consumption.

Nevertheless, sharing economy carries feature considered as common for current economy and shaping millennials buying practices: it is digital business. In general, purchasing online is ordinary routine for the sample as it is seen from data. All respondents agreed practising that to different degree. For instance, interviewee nr.2 balances between online and offline purchasing respecting type of production (products intended for a longer usage are bought online while daily production as food in physical shops). Interviewee nr.3 evaluates online shopping more negatively: *“I always prefer buying offline, visiting shops than online”* while interviewee nr.1 appreciate digital consumption: *“I usually buy online”*. Given examples show that even though gen Y is defined as generation depending on technologies, that is no rule of thumb, and not all online activities are admired by them highly.

Regarding brands, it was expected, that data will reveal some significantly liked or on the contrary avoided companies that could assist in understanding the generation. All respondents named well-known brands (operating both online and offline) as Amazon.com from online sector; Samsung for technologies; Nike, Puma and others for apparel. All these brands are important in the global market but not defining millennials’ consumption.

Only Airbnb, as an alternative to traditional accommodation providers, was stayed as highly appreciated and this finding can be explained by brand avoidance theory. If to talk about the reasons to ignore certain brands, term of *symbolically unappealing promise* proposed by Lee et al (2009) can be used. qThe interviewees admire Airbnb because of unique services, personal communication between seller and buyer, broad spectrum of rented properties, in general: for its original approach. Millennials desire to be original and distinguish themselves from masses, therefore conventional hotels or hostels chains that might offer only clichéd guided tours or similar experience do not attract them. It shows that if brand's (and production's behind) image matches with user's self-understanding (existing or desired), it is more likely that a brand will be wanted by certain group of consumers (Sirgy, 1982). Regarding millennials the finding indicates that reaching this consumeristic group requires authentic and unconventional attitude to market offerings.

#### **6.4 Online communication**

In order to function in the overall society, human being is need to connect with others, establish relationship, exchange information and knowledge following swaps of tangible as well as intangible goods and services. It is even possible to claim that communication among people is a basis of existence. Communication is multi-layered and can be expressed in several ways, the most common differentiation separates offline and online interaction.

In this thesis the focus is on digital communication but in order to capture its specifications it has to be analysed in comparison with physical one. Communication held via ICTS (as well as traditional one) is interactive since lets individuals to create content, share it with others, use both visual and verbal data on both local and global levels (Castells, 2010). In order to understand the phenomenon of electronic communication, agents' involvement within has to be elaborated.

In a simple sense, people use it in order to accomplish daily routines as interacting with others, studying/ working, or entertaining oneself. Empirical data gathered confirms that: interviewee nr.1 counts on it for work and business (Airbnb) purposes, interviewee nr.2 seconds that adding the notion of social relations maintaining, and interviewee's nr.3 business directly depends on technologically extended communication.

So there are 2 main spheres where individuals can benefit from electronic communication: professional and social one. Yet, the separation does not explain the motivation behind. Interviewee nr. 1 in the first place puts personal preferences and convenience: *“Of course it makes it more easier because... I don’t like going outside so... I rather would have that <communication> or a call here <at home>”*. Interviewee nr.2 and nr.3 also communicate online for convenience but it is expressed differently: *“ its faster and quicker”*.

Given motivations can be understood as advantages simplifying life. Regardless the reason, digital communication is not framed by time and space and does not require a person to make physical activities to achieve the same result as in interacting in traditional way: networking with others. Even more, technological connecting abolishes material distance: *“I use this platform <Airbnb> to attract more people from abroad”* (interviewee nr.3).

At the same time, respondents see issues that are based on a lack of personalized contact and anonymity connecting in digital way: *“you don’t know that person might be just a fraud or fake”* (interviewee nr.1).

Inability to fully identify person communicating in digital way is easier understood in comparison with physical interaction. Carkeek and James (1991) theoretically distinguish three types of social integration: face-to-face, extended by a third party, and based on technologies. On the practical level, respondents also categorize communication alike, just do not separate in such a strict way and talk about it interchangeably. For instance, interviewee nr.2 admits that digital communication is takes an important part in her daily life but yet for genuine connection needs intimate interaction:

*“I don’t know, maybe I’m ‘old school’ or... It’s not a problem for me to use Facebook, I use it every day, I spend a lot of time on it... I use Skype, I use emails....But if to get a normal contact with another person I think you need to go out and have that face-to-face communication <...> there are a lot of differences. First of all that eye contact. You can see what a person is like... His motions... another things like body language... I think offline represents much more than online.”*

Advocating on the personalized level of communication, face-to-face mode is also appreciated by interviewee nr.1:

*“Well... for me that <technologies> kills the... the traditional way of socializing with friends, family... It really affects because everyone is on their phone, looking at something, coding or having work <...> I still go for personal interaction whether you want it or not <...> Yeah... yeah it is really important because I can say that... I’ve been through a lot of relationships which... with somebody I have met online and then... well I would say everything else is ok but still I had to stop... You really need to see a person... so yeah... You still need a real interaction...”*

Evaluating interviewee’s nr.1 considerations, it is possible to claim that the line between online and offline realities is very blur: a person who claims to be totally dependent on technologies and on his own free will preferring to handle daily activities and conversations digitally still feels a need to establish more stable, authentic, and touchable relationships.

The second, more abstract than face-to-face mode includes a third party keeping interacting poles together. In some cases, a third party can add reliability to online communication. For example, in Airbnb digital community members are free to build relationships independently but all legal processes as money transactions are supervised and confirmed by responsible officers. This kind of interference into customer-to-customer connecting minimizes a risk to be defrauded and increases a trust in the platform itself:

*“At the first I read if there is an agreement between hosts and Airbnb... same with the guests <...> it <possible legal agreement> really takes out my doubts” (interviewee nr.1)*

Since the Internet is a relatively liberal place, there are cases, when focused communication might grow to uncontrolled one, thus moderators having legal right to control conversations are seen as a positive integration:

*“You actually get through... Ask stupid questions <interviewee means that you ca ask stupid question on forums> Well that’s how I see it from every forum I’ve ever been to. They are generally stupid ones... <...> I think there always should be a moderator when dealing with people on digital forum... Because people tend to go out of the topic. So yeah really really need a moderator for that <...> because people tend to choose the words they gonna use on that specific forum where is a moderator” (interviewee nr.1)*

The last mode of communicating is disembodied, fully based on technological means and uncontrolled. Respondents agree with the notion that it is the most abstract, therefore, requiring special attention and evaluation to take information seriously:

*“Well, I wouldn’t really trust that help <online>.... I would prefer to get it from my reliable source.... Finding some papers that says “do that and that” <like instructions>... Generally I wouldn’t really trust it, I wouldn’t put my trust on it”* (interviewee nr.1)

Holmes (1997) claims that often overall communication might ask for multi-dimensional communication uniting all named modes. The exact direction of relationship establishment might go both ways: from totally digital to physical one and vice versa:

*“To be honest, I like... I prefer to firstly meet a person face-to-face and only then to have that Internet connection”* (interviewee nr.2)

Talking specifically about online communication, there are some features that highlight its difference from traditional communication: many speak to many in a decentralized way; reciprocity is high while identification of others is weak; the feel of the time and space are gone (Holmes, 1997). Netnographic observation of a certain discussion in Airbnb digital community illustrates how named traits function (appendix nr.) The conversation is held in a ‘agency extended’ mode of communication since is started by Airbnb online community administrator Marjo who actively participates in the discussion and interacts with users. The conversation is called “*New to the forum? Introduce yourself here!*”. The initial post is inviting other users to interact in an informal way without any strict guidelines:

*“Hi everyone,*

*Welcome to the Airbnb Community Center. This thread is for introducing yourself to your fellow Airbnb forum members, as well as welcoming and saying hi to newcomers in return, in order to make everyone feel like they belong <...> How about you, any fun facts you want to share? :-) I'm looking forward to getting to know all of you so feel free to reply to this thread and say hello!”*

The post was commented 574 times while viewed 4478 times in total. The numbers prove the notion of many speaking to many because majority of comments stands alone, some part of them are replied to by other users, mainly greeting each other. Even though, the theme invites just to introduce oneself, users post more information, often connected with Airbnb:

*Hello world!*

*We've been hosting for four years and love it (or... at least 90% of the time, we love it). I also help manage other host's Airbnbs in Canada, Italy and Japan and have a newsletter, Optimal Hosting, to help hosts maximize their listings <...> Favorite city - to live and raise a family, Calgary. But my heart has two homes - San Francisco where I lived as a child and Paris, where I lived when I was seventeen, alone broke and speaking no french. Hemingway was right - it is a movable feast. So, I am pumped for the Open in November. tick tock...*

*Love and hugs and happy hosting to all! (Keith)*

The post was commented back a number of times and even evolved to the whole discussion. The researcher excluded several characteristics how communication is build here (the original comment with all replies can be found in Appendixes):

- Eye-catchy greeting;
- Presentation of hosting experience and moving to more personal details;
- Presenting interest in travelling as an essential part of life;
- Giving financial and business advices how to make money of Airbnb; how hosting can grow to independent central working activity;
- As an old and experienced user, encouraging newcomers respecting various cases;

Other users use multiple means for communication: both written and visual data. For instance, a user named Michelle looks like active member of community and can be called *Devotee* or *Insider* (Kozinets, 2002) since not only presents oneself with a photo of family (visible in Appendixes) but and pay attention to and reacts to other users posts:

*"Hi Lia & Garry,*

*It is so cool to hear your story. I might be copy your ideas to create a AirB&B community where I host my place. I have 1 room in San Diego and my husband & I also think to expand another room. I enjoy to meet and greet our guests who traveled all over the countries. Thank you for sharing your story. Michelle”*

In order to create communal feeling and communicate in a friendly way, users also use videos or emoji (various icons representing feelings):

*“Yea! The emoticon worked! It came through...!!*



(Deborah)

That emotional icons are helpful in illustrating mood a user wants to show confirms and interviewee nr.2:

*“I’m using them all the time. Because if you write without the icons, or you see somebody’s messages without smileys or other stuff, it sound for me like, you know, like angry man <...> I don’t know... It’s better when I use smileys and when the other uses smileys”*

That online communication is decentralized shows various topics, issues, and worries touched in the discussion, despite the fact that it was aimed to introduce oneself. For instance, users entangle themselves in speaking about technical issues:

*Hey All!*

*Paul from Melbourne, Australia here! Happy to be in here beta testing with my fellow global host organisers.*

*First suggestion, a 'quick reply' with no page load would be handy... and emoticons. I'm sure Airbnb can style some beauties up. ;) (Paul)*

Or sharing worries about local legalities and laws controlling the kind of business as Airbnb:

*“I still have concern on what the longevity of Airbnb will be in cities that have penalized or intimidated hosts and hope to be able to put that worry behind. Looking*

*forward to reading more success stories and give and take feedbacks to fellow hosts. The app is amazing but could have some improvements. Checking the website and the app on my iPhone/ipad is part of my daily routine and takes place half dozen times a day.” (Amir)*

Held communication is actually reciprocal and creating the communal sense since users react, reply, ask questions, and try to get to know each other in general. But yet identification of users is weak since every member choose how much information to reveal (at the same time there is no guarantee that given information is not falsified). Moreover, personal profiles at Airbnb platform are not very detailed, the company has strict rules protecting personal data since in the first place platform is made for business purposes.

Kozinets (2002) indicates that netnographic analysis might be never ending, thus recommend to stop when main notions start to repeat each other. The researcher also does not feel a need to spread regarding online communication among users in forum, thus highlights the main motifs that were captured in the discussion:

- Help and support. Discussion room is used as a source to find information, or ask and receive help regarding any issue connected with Airbnb. Users spend time evaluating each other's listed accommodations and give advices how property can be improved. Consultations how to succeed and make money from the platform are given from personal experience.
- Sharing and discussing legal issues globally and locally.
- Sharing and discussing technical issues regarding instructions how to use the platform or mobile application. It was observed, that it is easier and faster to get needed information from ordinary members rather than from responsible Airbnb consultants.
- Experienced hosts are seen as trustworthy, their opinion is valued by newcomers.
- Forming local groups if users from the same area discover each other online. It was observed that often these groups are planning meetings in the offline setting in this way upgrading communication to the next level.
- Moderator is an active user keeping the discussion alive, encouraging members to interact, and maintaining communal sense in general. Also moderator is in the place to observe actual problems (mainly technical) users face and transmit the problem for responsible staff.



- Introducing oneself is more based on experience within Airbnb rather than personal information.
- Communication is held in a friendly and informal way. Members use various means to express emotions: icons, videos, images, personal photos.

In overall, communication is multi-layered. It has several modes: face-to-face, agency extended, and disembodied. Even though it is accepted to think about online communication as totally disembodied, it can be expanded to other modes and achieve the level of physical communication, or vice versa. Netnographic analysis described the way how disembodied interaction is built while investigation of data derived from interviews gives an understanding how individuals feel communicating ‘behind the screen’.

## **6.5 Written and visual data**

All communication online is based on written and visual data. Given information, style of communication is already partly analysed above but here the theme is expanded mainly counting on data derived from interviews. The choice to investigate interviews was made since it is assumed that netnographic data mirrors the final version of communicating online but does not detail how it is built.

Online communication consist of written and visual data. In a line with Willson (1997) it is understood as minimalistic communication in comparison with traditional one. Yet it has ability to give enough information for agents to interact, get familiar with each other, and make deals and purchases. Here written and visual data is understood as components forming the overall content posted online, therefore, are analysed together without separation. Written data consist of text-based information while visual of images. Regarding visual data, it is usual to investigate personal profiles’ pictures of users that are publicly available as a mean representing a user and creating trust (Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014; Fagerstrøm et al. 2017).

Written data, was not elaborated by respondents intensively (except the case of social reviews). Yet the researcher tried to find out on what interviewees base the choices of words. Interviewee nr.3 claimed that in order to be understood online, one has to adjust to the social and culture context as well as keep in mind the nature of digital platform one interacts within:

*“I can say I am lucky to be called a diversified person since I mingled and am surrounded with different people of different cultures so I know what to say or do”.*

One of the things the researcher wanted to find out was a manner of writing. In the physical setting communication is held spontaneously, but interviewees’ account revealed that in online setting communication is way more thought off:

*“Mostly, I’m answering spontaneously when I write. Then I read what I wrote <...> when something comes to my mind, I write spontaneously, and then check”* (interviewee nr.2)

In general, it is seen as normal practice to check written data before posting it to public. Consequently, spontaneous communication often may include slangs or swear words. In the real life setting, where said words appear and disappear sayings like that might even not caught attention but in digital reality where content is publicly available and stored impolite replications are avoided:

*“No. Personally I don’t do this <swearing> when it can be seen in public”* (interviewee nr.1)

The purpose of communication plays a role when choosing a manner of writing. Interviewees made a separation between official and casual settings:

*“oh it depends on who I am talking with, it varies.... For example, CEO of a company: I like to present myself <...> Yeah yeah business level. So... there is a certain level... So you can expect from me that I would talk with him in formal/ forward manner”* (interviewee nr.1)

Visual data, expressed by profile pictures was also not elaborated highly. In overall, respondents did not separated written and visual data, they were more interested in overall view presenting other user: *“Oh yeah! Profiles are important for me, there is information”* (interviewee nr.1). Interviewee nr.3 also indicated for what reason he is looking at accounts: *“To check whether it is fraudulence or has a bad reviews”.*

In overall, respondents did not put too much weight on written and visual data.

## **6.6 Trust and reputation based on social reviews**

In online reality electronic word-of-mouth (WOM) expressed in a form of social reviews is a powerful tool forming user's image and reputation in the eyes of others (Schor, 2014). Social reviews give the first impression (which is hard to change) about a user, thus are used as a mean to evaluate a person.

Talking about digital platforms based on economy, social reviews' importance grow significantly since they reveal experiences former users had with a certain member and influence purchase-based decisions when choosing among providers (Ye et al., 2009). Airbnb platform is not an exception. All interviewed respondents agreed on their significance:

*"Reviews do help a lot"* (interviewee nr.3)

*"Well I'm reading comments when booking"* (interviewee nr.2)

*"I rely at the reviews. It is... It is where I look at when buying online"* (interviewee nr.1)

Real stories of previous people relationship and received services creates trust. It is expected that they are genuine:

*"I would actually trust... That's why I look at reviews, that's why I put my trust on that vender that is a good summary <...> I trust because people been there and already done that <talking about living via Airbnb> (interviewee nr.1)*

The same as positive reviews might increase the value of a user's reputation, negative ones have ability to decrease. Interviewee nr.1 had an experience giving and getting back a bad review after being hosted via Airbnb and despite that happened a time ago, all information is registered and kept publicly so the influence of the bad review remains:

*"I have experience with bad reviews...I was a host... I really don't like it when people leave the bed reviews about me because <...> people look at them, it is hard for me to book after bad review and they <people> not really accept my bookings anyway because of the bad review. But it is just technically not my fault still is... About the bad review, you know"*

This indicates that getting a bad review destroys user's reputation in a dual sense: as a host and as a possible guest. Important detail: interviewee nr.1 admitted that he is a former host so it is possible to claim that one negative opinion left about a user takes away chances of rebuilding image:

*“that was the only one <bad experience> with Airbnb... Because when I travel, I have that summary and it stays <meaning that others can see it>”*

It is obvious that respondent did not feel deserving negative evaluation, since he was the first one to meet negative experience travelling as a guest:

*“I had a lot of complaints about the place and services she provided me with < ...> The place was beautiful in pictures, modern stuff...I had no doubts... But when I got there, I was so disappointed... because all I had was this... tiny shit of plastic <...> I expected a lot... But she provided me with...with no locality, no internet <...> but it had to be high speed internet... and others things... But when I got there...She was like: “oh I don’t have that”... We had been arguing about that, I was very sorry about that... Very bad experience. So I contacted Airbnb <company itself> about the problems... And the problem reached and her, about the conflict... That I want to get my money back...So she gave me a very bad review.*

Yoon (2002) and Malaga (2001) agrees that in online reality absence of physical, face-to-face communication might result in uncertain trust and reputation. Interviewee nr.1 sharing memories about the same accident confirms the notion:

*“It seemed okey with her <the host> in digital versus real life”*

Practice to leave bad reviews might be illustrated with a snowball effect: receiving one might result in starting to leave them personally:

*“I give.... bad reviews to people, but it is more on the personal level, in a nice way”*  
(interviewee nr.1)

And on the contrary, if a user individually haven’t had bad former experiences chances that he would assign negative opinion available publicly to others are minimal:

*“If the staying was very good I’m trying to leave review... It would be enough few words... If it’s perfect it is perfect. What else you can say. But if it is not that good, I wouldn’t write anything at all <...> but I wouldn’t recommend it to my friends or relatives... But wouldn’t leave anything”*  
(interviewee nr.2)

The examples show that credibility of social reviews is doubtable: in the first case respondent’s public reputation was crushed not because of his fault (in interviewee’s view) and that influence his

digital image regardless all the other possible good qualities or reviews. The second example disclose that not all users are eager to give feedbacks which may result in existence of unreliable hosts/ guests with perfect reputation.

According to Wang & Vassileva (2007) in C-2-C setting reputation have to be maintained not only by ordinary peers but and by the platform itself. If the company as a third party supervising purchases has a reputation as a trustworthy organization answering to the clients inquiries, WOM spread by existing community's members might result in attracting new clientele and sustaining existing. Interviewee nr.3 gives an example how good reputation might be built:

*“I had been with Airbnb for 3 years and I didn't meet any problem with them. I called there customer care and they are fast in resolving certain issues. SO I am happy with it.”*

Generally, in digital reality successful social networking highly depends on relationship establishment with both company's representatives and other users. Since online word lacks physical communication, the trust and consequently reputation is built counting on public written data.

## **6.7 Identity in digital community**

According to Giddens (1991) and Martin-Barbero (2002) personal identity a person carries these days is fragmented. In digital reality fragmentation is possible even more since online world is an anonymous electronic space in which users simulate real life situations without physical presence so are able to build desired self-presentation quite easily and hardly traceably.

During interviews, the researcher was interested in two moments: how respondents understand personal identity and how evaluate self-presentations of others online.

Respecting interviewees, they presented themselves like carrying more homogenous than heterogeneous identity:

*“I try to be as true as possible because I'm dealing with a lot of people and I feel like I have to be at least honest”* (interviewee nr.1)

*“Well, I’m trying to be myself online and offline... I don’t know, I try to be myself...at the better and at the worst...So... I’m the same as I am.”* (Interviewee nr.2)

Despite the fact that respondents claim having homogenous identities (both online and offline), the doubt is felt in answers. Used words and explanations sound like justification to oneself trying to persuade and the researcher. This shows that identity a person has is actually fragmented. Previously presented findings regarding online communication shows that agents interact in different ways respecting the purpose (social relations building or working) and in every case of changed manner of communication, self-presentation also changes. Turkle (1995) also observes that individuals surfing from one online reality to other adjust to their surroundings. Supplementing, the researcher tried to ask additional questions that would explain how respondents understand homogeneity of identity but no clear answers were received:

*“I think... there is....a very minimal change how I interact with people online and how I interact in real life... I have this problem... with emotions online so... I try to be as usual as possible...”* (interviewee nr.1)

However, evaluating other individuals is easier and here respondents sounded way more confident observing others’ identities in digital reality:

*“I think that everyone try to be better than they are on social networks so... Not like in the real life”* (interviewee nr.2)

The consideration indicates a belief that simulating identity in digital world where the physical body is not presented and give information that cannot be confirmed is easier. Respondent expands the opinion:

*“From personal experience, I can say that... I don’t face it but I see a lot of people who have faced it <faking identity>.. Yeah they post that someone did something and other stuff... That they are writing not their real names and surnames... On the public platforms... “*

Ullman (1996) rises similar doubt in more theoretical way: he speaks about dual body: physical one and the one constructed online. In a practical way, the interviewee understands that as faking ones identity using divergent means, e.g. hiding behind artificial name in this way putting all characteristics and activities (e.g. told stories) on that spurious persona.

In overall, identities topic is hard to trace since it is hard to objectively evaluate oneself.

## 7. Conclusion

The study examined the phenomenon of digital communities and belonging within. The findings given here are understood as not fully homogenous since during writing process the researcher faced some major issues that changed approach of the analysis. In the same manner, the findings cannot be generalized neither to generation Y (primary sample of the study) nor to abstract segment of individuals gathering to digital communities and touched in the paper.

Millennials, as the leading generational cohort were in the focus, thus their digital practices were elaborated greatly. It was discovered that the members of generation are always looking for uniqueness and originality regardless it is consumption patterns or travelling destinations. Being digitally-savvy generation, Y'ers cannot imagine their life without technologies. Online reality takes a huge part in their life but is not distinguished as the main reality they reside in. Offline setting and human relationship within physical world yet were perceived as more genuine and real.

In the paper, the current society humanity lives within is understood as Informational one. Global flows and exchanges of knowledge via networked individuals touch all main domains of life like economy with consumption patterns, culture, labour market, and social relations. It was expected to derive concrete findings explaining how respondents understand the world in general: both in online and offline settings and the correlation of these realities shape individual's perception to oneself. But the only obvious derived finding states that technologies impacts current society on the high degree and are influencing all spheres of life as well as daily practices.

Consequently, the research was narrowed down to digital communication and its expression within virtual communities. It was found out that gathering to online communities is a quite common practise that cannot be adjusted to the certain generational cohort. Communication held with technological extensions is practised around the world so it is possible to call it global phenomenon.

In order to capture how belonging to community is expressed, digital communication was analysed as overall. Components that are important in evaluating digital relationship establishment (which results in built communal sense and belonging feeling) are: written and visual data available publicly, social reviews that are the basis for trust establishment on personal and collective levels. Positive reviews has a power to increase chances in relations establishment while negative reviews decrease the



overall value of digital account a person has. It was observed that credibility of social reviews is hard to evaluate and in some cases reviews might be faked or not mirror the truth.

It was discovered that online communication is valued but yet not estimated as real and genuine as in the traditional sense held in the physical reality. Therefore, often the overall communication evolution goes from offline setting to the online, or vice versa. In other words, digital community was defined rather as an important component of traditional communication rather than totally separate phenomenon existing on its own.

Together with that, identity a person carries within digital reality was analysed. The results showed that respondents are eager to understand themselves as having homogenous self-presentation that in digital reality is the same as in the physical world or just slightly different.

In the end, counting on all findings named here, it is possible to claim that belonging phenomenon is equal to communal sense within digital community. Respondents claims and considerations respecting divergent traits of virtual community let the researcher to claim that in online setting is possible if a person is actively engaged in the digital communication for social reasons

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### Appendix nr.1. Interview guide.

Themes	Questions	Theories behind
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Researcher introduces herself;</li> <li>- Explanation of the topic and purpose of the thesis, importance of data got from respondent;</li> <li>- Clarification respecting record of an interview for the later use;</li> <li>- Agreeing on personal details of an interviewee possible to reveal in the paper (if there exist any)</li> </ul>	-
General information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Name</li> <li>- Birth date</li> <li>- Gender</li> <li>- Nationality</li> <li>- Country of residence</li> <li>- Profession and Occupation</li> <li>- average financial situation</li> <li>- Marital status</li> <li>- Owned property (real estate available to market on Airbnb if there exists one)</li> </ul>	-
Generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Short illustration of the culture one lives within</li> <li>- Interest</li> <li>- Priorities in life (e.g. career, family, or travelling)</li> <li>- The most memorable events during life course (e.g. terrorism, the financial crisis in 2008, others?)</li> <li>- Technologies' usage on the daily basis</li> <li>- would you call yourself as digitally-savvy</li> <li>- Can there be any influencers from derived from childhood</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Amy M. Young, Mary D. Hinesly, (2012) <i>Identifying Millennials' key influencers from early childhood: insights into current consumer preferences</i>;</li> <li>2. Benckendorff, P.J., et al. (2009) <i>Tourism and Generation Y</i></li> <li>3. Knittel Z. et al. (2016) <i>Brand avoidance among Generation Y consumers</i></li> <li>4. Morton, L. P. (2002). <i>Targeting generation Y</i></li> </ol>
Economic considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consumption patterns (e.g. buying online and offline)</li> <li>- P2P business</li> <li>- Purchasing from/ to strangers</li> <li>- Expected value from bought product/ service</li> <li>- Please name several brands that in your opinion are the most influential these days and the ones you like</li> <li>- When you choose a provider (brand) what factors do you consider? Are there any negative qualities? Maybe you are looking for something unique? Are there any brands that somehow presents a desired image/ identity of a user?</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gilmore, J. H., and Pine, J. B. (1999) <i>The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre &amp; Every Business a Stage</i>.</li> <li>2. Frenken et al. (2015) <i>Smarter regulation for the sharing economy</i></li> <li>3. Lee, et al. (2009) <i>Brand Avoidance: A Negative Promises Perspective</i></li> <li>4. Sirgy, M. Joseph. (1982) <i>Self-</i></li> </ol>



		<i>Concept in Consumer Behavior: A Critical Review</i>
Information society	<p>- How would you describe today's society? In your opinion, on what values it is based?</p> <p><b>TECHNOLOGICAL:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What place in your life take technologies?</li> <li>- From where do you usually get information regarding daily life?</li> <li>- What is the best mean for information search? Why do you think so?</li> <li>- In your view, what is the most significant invention (technology) defining current society?</li> <li>- On what degree do you use technologies in daily life?</li> <li>- Can you imagine life and daily routines done without technologies?</li> </ul> <p><b>ECONOMIC &amp; OCCUPATIONAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How would you describe current economy? On what it is based (e.g. manufacturing, intangible services, pleasure &amp; entertainment, etc.)?</li> <li>- In your view, have tech revolution changed the face of economy?</li> <li>- How do you understand innovations and information and economy based on them?</li> </ul> <p>-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Let's talk about labour market. You, as a member of workforce, how would you describe it (competitive, challenging, professional, low, corrupted, etc.)?</li> <li>- How do you think, what personal traits are the most valued by employers?</li> <li>- How would you illustrate current economy together with labour market: is it easy to enter, what does it take to build a career, etc.? Maybe can give me some key words</li> <li>- Can you name the most desired and trendy professions these days? What traits do they require a person to have?</li> <li>- Can you think of any current and successful occupations/ brands that shape the workforce and economy these days?</li> <li>- <b>How does economic and work conditions influence your social life?</b></li> </ul> <p><b>SPATIAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How would you describe digital world? What it consists of? How it is connected with 'real', physical world?</li> <li>- Continuing, how do you see digital reality: as a part of 'real' traditional reality, or a separate intangible space that exists on its own?</li> </ul>	1. Webster, F. (2006) <i>Theories of the information society</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How much digitalization of life impacts your social, work, cultural practices? Maybe you can give some examples</li> <li>- Could you say that digitalization eases your life? In what way?</li> <li>- For you personally, does it seems more real and genuine to do things in traditional or digital way? What are the strengths and weaknesses of digitalization?</li> <li>- Physical bodies lack</li> </ul> <p>-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you feel more local or global individual (in terms of daily activities, knowledge, interests, work, etc.?)</li> <li>- Talking about interaction with others: what do you think about networking phenomenon? How much it is important? With strangers or acquaintances, local or global? Is it important to feel an ordinary member of society, I mean capable to function and keep up with daily routines? Can you give some examples (as a researcher can name Airbnb or LinkedIn to show what you want to ask respecting networking)</li> <li>- Thinking about spatial context, in the physical world you are framed by time ad space, can't be in several places at any given moment. But in digital reality every open window on the browser you see in th screen represents something different (and you can reach it in the middle of the night if want). What about digital reality with the Internet in the front? Do you have any routines using technologies or do that unconsciously?</li> <li>- Without technologies we wouldn't be able to reach places and people from all the globe at any time of a day. What does it say about innovations? How, to say it shortly, they changed the way of living? And if without them, would humanity go backwards? Is it possible to claim that technologies characterize us?</li> </ul> <p>CULTURAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keeping in mind everything we already have talked about, what about culture? Is it affected by technologies, information, globalization, etc.? In your opinion how?</li> <li>- Talking about Airbnb, is it possible to call it and cultural phenomenon or at least a mean to boost culture?</li> <li>- How technologies, digital and global connections influence your cultural life?</li> <li>- Maybe you can think of some examples that</li> </ul>	
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	<p>have cultural side and are influenced by modernity, e.g. globalization, digitalization, technologies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Talking about globalization, how does it influence culture in general? The local and the global one? - How would say, do you consume more local and global culture? Through which means (technologies)? Maybe some examples?</li> </ul>	
Globalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is it a positive or negative phenomenon? In your opinion?</li> <li>- Do you ever think about your life through local/ global scale?</li> <li>- What does globalization mean for you? What it gives for you (knowledge, experience, social activities etc.) and are there any negative effects for you?</li> <li>- Talking about your own nation state, how do you see it: as a leading or developing one in the global market? What does globalization mean on the local level, for the people?</li> <li>- Coming back to digital communities and their relations to globalization: what does it mean to you, to be member of global community? What that gives to you?</li> </ul>	
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you think about online communication? Do you practise that? How often? Via which means? For what reasons?</li> <li>- Digital communication can be called disembodied one since it doesn't require you to be in the certain place on the certain time. It is unique and different from traditional face-to-face mode. What do you think about it? Which one do you prefer and why? What are advantages/ disadvantages of both?</li> <li>- In physical reality you can use all the sense to experience surroundings. In digital world you have to count on written and visual data that is</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Carkeek, F., and James, P. (1997) <i>This Abstract Body: From Embodied Symbolism to Techno-Disembodiment</i></li> <li>2. Holmes, D. (1997) <i>Virtual Identity: Communities of Broadcast, Communities of Interactivity</i></li> <li>3. Kozinets, R. V. (2002) <i>The field behind the screen: using netnography for marketing research in online communities.</i></li> </ol>
Place within Airbnb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For how long do you use services?</li> <li>- Do you are a member because of marketing or social purposes? E.g. to sell/ buy temporary communication or connect with others?</li> <li>- If you are a member because of marketing purpose, do you host others or travel as a guest, or both?</li> <li>- Are you active or passive member?</li> <li>- Do you put an effort in creating representable</li> </ul>	

	<p>personal account which is visible for the public?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you participate in community's conversations?</li> <li>- Why do you belong to this FB group?</li> <li>- Do you feel comfortable with Airbnb digital application, is it easy to browse, find needed info, make a purchase, etc. Maybe you have some interesting/ silly/ sad stories regarding website?</li> </ul>	
Online communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In how many digital communities do you participate?</li> <li>- Do you check a member's account, information given there? How it is important and represents the person?</li> <li>- Do you care about pictures existence/ absence evaluating an account?</li> <li>- Let's talk about written data. Do you pay attention to it? The manner of writing? Used word, slangs? English language as the main and global? Informal or formal style? Laconic or detailed descriptions? Structuring the message: greeting, text, wishing good luck, etc.? Using emotion icons/ images?</li> <li>- In what manner do you communicate? Can you describe it or give an example? In general, what communication style can say about a person?</li> <li>- Do you take time to go through social reviews left by others? How meaningful are they in your opinion? Are social reviews give enough information to make a first impression about a user? How negative/ positive reviews impact your personal opinion about a user, if impacts at all?</li> <li>- How the trust is built via digital platform, how would you describe it? Do you trust any other digital members?</li> <li>- Do you take care of your personal reputation? Does it impact the way you communicate digitally? Is it important and hard to have a good reputation in eyes of others?</li> <li>- Let's talk about belonging. Do you feel like belonging to Airbnb community? How could you describe it? What would be the key words for belonging?</li> <li>- Do you have any digital connections that grew into relationship? If yes how would you describe those relationships, what helped to happen them?</li> <li>- How would you see online and offline</li> </ul>	<p>1. Willson, M. (1991). Community in the abstract: a political</p> <p>2. Fagerström, A, et al. That personal profile image might jeopardize your rental opportunity! On the relative impact of the seller's facial expressions upon buying behavior on Airbnb™</p> <p>3. Ye, Quing, et al. (2009) The impact of online user reviews on hotel room sales</p> <p>4. Wang, Y.; Vassileva, J. (2007) A Review on Trust and Reputation for Web Service Selection</p>

	<p>interactions, how would you describe them, what are the similarities and differences?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do online and offline relations are connected or not? Are they achieved separately or supplement each other? In your opinion, can they be alive on their own or should be united in order to feel real connection to other human being?</li> <li>- Do you know any people that you keep both online and offline relationship with?</li> </ul>	
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could you say that you understand your identity?</li> <li>- Do you see it as homogenous (1) or heterogeneous (more)?</li> <li>- When you do your daily roles, e.g. at home, at work, etc. how much do you change as a person? Actually do you notice any change in your behaviour or not?</li> <li>- What in your opinion distinguishes self-presentation in physical and digital worlds?</li> <li>- In which reality it is more convenient (easier) to represent yourself?</li> <li>- Do you adjust yourself respecting various digital realities (counting on goals, interest, websites, etc.)?</li> <li>- If having more than one digital accounts, how do they differ from each other (e.g. given personal info and pictures, communication) or you have some kind of strong and not changeable self-presentation?</li> <li>- When leaving posts/ interacting online do you write spontaneously or take time to review content before publishing it for the public?</li> <li>- Let's play a small imaginary game. Let's say we meet for the first in any social event based on interests, e.g. Airbnb host in certain country meeting. We would have to make a connection in the physical world...Now how our 'first meeting' would differ in digital reality, e.g. any Airbnb supporters forum? How an approach would happen?</li> <li>- Have you ever been in a place when you meet people online and built an imaginary persona of him/ her? After some time you met them and are surprized that in reality they are totally different? Can you share some stories</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Turkle, Sh.(1995) Identity in the Age of the Internet: Living in the MUD</li> <li>2. Giddens, A. (1991) The trajectory of the Self</li> <li>3. Martin-Barbero, J. (2002) Identities: traditions and communities</li> </ol>

## **Appendix nr.2. Airbnb Community's discussion**

**Room:** Hosting ([https://community.withairbnb.com/t5/forums/v3\\_1/forumtopicpage/board-id/listing-and-reservations/thread-id/63914/highlight/true/page/1](https://community.withairbnb.com/t5/forums/v3_1/forumtopicpage/board-id/listing-and-reservations/thread-id/63914/highlight/true/page/1) )

**Topic:** What technology do you use to help you host?

**Posted:** 11/29/2016; 45 comments; 1070 views.

### **Question**



**Kirstie**

Online Community Manager in London, United Kingdom

11-29-2016 08:12 AM - edited

11-29-2016 08:29 AM

Options ▾



Hi all!

As our world becomes more and more technology-focused, it would be great to see which systems or apps you find useful in your hosting. Maybe you use a great smart lock system or a lock box, or you've found an app that helps you stay on top of the tasks you need to do when hosting?

I discovered an app not too long ago that makes it really easy to divide bills between housemates/friends/partners - this might be really useful if you co-host or co-own a listing and you need to divide up your outgoings!

I'm looking forward to hearing what you use and your technology ideas :)

Kirstie



Victoria

Level 10 in Strathpeffer, United Kingdom  
11-29-2016 08:51 AM

Options ▾

To help me manage my listings and the requirements and wishes of each guest, breakfast requests and checkin/out times in our 2 rooms I use what is probably 19th century technology - a week to a page diary and a pencil!



12

Reply



**ADMIN** Kirstie

Online Community Manager in London,  
United Kingdom  
11-29-2016 08:54 AM - edited  
11-29-2016 08:57 AM

Options ▾

@Victoria

You can't go wrong with paper and a pencil can you? If it works why change it I guess! At least then there's no risk of their breakfast requests disappearing into the ether... ;)

---

*Je suis en vacances du 11-17 septembre! Besoin d'aide? Regardez nos [guides de la communauté](#)! Pour contacter Airbnb cliquez [ici](#)*



3

Reply



Branka & Silvia

Level 10 in Zagreb, Croatia  
12-03-2016 11:15 AM







Options ▾

me too :)

- Even though not possible to claim but it looks like not gen Y member (from profile picture);
- Traditional way of managing stuff;



<div data-bbox="201 244 268 315"></div> <div data-bbox="277 255 480 331"> <b>Blagoje</b>        Level 10 in Split, Croatia        11-29-2016 02:25 PM     </div> <div data-bbox="767 244 887 300">Options ▾</div> <p>I share with my guests google location of the best place to visit and see in my area.</p> <p><a href="https://community.airbnb.com/t5/Hosts/Eight-tip-for-great-guests-review-It-really-works/m-p/241944#M...">https://community.airbnb.com/t5/Hosts/Eight-tip-for-great-guests-review-It-really-works/m-p/241944#M...</a></p> <div data-bbox="662 530 751 586">  1     </div> <div data-bbox="775 530 863 586">Reply</div> <hr/> <div data-bbox="239 678 306 750"></div> <div data-bbox="319 689 641 790"> <b>Kirstie</b>        Online Community Manager in London,        United Kingdom        11-30-2016 01:19 AM     </div> <div data-bbox="767 678 887 734">Options ▾</div> <p>Thanks for sharing the link @Blagoje! It's seems like a good excuse to rediscover your own area for the benefit of your guests :)</p> <p><i>Je suis en vacances du 11-17 septembre! Besoin d'aide? Regardez nos guides de la communauté! Pour contacter Airbnb cliquez ici</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a favour for guests → expectation that they are digitally-savvy OR might be request from guests as well</li> </ul>
<div data-bbox="201 1095 274 1167"></div> <div data-bbox="287 1106 481 1187"> <b>Dario &amp; Dalya</b>        Level 2 in Miami, FL        11-29-2016 10:05 AM     </div> <div data-bbox="828 1095 963 1151">Options ▾</div> <p>I found this template online and I has really help me track all of my revenue and expenses</p> <p><a href="https://drive.google.com/previewtemplate?id=1vLBfeav42qnFAsg3wzf0Lwgy-f9wNaHbKUeKjRXXpE&amp;mode=public...">https://drive.google.com/previewtemplate?id=1vLBfeav42qnFAsg3wzf0Lwgy-f9wNaHbKUeKjRXXpE&amp;mode=public...</a></p> <div data-bbox="708 1538 809 1597">  3     </div> <div data-bbox="836 1538 936 1597">Reply</div> <hr/> <div data-bbox="239 1704 306 1776"></div> <div data-bbox="319 1715 689 1825"> <b>Kirstie</b>        Online Community Manager in London,        United Kingdom        11-30-2016 01:17 AM     </div> <div data-bbox="828 1704 963 1760">Options ▾</div> <p>Wow @Dario &amp; Dalya that's a pretty complex spreadsheet! I'm sure it really helps you keep on track with your finances though! Thanks for sharing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technologies to safe time and ease tasks</li> </ul>

	<div>  <div> <b>Sandra</b>  Level 10 in Daylesford, Australia  11-29-2016 02:48 PM </div> <div>Options ▾</div> </div> <p>A conventional paper diary which covers the financial year, can add all expenses, income, everything in one paper solution. I have year after year all kept, and absolutely nothing on computer because they fail more often than my diary.</p> <p>I am probably a bit of a luddite as I don't even have a smartphone, just the most minimal of technology for a more stressfree life.</p> <div>  4 <div>Reply</div> </div> <hr/> <div>  <div> <b>Kirstie</b>  Online Community Manager in London, United Kingdom  11-30-2016 01:24 AM </div> <div>Options ▾</div> </div> <p>I think that's perfectly reasonable @Sandra! I do sometimes worry about how reliant we are on technology - it seems that if the internet crashes for a long period we would all be completely lost (apart from you)!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional way of registering;</li> <li>• Obvious contradiction valuing technologies</li> </ul>
	<div>  <div> <b>Gary And Rose</b>  Level 5 in Champlain, Canada  11-29-2016 03:48 PM </div> <div>Options ▾</div> </div> <p>Schlange camalot door lock - no key and delete codes after guest leaves. very simple with very electronic moving parts, battery lasts a year. 3 months use no issues</p> <p>nest smoke/carbon monoxide detector</p> <p>- battery operated constant checks any issues come to your smart phone.</p> <p>Sinope thermostas- we have electric baseboards its the only thermostat i can see temp in each room and set a maximum valie for heat and turn down if needed via smartphone.</p> <p>Insteon lighting and door open monitor entry and am able turn lights on/off from anywhere as its a second home via smartphone</p> <div>  3 <div>Reply</div> </div> <hr/> <div>  <div> <b>Kirstie</b>  Online Community Manager in London, United Kingdom  11-30-2016 01:26 AM </div> <div>Options ▾</div> </div> <p>You seem very tech-savvy @Gary And Rose! I'm impressed. These sound like great bits of kit to make hosting life easier. Thanks for sharing!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technologies for safety reasons</li> <li>• High usage of technologies might represent one as tech-savvy</li> </ul>



**Lisa**  
Level 4 in Australia  
11-30-2016 02:32 AM

Options ▾

I have a Windows phone but alas no Airbnb app, actually hardly any apps of any description, but I can easily sync my calendar and contacts etc to my windows laptop so I have to do most of my Airbnb work on my laptop which is fine really. I also have a keyless entry - I love that I can program codes which expire and give my guests a code so they can check in at any time! Apart from that I have no other technology to help me with Airbnb. I would buy a cleaning robot when they become affordable!



2

Reply



**Kirstie**  
Online Community Manager in London,  
United Kingdom  
11-30-2016 03:57 AM

Options ▾

Ha @Lisa I'm sure a cleaning robot would be handy! Sounds like keyless locks are a popular choice, I can definitely see their advantages!

*Je suis en vacances du 11-17 septembre! Besoin d'aide? Regardez nos [guides de la communauté](#)! Pour contacter Airbnb cliquez [ici](#)*



1

Reply

- Assuming that Lisa is a member of older generation (profile pic)
- It looks like technologies are used only when there are no other means available; what is possible to achieve physically is done in that way; concerns that tech means are expensive (robot) as a luxurious goods'
- Some tech inventions (keyless doors) are admired by hosts regardless their generation. The next comment: also helps to monitor (take care) of guests



**Kenneth**  
Level 3 in Markham, Canada  
12-04-2016 06:23 AM

Options ▾

I strongly encourage those who do not use technology to consider using one of these.

Thermostat - Ecobee. It is not just a thermostat, it can also tell when someone is at the house. It has a sensor that sense movement in the house and set the desire temperature or according to schedule. When guest is away, sensor will follow the away schedule and vice versa. You can even control that temperature wirelessly from your phone in case you experience some difficult guest that decided to have a summer sweat party in the winter time.

Entry door - Samsung smart door lock - I am not a big fan of using wireless door entry. I am just concern about hacking. Thus, this is perfect for me as i do not want the door entry to be control wirelessly. It has a finger print reader, keypad and RFID card reader for extra security. Most time, a keypad code will be sufficient for my guest. Random access code will be provided to my guest and there is an added feature where they have to enter a random number first before access code. Thus throwing off those who try to figure out the combination from the finger print traces.

Garage door - Chamberlain garage door opener with MyQ. This is also another must have if you want to know if guest didn't close the garage door as it will send alerts to your phone wirelessly. It also will give you info when was the door last open or close for how long.



Reply



Karen & Will

Level 10 in Maryland, United States

12-03-2016 07:16 PM

Options ▾




I use the Schlage Sense keyless door entry. I added Apple TV and can now access it through the wifi anytime through my iPhone. I give each guest a 4 digit code (usually the last 4 digits of their phone number listed on Airbnb). Then I just delete the code once they leave. I like that I can see when they arrived too. This helps me to reach out to them via a text through the app to make sure everything went well getting in and if they have any questions/concerns. It is really convenient not just for me but for guests who have commented on how great it is.

I also use a Sensi remote thermostat. It also runs through the wifi. So I can turn on AC or heat shortly before/after a guest or my family are due to arrive/depart saving money and the environment. I usually check what temp the guests set it for once maybe twice during their stays. One guest turned the AC down from mid 70s to 60F. My heart skipped a beat thinking how hard the system must have been working and watching my profit go out the door. Several hours later when I checked they had turned on the heat even though it was very hot outside. Eventually they put it back to the original setting. All this within about 12 hours of arriving.

As for tracking my expenses/income I use a simple Excel spreadsheet I created.

I really like the convenience and security these technologies have provided me. I continue to look at others that might also provide benefits. Hope others find this info helpful.

- Comment up
- Wifi as a liberating mean to take care of an accommodation remotely;
- Providing the feeling of safeness

<div> <a href="#">View Profile</a> </div> <div>  <div> <b>Victoria</b>  Level 10 in Strathpeffer, United Kingdom  12-04-2016 04:00 AM - edited  12-04-2016 04:03 AM </div> <div>Options ▾</div> </div> <p> @Kirstie I previously posted that I rely on the traditional paper and pencil. The reason for this was brought home to me this morning. I had previously read posts where someone in the community had said that Airbnb had unblocked dates that the user had previously blocked. I had assumed this was on the app which has always been flaky and I have never used the app for anything other than notifications and checking who's arriving. But today I used the website on my laptop and all the blocked dates for 2017 for both our rooms had been opened up and there was nothing blocked at all for the whole year. For a platform that relies on good technology the one thing that Airbnb is NOT good at is technology. It's always been bad but my experience today shows we cannot trust anything that happens on the Airbnb site. </p> <p> So I have just had to spend an hour blocking off again the dates when we are on holiday or have booking.com reservations. Fortunately, because we use booking.com as well, we are not on Instant Book, but if we had been Airbnb could have caused us immense problems and embarrassment. I do wonder whether continuing with Airbnb is really worth the stress. So no, I do not use technology to help me host, and if I did it wouldn't be anything issued by Airbnb. </p> <div> <div>  0 </div> <div>Reply</div> </div> <div>  <div> <b>ADMIN Kirstie</b>  Online Community Manager in London, United Kingdom  12-05-2016 02:08 AM </div> <div>Options ▾</div> </div> <p> @Kenneth, </p> <p> Thanks for sharing! These sound like good ideas. I like the idea of a thermostat that can tell if anyone is home! </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complains regarding Airbnb</li> <li>Technologies as means to protect the house/ keep an eye on guests/ ease house chores (even multilingual equipment)</li> </ul>
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**Kenneth**  
Level 3 in Markham, Canada  
12-06-2016 04:08 PM

Options ▾

[@Kirstie](#)

I have yet to complete my technology upgrade. Still looking for improvement.

1. Ring doorbell - Will be great to have this to ensure who walks into the house and out. It also sensor that sense delivery guys or answer the door when someone ring the bell.
2. Wireless lights - I am still looking in the area how i can control house lights as i noticed a lot of time my guest leave the lights on when they are not in the house and during daytime. Any suggestion will be great.
3. R2D2 or CP03 - Robot to clean the house and translate any language to my guest. :)



Reply



**David**  
Level 2 in Singapore  
12-11-2016 08:23 AM

Options ▾

I like the Ring doorbell because it allows me to see if any guests has a problem with the digital lock they will just press the Ring doorbell and I can guide them through or I can also remotely unlock the door for my guests using my remote unlock function for my digital lock. The bad part about Ring is that i need to charge it every month.

I also like wireless control of my lights as I can see which lights are on and the occupancy sensor to see if anyone is still at home.

I have a program that allows automated switching off of the aircon and the lights in the common areas after a period of inactivity.



Reply



**Kirstie**  
Online Community Manager in London,  
United Kingdom  
12-12-2016 01:32 AM

Options ▾

[@David](#) these all sound pretty hi-tech! Seems like you have some good systems in place. Same you have to keep charging the Ring doorbell though!



**Gary And Rose**

Level 5 in Chemainus, Canada

12-11-2016 09:11 AM - edited

12-11-2016 09:28 AM

Options ▾

I just added a nest camera at my front door. It triggers a text if anyone goes in my front yard. More because were not at the home often. It has two way communication and i can talk or hear if any issues opening front door.

Nest thermostat for fireplace so i can turn it on and warm house before guests arrive. This all interconnects with camera and nest thermostats and smoke detector. If it detects smoke it immediately shuts off fireplace and starts recording on the camera.



Reply



**Kirstie**

Online Community Manager in London,

United Kingdom

12-12-2016 01:35 AM

Options ▾

@Gary And Rose

I like how your thermostats link with the fireplace, smoke detector and cameras! Good safety precaution.



<div data-bbox="199 248 256 309"></div> <div data-bbox="264 259 513 322"> <b>Anthony</b>        Level 2 in Conwy, United Kingdom        12-11-2016 03:55 PM     </div> <div data-bbox="691 259 794 297">Options ▾</div> <p>Hi. This is my first posting.</p> <p>i have a lock box for my guests in case I'm not able to greet them.</p> <p>i put the last four digits of there mob as the code, safer than having the same one all the time.</p> <div data-bbox="595 544 772 593"> <div>  2         </div> <div>Reply</div> </div> <hr/> <div data-bbox="231 669 288 730"></div> <div data-bbox="296 680 580 766"> <b>Kirstie</b>        Online Community Manager in London, United Kingdom        12-12-2016 01:37 AM     </div> <div data-bbox="691 680 794 719">Options ▾</div> <p>Hi <a href="#">@Anthony</a>,</p> <p>Welcome to the Community Center! It's great to see you here.</p> <p>That's a great way to make sure your guests don't forget their code! It's also a good safety precaution to change the code each time.</p>	<p>Hi-tech equipment but primitive usage (e.g. code: 4 digits of mob. Phone, several users name that</p>
<div data-bbox="199 1077 256 1137"></div> <div data-bbox="264 1084 466 1144"> <b>Mariann</b>        Level 10 in Bergen, Norway        12-12-2016 02:01 PM     </div> <div data-bbox="691 1084 794 1122">Options ▾</div> <p>Hello everyone :-)</p> <p>To help me hosting I use the following modern technologies:</p> <p>A vacuum-cleaner. Much faster than with a broom.</p> <p>A washing machine helps with the massive amount of linen to be washed. Also the washboard was getting a bit worn.</p> <p>My guests also appreciate the electric kettles in the room much more than having to heat their water in the fireplace.</p> <p>And when not home on arrival of guests I use the SENSITIVE CONTENT HIDDEN for them to get the key. Works every time.</p> <p>All jokes aside! I use the app for Android and the webpage of Airbnb. However I am used to living in a high technology society and the techonolgy used by Airbnb is severely flawed and should have a COMPLETE makeover. I am amazed that such a big company has such a poor system.</p> <p>I am wondering about a lock-box or a digital door opener. But they are still very expensive here.</p> <p>Othere than that I find that analog communications directly with my guest is the simplest and most appreciated way of interactions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make jokes → to communication style</li> <li>• Through a form of joke tells serious problem a forum has</li> <li>• Apparently Airbnb platform and app is not that easy and convenient to use, not one comments about that</li> </ul>



**Kirstie**

Online Community Manager in London,  
United Kingdom  
12-13-2016 02:02 AM

Options ▾

Hi [@Mariann](#),

We are so used to vacuums, washing machines and electric kettles, it didn't even occur to me that they count as modern technologies! Good shout. Thank you for reminding us how difficult hosting would have been 100 years ago without these electronic items!

Kirstie

P.s. I don't get your joke... I think it may require too much lateral thinking for me ;)

---

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Reply

[View Profile](#)



**Mariann**

Level 10 in Bergen, Norway  
12-13-2016 08:11 AM

Options ▾

[@Kirstie](#)

I think of it as an internal joke between the active members of the forums. Everytime we, or especially new Airbnbs, try to communicate something which contains a weblink or looks like an e-mail or phonenumber the site blurs it and state <SENSITIVE CONTENT HIDDEN>. Even when we just want someone to use the search-engine we all know that starts with a G (can't write it I will get censored...). Or you want to give access to the local buscompany and its apps. Which are necessary some places.

Then, when I was about to reveal my secret key-delivering system, I of course had to hide it. Since it is actually a secret. Not like G\*\*\*\* and the other things that are official :-)

Mariann :-)



Reply



**Kirstie**

Online Community Manager in London,  
United Kingdom  
12-13-2016 08:29 AM

Options ▾

[@Mariann](#) Thanks for clarifying! I see... I believe the 'Sensitive Contents Hidden' block is only on the Airbnb site messaging service - here we have \*\*bleep\*\*s for swearing!



Jerome

Level 2 in New South Wales, Australia

12-12-2016 06:15 PM

Options ▾



It's a locksis door handle. Seriously perfect for the airbnb room!

I'm using it everywhere, only \$300



2

Reply

Visual data + detailed  
explanation about working



Jerome

Level 2 in New South Wales, Australia  
12-13-2016 03:12 PM

Options ▾

Hi,  
You remove your handle from the door you want to secure then place this digital handle into it, it's retro fit.

Then you setup a Master password that you make sure to remember, (you can replace it at anytime).

You setup a user password between 2 to 10 digits using the numbers 0 1 2 3 4 5.

You can activate or deactivate the noise of when you touch a number, same with the LED light but better keep it ON.

When you receive a guest you tell them the user password that you preset and tell them how to replace it if they which, by pressing from inside the door a small button under the handle then entering twice the new user password. No need to know the previous user password to replace the user password.

The master password still the same so you can always open the door.

The batteries are on the inside door handle so no one can play with your nerves by removing the batteries. When the batteries are low the handle start to make a sort of christmas sound when you open the door.

If it's totally flat you still can open the door using a 9V battery on the external handle as there is two small connectors for that purpose.

Battery is about 18 months. I'm using my handle since 3 years, never had any issue, it's amazing.



Reply



**Daniel**  
Level 1 in Vancouver, Canada  
12-14-2016 05:31 PM - last edited on  
12-15-2016 02:04 AM by **Kirstie**

Options ▾

To manage our 14 listings, team of cleaners and change prices in one place for all of our accounts, we use a software which called AirGMS *[link removed]*

Before that, we did it through the Google Spreadsheet, but it was a real headache with these crazy huge tabs, comments, etc.



0

Reply



**Kirstie**  
Online Community Manager in London,  
United Kingdom  
12-15-2016 02:11 AM

Options ▾

Hi @Daniel!

Welcome to the Community Center!

I can imagine you need some intelligent software to keep everything organised! This sounds useful and easier to use than Excel. Thanks for sharing!

Kirstie



**Kate Mary**  
Level 2  
06-13-2017 07:31 AM - last edited on  
06-13-2017 07:35 AM by **Kirstie**

Options ▾

Hi, Kristie and hosts!

I would add to the list AirGMS Vacation Rental Software that can help you a lot with plenty of hosting work.

AirGMS has deep integration with Airbnb, so you can easily do almost all actions you would normally do on Airbnb.

The features include multi-platform and calendar synchronization, managing cleaning services, auto replies to guests, templates for messages and more. Free Trial and free pricing plan for 1 property owners available. Check out on *[link hidden]*



0

Reply

- Technologies used for managing invoices
- Basically makes life easier for hosts to accommodate guests and take their business (e.g. finances)
- Kate (last one) sounds like advertising in hidden way

### Appendix nr.3

**Topic:** New to the forum? Introduce yourself here!

**Posted:** 11/10/2015; 574 comments; 4478 views.

**Question:** New to the forum? Introduce yourself here

**Link:** <https://community.withairbnb.com/t5/Airbnb-Updates/New-to-the-forum-Introduce-yourself-here/m-p/37/highlight/true#M155>

**Question:**



**ASUN** Marjo

Online Community Manager in London, United Kingdom

10-14-2015 11:35 AM - edited

11-10-2015 07:41 AM

Options ▾

Hi everyone,

Welcome to the Airbnb Community Center. This thread is for introducing yourself to your fellow Airbnb forum members, as well as welcoming and saying hi to newcomers in return, in order to make everyone feel like they belong.



I'm Marjo, and I lead the Community Center staff team who will manage this online forum on a daily basis. You will see me posting here sometimes, along with our other English community staff member [@Lizzie](#), who has just joined as well and will be introducing herself in this thread too - Lizzie will be managing the English community full-time once we launch the forum.

Here's a few additional facts about me:

1. My favourite city is San Francisco. I spent hours and hours of time there on Google street view for years, until I actually got to visit the city in person recently. Such a friendly and colourful place!
2. I have 2 cats which probably makes me a bit of a (crazy) cat lady.
3. I'm originally from Helsinki, Finland.

How about you, any fun facts you want to share? :-)

I'm looking forward to getting to know all of you so feel free to reply to this thread and say hello!

1	<div><div><div><div>ian</div><div>Level 2 in São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil</div><div>10-16-2015 10:11 AM</div></div><div>Options ▾</div></div><p>Well... I'll introduce here and live my coments about the beta for a better place.</p><p>I'm Ian, from Brazil.</p><p>I used to host a lot of people in my house before Airbnb, than it came up, I now i've lot of concurrent.</p><p>Kidding...</p><p>Now a days i've people actualy living in my spare room, but since i like this hosting busines so mutch, i'm refurnishing 2 apartments just for hosting in São Paulo. And trying to get clients with empty spaces available to be a host manager for them as well.</p><p>I've two dogs, i'm cyclist and work with comununications.</p><p>Tnks for the beta program!</p><p>ian</p><div><div><div></div><div>6</div></div><div>Reply</div></div></div>



2



**Rebecca**

Level 3 in Bristol, United Kingdom  
10-11-2016 08:00 AM

Options ▾

Maybe you could say a little bit about yourself Sanjeeea, and then a conversation could take off from that. How about telling us about your listing and the area in which you live?



0

Reply



**Sanjeewa**

Level 2 in Habarana, Sri Lanka  
10-13-2016 08:16 AM

Options ▾

Hi im from srilanka, my guest house close to ancint place and nathcure, sigiriya it was eighthe wonder in world, so nice place



1

Reply



**Sandra**

Level 2 in Hudson, FL  
10-19-2016 03:45 PM

Options ▾

Sounds beautiful



1

Reply



**Sanjeewa**  
Level 2 in Habarana, Sri Lanka  
10-07-2016 08:25 AM

Options ▾

1. About culture srilanka ancient place wiled life,natchuer



0

Reply



**Sanjeewa**  
Level 2 in Habarana, Sri Lanka  
10-07-2016 08:36 AM

Options ▾

Hi who like to viset srilanka sandy beach and willd national parck



0

Reply



**Rebecca**  
Level 3 in Bristol, United Kingdom  
10-07-2016 09:00 AM

Options ▾

Hi Sanjeewa,

I think your guests have to find you by looking at your listing and then contacting you that way. I don't think you can find a guest by writing on this forum, although of course it might happen that way.



0

Reply



Sanjeewa

Level 2 in Habarana, Sri Lanka

10-11-2016 07:14 AM

Options ▾

Yes how will do it im new to airbnb, you can help



0

Reply



Rebecca

Level 3 in Bristol, United Kingdom

10-11-2016 08:35 AM

Options ▾

Well, you've got your listing up, I guess. So Airbnb members who want to travel to your country will look at the listings for Sri Lanka, and if they like your place, they will get in touch with you. It's nice to talk here as part of the Airbnb community, but the business side of it goes on separately where guests will see what you can offer and contact you if they are interested. See what I mean?



0

Reply



Rebecca

Level 3 in Bristol, United Kingdom

10-11-2016 08:39 AM

Options ▾

I just took a look at your listing and it looks really cool, and you've got some great photos up, and the one of elephants is terrific. Did you have a particular problem that you wanted some support with?



0

Reply

3

**Lia + Garry**

Level 5 in Pasadena, CA

10-19-2015 04:49 PM - last edited

on 10-22-2015 05:23 PM by

**Marjo**

Options ▾

We've been hosting in my (Lia's) home in Pasadena, CA, USA. I (Lia) started with one room and have expanded to two regularly and three on occasions when I have larger groups traveling together. You can see our listings on our profile --

<https://www.airbnb.com/users/show/389657>

When I started hosting, I reached out to hosts in my area through the very cumbersome Airbnb messaging system. I invited about 20 hosts to my home to discuss forming a support group. Twelve people came to the first meeting. We've grown to a network of more than 60 of the approx. 230 hosts in Pasadena. We communicate via email + a closed Facebook group and text and phone. We meet monthly for a pot-luck dinner and discussion of Airbnb issues.

We are now working with the City of Pasadena to achieve new codes that will make our status truly legal, instead of the current gray area of not illegal because there isn't any code that addresses Airbnb or short-term rentals.

We would love to connect with hosts and have checked the box on the profile saying that our email can be shown -- but here it is for anyone who wants to contact us directly: \*\*\*\*\*.

We will be at Airbnb Open in Paris and are looking forward to meeting and learning!

-- Lia  
Happy Hosting!



5

Reply

4



Barbara & Glenn

Level 2

10-13-2016 05:35 PM

Options ▾

Hello Lia & Garry!

My husband and I are new at hosting. We had our first guests last weekend and are booked again this weekend. I love your idea of reaching out to the other hosts in the area and getting together. You don't find that people are unhappy that you have come into their area?

Really excited about this journey.

We are in Chester, New York, The Hudson Valley.



Reply



Barbara & Glenn

Level 2

10-13-2016 05:36 PM

Options ▾

Oh, also, I notice you have Level 4 by your name. What does that mean?



Reply

5



David  
Level 2 in Woodway, TX  
01-19-2017 08:26 AM

Options ▾

Lia,

I am in Waco, Texas. The Fixer Upper TV show, along with the expanded Magnolia Market has made Waco a real tourist spot. Many new vacation rental properties have opened in the past year and the City has expanded requirements for all of us to obtain permits. The city council has several members who are control freaks and they make applicants go through hearings that are really unnecessary. Most everything could be handled at staff level unless there was a protest.

All that said, your city, Pasadena, CA could look at zoning code requirements for other towns. Waco's code is pretty straight-forward. The biggest hassle we had was making sure a window could open in every sleeping room. Our house is 107 years old and the windows were painted shut. Waco also requires a parking space off the street for every sleeping room. That is over-kill, as our guests come in clumps - generally, they all arrive in one car.

If you want to see our house, we are the last show in the first season of Fixer Upper.

Good luck!



Reply

6



Michelle  
Level 2 in Bonita, CA  
04-06-2017 05:07 PM

Options ▾

Hi Lia & Garry,

It is so cool to hear your story. I might be copy your ideas to create a AirB&B community where I host my place. I have 1 room in San Diego and my husband & I also think to expand another room. I enjoy to meet and greet our guests who traveled all over the countries.

Thank you for sharing your story.

Michelle



Reply

7



Alvina

Level 2 in Vancouver, Canada

02-25-2017 07:29 AM

Options ▾

Hi, My name is Vi and I have just started hosting in Vancouver, BC. Our city is also discussing code change restrictions although they are not in place yet. The idea of a city friendship and support group sounds great.



Reply



Sonam

Level 2 in Gangtok, India

2 weeks ago

Options ▾

Very great....good going best of luck



Reply



8



Keith  
Level 8 in Calgary, Canada  
10-15-2015 12:09 PM

Options ▾

Hello world!

We've been hosting for four years and love it (or... at least 90% of the time, we love it). I also help manage other host's Airbnbs in Canada, Italy and Japan and have a newsletter, Optimal Hosting, to help hosts maximize their listings.

Until now I've been the moderator/organizer of the Calgary group and am now looking forward to how this new community format will work.

Favorite city - to live and raise a family, Calgary. But my heart has two homes - San Francisco where I lived as a child and Paris, where I lived when I was seventeen, alone broke and speaking no french. Hemingway was right - it is a movable feast. So, I am pumped for the Open in November. tick tock...

Love and hugs and happy hosting to all!

--

Keith



Reply



**Fiona (& Family)**  
Level 7 in Richmond, VA  
11-05-2015 08:42 AM

Options ▾

@Keith Brave souls venture out and will be forever changed by the journey's experiences :)

May you ever be the benevolent ruler of your own domain that is your life. Allow no other to rule over it.



Reply



**Ana**  
Level 1 in Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
11-28-2015 01:49 PM

Options ▾

Hi Keith, I am in Toronto and started hosting in September and love it still at (98% of the time). I'm interested to know how you help manage other host's Airbnbs? How can I sign up for your newsletter?

Ana



Reply



**Keith**  
Level 8 in Calgary, Canada  
11-28-2015 02:38 PM

Options ▾

Hi Ana,

Hello from Calgary where we are basking in plus 3 sunshine!

Thank you for the question. Very glad you are enjoying hosting - 98% is pretty good. You know how people say things like "follow your bliss" and "if your job is what you love than you never have to work?" I read recently that even those people who are doing exactly what they love, 30% of what they do is kind of a drudgery. So 98% is pretty fantastic.

A couple of years ago when Airbnb became a central part of our financial lives, my wife and I made a pact: whenever we felt that our house was no longer our home, that we were uncomfortable in our own home; we would change something - stop hosting for a while, get out of town, do something. Since we made that deal we have not had that horribly uncomfortable feeling.

What I do for other hosts really ranges from keeping them up to date on Airbnb changes that may affect them to full service, turn-key. Full service rates are usually 20% of the gross plus a set cleaning fee.

In between those two extremes I offer range of services from site, competition, pricing and listing analysis and recommendations (\$200) to guest communications - screening, booking, pre check-in letter, check-up during stay, pre check-out letter and post check out follow up. (5% of gross) Everything focusses on setting and maintaining expectations and ensuring the best possible guest experience driving towards the goals that the host and I have set. Examples of goals may be longer average stays of a targetted duration, targetted higher average revenue per stay, goals for 5 star reviews, etc.

Everything is based on the host's budget, break-even points and individual financial requirements.

I am also a trained proof reader and editor and it is amazing the difference proper English grammer makes to some listing's responses.

All that is very general. We can get into specifics as we go forward. Each Airbnb is unique and each host's needs are unique. How I help depends on the host's situation.

To subscribe to my newsletter, Optimal Hosting, just send your email address. I will send you a sample issue and put you on the list (free!). I am hoping to have the first post Airbnb Paris Open newsletter next week, but business has been extremely busy since we returned from Paris, so I am running behind.

--

Keith

9



Christopher

Level 2 in New York, NY

12-14-2015 02:49 PM

Options ▾

Hello Keith: I have never been on a forum before so I hope I'm doing this right!

A couple of things: love the quote about "Moveable Feast" (since I included a bit from Hemingway's book in my book about Paris—one of my all-time favorite places as well) and see you help manage other airbnbs so I thought you might be a good resource.

I am a host and user of Airbnb looking for part time work (I am a writer not a millionaire and the rent keeps going up!) so thought I'd reach out to hosts in NYC (where I live) to see if they need someone to do some managing . . . but I'm not quite sure how to go about it.

Do you have any suggestions?

Best,

Chris



Reply



Keith

Level 8 in Calgary, Canada

12-15-2015 10:58 AM

Options ▾

Excellent, Christopher - both the book and your managing idea.

I call the services you plan to offer "Check in/check out" and "Person on the ground". Both are useful for remote hosts and hands-off hosts.

I am both a remote host and a "Person on the ground" for remote hosts. If you are hosting remotely, you set up everything possible to be automatic and, where possible automated and automagic - check-in, communications, cleaning. But you always need back-up and back-up plans invariably fail. So a remote host always needs a "person on the ground." Always.

If you have the flexibility, and you have the team to back you up - the reliable handy person and the reliable back-up to the reliable handy-person, you will be offering a valuable service.

So how do you find these remote hosts? Yes, the New York group is a very good place to start. This Community Centre has a New York section. Don't first post a note telling people what you do. First read every post and find out what people need.



Christopher

Level 2 in New York, NY

12-15-2015 11:16 AM

Options ▾

Hey Keith:

Thanks for all the tips . . . I'll try it and let you know.

Meanwhile what are these "Meet-ups" you're talking about . . . ?



Reply



Keith

Level 8 in Calgary, Canada

12-15-2015 11:48 AM

Options ▾

I do not know about NYC but here and elsewhere the groups organize Real World (TM) hosting meetups. They also may organize activities, community support events such as at homeless shelters, pub nights, etc. Check with the group or the NYV+C section of this Community.



Reply



Christine

Level 10 in Glenbrook, Australia

06-03-2016 09:03 AM

Options ▾

@Christopher,

Meet-Ups: <https://www.airbnb.com.au/meetups>



Reply

Go to every meet-up you can and get involved.

Start by listening, learning and helping. If you start is what I do and here are my rates, most hosts are think, someone else trying to feed off me.

Get to know people. Get to know the people who people. It won't be long before you are a known p really is right for you - your skill set, your tempram needs.

You re starting a new business. You will have false starts. But every host needs a trustworthy, reliable remote host and the hands-off host, and also the non hands-off host who wants to travel and take a host is potentially a customer.

Good luck! Let me know how it goes.

Keith



10



Rebecca

 Level 3 in Bristol, United Kingdom  
 08-23-2016 11:20 AM

Options ▾

The groups sound like a good idea.... I have a neighbour down the road who has an Airbnb room he lets out. I guess we're like a group of two.



0

Reply

11



Janet &amp; G Christopher

 Level 2 in Ontario, Canada  
 10-15-2015 12:57 PM - edited  
 10-15-2015 01:01 PM

Options ▾

Hi, I'm Airbnb Janet. I love the Group Platform and enjoy sharing Tips, Deals, and Places to recommend in and around Ottawa, and Ottawa Valley: Canada's Capital City and Region.

I am a busy designer, parent, educator/ innovator.

I love travelling and exploring the world.

My past work have taken me to Asia, Africa, Europe and the Caribbean.

My current work is Global.

I have three fantastic kids, a lot of fish (to eat mosquito larvae), a rescued Guinea Pig and the most fantastic man in the Galaxy.

I am crazy in love with my job and projects.

My family and I have been hosts since 1989!

Yup, probably when the Airbnb Founders were still toddlers :)

We likely will host for generations because we love sharing, learning and enjoying as much about this world as possible.

We recently visited and fell deeply in love with Portugal and we'll be going to Vietnam, Thailand, Japan and Ireland over the next 8 months.

It is my absolute pleasure to meet you Marjo!

If there are anything I can offer on this Community Forum regarding Hosting in the past (1980's), tips/deals/places in my City or Country, Cultural variations/ethics/mannerisms which can help the Airbnb Community, feel free to ask.

Happy airbnb'ing.

Janet and Family

**Guido E**

Level 2 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

10-15-2015 06:40 PM

Options ▾

Ola! I live in a great place at Rio de Janeiro. It's nice to meet you!

Guido.



Reply

**Janet & G Christopher**

Level 2 in Ontario, Canada

10-15-2015 07:27 PM

Options ▾

Ola Guido. bom Dia. Best wishes for the best Airbnb experience to you down there.

From up here in Ottawa, Janet



Reply

**Ellen**

Level 10 in London, United Kingdom

11-17-2015 04:22 AM

Options ▾

Oi @Guido,

Very nice to meet you! We're very happy you are posting here.

I hope you enjoy the new forum. We have a special board for Rio, feel free to start conversations and invite our "Cariocas" host to participate!

Grande abraço!



**ADMIN** MarjoOnline Community Manager in London,  
United Kingdom

10-15-2015 09:12 PM - edited

10-15-2015 09:27 PM

Options ▾

So excited to see you all posting here! Welcome [@Janet & G Christopher](#), your hosting experiences in the past sound very interesting and I'm sure the members would love to read more about that. You can definitely offer a great deal to the community here with all those useful topics you mentioned! Also, thanks for the fun mental image of the Airbnb founders as toddlers. :D

Hello to you [@Guido](#) as well, nice to meet you! [@Deborah](#) and [@Paul](#) welcome welcome, hope you enjoy the new forum and thanks for the suggestions. Feel free to post feedback in the Beta board too [here](#).

Also Deborah, I noticed you have many interests that some of our other members might share as well - I'd like to point you to the off-topic section, in case you feel like you'd like to discuss these at any point. The off topic board in the Hosting category is called [The Living Room](#). :-)

**ADMIN** MarjoOnline Community Manager in London,  
United Kingdom

10-22-2015 05:28 PM

Options ▾

Hello and nice to see all of your introductions here, welcome [@Lucille & Alan](#), [@Ian](#), [@Florian](#), [@Till & Jutta](#)! :-)



Amir Homayoon  
Level 2 in Irvine, CA  
02-24-2016 04:57 PM

Options ▾

I have joined Airbnb in July 2014 but didn't start hosting until a year later! Absolutely love the concept and quite fascinated by the potential it has offered me to not only get to know people from all over the world (15 families from 7 countries in my case) but also generating substantial amount of money on the side!

At this point I almost mastered how to check my rates and adjust it accordingly using tools that Airbnb offers, making reservations, accommodating guests from A to Z, following up before and after guest check-ins and check-outs.

I still have concern on what the longevity of Airbnb will be in cities that have penalized or intimidated hosts and hope to be able to put that worry behind. Looking forward to reading more success stories and give and take feedbacks to fellow hosts. The app is amazing but could have some improvements. Checking the website and the app on my iPhone/ipad is part of my daily routine and takes place half dozen times a day.

I am grateful for this opportunity and wish success for all involved.

Amir H. Tajalli



Peter  
Level 10 in London, United Kingdom  
02-24-2016 08:25 PM

Options ▾

Welcome and I hope your city continues to allow you this pleasure. Airbnb is working really hard to persuade governments and districts about the good that Airbnb does for people like us and our guests.



Reply

**Deborah**

Level 10 in California, United States

10-15-2015 07:59 PM

Options ▾

Hello Marjo, Janet & G, Keith, Guido, Lucille and Alan!

I am Deborah, from the East Bay in the San Francisco Bay Area. I help run the New Hosts Forum, and Home Sharers of the East Bay, and have been busy lately helping hosts organize, as several cities in the East Bay have started started to consider short term rental regulations.

About me -- I love the East Bay, the mellow side of the Bay, where I've lived for 30 years since graduating from UC Berkeley. I have a range of interests in the realm of creative arts --writing, drawing and painting-- and I study astrology and practice yoga. I think my favorite pets are birds -- I have a flock of backyard chickens, as well as a few quail. I find them to be very sweet pets even though they dont' like to be petted. I can talk to them though and they appreciate that. My guests get fresh eggs when the "girls" are in the mood to provide.

Travel? I could say -- I explore the world, but dont' go far. The vast majority of my travel is by car -- my vacations are almost all camping trips. So I like those Airbnb listings for cabins and yurts in people's rural farms. I like to travel inward when I go outward so I often travel in order to find a nice place for a private meditation retreat or art/writing retreat. Paris? I'd love to go if I could drive there....but I am going to be excited to hear how the experience was for you all.

Happy to be here!



6

Reply



Paul  
Level 10 in Brunswick, Australia  
10-15-2015 08:52 PM

Options ▾

Hey All!

Paul from Melbourne, Australia here! Happy to be in here beta testing with my fellow global host organisers.

First suggestion, a 'quick reply' with no page load would be handy... and emoticons. I'm sure Airbnb can style some beauties up. ;)

Cheers,  
Paul



Reply



Deborah  
Level 10 in California, United States  
10-15-2015 09:28 PM

Options ▾

@Paul, really **nice** to see you here!!! (oh good we get text colors too, fun!!) What a coincidence, hmmm? No, actually I am not surprised to see you here -- emoticons, good idea. I was having a lot of fun with those lately in another forum.

I just thought I would experiment with the images, but when I clicked on the camera to add an image, I got a pop up box which I did not know what to do with. IT gave me a choice to add a source or image description -- not sure what to put in those boxes. But -- guess what -- when I clicked on HTML in the menu bar above, then went to an emoticon website and picked an emoticon, and grabbed the HTML code for it and pasted it on the HTML version of this page, wa -la I see the emoticon...now lets' see if it saves when I click on "post"...



Reply



Deborah

Level 10 in California, United States

10-15-2015 09:35 PM

Options ▾

Yea! The emoticon worked! It came through....!!



and more ...some odd hosts are joining us here today, hosts from another planet I think....



Reply



Fiona (& Family)

Level 7 in Richmond, VA

11-05-2015 09:34 AM

Options ▾

@Deborah Cool emoticon!

May you ever be the benevolent ruler of your own domain that is your life. Allow no other to rule over it.



Reply

16



Wanda

Level 1 in Rotterdam, Netherlands  
04-27-2016 04:39 AM

Options ▾

Hi,

I'm new - Wanda from Rotterdam, but don't know yet how it all works, that is: the community.

I have a very urgent matter which i would like to discuss here somewhere because Airbnb doesn;t reply on my question.

Can somebody tell me or give me a link where to put my questions?

Thanks so much!

Have a nice day!

Wanda



0

Reply



Peter

Level 10 in London, United Kingdom  
04-27-2016 04:41 AM

Options ▾

Just post your question under General Hosting. Or even here.



0

Reply

LINE 1 continue:





**Paul And Raymond**  
Level 3 in Sydney, Australia  
10-15-2015 09:29 PM

Options ▾

Hi Paul,

Not at all sprurposed to see one of Melbourne's mot prominent hosts invited to teh beta testing!



Reply



**Deborah**  
Level 10 in California, United States  
10-15-2015 09:41 PM - edited  
10-15-2015 09:43 PM

Options ▾

What...now we have [@Paul](#) and [@Paul](#)!!

Hello, the other Paul, welcome, nice to see you here too! Anyone else from Australia going to come and join us?

I am starting to explore around, got a bit lost on these new pages, I wasn't sure if I would find my way back... but I did. Had some questions about what content goes where in the new boards. Got a little worried hosts new to the board might feel anxious posting things in the wrong place and get kicked out ...batted out...



Oops!

Hope there will be some either flexibility on the topics or expanded descriptions of the boards, to help folks feel comfortable posting. I imagine in time the boards will become full enough of content that hosts will use existing content to figure out what fits in each board.



Reply



**Till & Jutta**  
Level 10 in Stuttgart, Germany  
10-18-2015 02:06 PM

Options ▾

Hi [@Paul](#), nice to see you here!

[ [FAQ+Support](#) | [Tutorials](#) | [Ratgeber](#) | [Stuttgart HSC](#) ]



Reply



**Paul And Raymond**  
Level 3 in Sydney, Australia  
10-15-2015 09:36 PM

Options ▾

Hi from Sydney!

I've been hosting since early 2012 and have loved the whole experience. Especially when I went to the OPen in San Francisco last year. And of course I'm booked for Paris and counting the days.

Originally from New Zealand, I have lived in Australia for over half of my life.

I work as a lecturer for a counselling and psychotherapy college although I am neither of those things (by training I am a research sociologist but it is easier to find ongoing work in teaching and student management).

I've travelled a dozen times on Airbnb and always stayed in a place that I had to myself or just with my boyfriend. But for the first time recently we stayed with a host in the home. Unbelievably wonderful people - perfect folk in a semi-rural area who were so funny and welcoming. Now I really understand how much you get to know why locals love their environment when you share it with them.



Reply



**Deborah**  
Level 10 in California, United States  
10-15-2015 09:49 PM

Options ▾

I agree, Paul -- I think it helps hosts to feel more love for their area and environment when they get to share it with others. I certainly find that when I have guests to my house, their seeing my area with new eyes helps me see it all with new eyes, and love things that I had started to take for granted, be grateful for things I had started to take for granted. So...a gift from hosting is....our guests give us the gift of seeing our neighborhood or region all anew.







Fiona (& Family)

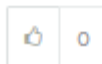
Level 7 in Richmond, VA

11-05-2015 09:39 AM

Options ▾

@Paul Isn't it lovely to connect on a personal level with the hosts?! We love connecting with our amazing guests too (mostly--there'll always be that 1% ... buggerit!) Our guests love picking our brains about our recommendations if they don't have anything specific in mind themselves that they want to do/visit/see. We can give them jam-packed (usually on a circuit), but quite do-able suggestions. The guests we've shared this type of information with, come back and are thrilled with their adventures :)

May you ever be the benevolent ruler of your own domain that is your life. Allow no other to rule over it.



Reply



Miyuki

Level 2 in Shibuya, Japan

10-16-2015 02:37 AM - edited

10-16-2015 02:42 AM

Options ▾

Hello I am Miyuki from Tokyo, Japan.

I have been using Airbnb since 2011. Nice to meet you everybody here.



Reply



Keith

Level 8 in Calgary, Canada

10-21-2015 10:12 PM - edited

10-21-2015 10:14 PM

Options ▾

こんにちは、Hello from Canada, @Miyuki

Yoshiko and Keith are going to the Open in Paris and would like to meet hosts from Japan. よろしく。

--

KnY



Reply

Join the conversation



574 Comments



4483 Views



Tomo

Level 2 in Tokyo, Japan

10-16-2015 07:05 AM

Options ▾

Hi everyone,

My name is Tomo and like Miyuki,

I'm a host in Japan.

Hope to see you guys in AO and maybe at my yoga and meditaion class. :)



Reply



Deborah

Level 10 in California, United States

10-16-2015 08:12 AM - edited

10-16-2015 08:16 AM

Options ▾

Hi Bronwyn, hi Miyuki and Tomo!

Wow, I love it that we can now post video in our posts! Miyuki, yours is wonderful, the video of Japan. And how great that we can actually click to make that video a full screen one! This is a fantastic new feature, I think folks will really love it.

Now, if I could just figure out how to post images ....I see that for posting video one gives a URL link, but when I click on the camera icon I get taken to a box that says "source" yet it does not tell me if I am supposed to put a URL in that box. I did put a URL in the box here, let's see if this works:



No, that doesn't seem to work as it only gives a little photo icon but the picture doesn't show up

Since that doesn't work, I see a way to get an HTML code for images, by uploading them on [www.tinypic.com](http://www.tinypic.com), so let me see if I can add the image that way, here, by clicking on the "HTML" version of message layout and adding the HTML code:





**Marjo**

Online Community Manager in London,  
United Kingdom

10-16-2015 09:51 AM - edited  
10-16-2015 09:53 AM

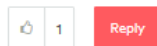
Options ▾

Hi everyone, great to see so many of you already posting here!  
Welcome!

@Deborah You have many good observations, thank you for pointing these out! Very helpful. The image uploading should get easier today, as there is a fix going to be put in place soon. If you check in a few min, it might already be done. Let me know if you find it easier now.

@Miyuki Beautiful video you posted! It's also good to see the full screen function working so nicely. :-)

-----  
New to the Community Center? Check [Getting Started](#) for guidelines and info.



Reply



**Lucille & Alan**

Level 5 in Toronto, Canada

10-16-2015 12:31 PM - edited  
10-16-2015 12:50 PM

Options ▾

Ok, I should have introduced myself earlier, I'll do that now (better late than never). I'm Lucille. I host in Toronto, Canada along with my husband, Alan. We've been hosting since 2013. We are really enjoying the opportunity that Airbnb gives us to meet people from all over the world. Nice to see such a diverse group of hosts testing out this new platform.



Reply