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Prøvens form (sæt kryds):	Projekt	Synopsis	Portfolio	Speciale	Skriftlig hjemmeopgave
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Uddannelsens navn	Tourism	
Semester	10th	
Prøvens navn (i studieordningen)	Master Thesis	
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Den afleverede opgave fylder (antal tegn med mellemrum i den afleverede opgave) (indholdfortegnelse, litteraturliste og bilag medregnes ikke)*	151.054	
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Abstract

This current study is a global study about the general attitude of guests and hosts about Airbnb based on their personal experiences using the business. Moreover, the research of this thesis fills a research gap in which it argues that no previous academic research has focused solely on reviews from the perspectives of guests and hosts about Airbnb. The thesis further argues that due to the importance social media plays today, it is relevant to use online reviews as the primary data to obtain new insights about Airbnb.

Hence, the primary research objective of this thesis was to gain insight into the general attitude within the online community about Airbnb through online user-generated reviews on the review websites Trustpilot and Sitejabber. Hence, through the methodology and method of netnography, this thesis excavated and analyzed 224 reviews where 181 of them were based on negative experiences.

The findings from the analysis suggest that there are many issues regarding Airbnb from a host and guest perspective, and, that although the indisputable success of Airbnb is evident through their innovative internal reputation system, external review platforms, like Trustpilot and Sitejabber paint a different picture of Airbnb. Hence, the average star rating is 1,5 out of 5.

Moreover, based on five predominant themes that derived from the reviews, and the interpretive epistemology of this paper, it is concluded that the general attitude toward Airbnb from the perspectives of the online host and guest community is *distrust*.

Thus, in correlation with preexisting research regarding motivational factors for using Airbnb and complexities in regards to trust, regulations, and responsibility, the findings from the analysis initiate a discussion about distrust. Furthermore this thesis suggests that Airbnb be more transparent and specific as to what their role is and in what issues it takes responsibly for, and thus, what can be expected from Airbnb when issues do emerge.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

This thesis is a global study about the experiences, opinions and general attitude in the online community about the Airbnb business. More specifically, the online community in this thesis consists of the two online review platforms; sitejabber.com and trustpilot.com. Henceforth, this thesis will review and analyze the reviews given by hosts and guests about Airbnb on the two platforms from January to March 2018 to identify the general attitude about Airbnb experiences to gain new knowledge about Airbnb. Thus, this thesis aims to contribute to the preexisting academic research about Airbnb and provide new insight concerning host and guests experience and attitude towards the Airbnb business.

In the following, the structure of this Introduction chapter will be presented.

Structure of chapter

This introduction will initially present a brief and superficial elaboration of the **terminology (1.1.)**, revolving collaborative economy, which will be applied throughout this thesis. In the extensive literature about collaborative economy, many different and overlapping terms are used when researching the phenomenon. Hence an initial terminology delimitation is necessary in order not to confuse the reader.

Secondly, a presentation of the **background (1.2.)** about collaborative economy and subsequently, Airbnb, will be provided. The background presentation aims to provide a superficial and introductory understanding to the reader about the collaborative economy - under which category Airbnb falls. This section will lay the baseline for the understanding of the central theme of the thesis, namely Airbnb. In continuation of the background introduction, my **motivation (1.3.)** for choosing Airbnb as the main topic will be presented in the subsequent section, followed by the **audience (1.4.)** that this thesis could benefit.

Following the presentation of my motivation, the main research question and **research objectives (1.5.)** will be presented. The primary research objective of this thesis is to provide insight into guest and host experiences and attitude towards Airbnb based on their personal experiences, which will

be excavated through online reviews conducted on trustpilot.com (Trustpilot) and sitejabber.com. (Sitejabber). Lastly, this chapter will conclude with a section that outlines the **structure of this thesis (1.6.)**.

Henceforth, the following section will introduce the terminology used throughout this thesis.

1.1. Terminology

Since there are many different and overlapping terms in the academic literature when it comes to the collaborative economy, the purpose of this section is to give a brief elaboration of the terminology used throughout this thesis to avoid any confusions.

The collaborative economy which online services, as we know it today, stretch from car and house sharing, travel, shopping, music streaming and many more, has many overlapping terms in the academic field; e.g. "sharing economy," "collaborative consumption" and "peer to peer economy" (Cheng, 2016, p. 61) and so on. Moreover, the term, "Sharing Economy" was argued by Slee (2015, p. 11) to be the correct term (in 2015) when talking about the phenomenon, albeit the term "sharing" might not be an accurate indication of what the phenomenon is really about. For example, (Martin, 2016) underlines, that the common sense meaning of the word 'sharing' excludes forms of exchange where an economic benefit accrues to one or more party, hence CEA innovations like Airbnb could be excluded from the sharing economy.

Thus, since there are many different terms when it comes to the collaborative economy, the objective of this section is to account for the terms used in this paper, so confusion does not emerge. I could have written pages about the terminology of the collaborative economy and the more precise meanings, authors have argued for and against, revolving the different terms, but this is however not my intention. The only intention of this section is to underline that this thesis will use the term *collaborative economy* (CE) – when talking about collaborative economy in general, and *collaborative economy accommodation* (CEA) – when talking specifically about accommodation services, such as Airbnb.

Airbnb is also described as 'peer accommodation rental operators' where the value is generated by

the public who are neither employees nor have shares in the firm, but where profit is extracted for the benefit of the private firm (Szilvia Gyimóthy, 2017c, p. 34). Moreover, CE that takes place between individuals and other individuals, without an intermediary can be termed peer to peer (P2P). However, this research does not care to go deeper into the difference between the terminology and will thus stick to collaborative economy and collaborative economy accommodation.

The following section will provide a background description of CE and CEA and serve as an introductory to the main topic of this thesis, Airbnb, and the motivation behind the theme of choice.

1.2.   Background

'We just may be entering the post-ownership economy.'
(Belk, 2014, p. 1599).

In accordance with the predictions of Belk, and as major cities like Amsterdam, Seoul, London, and San Francisco describe themselves as "sharing cities," and as an increasing number of politicians and policymakers worldwide adopt CE it is undeniable that the phenomenon is here to stay (O´Regan & Choe, 2017a, p. 162). The collaborative economy is a new, social, global and innovative wave in which business models use the internet and technology to facilitate and provide customers a platform for real-life exchanges such as, e.g., cars and short-term apartment rental. In other words, the overall purpose of CE online platforms is 'to be matchmakers so that there is an exchange of goods and services between peer groups' (Evans & Schmalenese, 2016 in Ganapati & Reddick, 2018, p. 78). The dominant players in this field are Uber and Airbnb (Slee, 2015), where the net worth of Airbnb is 30 billion dollars, exceeding the net worth of the Hilton hotel chain (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018).

Collaborative Economy is not in itself a new phenomenon, but one that has been practiced in communities for centuries (Belk, 2014). In fact, CE practices such as home swapping are documented as far back as the middle ages, although the modern phenomenon of home-swapping originated in the 1950's in Great Britain and the USA (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). However, the

buzz around collaborative economy really started entering the mainstream in 2013 and 2014, appealing to 'a new era of openness' (Slee, 2015, p. 10). Hence, it is argued by researchers that the 'intertwining nature of the actors in the CE system requires a holistic approach to understanding this rapidly growing area both as an economic opportunity and a sustainable form of consumption' (Martin 2016 in Cheng, 2016, p. 67).

Although there is still limited research on CE and there is still no standard quantifying the size of CE, tourism and hospitality scholars envision that CE will change the future dynamics of the industry (Cheng, 2016). Gyimóthy & Dredge (2017, p. 27) further indicate that there is limited knowledge into whether CE will lead to the restructuring of tourism systems or in which way it will affect communities or how it will transform guest-host relationships.

Supporters of CE view the phenomenon as innovative and as a social movement that is less about money and more about building a better and more sustainable future, enabling people to become 'micro-entrepreneurs' and building a sense of trust in communities and between strangers (Slee, 2015, p. 9-12). In continuation, proponents of CE argue that CE innovations 'unlocks idling assets' (Dredge, 2017b, p. 48), and that those assets contribute to economic growth and job creations as well as opening 'ecologies of innovation leading to increased competition' (Botsman, 2010 in Dredge, 2017b, p. 48). Additionally, Dredge & Gyimóthy, (2017), identify the myths about CE that it 'embraces openness, inclusivity, and the commons; it reallocates wealth across the value chain, and it carries the seeds of a more fair, just and equal society' (p.7). Moreover, 'that the collaborative economy focuses on community lifestyle and living local movements, it is an antidote to the failures of capitalism, and it contributes to a moral turn in consumer decision-making' (ibid).

However, since CE began to take off in all its forms, authors argue that it has fueled a range of disruptive innovations and that understanding the nature of this change is important in understanding the future of tourism (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2017). Disruptive innovations are described by Christensen (1997 in Blal et al., 2018) as a process that occurs in phases: 'an initial step when the innovation is not adopted by mainstream customers, performs worse than existing products, and is used only in niche or fringe markets; in a later stage, mainstream customers adopt the innovation rapidly, thus disrupting the leading firms in the market' (p. 86).

Although Airbnb is not the only company who facilitates this online, short-term rental-review based CEA model (others include VRBO, Wimdu, and Onefinestay), 'Airbnb is indisputably the most prominent' (Guttentag, 2017, p. 98).

To mention a few disruptions that stem from the fast growth of Airbnb, they stretch from locals being pushed out of Barcelona (Arias-Sans & Quaglieri Dominguez, 2016) to impacting small and medium hotel room revenue (Blal et al., 2018; O´Regan & Choe, 2017b, p. 163; Slee, 2015c; Varma, Jukic, Pestek, Shultz, & Nestorov, 2016; Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2017) to simply facilitating illegal rentals in cities where regulations to fight its growth have been implemented (Guttentag, 2017), tax questions and many others. Thus, albeit the glory of CE has been accounted for, the darker side of the phenomenon such as 'extending a harsh and deregulated free market into previously protected areas of our lives' (Slee, 2015, p. 10) should not be ignored. These disruptions of CE underline the importance of understanding all aspects of CE. However, although Airbnb might be an initial disruption to its direct competitors, it has been suggested that by carving out a niche for themselves they force existing models to be revisited, innovated and changed and adapt to using technology (Varma et al., 2016).

Henceforth, since this thesis cannot cover all the aspects of Airbnb, it will look at the host/guest aspect of Airbnb through online reviews, to add to the literature that has already been widely debated.

Social media has become the most popular communication tool for both service providers and consumers, and the effectiveness of consumer-generated content is undeniable (Ha & Lee, 2018). Moreover, social media is argued to play a substantial part in the growth and success of Airbnb, which is a user-generated brand (Varma et al., 2016). Thus, the importance of knowing what the users feel and think about the brand is essential when trying to understand the concept deeper. Moreover, the rapidly increasing amount of social media information and consumer reviews on products can have a considerable effect on an organization both positively and negatively (Lai & To, 2015), hence, making consumer reviews particularly important and relevant when researching a business.

Following the background introduction to CE and Airbnb, which is the dominant player within

CEA (Slee, 2015), and the largest lodging company in the world (Varma et al., 2016), Airbnb will constitute the primary focus of this thesis. Henceforth, the motivations behind this choice of topic will be explained with further elaboration in the following section.

1.3. Motivation

This section aims to describe my motivation for choosing Airbnb as the primary topic of this paper. I am a frequent user of Airbnb, both as a host and a guest, which has only brought me positive experiences both financially as well as experience-wise. Therefore, researching the phenomenon of Airbnb was my choice based on personal interest. In addition to being a frequent user myself, and also financially dependent on the service as a host, everyone I now use Airbnb. Thus, it is evident how the phenomenon has taken a dominant position in cities and tourism in general.

After initial research stages, I realized that the experiences, opinions and general attitudes towards Airbnb, from hosts and guest's perspectives, did not reflect my own experiences, leading me with questions. In fact, review sites like Trustpilot and Sitejabber (and other platforms) indicated that Airbnb was way less popular than I had imagined. Furthermore, I found, that opinions and experiences from the perspectives of guests and hosts, was an under-researched subject within the general academic research of Airbnb. Thus, being a user of Airbnb myself, researching host and guest experiences seemed relevant and exciting in terms of gaining personal knowledge, as well as adding to the general academic knowledge of Airbnb.

Henceforth, I am interested in contributing to the preexisting knowledge of the phenomenon of Airbnb by excavating new knowledge about Airbnb obtained from the experiences and perspective of hosts and guests from online review sites. Since hosts and guests, such as myself, play the most crucial role in the success of Airbnb, excavating information from the same hosts and guests about Airbnb seems like an important initiative in the pursuit to obtaining a more holistic understanding of Airbnb.

Henceforward, the audience whom might be interested in the findings from this thesis will be described in the following section.

1.4. Audience

I believe that academics interested in Airbnb, policymakers working with CE, CE entrepreneurs and the people working to optimize Airbnb, can benefit from the research findings. Moreover, I believe that guests and hosts of Airbnb, like myself, will benefit from some of the insights this thesis has to offer, in terms of engaging with the service in a more critical light.

Thus, the research will contribute to academics preexisting research on the phenomenon and contribute by filling the research gap of host and guest's experiences and attitude. Policymakers can use this research to gain insight into the complexities that exist within the user community which may be taken into consideration when discussing prospective policies within the area. Furthermore, entrepreneurs who dream about entering the CEA market can learn from this paper's findings, and so can Airbnb themselves in regards to improvement. Lastly, host and guests can obtain insights into Airbnb which they had not previously considered.

The following section will present the research objectives of this thesis.

1.5. Research Objectives

The background section provided a brief and superficial introduction to the fact that CE and Airbnb are complex and have many layers which have already widely been researched academically. Those layers especially include regulatory issues in regards to Airbnb, trust issues and disruptions in the industry caused by Airbnb. Moreover, previous research, albeit limited, has been conducted into the reputation systems, in which guests and hosts review each other, and is arguably the fundamental feature of the Airbnb business model. However, in this thesis, I argue, that studying the reviews outside Airbnb's own reputation system is just as fundamental for understanding Airbnb as those studied of the reputation system.

Thus, having identified a gap in the research field of Airbnb, the objective of this thesis is to fill that gap by conducting a netnography and content and thematic analysis of the hosts and guest's opinions, experiences and general attitude of Airbnb, based on online reviews. Henceforth, analyzing the opinions of the current hosts and guests of Airbnb, from the online review platforms, Trustpilot and Sitejabber, will provide new insight into the phenomenon of Airbnb.

Henceforward, the research objective mentioned above lead to the following research question, which is also the main research question of this thesis:

> **What is the general attitude toward Airbnb in the online community - from a guest and host perspective?**

To address the main research question in the most comprehensible way a netnography and content analysis of Airbnb host and guest reviews will be conducted. Moreover, each chapter of the thesis will answer a sub-research question which will act as a guideline throughout the paper in order to answer the main research question in the most comprehensible way. The sub-research questions and their purpose will be elaborated upon in the following section about the paper's structure, followed by a diagram to give an illustrative, comprehensible overview of the structure of the paper and the research questions and objectives.

1.6. Structure of paper and sub-research questions

This section will present the structure of the paper and conclude with an illustrated overview in terms of a diagram.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter of this thesis is the **methodology (chapter 2).** The objective of the methodology is to present how this thesis will approach the research question, and thus initiates the chapter with a presentation of the **research paradigm (2.1.).** With a social constructivist philosophy of science, the methodology presents the study as a qualitative, exploratory and interpretive study in which the method and methodology of answering the research question will be through a **netnography (2.2.)** presented in the subsequent section. Netnography derives from ethnography and is based on extracting data and cultural insights through online platforms, and mostly consist of a mixed method approach, typically consisting of content and thematic analysis. Hence, the **content collection and thematic analysis (2.3.)** of the two online

review websites Trustpilot and Sitejabber will be explained. Lastly, this chapter will be concluded with a section devoted to explaining **limitations to methodology (2.4.)**.

Chapter 3 – Literature review

The primary objective of this chapter is to answer the following sub-questions: (1) *What role does Social Media and online reviews play for Airbnb?* And (2) *What are the main motivations for using Airbnb and challenges to Airbnb?* The aim of answering the first sub-research question is to provide basic insight into the role that social media and online reviews play when it comes to CE and Airbnb. Moreover, when the basics of Social media are understood, the relevance and importance of choosing online reviews as the primary data source of this thesis is justified. Therefore, **Social Media (3.1)** will be accounted for, followed by a section introducing **Airbnb (3.2.).**

The second sub-research question that this chapter aims to answer is to obtain a background understanding of what motivates people to use Airbnb, hence the section **motivations for using Airbnb (3.3.)** This section is a more in-depth excavation of the business of Airbnb and is essential for the following analysis because: When it is understood what motivates people to use Airbnb, it can more easily be excavated what disappoints people – and thus, be related to the general attitude about Airbnb from a host and guest's perspective. Furthermore, **challenges** will be presented in the following section **(3.4.)** where **complexities in regards to trust (3.4.1.)**, and **regulations and responsibilities (3.4.1.)** are especially demonstrated based on previous research. Complexities regarding trust, regulations, and responsibilities, when it comes to Airbnb, are found to be especially relevant to discuss in the findings from the analysis, in which these are issues that I argue relate to the general attitude of hosts and guests. Subsequently, this chapter will conclude with a **summary (3.5.).**

Chapter 4 – Analysis and Discussion

This chapter's objectives are to - through host and guest's reviews on Trustpilot and Sitejabber – excavate what the dominant themes that emerge are. This part of the analysis also answers the sub-research question: *What are the dominant themes about Airbnb from the host/guest reviews?* Based on the findings from the analysis the aim of this chapter is to answer the main research question 'what is the general attitude towards Airbnb based on host and guest experiences,' and discuss the conclusions that are drawn. Hence, after a section that presents the **sample profile (4.1.),** followed

by an initial section that introduces a brief overview of the general **findings (4.2.)**, the **themes (4.3.)** that derived from the findings will be presented and elaborated upon.

After the themes have been presented, and an initial discussion initiated in response to the themes, section **(4.4) What is the general attitude in the online community** will constitute an answer and elaboration to the main research question. This section also constitutes the central discussion part of the thesis, in which findings from the analysis are discussed and compared to the findings from the literature review. This section will argue, that distrust is the general attitude in the online community towards Airbnb. Furthermore, issues like regulations and responsibilities will be discussed and argued to play a role in the general attitude of distrust.

Henceforward, this section will be concluded with a section that evaluates the **quality and credibility of the data (4.5.),** followed by a brief **summary (4.6.)** of the findings.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This section will conclude the thesis and underline the answer to the main research question: *What is the general attitude toward Airbnb in the online community - from a guest and host perspective.*

The following diagram provides an overview of the structure of this paper and the sub—research questions that each chapter aims to answer, before beginning the methodology chapter.

Main Research Question

What is the general attitude toward Airbnb in the online community - from a guest and host perspective?

Structure ⟷ Sub Research Questions

Structure	Sub Research Questions
2. Methodology	How will this thesis answer the main research question and research objectives?
3. Literature Review	• What role does Social Media and online reviews play for Airbnb? • What are the main motivations for using Airbnb and challenges for Airbnb?
4. Analysis and Discussion	• What are the dominant themes about Airbnb from the Host/Guest reviews? • What is the general attitude toward Airbnb in the online community - from a guest and host persepctive?
5. Conclusion	

The following chapter will constitute to methodology of this thesis.

2. Methodology

The objective of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the methodology used to answer the research objectives. The methodology and method employed in this thesis is a netnography of the online community that uses Airbnb (hosts and guests), with the purpose of excavating information about the general opinions and experience about Airbnb.

The primary data of this paper will be the findings from a netnography conducted of user-generated reviews about experiences of Airbnb.

Thus, the primary purpose of this thesis is to provide an answer to the following sub research question:

> ### Sub Research Question:
> - How will this thesis answer the main research question and research objectives?

Structure of Chapter

This chapter will initially introduce the **research paradigm (2.1.)** in which it briefly presents the ontological and epistemological views that this thesis follows and the methodology and method of this which is a netnography.

Henceforth, the section elaborating the methodology and method of **netnography (2.2.)** will be presented which will be the primary method for data collection of online reviews of Airbnb.

Subsequently, the process of **data collection and analysis (2.3.)** will be thoroughly described which will subsequently be demonstrated in a diagram that provides an overview of the methodology. From here, the chapter will be concluded with a section that reflects on the **challenges and limitation to the methodology (2.4.).**

The following section will initiate this chapter with a presentation of the research approach.

2.1.   Research Paradigm

This thesis is a qualitative, interpretive and exploratory study of the users' opinions of Airbnb. An exploratory research is described in Saunders (2009) as a means of finding out 'what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light' (Robson 2002, p. 59 in Saunders 2009, p. 139). In accordance, this thesis aims to explore the Airbnb phenomenon in a new light since host and guest reviews have not yet been the main subject of academic research. According to Decrop (2004, p. 2) qualitative and interpretive methods, which involve comprehensive observation, are the best when investigating human experiences. Hence, the main research question "What is the general attitude toward Airbnb as a company in the online community from a guest and host perspective?" will be answered through the approach of conducting a netnography of host and guest reviews followed by content and thematic analysis. Thus, the main method this thesis will use in answering the research question is netnography and hereafter content analysis which is also seen as the methodology of this paper.

Netnography stems from the qualitative research method, ethnography which is relevant for this thesis, as the typical methodology for ethnography is the same methodology employed in this thesis. 'Ethnography' and 'participant observation' is today widely acknowledged as the same discipline (Yanow, 2012), in which netnography can be argued to be aligned with "participant observation" online. Moreover, just like ethnography, netnography is "naturalistic, immersive, descriptive, adaptable, and focused on context" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 1). Following ethnography, which work Watson (2012) states fall into the pragmatist epistemological tradition, the ontological-epistemological poles which this paper follows are social constructivist-interpretivist which Yanow (2012) argues are the most typical for ethnography. Furthermore, since the primary research method and methodology of this paper is a netnography of online reviews, this paper takes the ontology of social constructivism in which it acknowledges that reality is socially constructed and that there is no single meaning to finding knowledge and no single reality. This ontology is also evident in the choice of data collection through online reviews. The epistemology is qualitative in its method of netnography and interpretive in analyzing its data which follows the lines of exploratory research (Stepchenkova, Kirilenko, & Morrison, 2009). In accordance with interpretive research, which 'seeks people's accounts of how they make sense of the world and the structures and processes within it' (Fisher, Buglear, Lowry, Mutch, & Tansley, 2010, p. 59) the interpretivist epistemology is evident in the method of netnography in which the users opinions of Airbnb are accounted for

through their reviews and interpreted by me in order to draw conclusions about host and guest attitudes about Airbnb.

Following Watson's (2012) argument that there are enormous advantages in treating ethnography as a distinctive type of research rather than as a method of doing research, netnography as a method of data collection can be argued to be not only a way of seeing but also a way of knowing. Henceforth, I argue that netnography not be only the primary method in this thesis but also the methodology. Netnography will thus be further elaborated upon in the following section.

2.2. Netnography

Netnography is a method 'based on anthropology for building social media data into cultural insights' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 1). In describing the essence of netnography, Kozinets continues that 'online interactions are valued as a cultural reflection that yields deep human understanding. Like in-person ethnography, netnography is naturalistic, immersive, descriptive, multi-method, adaptable, and focused on context' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 1). Moreover, analyzing the social networks has become a valuable tool when attempting to understanding the complexities of a market (Alavi, 2015). Particularly analyzing social media (e.g., Facebook) can advance our understanding of information sharing, communication and opinion formation (Lai & To., 2015). Hence, netnography is argued to be useful in tourism studies due to the expanding user-generated online platforms that provide researchers to understand tourists experiences (e.g., through reviews) better, due to its ability to take advantage of the changing virtual landscape of tourism (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). Furthermore, Kozinets (2010) suggests that netnography is best fit in the front-end and discovery stages of innovation and marketing and brand management. This argument makes sense since the internet offers us access to valuable consumer-to-consumer communications that are relevant, detailed, uncited and obtained in an unobtrusive way (Kozinets, 2010). Moreover, the internet has created a robust online community (Alvari, 2015) which is of high value in the marketing field. Thus, since Airbnb is a global phenomenon and exists through an online platform, conducting a netnography as the primary data collection approach seems the most relevant to extract data from the online community and thus uncover host and guest opinion, experiences and general attitude. In other words, the raw data from the online community which Kozinets (2010) describes as authentic, spontaneous, indigenous, unforced, unadorned and powerful, shall set the basis for bringing an

additional understanding of Airbnb to answer the main research questions.

Experience is something that happens to a person and thus, I, cannot directly access (Caru and Cova 2008 in Alvari 2015). Therefore, I can only interpret what consumers have expressed orally, or through their behavior, or in this case, in writing, with the help of netnography, by 'passively monitoring the community and integrating the gathered information, knowledge into the new product development process' (Kozinets 2002 in Alvari 2015, p. 72). Thus, in accordance with most tourism researchers that have conducted a netnography, I adopted the 'passive, lurker approach' (Mkono & Markwell, 2014, p. 290) in the sense that I did not participate in activity or reveal my research activity to online participants (ibid.) when carrying out this netnography. Furthermore, due to taking the passive lurker approach, and the fact that most of the reviews showed no identity of the authors, I do not find it necessary to account for ethical implications of the approach.

Henceforth, using the information obtained from social media platforms, the aim is to gain valuable insights into the beliefs, values, attitudes, and perceptions (Lai & To, 2015) of guests and hosts of Airbnb to get an understanding of the general attitude of Airbnb in the online community.

Netnography is multimethod, that is, a combination of various methods (Mkono, 2012) in which I will use content and thematic analysis, which will be elaborated upon in the following section.

2.3.   Content collection and thematic analysis

'Making inferences from a symbolic medium – usually text – is the essence of content analysis'
(Weber, 1983, p. 127)

With the increase of electronic data over the past couple of decades, content analysis has become a well-established researched methodology, and thus, is frequently used when analyzing communications in social sciences (Stepchenkova et al., 2009). In opposition to general quantitative research, the observational approach of content analysis allows for the users' opinions to be taken into consideration (Lai & To, 2015). Hence, this thesis uses content and thematic analysis when analyzing the data. The combination of these approaches can also be described as a grounded theory approach which suggests, that besides collecting relevant data for analysis, the researcher must also

allow concepts and themes to emerge from the ground up (Lai & To, 2015). This approach is also in accordance with the inductive research approach and typical in exploratory and interpretive research. Henceforth, I develop a theory as a result of the data collection and analysis, rather than having an initial, predetermined theory (Saunders 2010, p. 124). In other words, since Airbnb is a relatively new phenomenon into which there is limited research and literature – especially in regards to the opinions of hosts and guests – taking an inductive research approach is the most natural.

Hence, within the methodology of netnography this thesis conducts a content analysis based on Weber's (1983) definition in the beginning of this section, and furthermore on the definitions that: 'content analysis is a nonobtrusive research methodology used to study a wide range of textual data – for example, various types of media messages, interview transcripts, discussion boards in virtual communities and/or travel diaries' (Stepchenkova et al., 2009, p. 455) and is 'any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages' (Holsti, 1969 in Lai & To, 2015, p. 140).

The following section will describe the first step in the content and thematic analysis which is identifying social media platforms and setting a timeframe.

2.3.1. Content collection: Identifying social media platforms and timeframe

The first step in the content analysis is to identify and determine which review websites are the most sufficient in providing enough relevant data for conducting the analysis.

After searching the internet, two sufficient social media platforms were determined suitable for analysis; 'Social media comprise Internet-based applications that are developed based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. Social media enables the creation and exchange of user-generated content' (Lai & To., 2015, p. 139). Accordingly, the two chosen social media platforms, Trustpilot.com and Sitejabber.com, introduced below, allowed users to review Airbnb in the star system from 1 star to 5 where 1 star is the lowest.

Trustpilot.com

Founded in Denmark in 2012 and today a global platform, Trustpilot is one of the world's biggest communities for online reviews (https://dk.trustpilot.com/about). With more than 500 employees

and offices around the globe, Trustpilot has become a well-known online community that enables individuals to review companies globally independent of the companies. Due to Trustpilot's high traffic, with more than 500.000 new reviews every month (ibid.) and with 2809 reviews (as from today: May 26th, 2018) of Airbnb, which is more than any other independent review website, trustpilot.com was chosen as the dominant review website for excavating data for this thesis.

Sitejabber.com

During my web search, I came across the review website, Sitejabber of which I had not previously heard about. Sitejabber was founded in San Francisco in 2008 with the objective to help consumers get better information about companies before making purchases (https://www.sitejabber.com/about-us). Much along the same lines as Trustpilot. With 2.5 million+ monthly visitors, claiming to be 'the leading destination for customer ratings and reviews of business' (ibid.), and with a sufficient amount of reviews on Airbnb with 867 reviews as of May 26th, 2018, I decided that it was a sufficient platform for retrieving data.

The next step, after having identified and chosen the review platforms was to set a timeframe which I chose to be from January to March, including March 2018. The timeframe of (only) three months was necessary due to time, and I decided that three months be a justifiable window for getting an idea of the general attitude about Airbnb.

Hence, figure 1 shows how many reviews were excavated from each of the two platforms from January to March and how many stars were given in each platform. Furthermore, an average of the star review was provided, which was calculated using omnicalculator.com (https://www.omnicalculator.com/statistics/five-star-rating). Knowing the average of the star was interesting to get an initial idea of what the attitude would be once the analysis began.

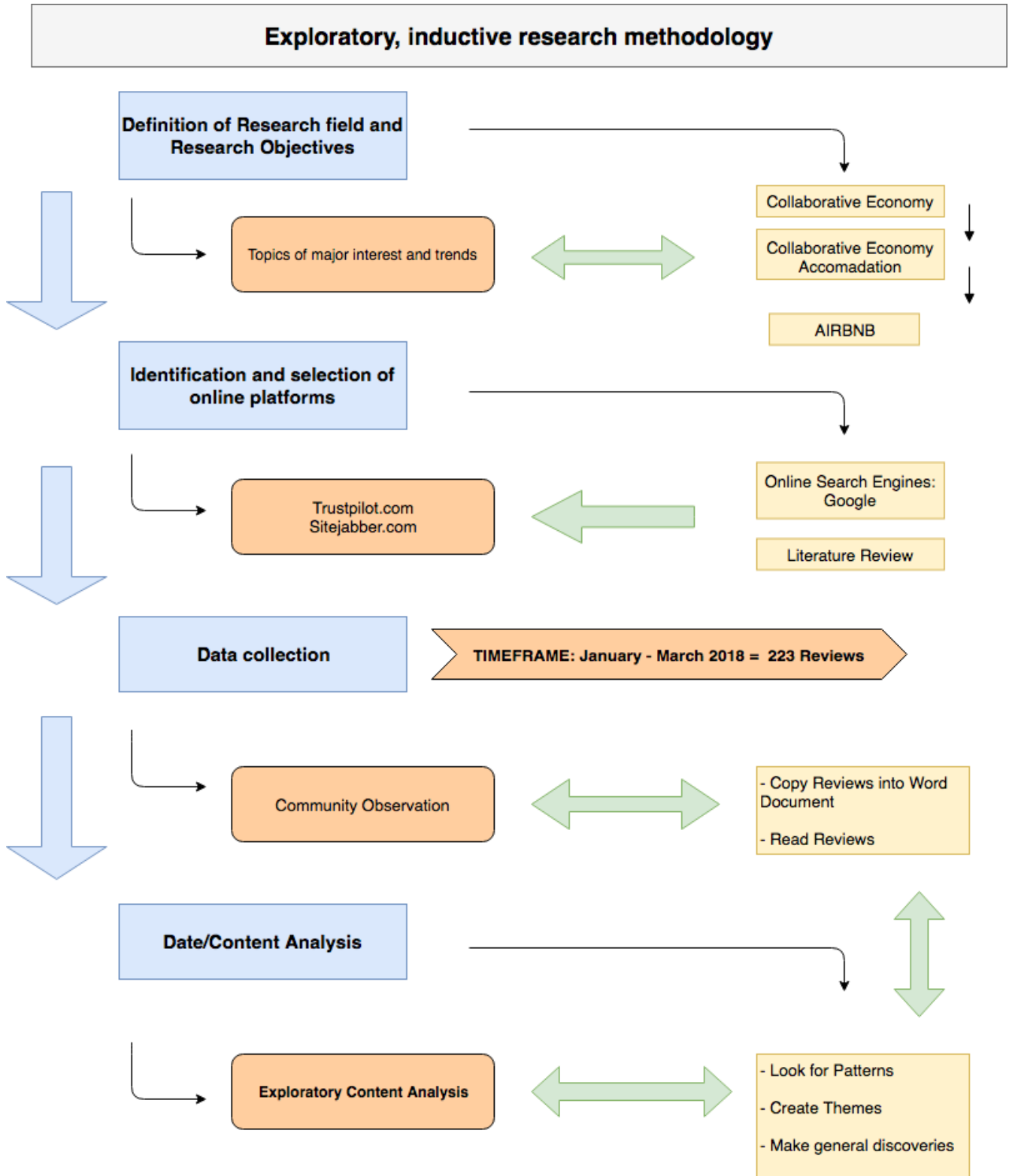| Stars 1 - 5	Trustpilot.com	Sitejabber.com	Total
1*	163	18	181
2*	11	2	13
3*	6	0	6
4*	4	1	5
5*	19	0	19
Total	203	21	**224**
Average star rating	**1,55**	**1,23**	**1,5**

Figure 1. Overview of the number of reviews and stars given to Airbnb by users from January – March 2018.

2.3.2. Thematic content analysis

When analyzing the user reviews of Airbnb (discussion boards in virtual communities) to get insight into the perspectives and opinions of users, users a qualitative content and thematic analysis were applied. Furthermore, the thematic analysis was conducted on the reviews to identify recurring patterns (Mkono, 2012). Often, a word-count content analysis is employed which entails the mapping of many words in the texts into fewer content categories (Weber, 1983). However, I did not use this technique in the sense of counting words, but instead identified reoccurring themes following a thematic analysis; First, all the reviews were read to get a general sense of the themes in the data. Following was the process of manual coding in which I selected recurring themes and categorized them according to the number of stars they had been given (see fig. 2). Next, I highlighted illustrative quotes for reference and evidence in the analysis and discussion of findings. Content analysis is usually employed using computer software (Lai & To, 2015; Stepchenkova et al., 2009; Weber, 1983). However, the content and thematic analysis in this thesis was conducted manually into an excel sheet (see appendix 3).

Thus, instead of obtaining the word-frequency matrix (Stepchenkova et al., 2009), themes and links among the themes, rather than words, were identified manually as they appeared which is following an exploratory and qualitative content analysis approach (Lai & To, 2015). Moreover, this is the most typical method used by tourists researchers (Mehmetoglu and Damn 2003 in Stepchenkova et al., 2009).

Summing up, to fulfill the research objective of this chapter 'how will this thesis answer the main research question and sub research question' a diagram to illustrate the research approach is provided. Hence, the netnography approach, illustrated below, is based on the content and thematic analysis used in this thesis, a diagram of the research design is provided based on Kozinet's six overlapping steps of doing netnographic research (2010), Lai & To's suggested content analysis approach (2015), and Alvari's research design (2015):

Exploratory, inductive research methodology

Definition of Research field and Research Objectives

Topics of major interest and trends

Collaborative Economy

Collaborative Economy Accomodation

AIRBNB

Identification and selection of online platforms

Trustpilot.com Sitejabber.com

Online Search Engines: Google

Literature Review

Data collection

TIMEFRAME: January - March 2018 = 223 Reviews

Community Observation

- Copy Reviews into Word Document

- Read Reviews

Date/Content Analysis

Exploratory Content Analysis

- Look for Patterns

- Create Themes

- Make general discoveries

The following and last section of this chapter will account for a few of the most obvious limitations to the methodology.

2.4.   Limitations to methodology

In accordance to Kozinets (2010), one of the main challenges to netnography is how to find the appropriate data, and how to balance the vast amount of available data. The internet seems to be an endless hole with countless opportunities and links when you type in a word in the search engine, such as the collaborative economy, or Airbnb. Accordingly, finding the right platforms that can provide enough and reliable data for analysis can be hard to choose, and there are arguably better platforms out there than the ones this thesis used.

Following, this methodology has limitations. The first and most evident limitation, is that netnography research is usually part of a triangulated or mixed methodology (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). Thus, applying a third method in addition to content and thematic analysis would perhaps have strengthened the body of the findings. For instance, conducting a survey in the online community with more in-depth questions about the themes that had derived from the content analysis. I realize that a potential survey collection on a grand scale could have potentially contributed significantly to getting a broader and more critical understanding of the general opinions of guests and hosts.

Secondly, limitations to the research method could arguably be found in the lack of not using a computer program to assist in word count, storage and theme identification like for instance CATA software (Stepchenkova et al., 2009) or Lexical (Lai & To, 2015). However, due to the amount of reviews, which I found manageable and in agreeance with the arguments that 'computerized measurement of content invariably misses such latent aspects of the text as figures of speech, irony, tone, colloquialisms' (Morris 1994 in Stepchenkova et al., 2009, p. 457), I decided against it. In other words, I would fear, that using a quantitative word calculator would make me miss some of the underlining meanings and emotions of many of the reviews. Nevertheless, do to the interpretive and qualitative epistemologies of this research paper, in which the conclusions of the data highly rely on my own personal interpretations, it can be argued that my findings are not entirely reliable (Stepchenkova et al., 2009) or that the findings do not constitute enough evidence to draw conclusions (Kozinets, 2010) – especially from a positives point of view. In this sense, using computer software to quantify the data could have contributed to the reliability of my findings.

Nevertheless, this paper provides a new and exciting insight into the general attitude of Airbnb from

a guest and host perspective which previously has not been underlined in the academic field (to my knowledge). Furthermore, the fact that this paper compiles the findings with previous findings concludes an important stepping stone for future research into the field.

The following chapter will constitute the literature review of this thesis.

3. Literature Review

Recent research and literature into the phenomenon of CE is, albeit still limited (Cheng, 2016), also widely debated, ambiguous and contrasting. CE's contradictory framings stretch from being viewed as an economic opportunity, a more sustainable form of consumption, a pathway to a decentralized, equitable and sustainable economy, creating unregulated marketplaces, reinforcing the neoliberal paradigm, and an incoherent field of innovation (Martin, 2016).

Out of the growing research more related explicitly to Airbnb, the dominant themes that have emerged thus far, have been on estimating the impact of Airbnb on the hotel industry (e.g., Blal et al., 2018 and Zervas et al., 2017), examining the issues of trust (e.g. Abrahao, Parigi, Gupta, & Cook, 2017 and Ert, Fleischer, & Magen, 2016) and, the issues and complexities related to laws and regulations (e.g. Dredge, 2017 and O´Regan & Choe, 2017a, 2017b). However, no academic literature, to my knowledge, constitutes research that specifically examines reviews about Airbnb from a host and guest perspective. With that being said, the closest previous academic literature that comes to studying reviews of Airbnb is by (Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2015) who researched the reviews given about the accommodations listed on Airbnb. In their study, they question the generally high scores that apartments on Airbnb seem to have (95 % of the listed accommodation has 4,5 and 5-star reviews and none less than 3,5 stars in ratings). Moreover, they compare them to the general ratings of hotels, holiday rentals and bed and breakfasts on TripAdvisor, where they find the average star rate of no more than 3,8. Although their review study is not directly related to this one, their findings are interesting given that, since the accommodation on Airbnb is generally highly rated, this implies that the satisfaction level of Airbnb services should reflect the high satisfaction level of the accommodation Airbnb provides.

As such, this literature review will serve as a background presentation of the preexisting literature that is relevant to understand as a basis for the analysis of hosts and guest's experiences and general attitude about Airbnb, and thus, for answering the sub-research questions which are as follows:

> **Sub Research Questions:**
> - What role does Social Media and online reviews play for Airbnb?
> - What are the main motivations for using Airbnb and challenges for Airbnb?

For answering the above research sub-questions, the literature review is divided into two main parts consisting of four main sections; (1) Social media and Airbnb and (2) motivations for using Airbnb, and complexities of Airbnb. The first part is an initial theoretical background description of Social media and Airbnb followed by the second part, which is a more thorough literature review of the dimensions of Airbnb concerning motivations and complexities.

The four sections will be elaborated upon further, in the following structure of the chapter.

Structure of Chapter

This chapter will constitute of two main parts; A general presentation of **social media (3.1.),** and an introductory description of the company, **Airbnb (3.2.).** These two initial sections of the literature review aim to provide a theoretical understanding of social media and online reviews, and thus, also acts as a demonstration of the importance of user-generated reviews, and justification of choice of online reviews as the primary data in this thesis. Subsequently, a background introductory of Airbnb will provide an initial, basic understanding of the business before accounting for and analyzing it further.

The second part of this chapter will constitute a literature review of the **motivations of using Airbnb (3.3.)** and the **complexities of Airbnb (3.4.)** These two sections are meant for uncovering more in-depth knowledge about Airbnb relevant to answering the main research question. Understanding the motivations for using Airbnb provides a broader notion of the concept of Airbnb and thus, more insight into why hosts and guests chose to use Airbnb. As such, when motivational factors are understood, expectations and then disappointments can more easily be excavated which affect the general attitude of Airbnb. These initial motivational factors will also be compared to the actual experiences found from the user reviews in the analysis and discussed.

The point of illuminating some of the complexities of Airbnb is not only obtaining a deeper understanding of the concept but especially to underline that Airbnb is a complex system in which there are no easy solutions to satisfy everyone. The main complex elements of Airbnb, highlighted in preexisting academic research are primarily related to the **complexities of trust (3.4.1.)** and the **complexities of regulations and responsibility (3.4.2.).** These elements of Airbnb will also be

evident in the analysis of the reviews, in which issues like trust and regulations will be the basis for a discussion.

This chapter will conclude with a **summary (3.5.)** of the most significant findings from the literature review.

The next section will begin with a background introduction of Social media to underline the importance of user-generated reviews.

3.1. Social Media

'Social Media is built on a willingness of people to be open, to share aspects of themselves with others' (Slee, 2015, p. 15)

CE businesses like Airbnb build their success on the willingness of people to be open and share their experiences both through their own reputation systems, but also through general social media. Moreover, social media is oriented toward peer communication networks, and not for transactional exchanges. In other words, social media platforms tap on knowledge from willing volunteers (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018). Review websites like Trustpilot and Sitejabber can, therefore, be categorized as a social media platforms, with the aim of individuals providing information to other individuals about a given product or experience. Zervas et al., (2015) further state, that 'online reviews are significant driver of consumer behavior, providing a way for consumers to discover, evaluate, and compare products and services on the web' (p.1). Moreover, consumer-generated information, such as the reviews on Trustpilot and Sitejabber is argued to often act as word of mouth, and thus, perceived as an indicator of product quality (Ha & Lee, 2018).

Social media has become the most popular marketing and communication tool for both service providers and consumers; businesses use it as a marketing tool, while consumers use it to exchange personal experiences and feedback about service providers (Ha & Lee, 2018). Hence, according to Forbes, 50 million businesses now use Facebook (ibid). In the social media era in which we live, social media platforms are powerful in exchanging and influencing opinions and recommendations

to which Varma et al., (2016) argue that the success of Airbnb is predominantly dependent on social media. In fact, research suggests that when consumers make travel decisions (especially when it comes to lodging and travel destinations), that one out of four use online reviews before purchase (Ha & Lee, 2018). Although this research does not specifically relate to Airbnb and Trustpilot and Sitejabber, it does underline the importance of online reviews, and thus, indicate that the reviews conducted on Trustpilot and Sitejabber can play an essential role for prospective consumers, and in understanding current consumers attitude towards a product.

Following this brief demonstration of Social media and the importance of consumer reviews, the Airbnb business will be presented.

3.2. Airbnb

'Imagine if you could build a city that is shared. Where people become micro-entrepreneurs, and local mom and pops flourish once again. Imagine a city that fosters community, where space isn't wasted, but shared with others. A city that produces more, but without more waste.'

(Chesky, 2014).

The above-written words, by Airbnb founder, Brian Chesky, lay the baseline for the vision and idealism that Airbnb bases its business model. The promotion of Airbnb reflects the general discourse, vision and success stories of Airbnb (and other CE platforms) participated in by the media, ICT industries, venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, academics and grassroots activist. These CE advocates argue that CE is a more sustainable form of consumption, an economic opportunity, and, a pathway to a decentralized, equitable and sustainable economy (Martin, 2016). With the beautiful, sustainable and community-based vision, it is no wonder that Airbnb has been embraced by most. However, a combination of this literature review and the analysis of host and guest reviews in this thesis indicate that there is a darker side to Airbnb, which will be concluded upon later in the thesis.

Airbnb was founded in San Francisco in 2007 by two college students Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia who were trying to make ends meet and came up with the idea to rent out their shared apartment when a big conference took place in town (Slee, 2015, p. 31).

Since then, Airbnb has become a fast-growing CEA platform having grown in user (guest/host) numbers from 0 to approximately 150 million globally (http://fortune.com/2017/03/07/airbnb-ceo-hosts/) since its launch in August 2008 until the present time (2018). With more than 3 million hospitality listings in 191 countries (Abrahao et al., 2017; Blal et al., 2018) Airbnb is seen to be disrupting and reshaping the tourism industry (O´Regan & Choe, 2017a, p. 154) as it is said to have become the largest lodging company and brand all over the world (Varma et al., 2016). Moreover, according to Cheng (2016), Airbnb is the player that has revolutionized the way in which we view CE in general, although the concept of CE can be traced back to ancient times (Belk, 2014).

In accordance with CEA, Airbnb is an online platform which has modernized the accommodation sector in facilitating private short-term rentals through an online platform. (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2017)

Airbnb introduced accommodations that differed from existing options 'by being cheaper and providing a more authentic local experience' (Guttentag, 2017, p. 101). The rapid growth of technology startups, such as Airbnb has been argued to be attributed to three factors: that the problems they addressed were globally pervasive, enabling users to act entrepreneurially, and providing innovative web-based services and processes (Bailetti 2012 in Varma et al., 2016). This argument is apparent in the case of Airbnb which enables hosts to act in an entrepreneurial manner in which they list their property, at rates usually cheaper than hotels, in exchange for earning profits. However, although it markets itself differently from the hotel industry by linking guests and hosts together in what might resemble a collaborative economy model, it is argued to be more so a business-oriented platform, which can in fact lead to false expectations (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2017; O´Regan & Choe, 2017b; Slee, 2015b).

Besides the rentals being private, which is the main difference from the preexisting hospitality sector, Airbnb differentiates itself in the sense that rentals are built on reviews and thus, trust (Ert et al., 2016). This review system, known in CE business platforms as reputation systems, is meant to establish trust between the hosts and guests through a feedback mechanism where both hosts and guests review each other (Belk, 2014). The reputation system ratings are publicly available, and thus horizontally distributed in the network, rather than being vertically enforced in a traditional firm (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018). Moreover, Zervas et al., (2015) note, that while most review

platforms predominantly evaluate products, goods and services and businesses, Airbnb reviews differ as they are much more personal in rating experiences in another person's home. Hence, the reputation system will be elaborated on further in the thesis in regards to complexities.

After the brief introduction to the Airbnb business, the motivations and drivers for using Airbnb will be presented in the subsequent section, based on previous academic research.

3.3.   Motivations for using Airbnb

'Travelers are increasingly looking for meaningful, memorable, personal and unique experiences during their trip so that they can feel fully engaged.'
(Forno & Garibaldi, 2015 in Mao, 2017, p. 2468)

Previous research conducted on motivational factors for using CE, and more specifically – Airbnb include e.g., Guttentag, Smith, Potwarka, & Havitz, 2018, Mao, 2017; So, Oh, & Min, 2018 and Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016. However, since Airbnb is still a relatively new phenomenon, the critical question of why tourists use Airbnb, has only been researched limitedly (Guttentag et al., 2018).

Hence, this section aims to account for some of the motivational factors found in previous research to get an understanding of the initial attitude and motivation guests and hosts have when using Airbnb. Since the research directly related Airbnb and motivational factors is, as mentioned, limited, this section will also incorporate relevant motivational factors, in regards to general CE which can be related to those of Airbnb. Thus, this section aims to provide a more holistic understanding of the attitude of hosts and guests towards Airbnb by accounting for motivational factors. The term motivation essentially refers to the reasons why someone engages in a particular behavior or activity (Hawkins, Mothersbaugh and Best 2007 in Guttentag et al., 2018, p. 343).

Firstly, a fundamental prerequisite for participating in Airbnb or CE, in general, is that you are technological and financially savvy in the sense that you can use the internet and that you have a credit card (Varma et al., 2016). This factor automatically leaves out a minor group of society. However, anticipating that this is mainly the older generation which then also do not leave reviews

or engage in the online activity, this factor is somewhat irrelevant in the context of this thesis, where the focus is on the online community.

The work of Belk (2014) on the collaborative economy has been widely cited in more recent research as a basic framework for understanding the background of CE. Through many examples of online CE services, one of the interesting conclusions that Belk draws is that CE services have fostered a strong sense of community (Belk, 2014). In fact, Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen (2016) argue, that economic factors do not at all play a significant role when it comes to the collaborative economy.

Pesonen & Tussyadiah, (2017, p. 291) have identified three main motivating factors for participating in CE from previous literature which they base their research on; *societal, economic and technological*. In regards to the former, their research suggests that the main societal drivers are that consumers are concerned about sustainability and social relations and that people are becoming more aware of consumption patterns, and thus, shifting preferences towards more eco-friendly consumption (ibid.). According to Tussyadiah & Pesonen's, (2018) own findings, based on a survey conducted in Finland, their findings were aligned with the above motivational factors, except for the environmental drivers, which they found were not significant when it comes to CEA (p. 297).

Other researchers, such as Botsman and Rogers (2010 in Forno & Garibaldi, 2015) agree with Personen and Tussyadiah (2017, 2018), arguing that people today are turning to models of consumption that emphasizes 'usefulness over ownership, community over selfishness, and sustainability over wastefulness' (p. 208), indicating that this modern mindset is a crucial foundation for collaborative economy, and thus, Airbnb

Moreover, research conducted by Forno & Garibaldi (2015) is not directly related to Airbnb, but to other home exchange services. However, when researching motivational factors for using home sharing services, they found that home sharing is generally appreciated because tourists can fully enjoy their vacations without forgoing the comforts of a real home. In fact, their findings suggest that the financial savings are the secondary motivation to the cultural, personal and unique experiences that can be achieved through private accommodation: 'it seems in fact quite clear that the choice to opt for this type of accommodation is quite strongly driven by a desire to get to know

the other and to fit into a different cultural context' (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015, p. 213). In agreeance with their findings, So et al., (2018) found that a significant motivational factor, which previous research has not accounted for, was the home benefits which Airbnb typically have in comparison to hotels.

Furthermore, in research conducted by Mao (2017) regarding the incentives to reuse Airbnb, the results showed that unique travel experiences were the predominant motivational factor for reusing Airbnb: 'The more unique, enriched and engaged experiences travelers have, the more likely they are to develop a favorable attitude that may eventually result in a higher repurchase intention' (Personen & Tussyadiah in Mao, 2017, p. 2476). In continuation, the other motivational factors found in Mao's research, when repurchasing an Airbnb experience was followed by value and familiarity.

These sustainable, societal drives are in accordance with the selling points that CE advocates and Ce business owners, like Chesky, present when promoting Airbnb and shape the baseline for the positive embracement of CE platforms, like Airbnb. Although the idea of sustainability, community building, and unique travel experiences are wonderful incentives for using Airbnb, other researchers, such as D. A. Guttentag & Smith (2017), So et al., (2018) and Varma et al., (2016) have found these motivations to be secondary to the economic drivers. In fact, So et al., (2018) did not find motivational factors like sustainability, community or social motivations to play any significant role at all in choosing to use Airbnb, compared to the financial aspects and home benefits. Hence these conclusions that economic drivers are the predominant factors when choosing Airbnb is opposite the argument by Hamari et al., (2016), whom state that economy has nothing to do when choosing to engage with CE services.

In accordance with Cheng's (2016) literature review on CEA motivational factors, she found that 'visitors are in pursuit of better value for memory, sustainable tourism products, and authentic tourism experience' (p. 61). Likewise, my literature review indicates that the motivations for using Airbnb are broad and yet similar. Albeit the accounted for research findings are different, the only main difference in the research is that some find economic factors to be more important than the societal factors and vice versa. Furthermore, the literature review conducted in this thesis did not find any indications of the technological drivers being of any great importance, in opposition to

Pesonen & Tussyadiah's (2017) suggestion.

Most of the literature accounted for above regarding motivational factors is called out by So et al., (2018) of lacking a more critical perspective in their research, such as a comparison to the incentives for avoiding Airbnb, and thus, not providing a broader perspective of the issues of Airbnb. Their appeal for adding a more holistic perspective to the perception of motivational factors of Airbnb will be approached in the following section regarding complexities of Airbnb.

3.4. Complexities of Airbnb

Airbnb is a complex system, and thus, the elements and complexities of each system should be researched to obtain holistic knowledge about the business. A complex system consists of 'autonomous agents such as organisms, humans, businesses, organizations, and institutions that pursue their own objectives and interact with one another and their environment' (Grimm et al., 2005 in Hall et al., 2018, p. 18). At first glance, Airbnb can appear to be a relatively straightforward concept – people looking to rent accommodation can connect with those people looking to rent out their accommodation short term, often cheaper than hotels making it financially beneficial to both parties. However, when you look closer at the mechanisms behind the Airbnb model, it is evident that the model is complex in the sense that Airbnb draws on multiple systems, intersecting across "technologies, cultures, languages, consumer preferences, extent and start-up operations of various size and scope, and legal and political dynamics" (Varma et al., 2016, p. 230). Hence, this thesis does not aim to define and research all the layers and complexities of Airbnb, but however, it does wish to underline that it is complex, and thus justify, that researching all elements of the business model is essential in order to understand it better – hence the under-researched aspect of host and guests experiences is relevant.

In continuation of the motivational factors for using Airbnb, it is also relevant to account for the constraint that Airbnb faces from a consumer perspective. These constraints were under-researched based on the above literature but can lead to a better understanding of the challenges, and thus, complexities of Airbnb. However, some constraints argued by So et al., (2018) include perceived risk, distrust, and unfamiliarity.

The following will elaborate upon some of the complexities in regards to Airbnb, starting with those of trust.

3.4.1. The complexities of trust

Trust is argued to be one of the foundations that make the Airbnb platform possible. For example, Ert et al., (2016) argue that since consumers put themselves at a certain risk when using Airbnb (versus other accommodation services like hotels), trust and reputation is 'pivotal to the proper functioning of the sharing economy business' (p.63). Livan, Caccioli, & Aste, (2017) support this argument in their statement that 'peer-to-peer (P2P) economy relies on establishing trust in distributed networked systems, where the reliability of a user is assessed through digital peer-review processes that aggregate ratings into reputation scores' (p. 1). Moreover, reciprocity is argued by Forno & Garibaldi, (2015) to be the single most important principle as you are entrusting your belongings to someone who will do the same to you. On the other hand, distrust is found by So et al., (2018) to be 'the single most important obstacle negatively affecting consumers' overall attitude toward Airbnb' (p. 233). Also, Cheng (2016) highlights that the element of trust and the processes of building trust is highly essential for completely understanding how CE redefines itself from pre-existing businesses and that this element is only superficially researched.

There are many aspects and elements of trust when it comes to CE in general and Airbnb. One of the main topics I have found discussed within the topic of trust is that of reputation systems, and thus, facilitating trust between guests and hosts (e.g., Ert et al., 2016 and Zervas et al., 2015). To facilitate online trust, Airbnb incorporated online reviews and pictures of personal photos in order to verify the identity of the host (Ert et al., 2016). Furthermore, Airbnb encourages, and in some cases requires hosts and guests to verify their identity by linking their Airbnb account with other website accounts such as Facebook, and uploading a picture of their passport or driver's license (Zervas et al., 2015). These systems are called reputation systems and are according to Belk's (2014) definition pictures and reviews that constitute the basis for doing business. Furthermore, reputation systems are claimed to solve the problems of screening so that strangers can trust each other (Slee, 2015, p. 12). Moreover, they are viewed as 'the central innovation of the sharing economy' (Slee, 2015, p. 91). Due to the fundamental importance of these reputation systems for CE platforms, Livan et al., (2017) underline the importance of ensuring that the reputation systems produce reliable reputation scores.

However, although the reputation systems are innovative and directly between the hosts and guests which enable trustworthy ratings, there are a few critical points highlighted by research. One of the initial critique points regarding Airbnb's reputation system is that hosts or guests would abstain from posting negative comments out of fear of retaliation, and thus, reviews could be flawed and unreliable (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018). In accordance, Livan et al., (2017) found evidence that CE reviews display high levels of reciprocity – especially in the positive case, and thus, do not necessarily produce reliable reputation scores. However, Airbnb made it so that you cannot see each other's comments before both reviews are made to prevent this issue. Furthermore, problems revolving the reputation system can be that new entrants face a difficult start, as they do not have any feedback history, and that hosts/guests who are planning to exit the market may not care about reputation and thus, do not provide good service (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018). Furthermore, (Zervas et al., 2015) argue, that trust is hard to build solely on the reputation systems like the one of Airbnb, as consumers solely rely on individuals experiences whom they do not know - in opposition to for example businesses which reviews and reputation often stem from multiple platforms and sources.

Although the ratings and review system of Airbnb is the predominate decision factor in choosing accommodation in Airbnb, early ratings may influence reputation way more than later ratings (Slee, 2015b, p. 100). This was evident in an experimental study conducted by Salganik, Dodds, and Watts, (2006) in which they had over 14000 participants rate new music which they had not heard before and then given the chance to download the song, if they liked it. The participants were divided into groups where some groups did not have any prior information before listening to the song, where others had the information about how many times the song had previously been downloaded. The results of the test proved that songs that had been previously downloaded many times continued to be downloaded the most despite of the quality of the song, evident from the group with no prior information. This test is a good indication of the effect that ratings can have on influencing other people's opinions, but also in general how essential rating systems are and not entirely reliable.

In continuation of the research conducted on reputation systems, some research has found that reputation systems are flawed and can backfire in creating social biases. For example, when it comes to total strangers trusting each other, social biases concerning ethnicity, sexuality,

attractiveness, age, gender and so on constitute a significant hurdle when it comes to the growth of CE services (Abrahao et al., 2017; Ert et al., 2016). A specific example to social biases was found by Ert et al., (2016) in which non-black hosts in New York charged higher prices than their black counterparts, suggesting that this effect was due to the use of photos in Airbnb which reveal the race of hosts. Moreover, it was found in research conducted by Edelman, Luca and Svirsky (2016 in Ganapati & Reddick, 2018), that African American names were 16 % less likely to be accepted than to identical guests with distinctly white names.

Thus, there are many different aspects of reputation systems where some are more critical than others. Slee (2016, p. 108), for example, states that collaborative economy reputation systems do not solve the problem of trust.

Furthermore, trust is discussed in regards to CE in general in regards to whether the phenomenon should be trusted based on its own sharing, communitarian and social selling points, or if it is merely a business-oriented phenomenon hiding behind social idealism (e.g., Szilvia Gyimóthy, 2017b and O´Regan & Choe, 2017a). For example, Gyimóthy (2017b, p. 71) argues that platforms like Airbnb have very little to do with the term "sharing" in its original meaning. Moreover, she argues that this term is misleading since Airbnb is nothing more than a hyper-capitalist venture that is reluctant to take civic responsibility for dealing with problems arising from the platform (ibid.). Moreover, in opposition to Airbnb's own selling points, O´Regan & Choe (2017a, p. 162) argue that Airbnb will not generate greater trust amongst hosts and guests and nor will it generate any other beneficial environmental, ethical or social value to the world.

Following, Szilvia Gyimóthy (2017a) argues that platforms like Airbnb harness the 'communitarian ideals of sustainable, eco-ethical and solidarity co-existence, and emphasize personal bonding and social cohesion instead..' (p. 71), implying that this is misleading and has been used to tap into the needs of consumers for 'caring, connection and communitarian values' (ibid). Furthermore, in O´Regan & Choe's (2017a) critical take on CE, they argue that 'collaborative economy platforms have been fully integrated into the market economy by raiding, cracking open, exploiting and releasing surplus value by using resources from private and public sources and repackaging them as cultural commodities and entertainment for the short-term benefit of stockholders, entrepreneurs and venture capitalists, as well as the ultimate tourist consumer' (p. 155).

Thus, from the above presentation of some of the main discussions on trust in regards to CE and Airbnb, it is evident that elements of trust are, albeit limited, debated from different perspectives. This furthermore demonstrates that trust is not a simple term which is easily researched in regards to CE and Airbnb but is complex. It was found, that research revolving trust in regards to Airbnb was predominantly focused on reputation systems and how these facilitate trust and/or social biases. Furthermore, a more critical perspective of CE, and whether CE businesses can be trusted to be seen as a social innovation rather than capitalist business projects, is debated within the academic field.

However, research on the topic of trust between consumers (guests and host) and Airbnb has not been found to have been a topic within the research of trust. In fact, research focuses so much on trust building mechanism between guests and hosts and the consequences of this mechanism, that academics have forgotten to research the trust-building elements between guests/hosts and Airbnb. Albeit a critical discussion of CE in generally exists, this does not directly relate to the issues of trust between the services of Airbnb and guests and hosts. Hence, the analysis will bring new light to the trust elements between hosts/guests and Airbnb

In continuation of the complexities of trust, some of the complexities in regards to regulations will be presented. The following complexities of regulations are not independent of those of trust, and in many aspects, go hand in hand.

3.4.2. The complexities of regulations and responsibility

"Technology always seems to move faster than the laws and the legal landscape."
(Varma et al., 2016, p. 235)

When it comes to the discussion between CE, Airbnb, and regulations, there are many angles all of which this section does not aim to cover. However, it will present some of the most discussed subjects and those that are the most relevant to this thesis.

In recent literature, the glory of CE services, such as Airbnb, have been critically assessed. Researchers critical of the concept seem to agree on the arguments that Airbnb, and other CE

platforms, transfer risk to consumers, create unfair competition, establish illegal, black or grey markets, and promote tax avoidance (Martin, 2016). Besides challenging the established businesses (e.g., hotels) and labor unions, Ganapati & Reddick, (2018) underline, that CE exacerbates inequality by privileging those who own property already, and, emphasize the issues regarding independent workers who depend on 'piecemeal gigs without workplace benefits' (p. 77). Moreover, Martin (2016) identifies the concerns for social issues emphasizing the new forms of work created by CE by increasing labor market flexibility by eroding worker's rights. However, Martin further presents the complexities of the social impacts of CE, as it both gives economic empowerment to some individuals while 'reinforcing structural inequalities' (Martin, 2016, p. 157). Dredge, (2017) argues, that when it comes to regulations of the collaborative economy that 'government decisions should be based on good sound knowledge and that this knowledge should be above politics' (p. 75).

In continuation, some suggest that CE start-ups should 'be proactive in engaging regulatory authorities by sharing their business models and data openly, being responsive to the regulatory authorities concerns, making a well-researched case, and using an industry association approach rather than an individual company one to approach governments' (Cheng, 2016, p. 67).

When Cheng (2016) conducted her research, she suggests that it is yet unclear how 'tourism policy makers, business communities, and organizations (e.g., UNWTO) respond to the impacts of CE on tourism and hospitality' (p. 68). Varma et al. (2016) expressed likewise how it is not clear yet how Airbnb has affected the hotel industry. However, issues of Airbnb regarding regulation and taxation are the dominant themes that have been identified to be addressed in 2016 in regards to Airbnb (Varma et al., 2016).

Hence, there are many critique points directly related to Airbnb in regards to regulations: For example, Airbnb is criticized by affordable housing advocates for creating rental housing shortages in key housing markets where the housing prices are relatively high (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018). Furthermore, O'Regan and Choe (2017), critical of Airbnb, state that 'Airbnb has facilitated a world without taxes, hourly ceilings, anti-discrimination laws, unions, health and safety regulations and minimum wages' (p. 157).

(Abrahao et al., 2017) Moreover, the hotel industry, which smaller and medium-sized hotels and bed and breakfasts are directly impacted by Airbnb (Zervais et al., 2017), have to fight for every guest and employ appropriate interventions and strategies to compete with Airbnb. Although Airbnb claims that they are merely a supplement to the market rather than a substitute, findings of (Blal et al., 2018) suggest that Airbnb has indeed had an effect on hotel revenue in San Francisco. In fact, in response to Airbnb, some within the hotel industry are lobbying city supervisors to ensure that Airbnb follows the same rules that Hotels are under (Varma et al., 2016). The American Hotel and Lodging Association has also taken a critical stand towards Airbnb, urging that Airbnb hosts should be subject to the same tax and health standards that the hotels have to meet (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018; Blah et al.). Moreover, Slee, (2015, chapter 3) in his critical account of Airbnb, makes a point in illuminating the case of long-term renters who have been driven out of their apartment so that landlords can make more money on Airbnb instead.

Moreover, one of the challenges with Airbnb is that since it is a global platform, there is not a one-size-fits-all regulatory framework for all destinations, which means that cooperation with local policymakers is more time consuming and wide (Dredge, 2017b).

Accordingly, O'Regan and Choe (2017) take a critical standpoint to Airbnb arguing that there need to be regulations that support the institutions which are negatively disrupted by the phenomenon, and that regulators must demand Airbnb data to be able to enforce regulations. Either way, there is no doubt that the lack of regulations and taxation is especially provoking to their nearest competitors who are the small and medium hotels and bed and breakfasts which have indeed been affected by Airbnb (Varma et al., 2016; Zervas et al., 2017). (Blal et al., 2018)

Hence, in response to the critique, Airbnb faces, Airbnb argues that although they promote and inform their customers about local tax laws, rules and regulations it is not their responsibility to make sure that hosts obey the rules (Slee, 2015, p. 44). Dredge, (2017b, p. 52) supports this ambiguity, arguing that Airbnb expresses willingness to work collaboratively in addressing emerging issues, but does not take responsibility for the impacts that emerge at a community level. This argument underlines the complexities of the discussion about regulations and responsibility. Moreover, local governments have tried to implement regulations by putting zoning and other code restrictions on short-term rentals. However, Airbnb routinely tests the limits of the restrictions in for

example New York, where it was found that 72% of the Airbnb rentals these local implemented regulations (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018). Thus, having been in dispute with major city regulators such as in New York, Berlin, Paris, Barcelona and Amsterdam (Slee, 2015, chapter 3), Airbnb continues to keep a foot in each camp by agreeing on regulations, but not being willing to provide the data that can enable the lawmakers to enforce these regulations. However, although countries and cities are rigorously trying to fight and regulate aspects of Airbnb, in order to accommodate all, and cooperation agreements have been contracted, Guttentag (2017, p. 114) predicts that as local governments put more pressure on regulations, Airbnb will begin to share more and more data in cooperation with such regulations.

Thus, although regulations in regards to CE and Airbnb have been widely debated and critiqued, as demonstrated above, discussions about regulations primarily focused on protecting guests and hosts is underprioritized. It seems as though between all the discussions of formalities and between competitors and city regulations, the discussion about protecting hosts and guests is undermined. Of course, it is pointed out, that CE services do not provide decent pay, pensions and so forth. However, it does not focus on whom is responsible in case a host or guest of Airbnb gets into trouble. Moreover, in regards to both regulations and trust, Dredge, (2017b) argues that due to the fact that CE is 'dynamic, liquid and resistant to the rule-bound ways that governments assign responsibilities and make laws' (p. 44) that other considerations and actions regarding regulations and laws should be taken, implying that CE platforms cannot be fit in to the preexisting universal boxes of rules and regulations. For example, she calls for more critical and alternative thinking in distributing responsibility and underlines the importance for focusing on ethics in regards to CE, implying that policymakers, researchers, and companies, like Airbnb, should move beyond attributing responsibilities, to actually caring about hosts and guests and the general CE consumers. This point of view is especially interesting and relevant in regards to the findings from the analysis, which implies that with a more ethical mindset in regards to rules, the general attitude toward platforms like Airbnb could be different.

The complexities of regulations are thus relevant to this thesis, which will be put in connection with the findings in the analysis chapter.

3.5.   Summary

Henceforth, the purpose of this chapter is to account for the previous academic knowledge regarding what motivates people to use Airbnb, and which challenges have already been identified about Airbnb in regards to the complexities of trust and regulations. The point of conducting a literature review on these topics is to get a more holistic understanding of Airbnb and to be able to context these discussion points with the findings in the analysis. In other words, when we know what the primary drivers and challenges are to using Airbnb, it is possible to compare and relate these to the findings in the analysis about the general attitude within the online community.

Furthermore, the primary objective of this chapter was to answer the sub-research questions:

What role does social media and reviews play for Airbnb?
Thus, the answer to this question is twofold based on the literature review; Firstly, the importance of Social media, under which category online reviews fall, was demonstrated concerning how widely it is used both in business marketing and in user-generated content and reviews. Thus, through the argument by Ha & Lee, (2018), that consumer-generated content is an indicator of product quality, the importance of online content is underlined. Thus, this argument justifies the relevance of using online reviews as the primary data in this thesis to excavate the general attitude about Airbnb. In the same manner, this content is important for the image of Airbnb, and thus for their business. In support of this argument, Varma et al., (2016) further argued, that Social media is a predominant factor in the success of Airbnb.

Secondly, throughout the literature review, the importance of Airbnb's internal reputation systems was underlined, and the positive and negative sides regarding this system were presented based on previous research. The findings suggest, that although reputation systems are the foundation of Airbnb's business model in building trust between guests and hosts, there are flaws in this system which can also create bias (Abrahao et al., 2017) and/or as found by Livan et al., (2017) and Zervas et al., (2015) not wholly reliable. Furthermore, this literature review identified a gap in not having covered the trust elements between guests/hosts and Airbnb, but mainly trust issues between hosts and guests. This leads to the next sub research question:

What are the main motivations for using Airbnb and challenges for Airbnb?

The motivations found for using Airbnb were very similar throughout the research. However, the main arguments were based on what were the most important motivational factors. Some argued that the financial aspects were the predominate motivational factors (Guttentag et al., 2018; Zervas et al., 2017), where others argued that the social, cultural and unique experiences are what drives people toward Airbnb (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Mao, 2017). Following the observations of So et al., (2018), I found the literature on motivational factors to be very one-sided without any or limited critical perspectives as to for instance why people were motivated, and/or why they might not be motivated to using Airbnb.

As for challenges, the literature review identified, that trust, regulations, and reputation are complex issues with CE in general as well as for Airbnb, and thus also constitute challenges for Airbnb. Scholars critical of Airbnb (e.g., O´Regan & Choe, 2017a; Slee, 2015) argue that Airbnb's sells and markets their business on a false ideology. Furthermore, multiple scholars and competing organizations call for regulations to be enforced (Ganapati & Reddick, 2018; O´Regan & Choe, 2017b). However, since CE is relatively new in its current form, consisting of many stakeholders, and thus, cannot be placed into preexisting regulative boxes (Dredge, 2017b), the argument in regards to regulations is complex and extensive, in which this literature review only superficially touched upon.

This literature review has identified the most important factors that play a role when it comes to Airbnb. However, it also concludes that although the literature on CE is growing, there is still not any research based solely on guests and host opinions. This is a mistake in my opinion as platforms like Airbnb rely on hosts and guests to be a successful platform, and thus, the opinions of hosts and guests should be accounted for as of high importance when it comes to analyzing any factor of the platform

The findings from Livan et al., (2017) and Zervas et al., (2015) regarding reputation systems being flawed due to reciprocity and that Airbnb's accommodation ratings are generally much higher than those of hotels, are particularly relevant to this thesis. Hence, this knowledge makes it especially important and relevant to excavate data from outside Airbnb's own rating system, where people can express themselves freely without worrying about reciprocity. Thus, new information, which has not been "colored" by Airbnb's marketing campaigns or their review systems is sure to emerge in

the analysis.

The analysis of the guest and host reviews will be discussed in the following chapter.

4. Analysis and discussion of data

In continuation of the knowledge derived from the literature review above, the aim of this chapter is to analyze the reviews about Airbnb given by hosts and guests based on their personal experiences. Based on the review analysis, the objective of this chapter is to initiate a discussion about the findings from the data analysis and relate those findings to the literature review, and thus, conclude with an answer to the main research question: *What is the general attitude toward Airbnb from the host/guest perspective?'*. Attitude is the manner in which a person expresses his/her beliefs and values and arise from an inner framework of values and belief (Mao, 2017). Consumer-generated information, such as the reviews on Trustpilot and Sitejabber are argued to often act as word of mouth and is thus perceived as an indicator of product quality (Ha & Lee, 2018). Based on this argument regarding social media platforms, analyzing the reviews conducted by host and guests of Airbnb is relevant to obtain information about certain aspects about the Airbnb business from the inside regarding the quality of the product.

Subsequent, to the analysis a discussion will serve as the end of the closure to this chapter about challenges Airbnb face based on the findings from the reviews and the preexisting academic knowledge presented in the literature review. The discussion will mainly be based on the fact that *distrust* is the term that I argue sums up the general attitude toward Airbnb. In continuation of a discussion regarding distrust, regulations and responsibly issues will be touched upon as important elements for Airbnb to consider in the future.

 Hence, the discussion will serve as an extension of the preexisting knowledge about the challenges of Airbnb, based on new information about the host and guest opinions and experiences. These challenges that Airbnb face evident through consumer reviews is thus, a small contribution in the attempt to understanding the phenomenon of Airbnb more holistically. Moreover, the findings from this analysis fill a research gap which is providing new insights into host and guest attitude towards Airbnb in the online community.

> **Sub Research Questions:**
> - What are the dominant themes about Airbnb from the Host/Guest reviews?
> - What is the general attitude toward Airbnb from the Host/Guest perspective?
> - What are the challenges for Airbnb based on findings from data analysis and literature review?

Structure of Chapter

This chapter will initially start out the analysis by presenting the **sample profile (4.1.)**. The sample profile is in continuation with the section data collection and analysis (2.3.) in which it introduces the data this thesis will analyze and provide a diagram that illustrates an initial indication toward the attitude about Airbnb. Thus, this section is an introduction to the data before the analysis further begins.

The second section, **Findings (4.2.)** will act as an initial introduction to the overall findings of the analysis and also account for some of the positive reviews given, albeit these a scar. Do to the very few positive reviews, these will not get any attention further in the analysis, as the small percentage of the positive reviews does not serve as an indication as to what the general attitude online is about Airbnb.

Following, the section **Themes (4.3.)**, will constitute the depth of the analysis in which the five most common themes derived from the content analysis are presented and elaborated upon. At the same time, this section will discuss the thematic findings and what they mean for Airbnb and the overall online community.

Subsequently, this chapter will conclude with a discussion that answers the **main research question: what is the general attitude toward Airbnb (4.4.)** which is argued to be distrust. This section constitutes the main discussion of the thesis based on the analysis findings and the literature review. Thus, issues in regards to responsibility and regulations will also be incorporated into the discussion, as these issues are related to the attitude of distrust.

Finally, this chapter will conclude with a section revolving **credibility and quality of analysis**

(4.5.) which will also contain my personal thoughts about the overall findings.

In the following section, the analysis starts with the sample profile.

4.1.   Sample profile

'Consumer-generated information often acts as word-of-mouth and is perceived as an indicator of product quality.'
(Ha & Lee, 2018, p. 133)

Following the above statement regarding consumer-generated information – in this case, reviews, it is possible to identify certain aspects of Airbnb which give an indication into the overall quality of Airbnb. Hence, the analysis of the reviews can be justified in adding to the knowledge of Airbnb.

The reviews are taken from the two global review websites trustpilot.com and sitejabber.com consisted of all the given reviews about Airbnb in the first three months of 2018, January-March, including March. The number of reviews in total equals 224 and are based on first-hand experiences, by guest and host of Airbnb. Excavating all the reviews from three months seems like a decent amount of time to get an overall indication as to what the online community's current attitude about Airbnb is.

Information generated by the hosts and guests is based on personal experiences, but often lacks details about its origin, authorship or posting date, versus information generated by service providers that are supposed to be credible and accurate (Ha & Lee, 2018). Hence, there is very basic or no general information about the authors of the reviews on Trustpilot or Sitejabber. When leaving a review on the two review platforms, it is optional to add name and where the review is posted from, and most leave the personal information out. Thus, focusing on demographics was neither chosen to be a focus point of this study, nor was it found to be relevant when analyzing the reviews to answer the research question regarding the general attitude towards Airbnb. In fact, being that this is a global study, I was not interested in any information besides the attitude and experiences derived from the reviews. Leaving out demographics made the general attitude toward Airbnb global rather than a case study. Furthermore, the stories from the reviews and thus, themes

that emerged are often similar, implying that the Airbnb experiences and attitude toward Airbnb is not, for instance, country-based, cultural, or do to a worse customer service section in a particular place. However, on Trustpilot, it is possible to rate Airbnb based on different country codes (e.g., Airbnb.dk, Airbnb.com) in which case this study bases its analysis on the reviews on trustpilot.com. In addition, Sitejabber is an American company. Therefore, the reviews that have been analyzed could arguably be predominantly ratings conducted by Americans. However, since Airbnb is used globally, the issues and problems people face can and have occurred all over the world. This is evident from those reviews in which the authors write more detailed where their experience took place. This information was in itself interesting since this suggests, that Airbnb face global problems and that the different countries with different regulations and laws do not make a difference to the repeated experiences people have had. Thus, the only thing I looked at from the reviews, other than the stories, was whether they were hosts or guests. In most of the reviews, it was possible to derive whether the stories were from a host experience or a guest experience. Identifying and dividing up the number of stars given in the reviews based on guests and hosts experience (see figure 2), gives a good indication as to whom is mostly subjected to the problems that occur when using Airbnb.

Thus, building on figure 1. (chapter. 2, section 2.3.1.), the following diagram shows the number of stars given from a guest/host perspective. As stated previously, it was not necessarily possible to know if the reviews were given from guests or hosts, as the information about the author was limited. However, based on the context and experiences written in the reviews, it was in most cases possible to derive whether they were written based on the context of the reviews. As the figure below demonstrates, 135 persons wrote reviews based on their guest experience, 38 people based on host experience, and, the last 51 reviews it was not possible to establish whether the experience or opinion about Airbnb was from a host or guest point of view. However, although it unclear whether the last 51 reviews are based on guest or host opinions, it was evident in all the reviews that they were written based on personal experience with Airbnb rather than general objective opinions. Moreover, it is already from this first diagram possible to get an overall idea about the general attitude towards Airbnb given that bad reviews were predominantly given both from guests and hosts, with 181 1-star reviews versus merely 19 5-star reviews. Moreover, it is also justified to argue, that guests are more likely to endure a bad experience with Airbnb versus hosts, being that guests are the predominant ones to leave bad reviews and reviews in general.

Stars 1 - 5	Number of Host/Guest (both websites combined)			
	Host	Guest	Not known	Total
1*	32	117	32	181
2*	3	8	2	13
3*	1	1	4	6
4*	1	2	2	5
5*	1	7	11	19
total	38	135	51	224

Figure 2. Overview of the number of reviews and stars given to Airbnb by users from January – March 2018.

In the following section, an overall introduction to the findings of the analysis will be presented, and the positive reviews will be briefly elaborated upon.

4.2. Results

'It would seem that only the most cynical, jaded person could see Airbnb's success as anything

other than a good thing.'

(Slee, 2015d, p. 31)

With the above, slightly sarcastic statement by Slee, who is generally very critical towards Airbnb, the findings from the analysis of the guest and host reviews of Airbnb suggest, that Airbnb can indeed be seen as anything other than a good thing. Moreover, Zervas et al., (2015) have argued that based on several empirical papers of analyzes of ratings distributions that arise on major review platforms, that most have concluded that ratings tend to be overwhelmingly positive. However, this is not the case with the above analysis. In fact, the reviews of Airbnb are clearly much lower than average.

It might seem like Airbnb is a win-win, idealistic, community-based platform – especially from the strictly positive stories that Airbnb shares, which Slee (2015) gives many examples of in his continuous critique of Airbnb their marketing strategy with solely positive stories (chap. 3). However, in agreeance with Slee, the analysis of the findings in this thesis, indicates that there are two, and more, sides to every story, and they are revealed in reviews about firsthand experiences by

host and guest. This is evident in figure two in the above section, which clearly demonstrates a bad side. As mentioned previously, figure two shows that out of the 224 reviews in total, 194 reviews have given Airbnb merely 1 and 2-stars with one star being the most popular choice of rating. Figure two also shows that there are only 24 reviews that have given Airbnb positive reviews

Thus, the reviews in the category of 1 and 2-stars and the themes derived from these reviews are the primary focus of the analysis. This is due to the fact that the objective of this thesis is to get a general sense of the online community attitude of Airbnb, and thus, choosing to analyze the predominant 1- and 2-star reviews are the most relevant. Another reason for not wanting to spend too much time on analyzing the positive reviews is because they tend to have fewer descriptions about experiences and fewer explanations to why they have given the positive review. Ergo, the positive reviews only substitute a small percentage of the 224 reviews and generally do not say much specific. However, to give a brief insight into the attitude of the hosts and guests who have given Airbnb good reviews, here are a few examples;

'I have used this many times in a personal level and everything has worked out well' (TP, p. 1),

'Nothing but good experiences with Airbnb and some of the best stays I've had – far better than hotels' (TP, p. 37).

As the above reviews indicate, the detailed background and experience for the positive reviews are not provided in the description. However, the more detailed positive reviews highlight that the customer service was very helpful with the handling of unspecified problems (TP, p. 69, p. 84), and others underline the financial aspect of Airbnb stating that Airbnb provides 'a great set of deals' (TP, p. 40). This is aligned with the literature review in which previous research found, that lower prices than Airbnb is one of the primary motivating factors for using Airbnb (Guttentag et al., 2018). Furthermore, a handful of the reviews praise Airbnb for being better than the competition like hotels (TP, p. 110, 108). This is possibly aligned with the motivational factors regarding the home benefits, that Airbnb has compared to hotels (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). However, none of the positive reviews indicate that they gave Airbnb five stars based solely on the cultural, communal and unique experiences, which Hamari et al., (2016) argue is the primary motivation for using CE services. In accordance, it has been argued by some scholars, that people do not

participate in the collaborative economy just for the sake of sharing, but for the benefits, it provides (Pesonen & Tussyadiah, 2017, p. 287).

Finally, a lot of the positive reviews target specific hosts with whom they have had great experiences.

Moreover, some of the positive reviews urge people to do their background work themselves when using Airbnb (TP, p. 108), like choosing a super host, suggesting that a lot of the complaints on the review sites are self-inflicted. Like anything new, there is a learning curve where you need to do your own research - and the same goes for Airbnb being relatively new.

Henceforward, the predominant attitude of Airbnb on Trustpilot and Sitejabber is very different from the positive attitude described above.

In fact, the below review headlines are a more correct description of the general attitude toward Airbnb on the two review sites:

<div align="center">

"DO NOT USE THIS COMPANY!"

"Don't book on Airbnb! Stay away!"

"Never use this company"

"If you like your home, don't use Airbnb"

"NEVER EVER USE Airbnb – SAVE YOURSELF"

"PLEASE AVOID – THE COMPANY IS A JOKE"

"Don't book through them please for the love of GOD!!"

</div>

The above statements are just a few examples of what the general opinion is about Airbnb, suggested by the headlines. As is evident from most of the reviews, the people leaving reviews are very unsatisfied with Airbnb and swear by never using the company again as well as urging other people not to use Airbnb. Many of the reviews are very emotional, suggesting that the experiences some people have encountered have had a very dramatic effect on them, e.g.

<div align="center">

"I have lost the will to live" (TP, p. 80)

</div>

4.2.1. Hosts versus Guests

Some of the reviews, albeit not many, solely base their complaints on their experiences of hosts or guests being favored by Airbnb. This is seen in the following headlines.

"If you are a host, believe me, those positive reviews don't mean anything, Airbnb is removing negative especially very bad negative reviews, bunch of crooks, shame on you Airbnb" (TP, p. 122).

"If you have problems with the host, don't expect Airbnb to help you" (TP, p. 33)

"Airbnb scams hosts. Doesn't deserve 1 star!" (SJ, p. 11)

As figure two shows and the above statements, there is a dispute whether Airbnb favors hosts or guests. Based on experiences from both guests and hosts, there seems to be a perception from both sides, that one another is more favored and protected by Airbnb. Many guests argue that hosts are looked after by Airbnb, e.g., concerning the review system. However, there are quite a few hosts who argue that in their opinions guests are always favored: Some hosts claim that reviews about guests are filtered and thus that positive reviews do not mean anything leading hosts to be vulnerable;

Another host wrote that after having closed her account, due to unsatisfactory, which had no further bookings, guests continued to show up with reservations through Airbnb which she had no knowledge of or any confirmations in any form (TP, p. 45). According to the review, the host had talked to other hotel owners who use Airbnb who had had similar experiences indicating that this is a continuous problem.

However, since the reviews that are about hosts/versus guests only constitute a few and they have conflicting stories, I will not go further into details on whether it can be derived if Airbnb favors guests or hosts. However, as stated previously, the findings of this thesis indicate that guests are more likely to have a bad experience. Whether this is because Airbnb favors hosts over guests is not possible to conclude on based on these reviews.

In the following section, the predominant themes derived from the reviews will be presented and discussed.

4.3. Themes

When reading through the reviews inductively, I simultaneously wrote down headlines and brief summaries to each headline with subsequent themes into a spreadsheet (see appendix 3). While doing this, it was very quickly apparent that the same themes would emerge, both from guests and hosts experiences. In fact, the variation of the complaints was surprisingly limited. Furthermore, many of the themes such as last-minute cancellation and bad customer service often were themes occurring in the same reviews. Thus, in most cases, several themes were excavated from one review.

Henceforth, as explained previously in the methodology chapter, the themes were identified as they emerged and the figure 3 below gives an overview of the five predominated themes that guests and hosts complain about and thus how much. I did not divide the themes up between hosts and guests but instead incorporated the subjects from both perspectives under one theme headline. Moreover, under each theme headline, it is explained what the most typical issues within the themes are.

Themes				
Themes	**Host**	**Guest**	**Not known**	**total**
Bad customer service: - Airbnb does not respond or hangs up - Resolution process long and bad - Bad attitudes by service staff	16	58	13	87
Technical Issues: - House double-booked - Website not user-friendly - Reviews can't be trusted - Accounts hacked - Price raised and charged after booking - Price change after booking request - Review Policy bad	10	43	8	61
Apartment/Guests not living up to expectations: - Apartment does not look like picture - Apartment lacks inventory or the amount of rooms and space promised - Disturbances - Bad host/guest experience	12	47	0	59
Last minute cancellations: - Guests have stand with no roof over their heads - Guests lose money on new, more expensive last minute bookings - Guests do not get reimbursed straight away - Airbnb keeps fees while hosts get nothing	7	37	0	44
Damages not covered - No refund - Slow refund	10	19	1	30

Figure 3. Overview and description of themes derived from analysis of reviews.

Due to the fact, that I did not use any computer software to categorize and theme the words derived from the reviews, it was possible to get a deeper understanding of the emotions that can run very high for both guests and hosts.

Evident from the above figure, bad customer service is the predominant complaint from both a guests and hosts perspective. Second to bad customer service, technical issues are a big complaint, but also the theme in which I put the most categories/issues. The theme technical issues is thus, also the most "broad theme" which will be elaborated upon when I describe each theme more in-depth.

Subsequently, a big issue that mainly relates to guests is that the apartment does not live up to standards in which case the theme bad customer service usually goes hand in hand. The fourth most identified theme and arguably the most emotional is last minute cancellations. Guests tend to find themselves left with last minute cancellations and with nowhere to turn for help. Lastly, the theme where both hosts and guests are effected is with damages not covered. This is both from the host perspective in regards to their belongings, but also from the guest perspective in regards to bad experiences where they were not compensated.

The following part of this analysis will go further into detail regarding each theme and discuss the implications that these problems have for both guests and hosts and Airbnb, starting with the theme of bad customer service.

4.3.1. Bad customer service

"DON'T WASTE YOUR MONEY – DISGRACEFUL COMPANY & SERVICE" (TP, p. 86)
"Pathetic customer service, this "business" is a joke" (TP, p.5)
"Trying to contact this organization is virtually impossible – you just get a set of idiotic standard answers which do not fit" (TP, p. 9).
"Appalling customer service" (TP, p. 10)
"awful, terrible, uncaring, incompetent and seriously shady are the best adjectives I can think of and they all fit.." (TP, p. 63)

The above headlines are just a few of many dissatisfied hosts and guests who have experienced terrible customer service, and most of the complaints are about the issue of access to competent customer service agents, and do to their lack of knowledge are not helpful: 'I have been trying for over a month to find out why they underpaid me and I keep getting fobbed off' (TP, p. 19). Thus, the need for more knowledgeable assistance and a more effective resolution process reflects the general attitude of the hosts and guests as well as more critical challenges that Airbnb face.

Moreover, most of the complaints about the customer service are usually in continuation of an initial problem that has occurred, in which the customer service does not help with the problem. In continuation, a reoccurring complaint is in regards to the resolution process where the complaints are especially dissatisfied with the waiting time which has been reported to last from hours to weeks

before hearing anything back from the support team with some never hearing back or that they get disconnected without hearing back. For example, this one person claims to have been disconnected" three times after being on hold for 15 minutes plus (TP, p. 28). This is in accordance with the resolution process that is another ongoing complaint, which the below review demonstrates:

'I've gone from email customer service where they stopped responding, to the hotline where I was assured a case manager would be getting back to me in 1-2 hours. It has now been three days and they are giving me another case manager. In total I've been waiting two weeks for help' (TP., p. 47).

It seems to be the prevailing attitude amongst host and guests who complain about the customer service, that you are on your own with the problems that occur. The statement below is from a guest, who had nowhere to go after being canceled on last minute, claiming that the guy from customer service laughed, with no other provided help:

'Basically you are on your own! No interest to address, adjust, correct or otherwise.' (TP. 6)

The fact that bad customer service most often goes hand in hand with a different problem or complaint, leaves this theme to be the most consistent in all the reviews with 87 complaints that directly refer to bad customer service experiences (see figure 3).

The highly emotional rendition of experiences and complaints about the customer service, suggests that guests and hosts seem to expect Airbnb to be more involved and responsible for the conflicts than Airbnb seem willing to be. Moreover, the personal bonding and social cohesion, which Airbnb emphasize, according to Gyimothy (2017a, p. 71), are not evident in the way customer service handles critical situations. The customer service of Airbnb is supposed to facilitate trust between Airbnb and the guests and hosts in which case it is evident that they continue to fail. This problem leads to a discussion about responsibility and regulations which will be further elaborated upon in section 1.5. Henceforward, the theme of technical issues will be analysed.

4.3.2. Technical issues

‘Great concern over the accuracy of reviews' (TP, p. 103)

‘Frustrating, dysfunctional booking system’ (TP, p. 119)

‘Airbnb let a registered sex offender make a profile and even verified him’ (TP, p. 120)

The above headlines indicate that there are many different complaints within this theme. Hence, within the category of complaints about technical issues many of them appear to be regarding getting charged fees they do not know about, following bad customer service.

The main complaint within this category is that prices are raised after booking accommodation. For example, a guest booked a place and after an hour of receiving a confirmation, he gets an email that the host wants 500$ more (SJ, p. 8). In addition to these issues of prices being raised post booking, Airbnb rids itself from any responsibility, urging the guest to work it out with the host or offer to help him find new accommodation. As the facilitator for an accommodation that has a set price, it is no wonder that customers expect Airbnb to take responsibility for what is an initially false advertisement. Thus, the above example is just one of many that indicate that Airbnb has major technical flaws and that those flaws are not accounted for by the customer service.

 A few reviews also state that they were hacked and lost thousands of dollars without being able to get the right help from customer service. Moreover, a customer claims his account was hacked with 800$ being spent on his account, leaving him without being able to pay rent and with no help from Airbnb (TP, p. 10). Another ongoing problem, albeit minor within this category, is that people seem to get suspended with no reason, or some hosts claim that Airbnb has changed their prices without their knowledge, and thus, when guests book, they are not paid what they had set their price to be. Moreover, simple complaints about the website are underlined: for example, a customer complaints that Airbnb does not allow her to upload her id (SJ, p. 4).

A couple of reviews complain that the reviews system is fraud in that their reviews have not been uploaded or that they cannot upload a review if the host does not upload a review. For example, these arguments claim that as a host you can see the review you receive from guests before leaving your own review about a guest. Thus, a review urges guests not to give honest bad reviews in fear of getting bad reviews in return, supporting the findings by Zervas et al., (2015) that Airbnb rentals

have questionably high rating scores:

'They pressure guests to give 4 and 5 star ratings only' (TP, p. 23).

However, these reviews are particularly questionable, since Airbnb changed their reputation system in July 2014, so that reviews were only revealed once both parties supplied a review for each other, or until 14 days post the rental date (Zervas et al., 2015). After 14 days, it is thus not possible to review any longer, and both (or just) one review is shown. This system was particularly developed to avoid retaliation in reviews and also to make the system more fair and trustworthy. Therefore, the experiences encountered in some of the reviews are discernable, and questionable in the sense of reliability. Hence, although questionable, these claims are aligned with arguments by Livan et al., (2017) and Zervas et al., (2015) regarding the fact that reviews are unreliable, and thus, that the reputation system is flawed.

If the stories are indeed correct, and not just a mistake or misunderstanding from the authors of the reviews, Airbnb has a significant fault in their review system on which the whole business is built around. Following, the analysis of the theme Apartment/Guests not living up to expectations will be presented.

4.3.3. Apartment/Guests not living up to expectations

'False description of the accommodation in Israel. Don't trust this organization!' (TP, p. 9)
'Airbnb – unsafe and unsuitable' (TP, p. 51)
'They are complicit in fraud perpetrated by owners, fake listings, etc.' (TP, p. 103)
'This place is deceptive and not suitable' (TP, p. 146)
'It seems like it's a "hit or miss" game. I got a miss' (SJ, p. 7)

The issues under this theme where apartment does not live up to standard vary from many complaints about dirty apartments to apartments where they do not provide the number of spaces listed, to complaints about having to share a place with other people, although listed as a private place. For example: After arrival, a guest found that two of the promised bedrooms were locked, and the owner would not unlock them unless getting additional money, resulting in some people

having to sleep on the couch (SJ, p. 3). Another complaint within this theme was in regards to safety issues;

A guest states that they lived in an unsafe apartment with no smoke alarm, fire extinguisher or safety/emergency instructions (TP., p. 51). These types of issues correlate with the arguments from the policy makers that request Airbnb to have similar regulations and rules like those in the hotel industry, such as safety.

For whatever of the above reasons that the apartment does not live up to the guests' expectations, the ongoing next complaint is that Airbnb does not compensate guests. This is a significant issue for Airbnb and relates highly to the discussion about regulations and responsibility in which hotels have called upon Airbnb to have the same standards as hotels are subjected to by law.

Issues within the theme last minute cancellations will be accounted for in the following section.

4.3.4. Last minute cancellations

'Cancelled our room two hours before check in on New Years' (SJ, p. 14)

'Cancelled after we arrived' (TP, p. 2)

'Host canceled the same day' (TP, p. 131)

'Airbnb equals risky booking' (TP, p. 109)

'Airbnb left us sleeping on the floor in a foreign country' (TP, p. 118)

The above headlines of reviews are just a few of many who have experienced having their hosts cancel very little time prior to check in. One of the ongoing complaints against Airbnb is that when host cancel on guests within just hours of arrival, which in many cases leaves guests stranded in the country they are visiting, the guests are not compensated for the stress, and most often left to book another more expensive accommodation – if there is any available in the given area. Not only do guests not get compensated, but they do not get a refund immediately, which has left some with no money to pay for other accommodation. However, Airbnb fines hosts when hosts cancel, meaning that Airbnb makes money for doing nothing.

There are two problems when the above issues occur, that can which are derived from the experiences in the reviews. One is that Airbnb does not refund the guests their money until two

weeks later leaving some guests without the funds to book new accommodation. Secondly, Airbnb takes no responsibility in helping provide the guest with new accommodation similar in price, which again leaves to a discussion about responsibility and trust.

The stories revolved around this theme are also described by the following guests, underlining the seriousness of this problem that seems to happen way more than it should:

'I saved up the money to take my wife on a nice trip and ended up being the day from HELL… oh yeah, we will get our money back in 5 – 15 days… Doesn't help us get a hotel…' (SJ, p. 14).

'Now tell me where I am going to find a place at this time on the beach in my price range? And Airbnb takes no responsibility in this. They should feel obligated in finding me the same of what I paid for' (TP, p. 35).

Another highly emotional review is about a bachelorette party during spring break in which the apartment was canceled not only after arrival but five minutes before check-in (TP, p. 41). Again, there was no help to get from Airbnb leaving a whole group of girls stranded in the midst of spring break. Moreover, another guest describes, that after arriving at the destination, the accommodation was double booked and canceled, leaving him with no other place to go or enough money to get another place (SJ, p. 2). Furthermore, the common problem here was that he did not get his money refunded immediately, and two weeks after still had not received a refund.

Although this theme has affected "only" 44 of the 224 reviews (figure 3), it is albeit the most serious and leaves guests in sometimes desperate situations. Hence these reviews are also the most emotional like the following headlines indicate.

'Terrible! Airbnb has ruined our trip' (TP, p. 36)

'Worst experience of my life' (SJ, p. 2)

According to a review, in response to some of the experiences, Airbnb's argument for not taking responsibility for cancellations is that Airbnb is just a platform, and thus not responsible for host's

cancellations (TP., p. 61). Since Airbnb takes fees, when cancellations are made, it is questionable how the can escape any form of responsibility. Thus, when providing the platform, and additionally earning money on cancellations, the moral and ethical responsibilities should be questioned, and are critiques in the reviews. The ethical fault is mentioned by many by the fact that Airbnb gets a fee when a host cancels, but that none of this money goes to the guest who has been canceled on:

'They charge the renters and the hosts fees if there is a cancellation – Airbnb never losses because they always collect and keep the fees no matter what' (TP, p. 65).

The frustration of this issue is further seen in the following statement:

"Well done Airbnb you have built a business to make money out of peoples' misery which is rather unethical" (TP, p. 36).

Since it is private accommodation rentals, it is unavoidable that emergency cancellations do appear, and all users of Airbnb should be aware of the risk they take when booking private accommodation rather than hotels. However, what is evident from the reviews is that, when something last minute does happen, Airbnb seems to be very unhelpful. Whom should be responsible when these situations occur seems blurred. Guests often stand helpless with their money not being refunded, and possibly only left with the option of booking over price hotels – especially if it is a holiday season, like some guests have experienced. Hence, in accordance to Dredge's, (2017b) argument that there needs to be more focus on core values, and ethical responsibility when it comes to CE platforms, this argument corresponds well to the findings of this thesis, where the simple aspects of caring about one another seems to be lost – in the customer service section. It seems like the Airbnb customer service personal focus more on company policies than considering the ethics of caring and having empathy, Of course, this is easier said than done if certain policies within the company of Airbnb are strict. Hence, the policy makers of Airbnb, rather than the customer service employees, should perhaps incorporate the thinking of ethics versus policies into their set of rules and mindset.

Lastly, the theme in which the least amount of reviews are under is damages not recovered which the following section will analyse.

4.3.5. Damages not covered

'I've had holes punched in the walls, doors pulled off their hinges, trash everywhere…. But Airbnb pays zero' (SJ, p.11)

This host underlines the fact that Airbnb does not cover damages, claiming to have had many damages in the 11 units that she rents out, without ever being reimbursed. This seems to be the general attitude within this theme and implies that, before using the Airbnb services, whom themselves state that they cover damages, it is important to know, that this is not always the case.

When the initial stories of vandalism and issues of safety began to emerge about Airbnb, Airbnb resolved the concerns with blanket insurance to hosts and thus ensuring that the problems would not affect the growth of the company (Blal et al., 2018). However, from the findings of the reviews, that are all similar, this blanket insurance does not seem to be sufficient any longer and the high growth of users, combined with the bad customer service, indicates that Airbnb cannot keep up with their own initial promises. This definitely is a breach of trust between consumers and Airbnb. Thus, transparency and clear guidelines as to what they cover should be provided by Airbnb.

After accounting for the main five themes above, and supporting the themes based on examples from hosts and guests, I will sum up the findings and answer the main research question of what the general attitude toward Airbnb is. The answer to this question is highly interpretive and derived from the above findings and arguments. Hence, the main research question is answered and discussed in the following section.

4.4. What is the general attitude toward Airbnb in the online community?

Trust has been shown to have a strong and positive correlation with customer satisfaction (Johnson and Greyson, 2006 in Ha & Lee, 2018). Following, it can be argued from this analysis that as the satisfaction level is so low, so is the ability to trust Airbnb. This is especially problematic for a company, which builds its business model around reputation systems and thus, trust.

Hence, based on the findings from the analysis of the reviews, this section aims to argue and discuss that the general attitude in the online community is *distrust*. In the context of Airbnb, distrust is defined as:

'the lack of interpersonal trust between the guest and the host, lack of trust toward technology, and lack of trust toward Airbnb' (So et al., 2018, p. 226).

Based on the literature reviews about motivations for using Airbnb, which were overall found to be; economic value, authenticity/unique experience, home benefits and social interactions (So et al., 2018), these initial motivational factors and thus, expectations, do not reflect the experiences which hosts and guests describe in the analysis. Thus, these disappointments facilitate distrust between hosts/guests and Airbnb:

'I have been a big fan/promoter of Airbnb but never realized how weak the customer service truly is' (TP, p. 58).

The above statement indicates that you can be a big supporter of Airbnb just until an issue occurs. This argument is evident in many of the reviews who did not seem to have any reservation about the service until they needed help. This fact, is a big problem for Airbnb, that they will help facilitate a service in which they make money, but if the service they initially help provide fails, they do not take responsibility leading to the breach of trust between them and their hosts and guests.

Deriving at the fact that distrust is the general term that sums up the attitude based on the above five themes, is especially ironic since Airbnb is argued to build its business around the element of trust (Ert et al., 2016; Livan et al., 2017). Hence, the following section will discuss some of the main issues about trust in the context of the findings in this thesis.

4.4.1. Distrust

Following the literature review, as is characteristic for CE, Airbnb, describes itself as 'a trusted community marketplace for people to list, discover, and book unique accommodations around the world (Airbnb 2016). Following, it is argued by scholars (e.g. Szilvia Gyimóthy, 2017b and O´Regan & Choe, 2017) that Airbnb is misleading in the way they market themselves. In fact, Gyimóthy, (2017b, pp. 59–72) goes so far to suggest that collaborative economy which indicates a strong feeling of community are misleading concepts that have purely been sold to consumers to

facilitate a successful business model. This skeptical attitude and belief in Airbnb is clearly also reflected in the findings of this thesis:

'Airbnb will fail with this lack of support to clients using their system' (TP, p. 6)

Hence, when Airbnb sells and markets itself on a false social, sharing and communal ideology, which is argued and criticized by e.g. Szilvia Gyimóthy, (2017), O´Regan & Choe, (2017) and Slee, (2015), this can create a false sense of security and false expectations to host and guests, whom believe in the CE, and the morals related to it. It is evident from the reviews, that many have been let down and disappointed by Airbnb, and been left to their own, when they needed them, and that false sense of security and expectations have led to distrust. Hence, I argue in accordance with the findings of (So et al., 2018), this study of reviews indicates that distrust is the predominate obstacle negatively affecting the hosts and guests attitude toward Airbnb. Supporting that argument, Tussyadiah & Pesonen, (2016) found distrust to be a key barrier to adopting Airbnb.

Under the category of distrust, the issues regarding the reputation systems, which primary purpose is to build trust, is relevant to discuss.

4.4.2. Reputation systems

As accounted for in the literature review, the reputation system is Airbnb's foundation for establishing trust between hosts and guests. However, the findings from the reviews suggest, that some hosts and guests are skeptical of this system, and such, the reputation system only creates more distrust between hosts/guests and Airbnb.

Similarly, to social media, the liability of Airbnb comes down to the reviews of users rather than for instance the general brand reputation that a hotel can have. In other words, the success of Airbnb comes down to the trust of an opinion from a previous user and is, therefore, a prime example of what can be termed a user-generated brand (Varma et al., 2016). The importance of user reviews is therefore significant, but becomes problematic in the case that reviews are restricted, edited, or if host/guest reviews are not equally validated. An example of this is seen in a guest who had a bad experience with her stay which ended in disagreements with the host. As a result, according to him/her, the host posted a bad review of her. When reaching out to Airbnb about this issue, they did

not take responsibility stating that people and opinions are different and thus, they could not do anything about a bad review (TP, p. 72).

In continuation of this argument, it was significant to find through the analysis of this thesis, that the average review star about Airbnb is merely 1,5 (figure 1) in comparison to the findings of Zervas et al., (2015) in which the general reviews rating of Airbnb's accommodations are 4,5. Although the reviews are not directly comparable, as mine is of the Airbnb business and Zervas et al.'s are of the accommodation within Airbnb, I would have presumed that the average scores would reflect each other better. In other words, if the quality of Airbnb's accommodations is an average of 4,5 in ratings, thus I would think that the opinions and experiences with these services would be higher too. However, this was not the case and makes me question the reputation system. In support of questioning the reputation system, a guest reported that she/he was bribed by the host to give her a five-star review after having encountered bad services (SJ, p. 12). Moreover, after telling Airbnb about his/her experience, she merely received an auto-generated email. This review suggests, that Airbnb does not take into consideration the unethical issues in regards to their reputation systems, such as when host try to bribe guests to get a better review. Moreover, it suggests, that Airbnb does not prioritize the credibility, or lack thereof, of reviews. If situations like these are not handled, it is no wonder that some researchers suggest, that their reputations systems cannot be trusted. In continuation of the above discussion, a discussion about responsibilities and regulations will conducted in the following section.

4.4.3. Responsibility and regulations

It is evident that Airbnb lacking in taking responsibility is a huge flaw in the company. Many host and guests underline this argument:

 'we reached out to Airbnb to be told it wasn't their fault and wasn't their responsibility' (TP, p.14)

Although the reputation systems implemented by Airbnb is argued to facilitate trust in an innovative manner, when the rare incidents of extreme breach of trust, which have been demonstrated to occur in the analysis, Airbnb does not take responsibility. Tom Slee gives an example of the same incident where a guest is raped by a host and Airbnb urges the guest to contact the police instead of them (Slee, 2015, p. 92). Although these extremities may occur for only a

small percentage of all Airbnb users, being aware of the risk, albeit small, that you do take when you use the services of Airbnb should be enlightened. In other words, there should be precise and clear, specific and transparent guidelines about Airbnb as to what exactly they take responsibility for and what is on your own risk. Hence, the constraints of using Airbnb, which were identified by in research conducted by So et al., (2018), were identified in the literature as distrust and unfamiliarity. However, their findings did not suggest that the notion of perceived risk was part of the constraints. The lack of perceiving the services of Airbnb as risky is evident in the problems that do occur. If people were, in fact, more aware of that there is a risk when using their service, such as possible cancellations, perhaps perceived risk would be found to be a constraint to using Airbnb.

In response to concerns, Airbnb has launched an online platform (www.airbnbcitizen.com) which aim is (among other areas) addressing the concerns of hosts, communities, and governments (Dredge, 2017b, p. 52). The platform focuses on spreading positivity and constructivism regarding concerns between hosts and guests, but also especially between Airbnb and governments. The 'Airbnb Policy Tool Chest' focuses on four sets of policy options for consideration which are; tax collection, good neighboring, accountability and transparency, and privacy (https://www.airbnbcitizen.com/home-sharing-policy-approaches-that-are-working-around-the-world/). Although this might be seen as a step towards more cooperation Airbnb does not seem to practice what they preach in regards to accountability and transparency.

Hence, in accordance with the findings from this research, So et al., (2018) argue that Airbnb could make a better effort in establishing trust with their consumers through not only better quality assurance or satisfaction guarantee mechanisms, 'but also a consistent provision of superior accommodation experiences that exceed expectations' (p. 234). However, to be able to guarantee superior accommodation experiences, the Airbnb business model needs to be tightened, and quality control and accommodation verification need to be employed as mandatory. However, Dredge (2017b) depicts the difficulty in establishing rules and especially in distributing responsibilities when it comes to CE in general. In continuation, I have continually stated throughout the analysis, that Airbnb should provide better and more clear guidelines that cover the issues that have been found in this thesis, and if such, the general attitude in the online community may change.

Authors critical of Airbnb, have highlighted that although Airbnb is a commercial success, which is

highly due to the economic opportunities, they have adverse social impacts (Martin, 2016). These arguments seem aligned with the findings from this analysis in which it is obvious that the social impacts on some of the cases have been extreme. These social impacts are high due to the lack of ethics and complexities of responsibility and regulations which clearly indicates, that the lack of the same rules and regulations that hotels are under, cause Airbnb to not have the same control of what goes on in homes that have not been verified. Thus, the lack of control, and wanting to have control, brings a certain risk to consumers every time they use the company. A risk that you simply do not have when using hotels. Albeit the percentage of bad experiences is small compared to those of good, hence the success of Airbnb, through all the glory that Airbnb gets in the media, it is important to be aware of these risks. Airbnb should not only be telling the good stories of the company, which Slee (2015) is highly critical of but should be equally underlining the risk that you do have both as host and guest when you chose to engage in the services of Airbnb. Furthermore, transparency regarding the exact help that you can expect to get from customer if something does occur, should also be underlined. Establishing these boundaries may have an overall effect on host and guest expectations and thus, general attitude.

4.5. Credibility, Quality, and limitations of data

As accounted for in the literature review, the issue of trust, which Airbnb build their business model around, is an essential factor when it comes to the continuation of their success. However, the findings above, indicate that Airbnb has failed at maintaining trust between them and many of their guests/hosts. However, albeit the above findings are based on a small percentage of the 150.000 million Airbnb users, the issue of trust, and lack thereof, is a significant factor which should be further enlightened.

Subsequently, the findings of the thesis imply that it represents the general opinions of hosts and guests. This is however not the case. In fact, it can be argued that people with bad experiences are more likely to leave reviews and therefore the dominant negative reviews do not represent the general opinion of the online community. However, it does provide a good insight into what some of the key challenges Airbnb do face, albeit maybe only a small percentage of Airbnb users experience these.

The conclusion that distrust is the general opinion about Airbnb, was based on my own interpretations of the themes rather than from a word calculator. Moreover, if I had utilized a computer system for my content analysis to word count, the word of distrust would not have derived, and thus, I could not have argued for that word to be the main finding of the analysis. However, do to manually analyzing the reviews thematically, I got a great insight into the underlining emotions and feelings of the reviews, and not just the words. Hence, the word of distrust came to me as the main attitude when summing up the five themes. This word was also inspired by the fact, that scholars base so much importance on trust both through the reputation system and through Airbnb's communitarian marketing strategies. Therefore, due to the interpretive nature of this thesis, I allowed the word of distrust to be the main finding of host and guest attitude, although quantifiably, this word did not appear much in the reviews.

One last observation regarding the limitations to the credibility of the reviews is on who's fault problems really are to blame. For instance, the hosts claiming that Airbnb has changed their booking prices, it can just as well be, that the host has made a mistake and set the price differently than the intention, by a mistake, and when then someone books the apartment, the damage is done and they need someone to blame. The point being, that in some of the complaints, who the mistake really lies on is hard to verify and thus, cannot correctly resemble the business of Airbnb. However, whoever is to blame, the customer service section should be able to better and more professionally deal with these situations as they occur, no matter who is to blame. And the reoccurring complaints about the customer service experiences suggest that this is a credible and ongoing issue within Airbnb.

Since the marketing of Airbnb, as accounted for in the literature review, paints the picture of collaborative economy and a global community of travelers more than a business-oriented platform, this has the potential of giving guests and hosts a false sense of security and an expectation that Airbnb will be responsible for more than is actually the case.

5. Conclusion

The work of this thesis serves to provide preliminary insights into user generated reviews about a collaborative economy accommodation platform that exemplifies the emerging collaborative economy, namely Airbnb.

This thesis argues that there is a research gap within the research field of Airbnb about online reviews conducted by hosts and guests based on their experiences using Airbnb. Hence, the main objective of this thesis was to conduct interpretivist research into the general attitude within the online community about Airbnb from the perspectives of hosts and guests. The methodology and method for approaching the research was through a netnography. Moreover, it was argued, that do to the relevance of social media today, under which category user-generated review platforms fall, analyzing the general attitude toward Airbnb from online review websites was relevant.

Before conducting the analysis, a literature reviews was presented that covered a basis presentation of Airbnb, the motivations for using Airbnb, and, the complexities of Airbnb in regards to trust, regulations and responsibility. The literature review found that the main motivations for using Airbnb were financial, social and correlated to unique travel experiences. Moreover, it was demonstrated that CE and Airbnb is complex when it comes to the issues of trust, regulations and responsibilities. These findings were later related to the findings of the analysis.

Hence, a netnograpy and content and thematic analysis was conducted from the two review platforms Trustpilot and Sitejabber constituting 224 reviews in total with 181 of them being negative. The negative reviews were divided in to the five predominant themes, in the order about which most complaints were given; Bad customer service, technological issues, apartment/guests not living up to expectations, last minute cancellations and damages not covered. It was evident from the experiences described in the reviews, that Airbnb lacks taking responsibility when issues occur and that guests and hosts were mostly left to their own. Moreover, many of the experiences had had deep impacts on the hosts and guests, which was evident from the emotional reviews.

Henceforward, based on the themes derived from the analysis this thesis concluded that the main attitude toward Airbnb within the online community is distrust. Distrust, was then argued based on literature review findings and the complexities of regulations and responsibilities.

This thesis suggests that Airbnb be more transparent regarding their responsibilities and more specific in what hosts and guests risk when the use the service.

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Appendix 1: Reviews from Trustpilot – referred to as TP

Appendix 2: Reviews from Sitejabber – referred to as SJ

Appendix 3: Excel sheet with the thematic content coding of reviews