

Member engagement in sharing communities

Using social media to engage active and less active online community members in sharing services

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the sharing economy has been a heated subject for public debate. This new development enables people to lend, swap, rent and barter products or services in a more convenient way. While property and mobility sharing are gaining more media coverage, other forms of sharing such as knowledge sharing remain less represented. Although the notion of sharing is not new, however unlike typical sharing behavior, today the sharing economy is significantly facilitated by digital technologies such as social media and mobile platforms. Thus, to formulate and engage online communities becomes an important instrument for a sharing platform to thrive. Given the prevalent use of social media in the sharing economy, online members' motivation to participate remains one of the main barriers not only in knowledge sharing communities but also virtual communities in general. Hence, this thesis is devoted to studying the strategies of Dutch knowledge sharing platforms using social media to engage community members, and to what extent do they differ their strategies towards active and less active members. The three building blocks of this thesis are the interpreted value of social media use, strategic engagement on social media, and tactical difference on member mobilization.

Theoretical literature indicates that based on the functional features of social media, it is feasible for practitioners to use them as tools for member engagement. Thus, this thesis postis that if a sharing platform's social media communication speaks to people's motivations of knowledge sharing behaviors, it is likely to stimulate participation in sharing initiatives. Through qualitative interviews with eleven practitioners across nine Dutch knowledge sharing platforms, this thesis shows that curating social media content, facilitating social relationships, and fulfilling individual needs are three main strategies deployed by practitioners. Moreover, this thesis concludes that among the interviewed platforms, there is no distinct tactical difference towards active and less active community members. Rather, it is the demographic groups, target audience on different social media channels, and the structure of a community that are likely to vary a sharing platform's member engagement strategies on social media.

KEYWORDS:

The sharing economy, Knowledge sharing, Social media, Member engagement, Community.

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1. Introduction

The sharing economy has witnessed a rapid growth in recent years, in 2013 this new economy was valued about \$15 billion worldwide, and it is projected to reach \$335 billion in 2025 (PwC, 2013). In the United Kingdom, the sharing economy is predicted to rise to \$9 billion by 2025 and 64 percent of adults will participate in sharing services by then (Stokes, Clarence, Anderson, & Rinne, 2014). The concept of the sharing economy, according to a Deloitte report (Zobrist & Grampp, n.d.), is impressively simple: anything that is not being used can be rented out. For example, when people have vacant accommodations, they can lend them out via sharing platforms such as Airbnb, or, when they decided to take public transports during the weekend, they can share their cars with strangers through the car sharing platform Zipcar. Not only do people share physical resources, sharing behaviors also happen in other disciplines such as skills, finance, care, and knowledge (Slijpen, 2014). While the sharing economy has been increasingly practiced in society, the discussion of this new concept is extended from public sphere to the professional sphere.

1.1 Defining the sharing economy

Rachel Botsman, the pioneer advocate of this new movement, defined the sharing economy as "an economic model based on sharing underutilized assets from spaces to skills to stuff for monetary or non-monetary benefits" (Botsman, 2015, para. 15). Drawing from an ownership perspective, Belk (2014) added that the sharing economy is a post-ownership economy which enables people to lend, swap, rent and barter products or services. Moreover, Rachel believes the sharing economy is not a transitory movement, but a significant development that breaks down institutional control of economic infrastructures and welcomes the culture of "we" rather than "me" in collaborative consumption (Botsman, 2010).

However, Botsman's definition is not unchallenged. Some argue that the term "sharing economy" does not represent the nature of this new development. For example, Eckhardt and Bardhi (2015) noted that sharing should take place among people who know each other, and without any monetary profits, whereas the type of sharing behavior in the sharing economy is market-oriented and between strangers, it is no longer sharing at all but rather an "access economy" (para. 1). Meanwhile, research finds that "sustainability", one of the core values in the sharing economy, does not always have a direct association with one's motivation to join in the sharing economy, rather, "enjoyment" and "economic benefits" are more likely to mobilize participation (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2015). Furthermore, while the

sharing economy is disrupting the institution of the traditional economy (Botsman, 2010), it is also raising concerns about social safety (Sundararajan, 2015), steady incomes (Sherman, 2014) and fair competition (Lougher & Kalmanowicz, 2015). Although the sharing economy lacks a shared definition (Botsman, 2013) and is facing various critiques, nevertheless it is evident that this movement is gaining more and more public attention.

1.2 Social media and the sharing economy

Despite the remarkable rise of the sharing economy, the sharing initiatives are still facing various practical dilemmas. One prominent issue is how to engage more people in the sharing initiatives and motivate participation in sharing behaviors (Wagner, Kuhndt, Lagomarsino & Mattar, 2015). Given the nature of the sharing economy is largely people-driven, a valuable premise of this new development is the balance between supply and demand (Dervojeda et al., 2013). The demand side from the audience is equally important as the supply side from the sharing services, the services will not function properly if either side falls short. According to a survey, only 7 percent of male internet users and 10 percent of females in Germany has used sharing services in September 2015, half of the respondents of both genders would not consider participating in the sharing economy at all (Emarketer, 2015), in fact, the sharing economy is still in its infancy in the European market (European Union, 2013). A medium through which sharing platforms can effectively engage community members and facilitate their business models is in need, research finds that the use of social media can be one of the solutions (Holmes, 2014; Reynolds, 2015).

With the growing use of the internet, practitioners in traditional businesses are paying more attentions to using online tools such as social media for marketing purposes: increasing visibility, interacting with customers and building virtual brand communities (Stelzner, 2010). According to a survey on small business, in 2015, 96 percent of marketers used social media as online marketing tools, and the increase of exposure was considered as the top benefit of using social media (Delzio, 2015). For larger businesses, social media are often used for promotional campaigns: in 2014, Hewlett-Packard (HP) organized a highly successful social media campaign #BendTheRules on multiple social media platforms. Research finds that for both small and large businesses, budget and resources are two prominent elements that can have a potential influence on their social media marketing strategies (Olenski, 2015), as aforementioned, large businesses have the leverage to use social media for series of social media campaign while small businesses use social media for increasing exposure on a basic level.

Although the notion of sharing is not new, however unlike conventional sharing behavior, the sharing economy nowadays is significantly facilitated by digital technologies such as social media and mobile

platforms. The infrastructure of digital media is fostering economic exchanges in the ways just as traditional economic institutions have done (Sundararajan, 2014). Besides using the internet to facilitate sharing and exchange on a greater scale, the digitalization of social through multiple digital media platforms also transfers trust and social capital to the online context (Sundararajan, 2013). These two concepts produce the two benefits of social media for the sharing economy: the expansion of sharing networks and the building of interpersonal trust (Rick, 2013), these two benefits can further contribute to the two important premises for member engagement in the sharing economy: community (Hernández, 2014) and trust (Badger, 2015). Hence, to take advantage of social media for member engagement in sharing communities, “be reactive” and “have a conversation” are important parts of an organization’s strategies (McIntyre, n.d.). This requires sharing platforms to adopt a more active role engaging with online members on social media.

1.3 Knowledge sharing as the next revolution

The sharing economy has been a heated subject of public debate: Airbnb is disrupting the traditional hotel industry by distributing 60 percent of its rooms in the top 14 markets of the United States (Bryan, 2015). Carpooling is raising concerns about unfair competition among taxi drivers, and lobbyists are trying to push restrictive regulations to constrain companies like Uber and Lyft (Vila & Gardner, 2015). As property and mobility sharing are gaining more media coverage (Justpark, 2015), other forms of sharing remain less represented, one of them is knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is an activity through which knowledge and skills are shared among strangers, friends, families, communities and organizations (Gorenflo, 2010; Serban & Luan, 2002). Knowledge sharing can take various forms, both online and offline. One prominent example of online knowledge sharing are Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), a MOOC is an online course which allows unlimited user participation in interactive learning, it is an online community where students, professors, and teaching assistants are connected (Bozkurt et al., 2015). Examples of offline knowledge sharing usually include offline community workshops and private seminars to name a few.

The notion of the knowledge economy has existed for years (Powell & Snellman, 2004), however, prior to the rise of the sharing economy, knowledge sharing behavior is more often found in corporate contexts, also known as the “Knowledge management” (Garcia-Murillo & Annabi, 2002). Knowledge sharing has been recognized as an important instrument towards a successful organization. For example, knowledge sharing between managers and employees can facilitate a better decision-making process, knowledge sharing among employees can build a learning-oriented corporate culture (Quast, 2012). Given all the merits of knowledge sharing, studies find employees are sometimes reluctant to share their

knowledge, because of not knowing what to post, or the fear of criticism and so forth (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003).

This leads to the debate of whether or not the knowledge sharing, in general, deserves a massive adoption, and should people be engaged in knowledge sharing initiatives or not. One prominent pitfall of knowledge sharing, the behavior per se, is that the activity may raise ethical or legal concerns, one of them is associated with the issue of intellectual property, which is applicable to both corporate context and knowledge sharing among peers (Morais da Costa, 2011). Meanwhile, in terms of engaging more people in knowledge sharing, the opinions are also twofold. On the one hand, engaging more people in this collaborative efforts is considered not only making knowledge reusable but also through the circulation of ideas, it is more likely to foster innovation (Garfield, 2014). Moreover, in the case of natural disasters, knowledge sharing is even more essential as it facilitate the exchange of expertise on precaution and emergency aid (Pathirage, Amaratunga, Haigh & Baldry, 2008). On the other hand, there is research that questions the relations between knowledge sharing and innovation. David Shaywitz (2015) pointed out that the more we have knowledge sharing activities, it is more likely that we overshadow the value of individual and independent research, which can be more insightful, profound and original. Although for the research purpose of this thesis, the general premise is that knowledge sharing should be encouraged, however, it should not be assumed that sharing knowledge with strangers is inherently good.

When a sharing model is being applied to skills and knowledge, it turns learning from an individual activity to a collaborative effort. Through knowledge sharing platforms, users can post the subjects they want to learn, questions they want to ask, or even organize an offline meeting. In addition to waiting for responses, they can reach out to a large number of existing topics to find a “match” themselves. Collaborative platforms are thought to be a strong supplement to traditional learning experiences by offering users more self-determined choices and more flexible schedules (Grauer, 2013). Hence, unlike in the traditional economy in which resources are depleted as soon as they are used, the knowledge economy enables people to share and reuse information and knowledge (Zajda, 2010). This gives knowledge sharing more leverage to be the next revolution in the sharing economy (Khosravi, 2015) and one of the trends of 2016 (CMW, 2015). Given the potentials of knowledge sharing and the fewer attentions it is being paid, this thesis chooses to focus on this type of sharing initiative and study how knowledge sharing platforms are taking the opportunities to thrive. Furthermore, different from accommodation sharing and car sharing which are physical assets with immediate effectiveness (PwC, 2013), knowledge sharing is more of a process which seeks to manage intangible assets for tangible outcomes, when the outcomes are not of immediate effect, people are less willing to share (Krok, 2013). Thus, it is even more essential for knowledge sharing platforms to motivate community members to participate. In this respect, using social

media as tools to implement strategies of member engagement is still a valuable topic to be further addressed in this thesis.

1.4 Problem definition

The sharing economy is not only a concept from the business sector, there is also a growing interest from academia to study this fairly new economic development. Research on the sharing economy focuses, for example, on business models (Jahromi & Weber, 2015), government regulations (Koopman, Mitchell, & Thierer, 2015) and the digital trust between strangers (Ert, Fleischer, & Magen, 2016). Research specifically on social media marketing and member engagement in sharing communities is still limited. According to previous research, online members' motivation to participate remains one of the main barriers not only in knowledge sharing communities but also virtual communities in general (Koh, Kim, Butler, & Bock, 2007). Moreover, the motivation for participation can vary between different types of online members. In a case study of online learning, Kajee (2008) distinguished online participants into two types: the more active and the less active. Kajee further noted that active online participants are more responsive and demanding to learning initiatives, which for the less active online participants there barely is an impact.

Besides online learning, the distinction between active and less active participation is also evident in other areas such as online citizen journalism (Bruns, 2009) and online reviews in E-commerce services (Nielsen, 2014). Thus, to sustain an online community, sufficient member engagement instruments, and active member participation are equally important to keep the community vibrant. One of the strategies for members' engagement in online communities is curating offline meetings such as social meet-ups or workshops (Matzat, 2010; Sessions, 2010; Van der Burg, 2015), and it is noted that community activities are increasingly important for member engagement and satisfaction (Langerak, Verhoef, Verlegh, & Valck, 2003; Matzat, 2010). However, subjects in previous research were mainly active members who were already highly participative to these community activities, the question regarding how to mobilize the group of less active online members to participate remains less investigated. Meanwhile, in the context of an online community, research suggests that online engagement is a significant facilitator for offline participation (Conroy, Feezell, & Guerrero, 2012), and offline activities, on the other hand, can stimulate online engagement (Van der Burg, 2015). Thus from either perspective, enhancing online engagement and mobilizing both active and less active members in an online community is crucial for a sharing platform to thrive. Based on theories and literature from sociology, customer engagement and social media marketing, this thesis will answer the following research question:

- *To what extent do Dutch knowledge sharing platforms differ their social media strategies to engage active and less active online community members?*

1.5 Elements of the research question and sub-questions

The study will be focusing on a practitioner perspective to explore and evaluate the extent to which knowledge sharing platforms vary their strategies to engage active and less active online community members. The most important concepts that are used to address the research question are: user media attendance, social media engagement, and the categorization of online members. Firstly, the concept of user media attendance describes what influence an online community member's decision to adopt certain media platform, and how they see the value from their media attendance. Literature note that the activity of media attendance is a proactive personal choice (Levy & Windahl, 1984), thus in this thesis, the certain social media channel a user chooses, or through which a sharing platform tries to engage with online members can reflect its functional values in associated with users' needs. Therefore, the first sub-question is:

1. Which social media channels do sharing platforms use for online member engagement?

It is worth noticing that, the research of this thesis departs from a practitioner perspective, further in this thesis, the social media strategies through which knowledge sharing platforms engage with online community members will be studied. Secondly, the online communities in this thesis are referring to the virtual communities that are built upon the antecedent of either a social media platform or a physical community that emerged from knowledge sharing events and then be migrated to online context, maintained within a social media network. As previously discussed, an online community consists of two main types of online members, the active and the less active. The distinction between online community members is one essential step prior to the member engagement, as a distinct audience group will facilitate platforms' social media engagement to be more targeted and more effective. While the boundary between active and less active online community member has been distinguished by academic research (Lai & Chen, 2014; Wang, 2012), whereas in practice, the identification criteria of an active or less active online community member may subject to change depending on the case of each sharing platform. For the online community members, their reason and motives to engage in the knowledge sharing initiatives can be for self-development, networking, or simply to join the sharing event as a weekend activity. Yet, for this thesis, the focus is on the platform practitioners, it is more relevant to understand how they reach their

online community members, and engage more of them in sharing initiatives. Therefore, based on two different types of online community members, the second and third sub-question are as follows:

2. *How do knowledge sharing platforms identify and engage active online members?*
3. *How do knowledge sharing platforms identify and engage less active online members?*

Following the research on knowledge sharing platforms' social media engagement. Thirdly, the assumption derived from the conceptual model of this thesis is that, if a knowledge sharing platform addresses the gratification of knowledge sharing initiatives in their social media engagement, it is more likely to trigger active online member participation. Yet, to answer the main research question, the aim is to understand the extent to which sharing platforms' social media use is speaking to active and less active online member differently. Previous research provides insight on the roles of active and less active online member, however, researchers tended to address the issue from a user perspective (Lai & Chen, 2014; Wang, 2012; Barysheva, Golubtsova, & Yavorskiy, n.d). However, in practical cases, whether or not the distinction between different types of online member is actually playing a role still is a fairly new discussion, especially from a practitioner point of view. Hence, the forth sub-question is:

4. *To what extent do sharing platforms vary their social media strategies to engage more/less active members and why?*

1.6 Social and scientific relevance

As research shows that offline interactions can reduce problems of sociability in a knowledge sharing community and increase online member participation (Matzat, 2010), one of the strategies recommended for sharing platforms is to organize more offline meetings. In a more general sense, since knowledge sharing platforms use various instruments to engage online community members, active participation on the members' side is equally important for the engagement to be continuous and effective. In 2015, a survey of the sharing economy was conducted in 15 European countries, the results in one of the categories revealed that only five percent of Dutch respondents have heard of the sharing economy and participated in it, nevertheless the whole European sharing economy is expected to grow by a third in 2016 (Bright, 2015). Being conducted in the Netherlands, this thesis will show how Dutch knowledge sharing platforms stimulate member participation and how they use social media to do so. The research question aims at evaluating their social media strategies to engage active members and motivate less active members, in this way to obtain a wider range of participants and amplify the effect of their engagement strategies. Hence, the findings of this thesis can provide empirical results for the reference of

other sharing organizations, and give more insights to the strategy-making in member engagement, especially engaging the less active members and integrate them with the group of active members.

Previous research (Matzat, 2010; Tillema, Dijst, & Schwanen, 2010; Van der Burg, 2015) explains the benefits of integrating online communities with offline meetings, but the strategies to engage and motivate online community members to participate in these community initiatives still needs further discussion. Social media, for example, are becoming popular marketing tools for activity promotion, statistic shows an increase up to 90 percent of marketers using one or more social media channels in the past few years (Hughes, 2012). However, research on using social media to motivate member participation in virtual communities focuses more on the contexts of political or civic engagement (Harlow, 2012; Conroy et al., 2012; Gennaro & Dutton, 2006), limited academic research pays attention to the use of social media to engage online communities in non-political activities such as cultural events, social meet-ups or knowledge sharing workshops in the case of this thesis. This provides the rationale to conduct this study, a better understanding of the use of online tools to boost member participation in community activities will be a relevant addition to current studies of community management and social media marketing. Furthermore, some academic research has increasingly been paying attention to different types of online users in virtual communities, such as active participants and silent participants (Barysheva, Golubtsova, & Yavorskiy, n.d.; Butler, B., Sproull, L., Kiesler, S., & Kraut, R. 2002), contributors and lurkers (Wang, 2012). For this thesis, it is interesting to also adopt an academic perspective to distinguish and analyze active and less active online community members, not just view them as subjects from a solely practical point of view.

1.7 Thesis outline

In chapter two, a review of the background of this field of research will be given, along with a presentation of the main theoretical concepts that are associated with the research question. Furthermore, relevant theories about how sharing platforms engage online community members via social media, and the categorization of online users will be presented. A theoretical framework is to be established based on a literature review on the Uses and Gratification Theory, Customer Engagement Theory and empirical research on online community members. After the theoretical chapter, the methodology of this thesis: qualitative interviews, will be explained as well as the research design including a description of the units of analysis, the data collection and data analysis process. The fourth chapter focuses on the outcomes of the interviews and proceed to the discussion of the major findings of this thesis. Eventually, this master thesis will close with a conclusion and a discussion of this thesis's academic and societal values, limitations and suggestions for future research will be addressed.

2. Theory and previous research

To explore how Dutch knowledge sharing platforms vary their social media strategies when engaging active and less active online community members, it is important to first understand the academic concepts that are associated with this question. The concepts relate to the four sub-questions of this thesis, and can be found in three main research areas: media participation, user engagement on social media, and the different types of online community members. These research areas distinguish the main research question into two parts of research focus. The first part will be focusing on the exploration of knowledge sharing platforms' strategic use of social media to engage their members. The second part will be focusing on evaluating their strategies on both active and less active online community members and determine to what extent they are different.

In this chapter, these areas will be explained using relevant theories and previous empirical research. To facilitate the first part of study on sharing platforms' social media strategies to engage online community members, it is necessary to first understand why people choose social media as communication tools. Uses and Gratifications Theory (Rubin, 1983) reveals online members' needs and motivations for social media use, therefore can provide further indications on what kind of strategic inputs are more likely to trigger member engagement and could be reflected in knowledge sharing platforms' strategies. After the U&G (Uses and Gratifications) theory, a discussion on the relations between social media use and knowledge sharing participation will be presented. This discussion aims to find out if there is a consistency in these two areas regarding user gratifications, which leads to the proposition of a link between knowledge sharing initiatives and community members' social media use.

To address the second research area of user engagement on social media, based on empirical research on user engagement in the organizational context, this section aims to distinguish the customer engagement pattern from solely the frequency of usage. The discussion will transfer the construct of Customer Engagement Theory (C&E) to understand the case of knowledge sharing platforms. In this section, the conceptualization of engagement and its theoretical relations with U&G theory will be explained. Meanwhile, based on the posited link between online members' social media use and knowledge sharing behaviors. A three-dimensional social media strategy for knowledge sharing platforms' member engagement will be proposed. This framework will serve as an important framework to understand in which ways knowledge sharing platforms strive to achieve member engagement on social media, and how their use of social media is in line with the objective of communicating the platform's initiatives to the gratifications of participating in knowledge sharing.

Furthermore, to analyze the last sub-question about the extent to which knowledge sharing platforms vary their social media strategies to engage two types of online community members, academic concepts from previous research on active and less active online community member will be discussed. This section closes with a review of the theoretical framework, and a conceptual model will be presented. Followed by a brief outlook on the application of this theoretical framework in the operationalization of the research questions, which will be further elaborated in the third chapter of research method.

2.1 Why people use social media

The Uses and Gratifications approach (U&G) was primarily developed to study the motivations of people who watch traditional media such as television (Kippax & Murray, 1980; Rubin, 1983). It distinguishes itself from earlier theories in mass communications by viewing audiences as active actors who have a motivation to adopt certain media (Levy & Windahl, 1984). With the development of new technologies and new media, academic researchers started to focus on what gratifications users are seeking in new media, and why, for instance, they switch from traditional media to new media (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). U&G theory originally focuses on an individual perspective of media participation: the gratifications sought from the internet determine individual's exposure to the media (LaRose & Eastin, 2004) and people will seek the media that fulfill their needs (Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2011). Existing literature on U&G theory classifies the gratifications users seek from social media use in general into four principal elements: seeking information, social interaction, entertainment and relaxation, reward and remuneration (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005).

Thereafter research develops an innovative term called prospective or expected gratifications, and this practical definition aligns with the social cognitive perspective of media participation derived from Bandura's (1986, 1989) Social Cognitive Theory. LaRose, Mastro, and Eastin (2001) then suggested that the expected outcomes or gratifications of users are far more reliable comparing to conventional U&G approaches regarding media participation. The assumption then proceeded from "I use social media because I want to" to "When I use social media then it is likely that I will have". Based on this new assumption, researchers suggested that an organization's social media presence should be designed to facilitate the expected outcomes, fulfill the gratifications of users and create values (Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013).

Formulated under the abovementioned four principal gratifications of social media use and based on literature on social media and customer engagement, the functional role of social media in online engagement can be further summarized in four segments: information; interaction; relaxation;

remuneration (De Vries, Gensler, & LeeFlang, 2012; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011; Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Lee, Hosanagar, & Nair, 2013).

From a practical point of view, the U&G perspective has been increasingly adopted to evaluate user behaviors derived from their motivations of using social media (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Motivation refers to the psychological mechanism that is central to the intention and mobilization, and it can produce outcomes of particular types of behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000), such as media use or knowledge sharing. The above discussion indicates that the U&G approach establishes a framework through which the motivations of individual's media participation can be understood. U&G theory acknowledges the active role of the audience in their decision-making on media participation, which is aligned with the context of social media: online members are not passively consuming the information on a social media platform but actively engaging with it. While the motivations and needs of social media users can be identified by U&G theory, the question then is how do practitioners gratify these needs and how can their objectives be reflected in social media practices. This remains an ongoing discussion and the practical implications may be subject to change when applied to specific cases. Besides, some researchers use the U&G approach to study the appeals of social media (Shao, 2009), from a practitioner perspective, the "appeals" can be integrated as guidelines for the design of social media plans. Hence, although U&G theory usually adopts a user-centered approach, it is reasonable for this thesis to extend the application of U&G perspective to explore practitioners' strategic use of social media to appeal to online community members and stimulate their participations in knowledge sharing initiatives.

2.2 Bridging social media use and knowledge sharing initiatives

In previous section, the motivations of social media use have been discussed, this provides a first overview on why people use social media. Given the research question of this thesis, one of the premises of member engagement using social media is to firstly fulfill the need of people who use social media. However, as much as members are using social media to engage sharing communities and vice versa, the engagement still needs to be translated into knowledge sharing behaviors. Thus, besides social media use, it is important to add another theoretical inputs to bridge social media use and knowledge sharing initiatives. In the following section, the motivational factors of knowledge sharing behaviors will be discussed, and its relation to social media use will be established using empirical research and literature.

2.2.1 Why people participate in knowledge sharing initiatives

The theoretical framework of this thesis intends to establish a link that bridge online community members' social media use and their motivation to participate in sharing initiatives advocated by knowledge sharing platforms. To explain the rationale of this link, it is important to first understand what factors are essential to the motivation of knowledge sharing behaviors. Previous research of motivation suggests that it is usually rooted in two main kinds of sources, the intrinsic factors and the extrinsic factors (Osterloh & Frey, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The intrinsic motivation drives people to participate in activities for their own good. Therefore, the motivations are underlying in the intrinsic interest and perceived values of the participant (Welschen, Todorova, & Mills, 2013), in other words, what is in it for them? Contrary to the intrinsic motivation, the extrinsic motivation drives individuals to engage in activities mainly for positive benefits or to avoid negative outcomes, which are likely to be alienated from the behavior itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This section will present an overview of existing literature on these two main categories of drivers that motivate people to participate in knowledge sharing: the intrinsic motivation and the extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivations

As Gagné (2009) noted, intrinsic motivation is important to understand voluntary and pro-social behaviors. Knowledge sharing in the sharing economy is not revenue-driven, and it is often regarded as a voluntary and pro-social behavior as well. Therefore, it can be assumed that knowledge sharing is likely to be motivated by intrinsic factors in a similar way (Gagné, 2009). Previous research illustrates the significance of intrinsic drivers in one's participation in knowledge sharing, and the key intrinsic motivational factors can be summarized as knowledge self-efficacy, perceived benefits, and enjoyment in helping others (Cabrera, Collins, & Salgado, 2006; Lin, 2007; Chen & Hung, 2010).

Self-efficacy is a concept originally derived from the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), self-efficacy is used for self-assessment, and it is considered as a crucial determinant of one's intentional behavior. A high level of self-efficacy indicates a greater self-confidence in one's own knowledge and skills, consequently, the person is more likely to engage in activities and perform their skills. Self-efficacy is reflected more in the deployment of cognitive resources, and it is reported to have an impact on one's knowledge sharing intention as well (Tamjidyamcholo, Bin Baba, Tamjid, & Gholipour, 2013). In the context of knowledge sharing, the knowledge self-efficacy indicates a person's confidence in ability to provide useful answers to questions posted by other online members, or a sharing initiative advocated by the sharing platform (Chen & Hung, 2010). Moreover, through knowledge sharing and the exchange of

expertise, people feel more comfortable in sharing their knowledge with others, thus, sharing knowledge to other members can, in return, enhance the knowledge self-efficacy of the contributor.

Perceived benefits represent the expected outcomes of an online member in a knowledge sharing community. Expected outcomes refer to the prospective consequences of one's own behavior (Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007). In the context of knowledge sharing, the perceived benefits relate to a member's expectation that by sharing knowledge within the social network, the likely advantages and benefits will return to him or her (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003; Chen & Hung, 2010). For example, in the form of career promotion (Cabrera, Collins, & Salgado, 2006) or better ability to manage personal knowledge (Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009).

According to Lin (2007) and Gagné (2009), another reason why people share their knowledge is the enjoyment of helping others. The intrinsic enjoyment of helping others via sharing knowledge has also been found in other research (McLure Wasko & Faraj, 2000; Davenport & Prusak, 1998). Further empirical research adds that, for sharing community members, the value that others can gain from them is equally important and meaningful to the value they gain as individuals (Lin, 2007).

Extrinsic motivations

The core of extrinsic motivation is rooted in the purpose of obtaining the external outcomes that come from participating in an activity (Welschen, Todorova, & Mills, 2013). Moreover, early research points out that extrinsic motivation also refers to the inherent satisfaction from engaging in certain behaviors (Deci, 1975). Based on these antecedents, the key extrinsic motivational factors of knowledge sharing behaviors can be summarized as the feasibility of platform, norm of reciprocity, and organizational rewards (Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009; Sharratt & Usoro, 2003; Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Lin, 2007).

The accessibility of platform indicates the technical infrastructure of a knowledge sharing system. According to Sharratt and Usoro (2003), the ease of use of a knowledge sharing platform plays a crucial role in determining one's motive to share knowledge. This proposition corresponds to what Ardichvili, Page, and Wentling (2003) have found that the more useful and convenient the system is, the higher people's willingness to contribute their knowledge.

In the context of knowledge sharing, the norm of reciprocity represents the knowledge exchange between community members and the mutual indebtedness inherent in sharing activities (Lin, 2007; Kankanhalli et al. 2005). For example, individuals reciprocate by returning the benefits received from other members, in this way to form a supportive cycle of knowledge sharing and establish a long-term cooperation (Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005; Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005). Lin (2007) confirmed in her research that the positive effect of reciprocity on knowledge sharing motivation of employees, whereas Wasko and Faraj (2005) found out the negative role of reciprocity in professional knowledge sharing

communities, they further noted that there is no development of social capital in an online professional community of practice. Cheng and Hung (2010) delivered similar outcomes from their studies on online professional communities. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the above research is based on a professional context, the different results suggest further research is needed, and it is reasonable to include this extrinsic motivation in this thesis, which departs from a similar standpoint but focuses more on knowledge sharing among strangers in non-professional settings.

Organizational rewards refer to the incentives which can be monetary such as bonuses, or non-monetary rewards such as job promotion (Kankanhalli et al. 2005). Previous research widely acknowledges the importance of a reward system in boosting knowledge sharing within an organization. Researchers further claimed that knowledge sharing behaviors need to be rewarded and recognized (O'Dell & Hubert, 2011). Nevertheless, results from empirical studies on the incentive of rewards are twofold. Some research finds that organizational rewards, such as an endorsement of good reputation, can have a positive impact on knowledge sharing (Alam, Abdullah, Ishak, & Zain, 2009; Kankanhalli et al. 2005), while other researchers found there is hardly evidence of a direct association between organizational rewards and member contribution (Zhang, Chen, Vogel, Yuan, & Guo, 2010; Seba, Rowley, & Lambert, 2012).

The above discussion provides an overview of the possible motivations of people who participate in knowledge sharing based on literature. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors have been explained. Referring to the theoretical concepts of the U&G theory, there is a noticeable consistency between the user gratifications of social media and the motivations of knowledge sharing. For example, the seeking of organizational rewards can be explained by the user gratification of remuneration. In the next section, these knowledge sharing motivations will be further elaborated relating to the gratifications of social media use, which will be summarized into three categories of need, which are for the proposition of a link between the two fields. Meanwhile, noted that the motivations of knowledge sharing have been well-discussed in previous research. Nevertheless, previous research is mostly rooted in the context of professional communities, in which knowledge sharing mostly happens between professionals. For this thesis, the theoretical construct can be used to facilitate the study of non-professional communities in the knowledge sharing economy, in which sharing happens between peers and strangers. However, the similarities and differences should be noted and acknowledged during the process.

2.2.2 Bridging social media use and knowledge sharing

The motivational needs of online members in knowledge sharing communities, to some extent, can be linked to the gratifications they seek from their use of social media. For example, the norm of reciprocity in knowledge sharing is similar to the need of remuneration in social media use. Research finds that the conjunction of knowledge sharing behaviors and social media use is because the functional values of social media platform per se are of knowledge sharing nature, for example, social media can be utilized for working purpose and serve as channels for knowledge management within an organization (Zande, 2013). The functional values of social media for knowledge sharing can be illustrated in two main perspectives. As Sie et al. (2012) noted, firstly, social media allow users to make content themselves, and the user-generated content can be easily made available to other users, this feature increases the circulation of knowledge and in a way enhances the norm of reciprocity as well as fulfilling the need for information. Secondly, user interaction on social media not only contributes to new knowledge, as a social activity, it also strengthens or weakens the social tie through commenting or liking a post. Although the relations between social media use and knowledge sharing motives still need further exploration, previous research shows that social media platforms also embody some of the natures of knowledge sharing (Gaál, Szabó, Obermayer-Kovács, & Csepregi, 2015). This provides the premise for knowledge sharing platform practitioners to encompass and address the sharing initiatives in their social media practices.

Integrating the user gratifications of social media use with the motivational needs of knowledge sharing behaviors, this thesis proposes there are three types of prominent needs when an online community member is visiting the social media pages of a knowledge sharing platform: (1) informational needs, (2) relational needs, and (3) personal needs. Informational needs represent users' desire of using social media to seek information and the extent to which social media can provide users with useful and fruitful information (Chen, Clifford, & Wells, 2002). Relational needs can be defined as using social media for social interaction and community integration. According to previous research, key motivations for users to access the internet in general is the need for social benefits (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004) and the sense of belonging (Muntinga et al., 2011). Personal needs refer to users' need of relaxation and remuneration, the fulfillment of this type of need, in return, is reported to be a driver for users' continuous engagement and contribution in an online community (Muntinga et al., 2011).

These three categories can provide the angles to study further how knowledge sharing platforms design their social media practices to fulfill the needs of their online community members and motivate knowledge sharing behaviors. In this respect, I posit there is a link between online members' social media use and participation in knowledge sharing platforms' sharing initiatives: people should be motivated to

engage in knowledge sharing if, somehow, the sharing initiatives of a knowledge sharing platform speak to certain gratifications that sharing knowledge will offer and the sharing platform uses these gratifications to address in their social media use. For example, the gratification of knowledge self-efficacy can be addressed by the informational needs in one's social media use, thus, by incorporating certain knowledge in social media messages, it is likely that online members become more informed, in this way to increase their own knowledge and produce a higher confidence in sharing their knowledge.

This posited link is rooted in the rationale of U&G theory and is further supported by the practical implications of the Customer Engagement Theory (C&E), which will be presented in the next section. Using social media as intermediaries, the abovementioned knowledge sharing motivations of members need to be converted into knowledge sharing behaviors. Although the relations between U&G theory and knowledge sharing have been explained in previous sections, yet it is still not sufficient because U&G theory focuses more on media use and engagement from a personal user perspective. For this thesis, a further rationale is needed to support the extended application of U&G theory to study the practitioners. Therefore, it is then reasonable for the link to bridge the proposition that when knowledge sharing platforms gratified online community members' need in their social media engagement, it is more likely to influence their knowledge sharing intentions, in this way to motivate further participations in the sharing initiatives. The next section will present the C&E theory and its theoretical reflections in social media practices.

2.3 Practitioners' strategic use of social media engagement

While the link between social media use and knowledge sharing behaviors has been established, this section will proceed to discuss previous research and theories regarding how social media used for member engagement. To understand how practitioners are using social media to engage community members, it is important to firstly understand the concept of user engagement. For this thesis, due to sharing platforms are, to some extent, organizations. Thus, empirical research on user engagement in organizational contexts will be discussed, followed by literature on how practitioners use social media for member engagement. In this way, this section intends to integrate the theoretical construct of U&G Theory and knowledge sharing motivations with the practical use of social media for member engagement in sharing communities.

2.3.1 User engagement in organizational contexts

The concept of engagement is discussed in academia, and research on engagement has been conducted in multiple fields including social psychology (Redzic et al., 2014), organizational management (Saks, 2006) and education (Kahu, 2013). New research development on engagement in the marketing field focuses more on customer engagement, and/or brand-customer interactions (Sashi, 2012; van Doorn et al., 2010). This type of user engagement adopts an organizational perspective, which is considered more relevant and applicable to this thesis. Although knowledge sharing platforms are, to a large extent, driven by the users, the communication and engagement practices are still rooted in an organizational context. Examples of an organization's customer engagement practices are brand-consumer interactions, use of products, and social media activities. The mediums for customer engagement which are acknowledged by researchers are products and customer services, events, and media (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012).

With the growing use of the internet, practitioners are paying more attention to using social media as mediums to facilitate online customer engagement with the brand or firm (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). For example, SkyTeam Airline Alliance Management is using social media as tools to engage with customers from around the world, especially in the emerging markets such as Asia-Pacific area where it has quite a number of potential customers (SkyTeam, 2016). More specifically, they use the reputation and network of member airlines to engage local communities. The head office of SkyTeam coordinates with member airlines such as China Eastern and China Southern to manage their own social media accounts in China, and interact not only with the SkyTeam community but also the communities that of member airlines'. By doing so, SkyTeam can have their own social media presences while at the same time, build a community which involves member airlines and a collective brand assemblage (SkyTeam, 2016). This community building approach echoes with one of the three functions of social media in organizational communication that Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) identified: information, action, and community. They further categorized the role of organizations in social media engagement as information sources, community builders and event promoters. This proposition is consistent with the construct of the U&G approach, that is to say, an organization's role as the information source is to cater users' informational needs. The role as community builder can strengthen social ties between online community members and provide gratification for the relational needs. Moreover, by promoting various events such as social meet-ups or reward, community members' need for relaxation and remuneration can be fulfilled.

Derived from different perspectives, further literature discusses few definitions of customer engagement (Bowden, 2008; Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009). For example, Hollebeek (2011)

defined customer engagement as the cognitive, emotional and behavioral investments people have in brand interactions. Cognitive and emotional variables are effective in stimulating engagement, referring to previous research on engagement in social media context (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, & Pihlström, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010), the behaviorist perspective from Van Doorn et al. (2010) along with Verhoef et al. (2010) is considered more relevant for this thesis. Van Doorn et al. (2010) defined customer-brand engagement as “customers’ behavioral manifestations that have a brand or a firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers” (p. 254). This definition views customer engagement as rooted in motivations, which corresponds to the theoretical inputs from U&G theory. Translating the customer engagement construct into the context of social media, from a practitioner point of view, social media engagement can be regarded as an “interactive” and “integrative” practice (Verma, Jahn, & Kunz, 2012).

2.3.2 How practitioners use social media to engage

In a more practical sense, practitioners’ use of social media as tools for engagement is often found in areas such as public relations (Taylor & Kent, 2010), digital marketing (Chan & Guillet, 2011), non-profit organization (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009) and political campaign (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). An organization that is present on social media usually aims to increase brand awareness (Hutter, Hautz, Dennhardt, & Füller, 2013), connections with customers that are otherwise not reachable (Dong-Hun, 2010; Newman, 2003), and develop a relationship with customers (Hackworth and Kunz, 2010). According to Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014), all their interviewed practitioners said that most-expected benefit from their social media use is to engage with people who like the brand and cultivates a relationship with them. Some have advocated that organizations should invest in and implement strategic online engagement to foster brand-customer relationship (Kelleher, 2006). Among the research that discusses practitioners’ strategies on social media engagement, several prominent tactics have routinely been found of prevalent use.

Research suggests that the first step for an organization to engage in social media practice is through the dissemination of information. As Taylor, Kent and White (2001) noted, the internet should be useful for stakeholders, further research confirms this premise by suggesting the organizational use of social networking sites should also be focusing on the distribution of information (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Furthermore, this suggestion also echoes the motivation of informational needs in an online member's social media use. By providing useful information, a platform can gratify its members' needs of seeking information on social media pages, and as Smith (2012) noted, one way to stay on top of the minds of

users is via social media newsfeed, which further emphasizes the importance of information and content in retaining members in an online community. Besides, for example, the most common form is to update newsfeeds with organizational news, posting pictures and videos, using the newsfeed to answer questions and posting announcements when necessary (Carrera et al., 2008). Information dissemination involves disclosure, which is considered as a gesture of transparency and helps to create a positive image for an organization (Kelleher, 2006). Being transparent, in turn, will increase one's interest in an organization and more easily for the audience to stay in touch whenever there is an update (Forant, 2013). Meanwhile, in a survey on how the hotel industry in Hong Kong engages customers via social media, it is reported that in commercial settings, information about discounts and promotions can attract customers to start following the social media page (Chan & Guillet, 2011). The rationale of this strategy can be found in the U&G theory (De Vries, Gensler, & LeeFlang, 2012), receiving information about an organization is proven to be one of the main reasons why users participate in an online community (Muntinga et al., 2011).

The second strategy involves interactivity. Interactivity plays an important role if an organization were to develop a relationship online with stakeholders (Waters et al., 2009). One technique to maintain an interactive role in social media is through “daily communication” (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014), which can take the form of a simple message to customers such as greetings in the morning. The emphasis on “daily” also indicates the importance of an organization to be present on social media. Besides, as Forant (2013) noted, the “social” side of social media is what seems obvious but sometimes be overlooked by practitioners. One way to keep social media "social" is to follow back community members, this can help expand the social network of a brand as well as creating goodwill in an online community by drawing proximity between the organization and online community members (Forant, 2013). This strategy caters the motivation of relational needs among social media users, the need to be included and valued (Park et al., 2009). It is usually hard for a member to break up with a brand when strong social ties have been established, both with the brand and with other community members (Smith, 2012). Hence, it is reported that practitioners should be proactive rather than reactive (LePage, 2014), not to wait for the online community members to reach out to the organization but try to start a conversation first, sometimes even create opportunities for brand-customer interaction. For example, asking a question (Awareness, 2011) or start a competition with prizes (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). The tactic of competition with prizes also leads to the third aspect of engagement strategy which is about rewarding.

Since engagement is a major expected benefit of an organization seeking social media presence, practitioners should encourage the loyal followers and positive commentators on their social media page to sustain the engagement (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). A common approach to engage and increase the loyalty of existing members and appeal to prospective members is through rewards (Taylor, n.d.).

Research finds the degree of rewards or remunerations offered can be a driver of members' contribution to an online community (Muntinga et al., 2011). This finding corresponds to social media users' need for remuneration (Lee, Hosanagar, & Nair, 2013), and the extrinsic motivation of organizational rewards in knowledge sharing (O'Dell & Hubert, 2011). Rewards are considered to be a good principle for both better user acquisition and user retention (Adweek, 2015). Social media engagement that offers a reward usually includes monetary reimbursements, prize incentives or goodie bag giveaways. These kind of rewards are expected to gratify members' personal needs of remuneration (Lee, Hosanagar, & Nair, 2013). Although the monetary incentives have been acknowledged, however, a common drawback of monetary incentives is that once users redeem the offer, they are more likely to leave (Adweek, 2015). Thus, corresponding to the motivations for knowledge sharing, Füller, Bartl, Ernst, and Mühlbacher (2006) further noted that non-monetary, social rewards such as new knowledge, recognition from the organization or other members in an online community can have even greater impact on a members' participation in initiatives.

Following the main tactics to engage users on social media, research provides an important remark on practitioners' strategic use of social media engagement. Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) suggested that organizations should consider and monitor the factors that motivate a social media user to become an online community member, for example, what content they like to read more, what benefits or needs they are seeking in social media use. This echoes with a previously mentioned antecedent of the main research question in this thesis, which is that an organization's social media practices should be designed to facilitate the expected outcomes and fulfill the gratifications of users (Malthouse et al., 2013). As suggested in previous research, the social media practices of an organization usually depart from initiatives to gratify potential users' needs, this provides the reason to propose a framework that integrates the motivational needs of knowledge sharing community members and the functional roles of social media in online engagement. This framework will be used to explore the sub-questions regarding knowledge sharing platforms' strategic engagement on social media. Therefore, based on the previously discussed theoretical concepts, this thesis proposes a three-dimensional framework: media- content oriented strategy, social-relation oriented strategy and personal-need oriented strategy.

Media-content oriented strategy aims to study sharing platforms' strategic use of content curation on social media channels. Although the term "content strategy" can be an overarching idea to cover the most of a sharing platform's social media practices, this thesis intends to define media-content oriented strategy as primarily about informational content, through which a user's informational needs can be gratified. Moreover, by deploying a media-content strategy and providing useful information to online community members, it is expected to enhance their knowledge self-efficacy and in return, motivate them to share knowledge with others. A social-relation oriented strategy corresponds to the relational needs in online members' social media use. This strategy indicates practitioners' efforts to bond their online communities,

and strengthen the social ties between members. In this way, to speak to the knowledge sharing motivation of perceived benefits, and the norm of reciprocity, which are considered essential to maintain the knowledge sharing flow. When exploring this dimension of strategy, this thesis intends to not only study how platforms manage social relation in their online communities but also look into how practitioners migrate the offline connections to online context as well. A personal-need oriented strategy represents the social media practices that aim to fulfill users' need on a more individual and personal level. It tends to achieve more intangible outcomes such as enjoyment of helping others and facilitate social rewarding in an online community.

2.4 Active and less active online community members

To successfully monitor and engage an online community, an understanding of the members' roles and their participation is important. Members of an online community can be classified into three categories including "Active chatters", "Socializers", "Observers" (Barysheva, Golubtsova, & Yavorskiy, n.d.). A more prominent research result is that online community members are of two major types: contributor and lurker (Lai & Chen, 2014; Wang, 2012). Researchers found that the majority of members in an online community are lurkers, who simply browse online conversations but barely contribute to them (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2016). On the other hand, a contributor is someone who actively participates in discussions and who is likely to bring up new information to sustain an online community (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). This phenomenon is also described as the "90-9-1 rule" for participation inequality in social media, which states 90 percent of social media users are lurkers, 9 percent of users have a modest contribution, and only 1 percent of users are full contributor (Nielsen, 2006). While previous researchers have profoundly looked into these two types of online community members, for this thesis, "contributor" and "lurker" are considered equivalent and interchangeable to that of "active" and "less active". To illustrate, although lurkers are basically considered as in-active and silent, however, in an online community, they might still consume social media content. In this sense, they are also active in some ways. Therefore, for this thesis, distinguishing online community members into "contributor" and "lurker" is sufficient for this theoretical framework. While research uses the aforementioned terms to distinguish online community members, other researchers focused on the factors that determine whether an online community member is active or less active, and how he/she can be motivated.

Individual differences, social group processes, and technological setting are three determinants of a contributor or lurker behavior (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2016). In other words, personal needs, social ties between online users and the design of a website or online platform are likely to affect one's participation in an online community. Following this assumption, Lai and Chen (2014) further noted that

the motivational factors associated with online participation can generally be categorized into personal factors (Jadin, Gnams, & Batinic, 2013), technological factor (Phang, Kankanhalli, & Sabherwal, 2009), and contextual factors (Chang & Chuang, 2011). To further demonstrate the motivational factors, for example, personal factors and technological factors such as an online user's desire for informational needs (Chen & Hung, 2010) and enjoyment from, for example, a pleasant website layout (Oh, 2012). On the other hand, the extrinsic motivation derives from contextual factors such as social interactions with other online users and the reciprocal benefits users gained from an online community (Chang & Chuang, 2011). Determinants and motivational factors for online community members show consistency with the theoretical concepts in Uses and Gratifications Theory and previous studies on organizational customer engagement. Empirical results on the role of online participants can add extra constructive insights in the theoretical framework of this thesis, in this way to facilitate a better understanding of knowledge sharing platforms' strategies towards different groups of online members and help to further evaluate to what extent these strategies vary.

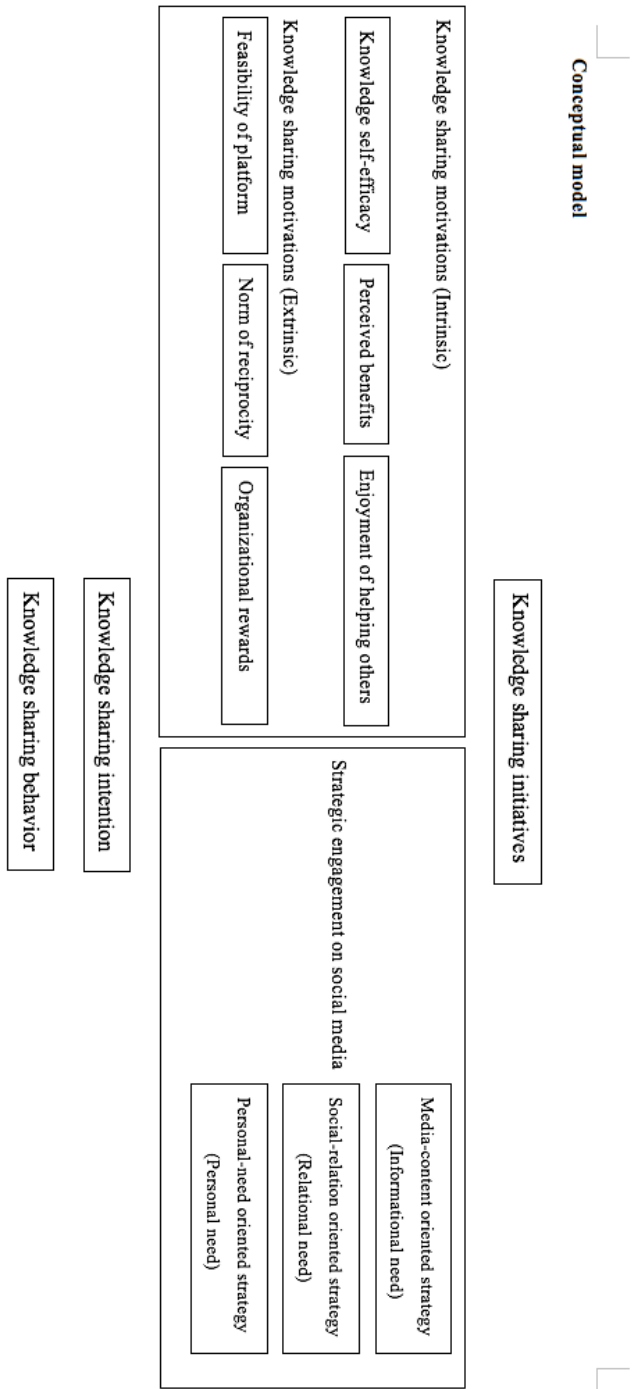
Furthermore, based on the extrinsic and intrinsic factors, researchers defined different types of online members in a knowledge sharing community (Hung, Lai & Chou, 2015). As Bock et al. (2005) noted, extrinsic factors would trigger someone to share knowledge, Hung, Lai, and Chou (2015) further identified the extrinsic factors as reputation, reciprocity, community-related outcome expectation. On the other hand, they summarized the intrinsic factors as knowledge self-efficacy, enjoyment, and commitment. The effect of extrinsic and intrinsic factors of online community members' knowledge contribution has also been found in the early research of Osterloh and Frey (2000) as well as Smith and Kollock (2003). The intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions these researchers used are relatively similar to the motivational factors of knowledge sharing which has been explained in previous sections. In this sense, it is more necessary to look into the difference between active and less active online community member, as one's motivations to share knowledge gives essential indication to a contributor or lurker behavior. Through the characteristics of different types of an online community member, it is possible that the posited link be found evident through the empirical research of this thesis.

2.5 Concepts for operationalization

Based on theoretical concepts and empirical research, a conceptual framework is established for further analysis of the research questions in this thesis. Deriving from U&G theory (Kippax & Murray, 1980) and the motivational factors of knowledge sharing behaviors. Informational needs, relational needs, and personal needs, these three categories of user gratifications can be used as criteria to distinguish active and less active online community members. Moreover, they also can help better understand the functional values of different social media pages and facilitate the discussion on social media engagement in a more practical way. Integrating the user gratifications developed from U&G theory and the empirical research on customer engagement, a three-dimensional framework is proposed based on the extended application of U&G perspective to studying practitioners. Media-content oriented, social-relation oriented and personal-need oriented, the three-dimensional social media strategy is very relevant for the operationalization in this thesis because they are developed from user gratifications of both social media use and knowledge sharing initiatives.

This theoretical framework seeks to bridge online community members' social media use and their knowledge sharing participation, which supports the premise in the main research question of this thesis. Meanwhile, Customer Engagement Theory further indicates the practical implications for social media engagement, one of them is to curate media plan with the objective of gratifying users' need. Following this proposition, it is therefore reasonable for this thesis to posit a link which claims that, if knowledge sharing platforms address the motivational factors in their social media messages to online community members, it is more likely to affect members' sharing attitude, cultivate social ties, motivate certain behaviors, and consequently to stimulate participation in knowledge sharing. In this regard, the discussion of strategic engagement in the second and third research question is theoretically based on this posited link, which is reflected in the three-dimensional strategy. Furthermore, the distinction between active and less active online community members adds another pillar to the discussion of social media engagement strategies and answers the last research question of the extent to which these strategies are different. Below is the visualization of the conceptual model based on the theoretical framework (figure.1). It is important to note that no quantitative research methods will be applied to test this conceptual model, this graph is presented as an overview of the reviewed theoretical concepts of this thesis and guides the operationalization of the research questions. In the next chapter, the methodology this thesis uses for operating these concepts will be presented. Firstly, it will be discussed why qualitative research approach is more appropriate for this thesis, along with the justification of qualitative interviews as data collection method.

Figure.1



3. Method of research

As elaborated in the theoretical chapter of this master thesis, several elements can play a role in understanding if and how Dutch knowledge sharing platforms strategically use social media to engage active and less active online community members. These elements include new media use, knowledge sharing motives, online activity and so on. In the conceptual framework of this thesis, the elements all appear as relevant and related to each other. However, previous discussions about these elements are mostly rooted in the user perspective, for example, why users choose to perform certain behaviors such as media participation (LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2011). In addition to results from previous studies, there can be other findings from practitioners' side that indicate how sharing platforms respond to members' requests and gratify their needs via the strategic use of social media, therefore, eleven practitioners from nine Dutch knowledge sharing platforms are chosen to support the research of this thesis.

In this thesis, a qualitative approach is applied, because the research aim of this thesis is to understand and evaluate knowledge sharing platforms' social media engagement strategies. Thus, it is the research subjects' experiences and opinions that will be studied (Gilbert, 2008). For the operationalization of relevant theories, a qualitative method is more suitable since the social media engagement explored in this thesis is not solely about the frequency of use. Therefore, the understanding of strategic engagement requires more complex and diverse explanations. The answers are also likely to vary depending on different interviewees. Meanwhile, an exploratory perspective is adopted due to the main task of this thesis is not to test hypotheses but to explore certain phenomena in a certain field (Veal, 1997). This methodological chapter will first introduce interviews as the chosen qualitative approach and why it is the most appropriate research method for this thesis. This is followed by the units of analysis in which the interviewed Dutch knowledge sharing platforms will be presented. This chapter concludes with an introduction of the data gathering process and an account of the data analysis.

3.1 Qualitative interviews

Qualitative interviews are conducted to explore the strategies knowledge sharing platforms used to engage active and less active online community members. It will be explored to what extent the platforms relate to possible user motivations and whether or not they differentiate their strategies to speak to different user groups. The interviews aim to study the point of views of interviewees. Thus, the qualitative approach of interview is appropriate for the data collection in this thesis (Bryman, 2008). As above mentioned, with this method it is the strategic aspects of member engagement that are studied rather than the descriptive data of online communities in member engagement. The rationale to study strategies is because previous research indicates that motivational factors are essential for stimulating actual behaviors, whether it is the use of social media or the willingness to share knowledge (Malthouse et al., 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, the interviews are not to be confirmatory and define relationship between variables, rather, the interviews are designed to be exploratory and to reveal how the engagement is strategically planned and implemented.

For this thesis, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted. Primarily, it is because this thesis intends to study the underlying knowledge sharing motivations, and sharing platforms' strategies to advocate their initiatives to communities. Moreover, the use of in-depth interviews allows a deeper understanding of issues, an interview has more flexibility and through real-time interaction the unknown stories can be uncovered (Nykiel, 2007). Hence, as Gillham (2000) noted, semi-structured interviews are considered to be the most appropriate data gathering instrument for qualitative research. By "semi-structured", it means that before the interviews, a topic list needs to be made to cover the relevant topics concerning the research questions of this thesis (Bryman, 2008). The topic list serves as a guideline for the interviews, the data retrieved are highly depended on the actual answers of the interviewees. In this regards, the operationalization of interview was with a certain degree of flexibility, and this was to encourage the interviewee to speak more freely and thoroughly.

There are other data collection methods which can also serve qualitative research purpose. For example, using questionnaires in a survey is also an optional qualitative approach, it is not as suitable as interviews for this thesis. Because the data retrieved from a survey is rather general and descriptive towards a population (Sapsford, 2007), whereas this thesis asks for more detailed answers about practical social media strategies towards different types of online community members, while using surveys can hardly achieve this research objective. Moreover, a qualitative content analysis on social media posts can be another approach to retrieve data. However, given the feasibilities of the aforementioned methods, it is important to note that this thesis is fundamentally interested in studying the underlying knowledge sharing motivations, and their reflections in sharing platforms' strategies to advocate the initiatives. In this respect,

it is not the content of the messages which is being studied. Thus, qualitative interviews are considered as more appropriate data collection methods for this thesis.

3.1.1 Operationalization and topic list

The topic list of the interview is divided into four parts (see appendix.A). First of all, there are initial questions, and this is to gather background information about the interviewee and to establish a rapport. Then the interview covers questions about the particular sharing platform the interviewee works for. These questions are rather straightforward and descriptive, such as what do the interviewee think of their platform's performance so far. The answers are expected to be informative, but the questions are not too intense to make the interviewee feel more comfortable to share their stories. In the second part, the topics cover the theoretical concepts from knowledge sharing motivation, when transferred into practitioner's context, it is the knowledge sharing initiatives of the platform that are asked. Within this part, the types of sharing initiatives, the member participation, and the evaluation are explored. This part of topics is not relevant to a particular research question, however, understanding the sharing initiatives of a platform can provide insights on their engagement motives, and compared to members' gratification of knowledge sharing to see if there is any correspondence.

The third part of the topic list covers the strategic engagement on social media which aims to answer the second and third research question. The detailed social media engagement strategies are explored in this section. It is worth mentioning that this part of interview speaks to the theoretical concepts of U&G theory which concern both media use and knowledge sharing. Because the posited link in the theoretical framework is based on addressing the gratifications of knowledge sharing in sharing platform's social media use. For the initial question of this part, to answer the first research question, it is asked through which social media channels do the platform interact with its community members, then followed by a general question about the platform's expectation from their social media engagement with members. This question is to provide the researcher an overview of their objectives, and in the data analysis, which can be compared to the posited link to see if what a platform intend to achieve is in line with what an online community member looks for when interacting with the platform on social media. Meanwhile, this part is clearly categorized according to the three-dimensional strategy proposed in the theoretical framework, namely media-content oriented, social-relation oriented, and personal-need oriented.

Respectively, these dimensions are based on users' informational needs, relational needs, and personal needs in social media attendance. These dimensions are derived from the theoretical framework, during the actual interviews, nevertheless, there might be inputs that fall out of either dimension but added

valuable insights to the discussion. Furthermore, the elements in the three-dimensional strategy are the motivational factors of knowledge sharing, the categorization of factors under each strategy has been argued in the theoretical framework. In this part of the topic list, the posited link between social media use and knowledge sharing initiatives are reflected in the interview questions.

The fourth part of the topic list includes questions referring to the last research question of the extent to which knowledge sharing platforms deploy different strategies to engage active and less active community members. Firstly, the interviewees are asked if they, as practitioners, sense any obvious difference between their community members. If there is a difference, on a scale of one to ten, how active and less active do they think their community members are. The scale number, along with the interpretation, gave insights on how distinct are members of a particular platform, to have a first impression on how different their strategies will be. It should be noted that the scale used here will not be measured by quantitative tools, rather it is a descriptive answer based on interviewees' empirical inputs. Questions based on contributor or lurker behaviors were asked. This part of the interview concludes with a final topic on the extent of the difference in platforms' strategies to engage active and less active members. Through all the topics on the list, with the interview transcripts, all aspects of the research questions are expected to be covered. The characteristics of the operationalization and the fruitful outputs of data analysis will be explained in the result chapter.

The operationalization of the interviews follows the structure of the topic list, which embodies the concepts proposed in the theoretical framework. The interview starts with general questions such as how do the practitioners come up with certain knowledge sharing initiatives and what are the social media channels they use so far. In the actual interviews, few questions were added as probes when it felt relevant. For example, when discussing the social media use of a knowledge sharing platform, given the social media channels a platform uses, it was asked what are the different goals of using these channels. This question adds important value to the analysis as interviewees shared their reasons for choosing social media, and it eventually developed into one of the three main topics of this thesis.

The interview then proceeds to the discussion of knowledge sharing initiatives, which refers to the knowledge sharing motivations in the theoretical framework. Questions in this part aim to find out if the knowledge sharing initiatives that practitioners curate speak to the knowledge sharing motivations of members. Built on this part of discussion, it is expected to get hold of what kinds of initiative a platform has, and are likely to be broadcasted via their social media channels. Hence, next part of the interview is related to the strategic engagement on social media. Primarily, topics in this part of the interview are guided by the three-dimensional strategy developed in the theoretical framework. Meanwhile, as illustrated by the posited link in the theoretical framework, a platform's social media use should speak to the knowledge sharing motivations of users. Thus, questions in this part of the interview also reflect the

intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of knowledge sharing. Through this part of the interview, it is expected to study the posited link, and explore more in-depth about sharing platforms' strategic member engagement on social media.

Referring to the discussion of the extent to which knowledge sharing platforms differ their strategies to engage active and less active members on social media, it is first discussed about the active and less active community members, this topic is guided by the factors that affect members' level of activity in a community. To proceed to the last question of the extent of difference in platforms' engagement strategies, for the interviewees who did not provide confirmative answers, additional questions were also asked to explore if their strategies are any different in other aspects.

3.2 Units of analysis

As previously noted, this thesis adopted a practitioner perspective to study the strategic engagement on social media for stimulating member participation. Therefore, the units of analysis in this thesis are practitioners from different Dutch knowledge sharing platforms. In practice, knowledge sharing platform can take various forms, for example, online knowledge sharing and offline knowledge sharing (Nasir, 2010), organizational knowledge sharing (Widén-Wulff & Ginman, 2004), and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing (Yang & Chen, 2008). Although there is a variety of knowledge sharing platforms, based on the premises in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the internet-facilitated, online-to-offline knowledge sharing is considered to be more relevant for this thesis. Hence, while the category has been defined, a more selection is necessary to determine the research subjects.

For qualitative interviews, it is important to relate the results to the context of the organizations (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, besides narrowing down the research to The Netherlands, it was chosen to study multiple knowledge sharing platforms which are of different identities, rather than a case study on one Dutch knowledge sharing platform. Moreover, since social media practice not only depends on the social media specialists but also involves other different roles in an organization such as community manager and marketing strategist, both of them have constructive values whereas their contributions can differ (Demers, 2015). It is then more relevant to involves multiple positions rather than one interviewee for one organization, however, for some of the platforms, there is no separate functional position for social media, which makes the one interviewee situation acceptable. To select the platforms, the sampling procedure of platform selection was purposive based on the theoretical framework. For example, interviews with social media specialists aim to understand the sub-questions regarding the overall social media strategies of a Dutch knowledge sharing platform; interviews with founders are expected to provide

information on the business model and market insights; from community managers, more details about active and less active online community members can be revealed.

The primary search for platforms is in cooperation with ShareNL(www.sharenl.nl), a Dutch knowledge network for the sharing economy. On their official website, where there is a subpage called “Netwerk” (ShareNL, n.d), all the sharing economy startups under the network of ShareNL are presented. Among all the enlisted sharing platforms, this thesis only concerns the knowledge sharing platforms. After a preliminary selection, knowledge sharing platform Seats2meet and its network provide more choices as for local Dutch platforms. The knowledge sharing platforms recruited as research subjects had to meet the following criteria: first, the platform needs to be located and operated in the Netherlands, this is because it is easier to conduct face-to-face interviews when the platforms are located in the country. Meanwhile, for qualitative interviews, the contextual elements are essential to facilitate meaningful outcomes (Bryman, 2008), hence, situating the interviews in Dutch local contexts is also for the benefits in this respect. Second, the chosen platforms should have social media presence and at least one online community, this is because the research focus of this thesis is on social media and online member engagement. Third, for the diversity of sample, the recruited platforms should include both large and small business scale.

Meanwhile, previous research about engagement in knowledge sharing communities concentrates more on stimulating members’ online contribution (Ardichvili, Page, & Wentling, 2003; Hoisl, Aigner, & Miksch, 2007). Because in some knowledge sharing platforms, offline knowledge sharing can be facilitated by social connections in an online community. For example, in some virtual community of practice, community members know each other via online communication. As the social network being established, the conversation can be migrated to the offline sphere, and transferred to actions as well, and this is particularly evident in knowledge sharing communities in civic engagement (Tewksbury, D, 2013). Therefore, it was worthwhile to have included this type of knowledge sharing platforms into the sample as well.

The platforms included in this thesis are across two main sectors: the knowledge sharing economy, and the E2F (electronic-to-face) network (Jun-E, 2012). E2F network refers to the platforms where users are first connected online, and then the connections are extended to the offline realm where users meet with each other face-to-face (Jun-E, 2012). It should be noted that, even though E2F network is not by strict definition a part of the sharing economy, for this thesis, the research subjects were chosen from the network are knowledge sharing and peer learning communities. The idea of E2F network is highly depended on the contribution and participation of its members, in this regard, it can be related to the sharing communities. Moreover, as aforementioned, previous research profoundly discusses the online-to-offline mechanism as a new way to manage and motivate a community, it is, therefore, relevant for this thesis to study this type of community.

Another reason to recruit practitioners from E2F network was that, in some contexts, knowledge sharing is a rather generic concept that can be applied to most of the intellectual exchange such as a random chat. However, it is interesting to study the knowledge sharing in the sharing economy on the one hand, and compare to that of online to offline participation in E2F network on the other. Practitioners from the E2F network may have different visions, strategies, and engagement instruments towards online community members. Furthermore, while most of the interviewees in this thesis were practitioners from the sharing economy, their similar counterparts from E2F network can serve as “outsiders” who add valuable extra opinions to the discussion about member engagement in online communities. The organizations in this aspect are chosen from Meetup, a social networking platform for local groups. More specifically, this thesis focuses on their communities in the subsection of “Education & Learning” that met the criteria as being Netherland-based, and active on social media channels.

Aside from E2F network, three other Dutch knowledge sharing platforms were chosen from the long list, namely Konnektid, Seats2meet, and 3D Hubs. The selection process is based on the previously mentioned criteria of online and offline knowledge sharing, as well as the business scale of the specific platform. For example, comparing to 3D Hubs, Konnektid and Seats2meet are more of offline knowledge sharing platforms, knowledge is usually shared between social connections established in online contexts. Meanwhile, as Konnektid and Seats2meet are startups whose business scales are rather small, 3D Hubs is a more established platform with larger business scale and global network. These platforms can be distinguished based on their business models, which represent different disciplines under the overarching concept of knowledge sharing. It was chosen to study three different types of knowledge sharing platforms not only because of the sample diversity but also with an expectation that community members from various forms of knowledge sharing platform are likely to have different motivational needs and gratifications. In this regard, it is more interesting to study these practitioners’ strategies and obtain more diverse and insightful empirical results.

There are forty sharing services enlisted on ShareNL’s official website, including Dutch and international sharing platforms. This thesis narrows the selection down to only Dutch knowledge sharing platforms. As a result, the list has been shortened to 3D Hubs, Konnektid, and Seats2meet. Therefore, among all the nine sharing platforms studied in this thesis, three of them are chosen from ShareNL network. It is worth noting that, there are five platforms which are part of the Seats2meet network. Nevertheless, each of them has an independent administrative team and brand identity. In below section, the selected sharing platforms are explained in more detail.

3.2.1 Seats2meet network

Seats2meet is a knowledge sharing platform based in Utrecht, in addition to 130 branches in the Netherlands, Seats2meet can also be found in Spain, Germany, United States and more locations (Seats2meet, n.d.). In this respect, Seats2meet is larger than Konnektid. Meanwhile, slightly different from Konnektid, Seats2meet is a knowledge sharing platform that devoted to empowering not only individuals but with a focus on helping professionals to excel. Thus, knowledge sharing on Seats2meet usually happens within professional contexts. Seats2meet positions themselves as a networking platform, where people connect in virtual headquarters, then they can be matched by Seats2meet software and start sharing knowledge. By doing this, users can expand their physical and virtual spaces to a larger group of professionals and create a community where new values, collaboration, and knowledge can thrive.

The knowledge sharing platforms selected from Seats2meet network are based on few reasons. First, a premise is that for the diversity of sample, a knowledge sharing platform with larger scale needs to be included. Meanwhile, it is interesting to include a knowledge sharing platform that mostly focuses on professionals rather than ordinary neighborhoods. As this distinction is expected to lead to various member gratifications as illustrated in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, given Seats2meet also has local subsequent online communities, this provides more angles to study not only their centralized engagement strategies on the main platform but also localized strategies targeting branch locations.

3.2.2 Konnektid

Konnektid is an online knowledge sharing platform founded in Amsterdam. It is a platform where people can find the knowledge and skills they are looking for in their neighborhoods. Konnektid believes everyone has knowledge worth sharing, and this platform is devoted to making knowledge and skills locally accessible. Konnektid does not provide physical meeting places but offers peer-to-peer learning experience by enabling personal and local connections with skilled people nearby.

Konnektid was chosen from the list of platforms because it is a Dutch start-up knowledge sharing platform eager to engage community members and expand their landscape. Meanwhile, Konnektid has this vision of connecting offline neighborhood in online communities and mobilize knowledge sharing among community members, which matches the topic of this thesis fairly well. Moreover, Konnektid is active on multiple social media platforms as well as their own blog. Given all the engagement tools they deployed, it is expected to have fruitful outcomes from studying Konnektid's strategies on engaging community members via social media. For example, on their Facebook page, Konnektid shares successful learning pair's stories and empower community members with new knowledge by sharing insightful posts.

3.2.3 3D Hubs

Founded in 2013, 3D Hubs is a multi-national, online knowledge sharing platform with a focus on making 3D design and production locally accessible. The name “3D Hubs” represents how this platform works: a registered member with a 3D printer can be called a “hub,” where people can have access to paid 3D printing services. Members can start by uploading their design online and then the “hub” will download the design and have the physical product printed, available to pick up at the local “hub”.

Besides offering 3D printing services, 3D Hubs also attach significant value to an online community, because an important part of their business highly depends on the sharing of 3D printing knowledge and design among members on the platform. With a vision of community driven manufacturing, 3D Hubs bridges local 3D printing initiatives on their platform via “Talk”, a subsequent forum where community members can share their experience and knowledge about 3D printing, and facilitate ideas to grow. Meanwhile, via the forum, communities can organize online and offline meet-ups to further strengthen the social ties between members. Members can either organize events themselves or find an existing local event to join. Moreover, aside from peer knowledge sharing, 3D Hubs as a company also share their monthly industrial report to their members, a section called “Trend” help keep members updated with the latest insight from professionals.

Although 3D Hubs is not a complete knowledge sharing platform since the final product is nevertheless physical. However, the way their members interact with the platform and fellow members are considered knowledge sharing as well. Because before the final 3D printing production is delivered, the knowledge exchange during the process is what truly make this platform works. While 3D Hubs as the central moderator, with multiple local hubs and communities it will be interesting for this thesis to study how an offline activity such as printing, can be communicated and motivated within online communities, through the approach of social media engagement.

3.2.4 Amsterdam Academy

Founded in 2014, Amsterdam Academy is a knowledge sharing platform for the international community in Amsterdam. In the form of panel discussions, guest lectures, workshops, and seminars, Amsterdam Academy is devoted to creating a space where people genuinely involve in knowledge sharing initiatives that not only help them understand local culture but also enables them to actively engage and interact with it. Besides its own knowledge sharing events, Amsterdam Academy is also served as an event curator for external stakeholders who are interested in organizing events and share knowledge with the public.

Amsterdam Academy was chosen to be one of the research subjects, because its unique position amongst all the interviewed platforms. Primarily, it is a platform that based in The Netherlands. However, the majority of their audience is made up by international communities in Amsterdam, and the official language of the platform is English. These characteristics make Amsterdam Academy an interesting research subject of this thesis, they are part of the Dutch knowledge sharing platforms, but at the same time has different background and ideas.

The above section introduces the chosen knowledge sharing platforms for the research of this thesis. Before proceeding to the explanation of data gathering. The line up of practitioner interviewees for this thesis is given in table.1. All four of the sharing platforms have the contiguous objective, which is to boost participation of their online community members, therefore, practitioners from these platforms who are either directly responsible for or have expertise in social media engagement were interviewed. It is important to note that the “engagement” in this thesis does not indicate the actual quantitative data such as online traffic or application program interface, rather, the “engagement” studied in this thesis is strategy-wise. In this respect, the qualitative interviews in this thesis aims to gather empirical data rather measure the actual engagement behaviors. The table demonstrates the details of the practitioners from the four knowledge sharing platforms, and all interviewees give permission of full disclosure of their identity in this thesis. The overview of interviewees of this master thesis is as follows:

050 Groningen	Jelmer de Jong , Social media expert
3D Hubs	George Fisher-Wilson , Business development manager
Amsterdam Academy	Hannah Huber , Founder
AmsterdamConnected	Andre van den Toorn , Social media manager
Konnektid	Maartje Maas , Community manager
Meet and Discover	Elise de Bres , Co-founder
Peer	Sandra Barth , Founder
Peer	Charlotte Duzong , Community manager
S2M Haarlem	Klaartje Vreeken , Founder
Seats2meet	Lenneke van Rossum , Communication manager
Seats2meet	Nynke Visser , Location owner (Utrecht CS)

Table.1 Overview of the interviewees of this master thesis

3.3 Data gathering

As presented in the previously section, eleven platform practitioners from nine Dutch knowledge sharing platforms were invited to the interviews. The professional positions of the platform practitioners include social media specialists, marketing strategists, and community managers. To answer the sub-questions about the strategies of knowledge sharing platforms, a multi-platform approach is used for data gathering (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). This methodological approach has been adopted in multiple previous research on social media strategies (Richter & Riemer, 2013; Werder, Helms, & Jansen, 2014). Moreover, a cross-platform perspective can help determine if any patterns are emerging from each case (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

To invite knowledge sharing platforms to participate in my research, firstly this project sought help from ShareNL, and ShareNL helped bridge the communication to invite platforms because most of the knowledge sharing platforms that are studied in this thesis are members of the ShareNL network. At the same time, email and telephone contact are used. The main ideas and framework of this thesis are presented to the platforms in order to relate the expected outcomes to the improvement of their social media engagement, in this way to stimulate their interest to cooperate. When this did not generate enough response, reaching out to their social media pages is also reserved as an alternative. Since the units of analysis are knowledge sharing platforms based in The Netherlands, therefore most of the interviews were conducted in face-to-face settings because in- person interview can strengthen the communication effects (Gillham, 2000). However, when it became difficult to accommodate the schedule, interviews through web chat software such as Skype were also applied. Also, the use of Voice over Internet Protocol such as Skype enables the data to be collected in a faster and economical manner (Bertrand & Bourdeau, 2010).

Face to face interview is considered as the primary qualitative interview format of this thesis. However, in the case when it is impossible to schedule a face to face interviews nor a Skype session, while the interviewees are particularly valuable sources for this thesis, two email interviews are conducted alternatively. Email in-depth interviews, which has been used in previous research as one of the approaches for qualitative interviews as well. As Meho (2006) noted, has ideal efficiency, and can facilitate researchers to study a more diverse population, especially those otherwise cannot be reached, such as founders and executives (Lehu, 2004). Moreover, email interviews enable interviewing people who are not as talkative as they are in writing, in the case of interviews using the second language, email interviews also give more spaces for consideration and formulation (Lehu, 2004). Nevertheless, face to face interviews is regarded as superior to email interview due to social cues such as body language (Barratt, 2011). The lack of social cues may increase ambiguity, and email interviews are usually less informative regarding data richness (Robert & Dennis, 2005). Since the two email interviewees of this

thesis are native English speakers, the gap of ambiguity can be narrowed. Meanwhile, after the primary interviews, following up emails also helped clarify and request further data.

Each interview was expected to have a duration of 40 to 45 minutes. With the consent of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded and transcribed afterward. Meanwhile, permission for direct quotes from the transcripts was granted by interviewees beforehand. Interviewees have been contacted again should there be any further questions. It is also important to have notified the interviewees that this thesis is for academic research. Therefore, there are no right or wrong inputs, all kind of answers are mostly welcomed. Topics on the list were translated into two main types of interview questions. Demographic information was obtained via close questions, the strategic social media engagement practices of knowledge sharing platforms were covered by open questions. Open questions are considered as useful instruments for retrieving rich data because it does not set strict boundaries (Bryman, 2008).

3.4 Data analysis

The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed, the transcripts were further processed using qualitative data representation and analysis methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994). More specifically, the data analysis process adopted a grounded theory perspective with a focus on the thematic analysis (Boeije, 2002). In general, thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method for analyzing interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is the method used for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (2006, p.79). Another merit of thematic analysis is that the rigorous thematic processing can produce insightful answers to the specific research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, to explore more thoroughly into the research questions, the thematic analysis approach facilitated the investigation of interview transcripts from two perspectives: firstly, a data-oriented perspective with an inductive manner using open coding. In regards to the sub-research questions of how sharing platforms identify and engage online community members, open coding avoided the restraint from structured methodologies and allowed key social media strategies to emerge from the most frequent or significant themes inherent in the raw transcribed data (Thomas, 2006). Secondly, corresponding to the research questions, thematic analysis can establish links between the summarized key findings and the research objectives (Thomas, 2006).

Arguably, for this master thesis, it was considered not appropriate to use discourse analysis to decrypt the interview transcripts. According to Potter and Edwards (1996), discourse analysis focuses more on how things are being said, the way society, culture, and the psychological world are produced in discourses. Although discourse analysis also helps create and reassemble meaning in a system (Tonkiss,

2012), nevertheless, the meaning is rather social-wise and can be produced out of certain context (Gee, 2005). Thus, discourse analysis can be problematic for this thesis because sharing platforms' strategic engagement studied here is rather practical and pragmatic. Even though strategies can be based on contexts, however, it is not necessary and can be over-interpreted to study the socio-economic influence or power functions upon which the strategies are constructed. For this thesis, categorizing the accounts about strategic engagement or the aspects of accounts that are being told is already considered valid and sufficient (Reissman, 2008). The thematic analysis followed a four-stage procedure derived from previous research practices (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

1. Data familiarization: preparing the data

- The interview transcripts are reviewed multiple times before actual analysis to get familiar with the data in a general sense.

2. Data open coding: reducing the data

- Important segments of the transcripts are openly coded within its own text and referred to the research questions. For example, the preliminary open coding aligns with the structure of the three-dimensional strategy mentioned in the theoretical framework, technically, the open coding is significantly focused on the types of word that correspond with the words referring back to the three dimensions. For example, "online magazine" can be related to the informational needs and knowledge self-efficacy, "acknowledge" and "reward" can be coded in correspondence to personal needs and perceived benefits in knowledge sharing.
- Axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) are employed to reassemble the data within the same interview and emerge categories. It is important to note that, the four sub-questions are the primary angles when emerging categories from codes, it is expected to have more dimensions that can represent a platform's social media strategies. Also, to answer the last research question about the extent of strategic difference, one important technique was that the questions regarding active online members and questions regarding less active online members should be grouped separately, through this process, patterns are emerged and identified.

3. Theme development: representing the data

- Categories are integrated using selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), and core categories are defined. The sub-themes are grouped into main themes, and eventually became three relevant topics, namely interpreted value of social media use, strategic engagement on social

media, and tactical difference on member activation. Also, besides coding specific answers, the transcripts are also analyzed as a whole to seek more relevant findings. Through this analysis process, the interviews can be interpreted to understand concepts, themes and emerging patterns (Boeije, 2002).

- The similarities and differences of themes across platforms are highlighted. For example, while most of the interviewees acknowledge the value of rewarding active members, two interviewees specifically noted that community members do not need a reward from the platform, but from the knowledge sharing behavior per se.

4. Interpretation and revision: understanding the data

- Key findings from the thematic analysis are interpreted and discussed.

3.5 Reliability and validity

For the analysis of this thesis, the data analysis software Atlas.ti was used. Atlas.ti is designed especially for qualitative analysis. The functional value of Atlas.ti is that this software helps researcher first uncover then systematically analyze unstructured data. The software is considered an appropriate tool to analyze interview transcripts. It enables a user to locate, code, and annotate findings based on the raw dataset, it also allows weighing importance, and visualize the relations between complex clusters (Lewins & Silver, 2007). In this way, the keywords and relations within an interview transcript can be more easily identified.

For the credibility of this master thesis, this study was devoted to being as reliable as it can be. Thus, all the retrieved data are handled in an open coding manner. Meanwhile, the internal validity was preserved by an inductive approach started with pointing out key themes in the data, then cross-compared the variables in the data, and lastly by reviewing the codes and themes based on the general picture of the dataset. Moreover, the description of the sampling procedure of interviewees further assured the external validity of this thesis.

3.6 Summary

This chapter presented the methodology of this thesis. It was first noted that the research method was based on the theoretical framework, which extended the application of U&G theory to practitioner's perspective. Then it was explained that a qualitative approach was used in this thesis because qualitative methods are exploratory, and allow a deeper understanding towards the research topic of strategic social media engagement in sharing communities (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In the second subsection, qualitative interviews were explained as the most appropriate data gathering instruments because it was people's opinion and experience that were studied (Gilbert, 2008). The research subjects of this thesis are Dutch knowledge sharing platforms Konnektid, Amsterdam Academy, 3D Hubs ("Talk"), along with platforms from the Seats2meet network. With these sharing platforms, eleven interviews were conducted. Thirdly, a thematic analysis was chosen as the data analysis method in this thesis, because it enables researchers to decrypt the data in an inductive manner while at the same time produces insightful answers to the relation between themes and topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Lastly, the reliability and validity of this thesis shed light on the evaluation of the results quality in this thesis. In the next chapter, the outcomes of thematic analysis will be presented and discussed.

4. Results

In this chapter, the results of this thesis will be presented and discussed. The results aim to answer the main research question of this thesis, which is to what extent do Dutch knowledge sharing platforms differ their social media strategies to engage active and less active community members. Based on the topic list applied to eleven qualitative interviews, and with thematic analysis approach, three main topics emerged, namely: (1) Interpreted value of social media use, (2) Strategic engagement on social media (3) Tactical difference in member mobilization. This chapter, therefore, will be divided into three main sections corresponding to the topics. Within each topic, themes will be demonstrated using direct quotes from the interviewees. Meanwhile, during the discussion, the commonalities and differences between each theme will also be introduced. The research subjects of this thesis are chosen within The Netherlands, and to some degree, they have similar knowledge sharing initiative, which is to having online conversations migrated to offline knowledge sharing. However, based on observations during the interviews, each platform has its own identity and brand, thus, before proceeding to a more in-depth analysis of the results, it is important to have an overview of the characteristics of each platform. Although commonalities exist across different platforms, the social media strategies can be influenced by the characteristics of a platform, and the specific settings in case there is an engagement plan.

4.1 Characteristics of platforms

The interviewees of this thesis are practitioners from different knowledge sharing platforms in The Netherlands. Given they share the same idea of online to offline knowledge sharing, it appears in the analysis that their social media strategies are related to the characteristics of the platforms, such as business scale, user profile and so forth. It is essential to firstly look at the different characteristics, as it provides contexts to understand the strategies of each platform. For example, two interviewees from different platforms explained that they do not see there is an online community, nor is there any offline community. Based on their answers, they abandoned the notion of community, rather, they prefer to have a new way of representation and engagement with participants on their platforms. This perspective will be further illustrated in the following section. Nevertheless, it shows that the characteristics of platforms might play an role in influencing their decision making of engagement plan and social media strategies.

4.1.1 Seats2meet network

As aforementioned, knowledge sharing can be online and offline (Nasir, 2010). In the case of Seats2meet, knowledge sharing platforms chosen from its network facilitate both online knowledge sharing and offline meetings. Starting with the Seats2meet website, the prominent functional value is that users can book a workspace in one of the Seats2meet locations, and work on-site while sharing knowledge with people who are also present in that location on the same date, and with overlapping time schedules. Alternatively, users can join in one of the offline knowledge sharing events organized by the platform. Moreover, they can also post questions online on their website, so other community members can answer. Another characteristic of Seats2meet is business scale, which also influences how they engage with their communities. Since Seats2meet is a knowledge sharing platform established for nearly a decade (Seats2meet, n.d.), it has a relatively large local and global network comparing to other start-up platforms in The Netherlands. Consequently, more sophisticated organizational apparatuses and technological supports.

In their social media communication, besides appearing on mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, Seats2meet also has its own social media tools such as the online magazine and the “Serendipity Machine”, a mobile application which enables peer-to-peer conversation and matches people based on their knowledge and skills. In addition, it is worth mentioning that by using the term “Seats2meet network” as a group concept, it does not necessarily indicate that the platforms within Seats2meet network share the same characteristics. Rather, they share an overarching philosophy of “Society 3.0” (Seats2meet, n,d) which can be generalized as the way knowledge is being shared within the system. For every platform interviewed in this thesis, their social media strategies are guided by this very core idea, yet, each platform has its own brand identity and community engagement practices.

4.1.2 Konnektid

On Konnektid, users connect with each other online based on their knowledge and skills, then the conversation is taken to offline as the tutor and the student begin to share knowledge and learn from each other. On this note, Konnektid does not really have a fixed offline location as the meeting place for its members, and it is more of a virtual platform which facilitates encounters and peer-learning demand. Thus, Konnektid is heavily investing their efforts in interacting with their online community, as the offline meetings can often fall short due to the characteristics of the platform. Unlike Seats2meet, who has their own websites and mobile apps to target their core audience. For Konnektid, due to people using their website mainly for practical reasons such as to search for relevant knowledge and tutor, conversation with its members out of the platform becomes more essential.

4.1.3 Amsterdam Academy

The first unique characteristic of Amsterdam Academy is that it is a knowledge sharing platform initially tailored for the international community in Amsterdam, there is no fixed knowledge sharing themes nor specific focus on a particular genre. Therefore, the engagement with its community can be seen in a more dynamic way. Meanwhile, all their social media content is communicated in English. Among all the interviewed platforms, Amsterdam Academy has the most diverse digital media practices, active on channels including Facebook, Twitter, Meetup, and Soundcloud. Moreover, Amsterdam Academy is the only platform of this thesis who posts podcasts of their offline events on social media channels. Amsterdam Academy is to a large extent event-driven, therefore, while other platforms whose conversation with community usually starts online, Amsterdam Academy also initiates their conversations with communities in another way around. It continues the offline discussion online, and sustain an online community which is bonded by offline social ties, and knowledge sharing initiatives.

4.1.4 3D Hubs

Primarily, for 3D Hubs, this thesis intends to study their member engagement practices across different social media channels. However, 3D Hubs has its own subordinate knowledge sharing platform called “Talk,” “Talk” is an initiative which is equivalent to an online forum. Users can ask questions and share their knowledge about 3D printing. So the interview questions tailored for 3D Hubs focus on their practice on “Talk”, as it can also be seen as a media channel driven by social connections. It is important to note that “Talk” is more of an affiliated initiative of 3D Hubs. Thus, the topics and themes on this knowledge sharing forum are mostly about 3D printing.

4.1.5 Summary

The following part of the result chapter will be structured according to the three main topics that were derived from the sub-questions of this thesis. Corresponding to the first sub-question, the first topic is the interpreted value of social media. In the theoretical framework, the inputs of U&G Theory reveal the needs of social media users. Based on the theories, this topic aligns with the extended use of U&G Theory to studying the practitioners, under this topic three themes emerges. The informational, networking, and economical value of social media refer back to the informational needs, social relational needs, and personal needs of social media user, which acknowledged the use of U&G Theory to study practitioners’ social media strategies. With the second topic, strategic engagement on social media, the interviews intend to gather information regarding platforms’ media plan to strategically engage their communities. This topic is an important bridge that links community members’ knowledge sharing motivations and

practitioners' strategic engagement on social media. Furthermore, the three themes under this topic refer back to the three-dimensional strategy developed from the theoretical framework, namely media-content oriented strategy, social-relation oriented strategy, and personal-need oriented strategy. Lastly, the third topic, tactical difference in member mobilization, aims to answer the last sub-question of the extent to which the strategies are different, and integrating with the aforementioned two topics to finally answer the main research question. Overall, the three main topics are strongly related to the sub-questions and the theoretical framework.

4.2 The interpreted values of social media use

The first topic emerged from the interviews is the interpreted values of social media use. As illustrated in the theoretical framework, this thesis posits a link that bridges practitioners' social media use and participants' possible knowledge sharing motivations. Stating that if practitioners from a knowledge sharing platform address those knowledge sharing motivations in their social media message, it is likely to meet the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of knowledge sharing, consequently to stimulate more participations in the sharing initiatives. To understand how practitioners are using social media, it is important to understand why practitioners choose social media as communication and engagement tool in the first place. In the qualitative interviews, the interpreted values of social media use are reflected by interviewees' personal knowledge or actual hands-on experience of using social media to engage sharing communities. The interpreted values of social media use refer to the first sub-question. Although the sub-question is initially about what social media channels do sharing platforms use, the interpreted values of social media use help to explore one step further about the different goals of practitioners to use various social media channels. The interviewees provided a fruitful amount of reasons on why social media are essential to their member engagement and the promotion of knowledge sharing initiatives through different social media channels.

This topic can be further divided into three themes: the informational value of social media, the networking value of social media, and the economical value of social media. The first two themes are related to the U&G theory discussed in the theoretical framework, which corresponds to users' need to seek information and to establish social connections. There are quite a number of codes found in the open coding that can be related either to the U&G theory or the knowledge sharing motivations. Unexpectedly, the third theme "the economical value of social media" does not fall into the construct of either theory. However, from a practitioner perspective, the cost performance of deploying social media as online marketing tools does influence their approaches to engage community members. Moreover, it also proves that when the application of U&G theory is extended to practitioners' side, common ground can be found.

These three themes are considered as the starting points of a platform's social media strategies, the interpreted values of social media echo with social media users' needs. Thus, the premises are established to further study how platforms are using social media for member engagement purposes.

4.2.1 The informational value of social media

In the theoretical framework, it was discussed that one of the primary motivations for people to use social media is to seek information in a spontaneous way (Whiting & Williams, 2013), and the platform using social media should provide useful information to fulfill their need of information. More specifically, there are three sub-themes emerged from analysis, namely (1) information about knowledge sharing events, (2) information about technical issues, and (3) information about the platform in general. In the following section, these three sub-themes will be discussed separately. Firstly, according to the interviewees, except for Konnektid, all the other platforms are very much event-driven. Hence, in order to inform and mobilize people to participate, the first sub-theme represents the use of social media to disseminate information about upcoming events and recap past events, a proposition that brought up by nine out of eleven interviewees. In some cases, information about knowledge sharing events is the most popular content on their social media. As the following quote demonstrates:

“And on Twitter, we use Twitter to organize event. So when there is event for example, then we are tweeting about that event. And then people will know about the event, and people will oh there is something going on at our location. Then location will be more familiar to people.” – Nynke, Seats2meet Utrecht CS.

Information about knowledge sharing events

This above quote shows that knowledge sharing platforms often use social media as tools to disseminate information, especially the information about their offline knowledge sharing initiatives. As stated in the quote, Twitter is the social media channel which is used for this kind of event information. Similar to other interviewees from Amsterdam Connected, Meet & Discover, and Konnektid, when it comes to the choice of social media channels, different channels serve different purposes. For example, on Facebook, there are more storytelling approaches, since the characteristic of Facebook allows more personal connections comparing to that of Twitter. This finding indicates that different channels also can play a role in a platform's social media engagement. This proposition of different channels does not correspond to the theoretical framework of this thesis, which only distinguishes different users and different strategies. Thus, regarding practical information about the events or any short updates about the platform, they tend to use Twitter as a mean of public broadcast for that matter. On the other hand, when

platforms are seeking more personal interaction or proximity with their community, they usually go on Facebook page to post information with more diverse media content. This is because nowadays Twitter are demonstrating more public or even professional image of an user, and the personal feeling and proximity seem fading away:

“It’s too massive [...] Facebook can sort of deepen the relationship depending on how active the person is. But like before, when I started with Twitter for instance in the beginning, I tweet my friends via Twitter. [...] I don’t see it happen that much anymore. Many people now use Twitter in a different way, I haven’t seen any other social media platform, it’s more difficult, it’s also more massive. It’s more.... too many things, too many to mention.” – Elise, Meet & Discover.

“There are different target audience, using more Facebook for engagement, and Twitter for letting people know and connect there.” – Charlotte, Peer.

Information about technical issues

The interviewees might vary on using social media channels to disseminate information, and the reasons can be the user profile of a particular channel, the online traffic of a channel, or just for personal preference. However, all the interviewees acknowledge that they use social media because it is considered as a fast way to spread the word and to have people’s immediate attention. For example, as this second sub-theme demonstrates, the information about technical issues. The interviewee from Konnektid described that when there is a technical breakdown of their website, social media will be the first place where they will inform the community. Similar to Meet & Discover, they also post on social media when there is an unexpected closing date of their location.

“If there for instance right now, God forbid, the site would fall out, obviously I would put that news on social media, because people need to know what’s happening.”- Maartje, Konnektid.

Information about the platform in general

According to interviewees from Meet & Discover, Amsterdam Connected, and Peer. It was explicitly stated that another reason why they see the informational value of social media is that they can keep members up-to-date about what they are doing on a daily basis, which leads to the third sub-theme: information about the platform in general. This can take various forms, for example, for all the platforms which curate offline events, as a recap, they usually post photos of their offline events back on their online

social media channels, in this way to keep their members updated, and to trigger their interest to maybe join in themselves some day. Another way of disseminating information about the platform is through online publications, such as an online magazine, which is an extensive practice of the Seats2meet network. Nevertheless, the following interviewee took the question one step further and noted the benefit of using social media to do so:

“The reason they come back because they are still connected, somehow, maybe they are not liking my Facebook posts, they are not retweeting my tweets. But apparently, they are still reading them, because what we realize when people come back to the ecosystem after two or three months, they always know what has been going on within the ecosystem.” – Andre, Amsterdam Connected.

As the above quote shows, the informational value of social media is not necessarily always about sophisticated knowledge and education, sometimes it can be just a way to stay connected with the community. This proposition also corresponds to the notion of “daily communication” (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014) in the theoretical framework, the use of light content to keep a sharing platform’s presence in users’ newsfeed every day. The downside is that when the connection between a platform and its community member is only in the newsfeed, it will not actually help develop the community and boost knowledge sharing effectively:

“I mean sometimes content is just like too light, for instance the nice quotes, people can response to that if they wish obviously. But usually, it just about I like this too, this is a nice quote. But the other day...”- Maartje, Konnektid.

Hence, while people only stay connected online but barely meet someone offline and share knowledge, the platform is actually accumulating more “lurkers” (Wang, 2012). This will not benefit the platform, as they need to maintain this kind of members with continuous investment on social media, but the tangible outcomes are quite limited. However, the upside is, as the interviewee from Amsterdam Connected stated, those “lurkers” are in-activated members, but the numbers of this group can still be promising. If the platform does it right, they will eventually come back to the platform, with up-to-date information, and the right intention to bring other people up with their knowledge about the platform.

Given all the merits of social media channels as a way to disseminate information, in contrast with other interviews, the interviewee from Amsterdam Academy does not see as much informational value of mainstream social media as others, especially when it comes to organizing offline knowledge sharing

events. This point is not brought up by other interviewees explicitly, but it feels relevant to this thesis as it can be related to the discussion of active and less active members:

“I used to actually post a separate Facebook event, but found that people would commit, say they’re coming, then not show up [...] At one point I was making a ‘Weekly Round Up’ which I sent out each week to Amsterdam Academy newsletter subscribers, giving them tidbits from local news, upcoming events at Amsterdam Academy, and suggested local things to do. This actually worked quite well, but was time consuming.” – Hannah, Amsterdam Academy.

As this quote illustrates, the pitfall of organizing events using Facebook is that sometimes it provides inaccurate feedbacks to the organizers. This can be explained by the discussion of contributor and lurker behavior in the theoretical framework, that when people are reluctant to joining knowledge sharing initiatives, it can be related to contextual factors (Chang & Chuang, 2011). As shown in the quote, when Amsterdam Academy tries to reach out to its community using an email newsletter, a way that is supposed to be more targeted, and with local news and local things of suggestions, it adds more contexts to their information and makes it more interesting to the community.

4.2.2 The networking value of social media

The previous theme demonstrates the interpreted value of social media in member engagement, which is the dissemination of information. However, it is still one-way communication if it is only the platform broadcasting to the community, the social side of this social media is not fully leveraged. The social aspect of social media will be discussed in this second theme, which is the networking value of social media. During the open coding, the frequent codes echo with the theoretical inputs of the U&G theory: people get on social media out of the need to feel included, interact with people and establish social connections in a more efficient and timely fashion (Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011). Eleven interviewees out of all the nine platforms said they value the fact that social media helps their business connect to more people in their network. The strategies of practitioners using social media to facilitate social contact will be discussed in the next section, this theme mainly focuses on why they see the networking value rather than how they take advantage of such value of social media in their member engagement. There are two sub-themes derived from the analysis, namely (1) Two-way communication, (2) Electronic word of mouth.

Two-way communication

The first sub-theme is that social media enables two-way communication between the knowledge sharing platform and its community. This two-way communication sets the antecedent for member engagement on social media, because according to the open coding, there are indications that all the interviewed platforms see their presence on social media not in a unilateral way, rather, it needs to be bilateral. As represented by the following quotes:

“It needs to be a two-way channel communication, if it is just me pushing up my messages to them, then I am doing it wrong [...] So that’s why we really like social media as a start-up, a social start up to really get feedback, to get two-way communication.” - Maartje, Konnektid.

“It’s basically, we try to encourage people not only to get information, but to share information. And to look for what their abundance is, what we give away. And normally if they start a conversation, and it’s a two-way conversation.”- Elise, Meet & Discover.

Similar propositions are also found in three interviews with Amsterdam Connected, Peer, and 3D Hubs, nevertheless, according to the interviewees, the networking value of social media is not only about starting a conversation with community members, but also about the affiliated social connections that come out of the interactions. The content a knowledge sharing platform posts on social media is a conversation starter both for platform-to-community interaction, as well as for people within the community itself. Giving a common topic to a group of like-minded people who share similar interest, it is going to facilitate more conversations to emerge, and consequently, according to one of the interviewees, generates more online traffic. Interviewee from 3D Hubs described their strategic objective of using social media as in the following quote:

“The strategic objective is to highlight the main points of contact we have with the community, and to encourage engagement in those touch points.” – George, 3D Hubs.

Electronic word of mouth

As shown in the above quote, the interviewee from 3D Hubs gave another perspective on the networking value of social media. It is not only about reaching out to a larger audience and establishing more social connections, but also the electronic word of mouth within the community, which leads to the second sub-theme. Social media can help practitioners to monitor the existing network and to identify the main point of contact. Similar idea is also shared by four interviewees from Amsterdam Connected,

Seats2meet, and 050 Groningen, which bridges to the third sub-theme of the economical value of social media:

“When I put a message on LinkedIn for example. That doesn’t concern you that much, but you got a friend who was yet on that topic, you just tell him or you just come and like hey, Andre you maybe should check this message, so you also get the viral part of it.” – Andre, Amsterdam Connected.

4.2.3 Economical value of social media

This third sub-theme is an unexpected finding which does not align with the theoretical framework. Six interviewees from nine interviewed platforms shared the idea that posting on social media is an economical way for them to do marketing, especially given the fact that most of them are start-ups. This sub-theme is not particularly related to any of the research questions, but it is considered as a plausible and more pragmatic factor that affect practitioners’ use of social media. Furthermore, it refers back to the introduction chapter where it is noted that for both small and large businesses, budget and resources are two prominent elements that can have a potential influence on their social media marketing strategies (Olenski, 2015). It also shows that practitioners’ engagement plan on social media is not only influenced by the motivations of users, but are also influenced by their own motivations.

Meanwhile, as previously discussed, this sub-theme indicates the difference between personal social media use, and professional use of social media, which is the economic cost. Electronic word-of-mouth (De Vries et al., 2012) is seen as a budget saver to the interviewees mentioned above:

“So they be in part of our organization, they become our marketing tool, so that’s one way. So the whole marketing budget is zero, at this location. Because they connect to this location, this location to their network, and the network is spreading the word.” – Lenneke, Seats2meet.

To sum up, this section discusses the interpreted values of social media from a practitioners’ perspective. Three main themes help identify the reasons why knowledge sharing platforms are using social media to engage their communities. Evidently, the main themes speak to the needs of social media users, thus, in a way to acknowledge the proposition that a platform’s social media use is supposed to fulfill the needs of its communities. Based on the first main topic, the following section is devoted to the second topic, strategic engagement on social media. From this topic, the analysis explores more in-depth about how practitioners reflect the interpreted values of social media to their deployment of social media to engage their communities.

4.3 Strategic engagement on social media

The second main topic is strategic engagement on social media. As the theoretical framework suggests, the knowledge sharing motivations need to be addressed in social media messages to engage community members in an active way. After the previous section about sharing platforms' goal for social media use, this second topic contains the open coding results which relate to the three-dimensional strategy proposed in the theoretical framework. Hence, this topic is divided into three themes, namely (1) curating social media content, (2) facilitating social relationships, and (3) fulfilling individual needs. As the topic indicates, these three themes correspond to the sub-questions as how do knowledge sharing platforms identify and engage their active and less active community members. During the open coding, most of the codes fall into the three-dimensional strategy as proposed in the theoretical framework. Although their answers are fairly in line with the theoretical constructs, depending on certain platforms, there is a noticeable difference on how they actually deploy these strategies.

4.3.1 Curating social media content

The first theme is curating social media content, which refers back to the media-content oriented strategy as how knowledge sharing platforms gratify members' informational needs via social media engagement. Eight out of eleven interviewees explicitly stated that making good social media content is one of the building blocks to further implement their social media strategies. As illustrated in the theoretical framework, the first step for an organization to engage audience on social media is through the dissemination of information (Smith, 2012). Hence, in the theoretical framework, the proposition is that regarding social media content, this thesis defines it as primarily about informational content, which aims to provide useful information to members, and to increase their knowledge self-efficacy. However, in the open coding, there are codes which cover more than just informational content. In fact, only the interviewee from Konnektid explicitly noted the "informational content" in her response to questions about the different type of message they post on Konnektid's Facebook page. Therefore, for the first theme, this thesis categorized the relevant codes into two sub-themes, namely (1) informational content, (2) educational content.

Informational content

From the interviews, the posts of informational content can be seen not only on the mainstream social media channels. As discussed in the interpreted values of social media, some platforms also use other means such as email newsletter, or their own website to achieve the same communication objectives. For example, one of the interviewees' from Seats2meet explained how they share information with communities via their own media channels, as the following quote illustrates:

“Because when you sit here you don't know what is happening or who is over there, it might be that the person over there is very relevant [...] So we asked them to put some knowledge text in your profile, so we can make it visible who is here this moment, and which knowledge is shared in this moment.”- Nynke, Seats2meet.

This quote is a nice demonstration of the particular type of information that a knowledge sharing platform is delivering to its community members. Because Seats2meet is driven by offline knowledge sharing initiatives, meanwhile, as the term “Serendipity” is brought up by all the two interviewees of this platform, thus their social media communication is expected to be in compliance with that philosophy. Information about other users in the platform is also considered as a way to facilitate encounters, and the similar perspective is also found in one of the interviewees of Peer. By organizing offline knowledge sharing events within Peer's online community, the interviewee explained that the purpose is not only to share knowledge but also to facilitate social contact between people who not yet know each other. To do so, when posting information about their offline events, Peer also creates an online showcase for the event moderator, guest speaker or trainer. Therefore, the information about other users on the platform, on the one hand, can help newcomers to get better hold of the platform and its members. This is also an enhancement to their self-efficacy because they will know better how they can benefit from the platform. On the other hand, information about other users can be the first step to increasing familiarity within the community and establish further social connections.

Educational content

The second theme is educational content, all eleven interviewees from nine platforms have similar descriptions in term of the educational content that they post on their social media channels. Primarily, educational content focuses on philosophy of the sharing initiatives and the value of platforms, and this is different from informational content, which aims to disseminate practical and instant information. Interviewees from Seats2meet, Peer, Konnektid, and Amsterdam Connected all noted the importance of creating a culture within their community and the way they do so is by starting with communicating their

missions and educate their members from day one. This can take both online and offline approaches, the following quote is a good example of how a sharing platform provides educational content to its newcomers:

“So what we do with every user is that when they signing up, we give them a communication plan, we want to tell them sometimes bit by bit [...] to become to get them to know society 3.0 and healthy working and connecting what we can do for you, and you can give more information to them.”- Lenneke, Seats2meet.

As this quote shows, Seats2meet provides newcomers with a communication plan to help them get started with the platform. During the interview, the interviewee specifically noted that when educating their members about the philosophy of Seats2meet, they expect it is a step-by-step process, which further corresponds to the notion of knowledge self-efficacy in the theoretical framework. According to Chen and Hung (2010), knowledge self-efficacy represents a person’s confidence in sharing their knowledge with other people. To increase confidence, it is expected to be a rather long-term process. Another interviewee from Seats2meet also indicate it is an “every day” effort. This kind of communication plan and introductory message are available on Seat2meet’s website, and it goes online on Facebook and their online publications as well. Regarding offline approaches, when asked about how they educate their members, three interviewees from Seats2meet, Peer, Meet & Discover indicate that conversations during lunch or coffee break can be an effective way:

“Actually we are doing already, because sometimes we put an example of text on the internet [...] So that we share with other people see ok, that’s also possible and sometimes we are saying it, and talk with people during the lunch.”- Nynke, Seats2meet.

Different from the platforms mentioned above, regarding this question, the interviewee from Amsterdam Connected suggested that their educational content with members remains only offline. As their priority is to use the online platforms to build an ecosystem where different people can join in, thus, their way of educating their members is to have a 45-minute on-site introduction sessions to everyone who walks in for the first time. Moreover, interviewees from Seats2meet, Amsterdam Connected, and Peer both explicitly indicated a very constructive insight:

“I think they would bring something interesting, and they got an interesting discussion over there, we would like to invite you all to Amsterdam Connected, and to have a cup of coffee. That’s what I believe that the true knowledge sharing, only happens offline.”- Andre, Amsterdam Connected.

“I believe the real knowledge sharing is offline meeting, so face-to-face, in this community. Online is just a method to find each other that you can continue the conversation in real life.” – Sandra, Peer.

As the above two quotes indicate, some of the interviewees believe the real knowledge sharing is facilitated by online connections and takes place in offline settings. This opinion also echoes with the finding that although all eleven interviewed platforms share knowledge with their communities, the way they do so can be online or offline. Besides the organic approaches which are found in interviews with eight out of nine platforms, such as the online magazine, sharing online articles. As previously mentioned, Amsterdam Academy is the platform with the most diverse media usage, therefore, when it comes to sharing knowledge with their members, the interviewee gave a really good example of how to keep the knowledge sharing flow and increase their community members’ knowledge:

“Currently Amsterdam Academy has a Facebook page with 291 likes, a Twitter account, a Meetup.com account with 1231 members (as of May 8, 2016), and a podcast available on iTunes, Stitcher, and SoundCloud (last episode had 285 listeners).” – Hannah, Amsterdam Academy.

The above quote indicates the approaches that Amsterdam Academy uses to curate educational content for its communities. For example, when there is a knowledge sharing initiative, they will record the knowledge sharing sessions, such as workshop, speakers, and aspire people sharing their knowledge with the community. Afterward, they will post the recording as a podcast on SoundCloud, iTunes, and Stitcher, the links will also be available on their Facebook. In this way, people can have a second chance to access knowledge, and keep updated about the platform. This refers back to the introductory chapter of this thesis, the leverage for knowledge sharing to be the next booming economy is because unlike sharing physical resources, knowledge can be shared in a more sustainable way (Zajda, 2010), and social media can facilitate the sustainability with the technological infrastructures.

4.3.2 Facilitating social relationships

The second theme is *facilitating social relationships*. As discussed in the theoretical framework, the “social” side of social media is something that often get overlooked in a business’s social media use (Forant, 2013). More specifically, it is found that the interviewees may vary in their reasons as to why

they choose social media for personal or professional use. However, for all eleven interviewees, facilitating connections in social networks remains as one of the reasons why they are using social media, regardless of their role as generic social media users or the community manager of a sharing platform.

In the open coding, the theme of facilitating social relationships can be seen as mainly about facilitating online to offline social connections. What is worth mentioning is, when referring to online to offline social connections, the analysis finds out that it is more of a peer-to-peer connection rather than members' association with the knowledge sharing platform per se. More specifically, the connections which are facilitated by the knowledge sharing platform are mainly between community members. As the following quote illustrates:

“And what you see is that you can use the internet, or you can use social media to reach a larger audience, and then the philosophy of S2M and with that Amsterdam Connected and Berlage, we offer the stage where you can take your conversation online, you can take it offline, meet at our places, or our facility.” – Andre, Amsterdam Connected.

Corresponding to the social-relation oriented strategy, the way knowledge sharing platforms gratify users' relational needs is by providing the digital space where online connections are possible. While seven out of nine interviewed platforms have built-in social media function on their own website, such as profile, and private message, however, this does not inherently overshadow the functional value of social media. Because based on the interpreted values of social media among the interviewees, aside from using the official websites, mainstream social media channels are still important complementary approaches to keep the connections active. As the above quote indicates, social media are capable of introducing the knowledge sharing platform to a large audience and leveraging the characteristics of the platform. In doing so, knowledge sharing platforms can bring people under their initiatives, and create a system which bonds like-minded people who otherwise will not likely to encounter each other.

4.3.3 Fulfilling individual needs

The last theme is *fulfilling individual needs*. According to the theories, the strategies to fulfill individual needs speak to the remunerative need in U&G Theory and the organizational reward in knowledge sharing motivations (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). Eight out of eleven interviewees noted that they intend to make their social media communication interesting to the audience, in the open coding, there are two sub-themes found relevant to this theme, namely (1) the need to be entertained, and (2) the need to be rewarded.

The need to be entertained

To make the social media communication more entertaining, it is indicated by interviewees from Konnektid and 050 Groningen that even as a knowledge sharing platform, their social media communication does not necessarily need to be always scientific and sophisticated all the time. As one of the interviewees described, the post could be just for fun because even if using social media is for business purpose, the people deliver and receive messages are only human, not robot:

“I feel like there is always a person behind writing a post, and I like to convey personality in that post, to show some authenticity, it is not a computer writing behind it, it is a person, so it is ok to show some personality.” – Jelmer, 050 Groningen.

As the quote illustrates, in order to be entertaining and light-hearted in social media post, it is the practitioner behind the computer that could make a difference. Moreover, according to interviewees from Peer and Meet & Discover, multiple media formats such as video and images are also ways to fulfill users' need of entertainment:

“Vlog, yes, so we are trying that. We also think it's very important we don't want to just facilitate the encounter, we create things that are interesting for our audience.” – Charlotte, Peer.

The need to be rewarded

The second sub-theme which is the need to be rewarded. To illustrate, there are two types of rewards summarized from the open coding, namely (1) the material rewards, (2) the non-material rewards. The material rewards can be a free workspace, or a cup of coffee, while the non-material rewards are usually social acknowledgments:

“Cause we are thinking how can we reward that to make more movement like those kind of people. So at this moment, sometimes I give a like a cup of coffee for free, at the bar.”- Nynke, Seat2meet.

The above quote represents a quite general incentive which knowledge sharing platforms use to mobilize participation. Similar answers are also found in interviews with Amsterdam Connected, Meet & Discover, who also offer free workspace or free lunch as ways to stimulate contribution. Due to this thesis primarily focuses on the use of social media to engage communities. Thus, when asked if their knowledge sharing platforms reward people in a non-material way, six out of eleven interviewees confirmed they use social rewards. For example, in the Seats2meet network, some platforms have a “social capital board” at

their offline meeting place, on the board they publicly acknowledge participants with stars and a short biography about their skills. Besides the offline approach, Peer and Konnektid also promote individuals or showcase participants on social media:

“So we promote individuals too [...] in one year, and we had a musician, came here to play, so we promoted her. For the second time, we would like to promote someone who makes snacks with biological food.”- Charlotte, Peer.

Additional findings

Besides the approaches as mentioned above, the analysis also reveals a few unexpected findings which add to previous research. While other researchers stated that personal needs are more about entertaining and remunerative purpose (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Lee, Hosanagar, & Nair, 2013), the open coding shows that personal development is also a need of a person who participates in knowledge sharing. This can be seen as an additional finding under the theme of fulfilling individual needs:

“when you are part of S2M ecosystem in Utrecht, it doesn’t stop at the door. So it’s beyond this walls, it’s still creating an environment which is really good for people to be an entrepreneur to develop themselves.” – Lenneke, Seat2meet.

Interviewees from Meet & Discover and Amsterdam Connected also responded that there is no need to reward their community members regardless of how active they are. The moment one starts to share knowledge, the moment one is being listened to by others and learn from each other, it is already rewarding. The interviewee from Amsterdam Connected shared a similar perspective, and addressed this as a form of “synchronous reciprocity”:

“Well they don’t need to be rewarded, because they are getting out of here, the reward is almost instant, when you give away your knowledge you normally get that.” – Elise, Meet & Discover.

4.4 Tactical difference on member mobilization

The last main topic of this thesis is the tactical difference on member mobilization. This topic aims to answer the last sub-questions of this thesis. Based on the thematic analysis of interview transcripts, it is clearly evident that for all the interviewees in this thesis, this is not a “yes or no” question. Referring back

to the theoretical framework, individual differences, social group processes, and technological setting are three determinants of a contributor or lurker behavior (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2016). Corresponding to these three determinants, for this topic, three themes emerged, namely (1) distinguishing members, (2) strategic difference in engagement, and (3) rethinking “community”.

4.4.1 Distinguishing members

If a platform were to use social media to activate members in knowledge sharing communities, firstly, it is important to know that whether or not there are any different types of members in a knowledge sharing community. According to the interviews, eleven interviewees from all nine platforms described that they do have a sense of different types of members in the community:

“You always see it, within the ecosystem, there are people that will be really active, in a certain time, then they maybe they’ll leave for a while, or they will get less active, but maybe they’ll return again.” – Andre, Amsterdam Connected.

“They are different, obviously I want to get them more active cause I like to interact with them as much as I can. But I mean...they are good, it is always interesting to see how they differ per social media.” – Maartje, Konnektid.

The above two quotes distinguish community members based on how active they are. This refers back to the proposition in the research question of this thesis, which posits there are indeed active and less active community members. Nevertheless, this concept does not apply to all the interviewees, as for Peer, and Meet & Discover, they distinguish their members based on their knowledge of the sharing initiatives and how the system works. According to the interviewee from Peer, the silent members sometimes are the one who do more, which contradict to the notion of “contributor” in the theoretical framework:

“Yes, there are the silent ones, and the ones that are doing a lot [...] that’s the difference, doing a lot, and they are the silent ones, if you ask the different type of people.”- Charlotte, Peer.

4.4.2 Strategic differences in engagement

Since all the interviewees have noticed the difference between active and less active members, when it comes to strategic engagement on social media, however, there may not always be different strategies. Based on the open coding, this thesis categorizes the strategic difference in engagement based on having

or not having a difference. More specifically, for the platforms which do not have different strategies, the sub-themes are (1) organic engagement strategies, and (2) rethinking the community. For the platforms who do have different strategies, the sub-themes are (3) demographic differences, and (4) internal communication.

Organic engagement strategies

On the other hand, seven out of eleven interviewees explained that they treat everyone the same. What should be acknowledged is that the number of interviewees under this theme overlaps with the number of interviewees who said that they have different strategies. This is because even if they do, as mentioned in previous sections, it is not defined by the level of activity. For the platforms which do not really have different strategies towards active and less active members, it is either because they do not want people to distinguish and isolate themselves from others, or they have not yet developed a strategy that sets active and less active members clearly apart:

“No, because now the user experience for everybody is the same [...] It’s up to them, how they use the system because if they are active, they get more results from out the system.” – Lenneke, Seats2meet.

“It’s not that we are always on the look out of the active people, then what you have danger in that [...] If you only focus on the active, the active ones are going to protect themselves [...]” – Andre, Amsterdam Connected.

The quotes explain why for some of the platforms, there are no strategic differences regarding social media engagement. Given that a knowledge sharing platform is monitored by practitioners, the activities on the platform are, to a large extent, people driven. Thus, as the quotes illustrate, within a community or eco-system, it is the people who are organizing and processing the sharing activities. This proposition also refers back to the social group process, one of the determinants of “contributor” and “lurker” behaviors (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2016), which indicates that the social ties between community members can help distinguish which are the actives and the less actives. In fact, according to eight out of eleven interviewees, they do not see their “community” as a community, rather, they have a new concept which defines the mechanism that bonds their participants together. This leads to the sub-theme of rethinking the community.

Rethinking the community

“An ecosystem like S2M, so umm no it’s not up to us I think to umm separate active from less active. It’s up to them.” – Lenneke, Seat2meet.

“And you need to be in it for a long term, because if you just be in there for a short term success, everybody will notice that, and you will be kicked out of the ecosystem. Not kicked out, so you will not have the benefits, you will leave.” – Andre, Amsterdam Connected.

The above quotes bring up an important notion which is “ecosystem” or “mesh”. An ecosystem is different from a community in the way it is formulated. According to interviewees mentioned above, an ecosystem is dynamic, and it has open access to people who is either in the system or out of the system. People can join in or leave, but it is highly moderated by the norm of the ecosystem itself, not by the administrator or community manager. Because when one be in a community, it is a closed environment, which means the community manager has to monitor the community, or at the minimum, set certain housekeeping rules. Whereas in an ecosystem, the system itself will leave those less active people being less active and not adding value or being valued by others, eventually they will have to activate themselves in order to fit in the eco-system, or they will leave. The adoption of “ecosystem” becomes the reason why half of the interviewed platforms do not have different strategies towards the actives and less actives. This sub-theme is an unexpected finding from the analysis, which does not correspond and even contradict to the very fundamentals of the research questions of this thesis. However, it adds extra value to the discussion of member engagement and help rethink the concept of community, especially given the open and people-driven nature of the sharing economy per se.

Demographic differences

On the one hand, some platforms do have a different strategy, and it is evident that they are not necessarily about the active and less active members. For example, interviewees from Konnektid, Amsterdam Connected, and Seats2meet clearly stated that they do not have different strategies towards active and less active members on social media, however, they do have different strategies towards different demographics on various social media channels:

“Different group, for instance, Twitter is a little bit of mix of male and female, but very much of news oriented, while Pinterest is more of female and more lifestyle oriented. [...] Twitter is a bit more about

news, Facebook is almost like a coffee corner, where everything can be discussed. Twitter is more about news, Pinterest is more about the girl version of coffee corner.” – Maartje, Konnektid.

As this quote illustrates, the different user base on different social media channels affects a practitioner’s strategic point of view. Referring back to the topic of curating social media content, the different demographics on certain social media platform determines what type of content a practitioner posts. For example, the above quote states that Twitter is more about news, similar opinion is also found with Amsterdam Connected, the interviewee said they use Twitter is mainly to deliver the messages instantly and reaching as many people as possible. Therefore, regarding engagement, Twitter is considerably less than that of Facebook:

“On Facebook and LinkedIn, people take a bit more time to go through their timeline than on Twitter. And if you have a business question on LinkedIn, it’s going to trigger people to answer, to show how they feel about certain topic, or they can help you with certain topic, and help the viral thing go as well.” – Andre, Amsterdam Connected.

Internal communication

Another finding from the interviews is internal communication. Six out of eleven interviewees explained that they do have different member mobilization strategies. However, they are not targeting members in the community. Rather, they internally mobilize their platform operators. For this group of interviewees, activating their staff and let them be the one who has direct contact with the people in their location is considered as a more effective mobilization strategy, for example:

“We don’t have it here yet, we tried some in Berlage, but what we see is that, the most important thing for those initiatives to work, is really active operators in the location.” – Andre, Amsterdam Connected.

“We have like once in a half year, like meeting with the two owners, one on one, what we want to accomplish, not everyone from the community but the crew members who are active [...]” – Charlotte, Peer.

The quotes further support one of the propositions developed from the theoretical framework, which is that to engage or activate community members, besides understanding their needs, it is equally important for the practitioners to be proactive and with every effort trying to fulfill the needs.

4.5 Answering the sub-questions

Relevant findings in this thesis on the extent to which Dutch knowledge sharing platforms differ their social media strategies to engage active and less active online community members can be related to previous research and the Uses and Gratifications Theory. In previous research, it is found that one uses social media mainly based on four principal elements: seeking information, social interaction, entertainment and relaxation, reward and remuneration (Whiting & Williams, 2013; Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005). In the theoretical framework of this thesis, they are further summarized into three prominent needs of a social media user, namely: informational needs, relational needs, and personal needs. Malthouse et al. (2013) already suggested that an organization's social media practice should be aimed to facilitate the expected outcomes and fulfill the gratifications of users. This thesis further develops this proposition and extends the application of U&G Theory to the practitioners' side. While researchers such as Whiting and Williams (2013), Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) explained the reasons for people to use social media, for the research question of this thesis, it is still not fully clear as how can one's social media use be related to knowledge sharing behaviors. Thus, empirical results from early research on the motivations of knowledge sharing are added to the theoretical framework.

Previous research on motivations of knowledge sharing points out the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect one's willingness to share knowledge with others (Gagné, 2009; Welschen, Todorova, & Mills, 2013). Surprisingly, the motivational factors of knowledge sharing are, to some extent, aligned with the three prominent needs of a social media user. Therefore, this thesis posits a link that bridges one's social media use, and motivations to share knowledge: people should be motivated to engage in knowledge sharing if, somehow, the sharing initiatives of a knowledge sharing platform speak to certain gratifications that sharing knowledge will offer. Meanwhile, the sharing platform uses these gratifications to address in their social media use. Furthermore, to study the extent to which the member engagement strategies are different, previous research on different types of online community members are referenced, which adds another layer also to include the less active members besides the active ones.

These theoretical insights guided eleven interviews with nine knowledge sharing platforms based in The Netherlands. For the first sub-question on which social media channels do knowledge sharing platforms use for online member engagement, it can be concluded that the interviewed platforms have presences across mainstream social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, especially given few of the platforms are focusing more on knowledge sharing among professionals. Under the first sub-question, the probe question regarding the goals of practitioners using different social media channels reveals three main interpreted values of social media. Corresponding to the construct of U&G Theory, practitioners' interpreted values of social media are in line with the prominent needs of social media users.

For example, the need of a social media user seeking information aligns with the informational value of social media in disseminating the relevant information. However, as mentioned in the theoretical chapter, the difference between professional use and personal use of social media for engagement should be noted. The economical value of social media is an unexpected factor which is mentioned by the interviewees, but not found in previous research on social media users. Therefore, based on the findings of the interpreted value of social media, it can be concluded that the extended application of U&G Theory is scientifically feasible.

Regarding the second and third sub-question, how do knowledge sharing platforms identify and engage active/less active members. This thesis concludes the questions by two parts, the first part is about the strategies knowledge sharing platforms use to engage community members, the second part is how do knowledge sharing platforms distinguish the active and less active members. The divide not only can answer the two sub-questions but also can lead to the answer of the third sub-question. Regarding the question on how do knowledge sharing platform engage community members, it appears that interviewees explained that their social media strategies mainly based on curating social media content, facilitating social relationships, and fulfilling the individual needs. This is in line with the informational needs, relational needs, and personal needs seen in a social media user (Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011).

For curating social media content, it is mentioned by interviewees that informational content and educational content are two main types of content that a knowledge sharing platform usually produces on their social media channels. It can be concluded that, by curating social media content, sharing platforms aim to engage communities by keeping them updated with the latest information, while also well-educated about the philosophy of a sharing platform. This outcome relates to one of the knowledge sharing motivations which is the increase of knowledge self-efficacy (Chen & Hung, 2010) and confidence in sharing knowledge. For facilitating social relationships, it can be concluded that there are two approaches to strengthen social ties between community members: online to offline connections and offline connections be migrated to and sustained in an online network. This outcome relates to the finding of Matzat (2010), Tillema, Dijst, and Schwanen (2010): organizing offline meetings is an effective way to bond the community. For fulfilling the individual needs, it appears that interviewees' answers are not different from what previous research has categorized. The material reward such as free food and discount relate to the need of relaxation and remuneration (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005), while the non-material reward such as social rewarding refers back to the need for reward and recognition (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Regarding the question on how do knowledge sharing platforms distinguish active and less active community members, it appears that the majority of interviewees do not have clear criteria on how to set boundaries to identify the active and less active members in their community. Nevertheless, it is more

based on a general feeling when practitioners are interacting with communities both online and offline. Due to the fact that this thesis is using a qualitative approach, thus, it is not applicable to measure the level of activity among community members based on quantitative models. Interviewees mentioned that active members are usually identified by the personality and attitude that evolved in their sharing behaviors and their online and offline interactions with the platform. It can be summarized that active members are the people who are open, helpful, and willing to sacrifice their own time and efforts for the good of the community. This is not only limited in sharing knowledge, but also helping with building and maintaining the community. On the other hand, less active members are the people who are relatively quiet, more willing to listen, but sometimes also contribute more. The last characteristic is a plausible finding of this thesis which challenges the norm of “contributor” and “lurker” in previous research.

The discussion between different types of members also relates to the fourth sub-question, this sub-question covers the extent to which knowledge sharing platforms have different strategies towards active and less active members. It appears that for the majority of platforms, they do not have different strategies towards active and less active community members, based on the fact that for some of them, defining members by their activity is not a primary concern. For the platforms who do have different engagement strategies, it is mainly for different demographics and different target groups on certain social media channels. However, for the platforms which do not have different engagement strategies, it is because the culture of knowledge sharing advocates openness and collaboration, it can be concluded that by using different strategies it is likely to create small groups within a community who are isolating themselves from others. This proposition leads to the discussion between the notion of community and a new concept of ecosystem. An ecosystem represents a more autonomic and self-managing mechanism. Meanwhile, to mobilize community members to participate in sharing initiatives, it can be concluded that, strategic-wise the internal communication approach within a knowledge sharing platform can play a role in mobilizing community members by activating platform operators first.

4.6 Concluding and key findings

From the first topic of the interpreted value of social media, it is evident that all the interviewed platforms extensively use social media channels for their member engagement. Although their reasons to choose social media as engagement tools may be different, however, for business purpose, social media seems to be inevitable tools. This topic intends to answer the first research question about knowledge sharing platforms’ social media use, the three themes of the interpreted values of social media echo with the theoretical inputs of U&G theory, but in a reverse way as this thesis uses U&G theory to study

practitioners. Therefore, the informational value of social media reflects the way that knowledge sharing platforms try to disseminate information through social media. The same applies to the social value of social media, which, according to the interviewees, sets the foundation of their member engagement as it enables practitioners to reach a larger audience. Another key finding from the first topic is the economical value of social media. This finding also refers back to the theoretical framework as an acknowledgment of the differences between personal social media use, and social media use in professional or organizational settings (Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Cheng & Hung, 2010).

As for the second main topic, strategic engagement on social media. The strategies that the interviewees use mostly align with the three-dimensional strategy as proposed in the theoretical framework. The three themes under this topic are curating social media content, facilitating social relationships, and fulfilling the individual needs. This is similar to the literature that an organization's social media presence should be designed to facilitate the expected outcomes, fulfill the gratifications of users and create values (Malthouse et al., 2013). What is contradictory to earlier research is that, when referring to personal needs, most of the research tend to narrow it down to only leisure or entertainment-related needs, however, in the settings of this thesis, personal development is found as a new addition to the personal needs of a knowledge sharing community member.

Lastly, regarding the topic of tactical differences on member mobilization. Different from the proposition in the theoretical framework, the differentiation of members in a knowledge sharing community is not based on whether the person is active or not, at least when departing from an engagement point of view, and it needs to have a more diverse distinction between community members. This thesis finds out that over half of the interviewees do not have a clear differentiation between active and less active members, however, they do have different strategies in other aspects such as different demographics. Meanwhile, as for member mobilization, for those platforms who do not have different strategies, two interviewees brought up an important factor which is the perceived structure of a community, or ecosystem. This finding indicates that the strategic difference is not only defined by the practitioners, in some cases it is the structure of the community in the first place decides the role of practitioners rather than the other way around.

The three main topics developed from the thematic analysis relate to the sub-questions in this master thesis. With the results from the analysis of interview transcripts, these sub-questions are answered in this chapter. Furthermore, the main research question can be answered in the concluding chapter. Some of the results can also be generalized to practical implications for the future reference of knowledge sharing platforms.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This master thesis departs from the research question that, to what extent do Dutch knowledge sharing platforms differ their social media strategies to engage active and less active community members. Using qualitative interviews as data collection method, and by conducting a thematic analysis, three important topics emerged to answer the sub-questions and eventually to answer the main research question. Firstly, the topic of the interpreted values of social media, which is considered to be related to the first sub-question about the social media use of knowledge sharing platforms. As the theoretical framework proposed, this thesis is interested in the application of Uses and Gratifications Theory to study the practitioners. Therefore, findings under this topic are essential to support the proposition that an organization's social media practices should cater the needs of social media users (Malthouse et al., 2013). Answers from all eleven interviewees resulted in three main interpreted values of using social media as engagement tools, namely the informational value, the networking value, and the economical value. Secondly, the topic of strategic engagement on social media refers to the second and third sub-questions. Unsurprisingly, three themes under this topic are in line with the three-dimensional strategy developed from the theoretical framework of this thesis. The last topic of tactical difference in member mobilization concerns the final sub-question and refers to the main research question about the extent to which knowledge sharing platforms deploy their social media strategies differently.

This chapter will start with a summary of the answers of sub-questions, and proceed to the answer of the main research question. Meanwhile, following the conclusion of the research questions, this thesis can provide further insights to knowledge sharing platforms as how to optimize their strategic plan to engage sharing communities via social media. After the conclusion, there will be a short discussion which reflects back to the literature in the theoretical framework. In the discussion, the theoretical and practical implications will be presented, as well as the limitations and suggestions for future research.

5.1 Conclusion and implications

To answer the main research question, this thesis shows that by addressing the knowledge sharing motivations in social media messages, a knowledge sharing platform can use social media as tools to engage members in sharing communities. By curating social media content, facilitating social relationships, and fulfilling individual needs, not only can knowledge sharing platforms cater to their members' needs when participating in social media, but also speak to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of knowledge sharing behaviors, in this way to stimulate member participation. Moreover,

regarding social media strategies to engage active and less active community members, there are noticeable strategic differences in demographics, target groups, and internal communications. The findings from this thesis are considered relevant to ShareNL, as it is a knowledge sharing network per se which includes different platforms from various disciplines of the sharing economy. Although this thesis focuses on knowledge sharing platforms, however, some practical implications on member engagement using social media can be generalized for the reference of other organizations not only in The Netherlands but also worldwide.

5.1.1 Practical implications

The first implication is based on the research result of the strategic engagement on social media. Although the theoretical framework of this thesis develops a three-dimensional strategy in member engagement, the results indicate that knowledge sharing platforms' social media strategies are primarily built on content curation. More specifically, informational content and educational content. For informational content, it is important for sharing platforms to deliver accurate information to their community promptly. Whereas for educational content, it is a rather long-term effort which aims to influence community members' perception of certain knowledge sharing platform, and acknowledge the value of the sharing initiatives. Meanwhile, the research results show that different social media channels serve the different purposes. Hence, when curating content, it is recommendable for knowledge sharing platforms to use different social media channels for different content. For example, using Facebook for more storytelling while Twitter is used to broadcast more practical and instant information. Furthermore, for educational content, LinkedIn is an ideal channel to create an external blog which allows more word counts, and more targeted communication.

According to the findings of different types of members in a sharing community, the second implication is for knowledge sharing platforms to distinguish target groups based on criteria other than activity, but also look at, for example, demographics and user profiles. For knowledge sharing platforms, according to the research results of this thesis, they do not distinguish community members clearly apart, and specifically tailor engagement strategies to treat people differently. Because it will formulate small groups within the community and makes people more protective of their own social circles. Besides, it will foster a sense of differentiation which makes being in a community feels like a kind of obligation. The community is no longer people-driven, which is oppose to the very core of the sharing economy: the culture of "we" rather than "me" (Botsman, 2010). Nevertheless, while the research results of thesis show sharing services do not do so, it is also plausible that maybe they should, somehow, implement clearly different strategies towards active and less active members. For example, strategies tailored for less active

members might help them to become self-motivated, and eventually to transfer from the less active to the active.

Regarding the tactical difference in member engagement, the third implication for the knowledge sharing platforms is to adopt an internal approach and differentiate and define roles within the administration of a sharing platform. To mobilize community members, it is important to activate the offline operators and online social media accounts administrator. Given that social media have various advantages including speed, networking effects, nevertheless, online communication is not as effective as the offline face-to-face conversation regarding more direct contact and knowledge exchange. Therefore, besides engaging online members, it is recommendable for sharing platforms also to have operators to join in offline events and facilitate offline social connections which then can be sustained by an online social network.

5.1.2 Theoretical implications

This thesis extends the application of Uses and Gratifications Theory to study practitioners' strategies on user engagement, which adds to the current use of U&G Theory in the research of social media. It is an innovative research angle which still needs to be further acknowledged. However, the research results of this thesis indicate that it is feasible to adopt this perspective due to some alignments between this thesis and previous empirical research of users. For example, some of practitioners' interpreted value of social media are corresponding to the prominent needs of social media users. Moreover, when addressing the knowledge sharing motivations in social media messages, the educational content also speaks to the knowledge self-efficacy of users. Nevertheless, it should be noted that motivations can be different between users and practitioners on social media use, such as the economical value of social media. Hence, this thesis shows that to use reverse perspective in studying practitioners or users can also shed light on new findings.

Previous research distinguishes community members mainly based on their level of activity (Barysheva, Golubtsova, & Yavorskiy, n.d.; Lai & Chen, 2014; Wang, 2012), it is also suggested by the researcher to study less active members in a community (Van der Burg, 2015). This thesis nuances previous research by finding out that in user engagement, sharing platforms' strategies can be different in other aspects, such as demographics, and user profile on certain social media channels. Therefore, it is worthwhile for research to further study the elements that differentiate members within a community. For example, why some members of a community are reluctant to join in sharing initiatives but still actively receiving information from social media.

5.2 Discussion

Social media can be effective member engagement tools for knowledge sharing platforms because the informational value, the networking value, and the economical value enable practitioners to address a community with messages that speak to the motivations of knowledge sharing. In this way, to advocate a platform's sharing initiative to a larger audience. By deploying strategies on social media content, social relationships, and individual needs, it is expected to stimulate participation in knowledge sharing initiatives as the strategies speak to knowledge sharing motivations as well. This thesis shows that for a knowledge sharing platform, it is not a priority to differentiate engagement strategies towards active and less active members. Rather, there are existing strategies which target different demographic groups, and different user profiles of various social media channels.

Although the results of this thesis are relevant for knowledge sharing platforms, it should also be noted that the platforms chosen as research subjects are all from The Netherlands. The results may be narrowed more to the local settings. For future research, it will be interesting also to include international platforms or Dutch platforms that are operating abroad, to study how different audiences or even local cultures can affect practitioners' engagement strategies. Moreover, it is plausible that some interviewees explained that there is no such notion of community, but an ecosystem instead. This proposition provides another perspective that member engagement strategies may not be fully defined by the practitioners, the structure, and culture of a community should also be taken into account as well. Future research could focus on this new concept of ecosystem and study to what extent member engagement in an ecosystem is different from that of a community.

Meanwhile, as indicated in the theoretical framework, this thesis uses qualitative interviews as data collection method. This is because the primary concern of the research question is about the strategies of how practitioners use social media, rather than the content they post on social media. Through eleven interviews with practitioners from nine Dutch knowledge sharing platforms, this thesis is able to retrieve rich data which represent their opinions and experiences. Yet, a limitation of this method is, it only gathers a person's perception and knowledge while setting aside the actual practices, the posts, which can be different than what they indicate in interviews. Therefore, based on the research result of this thesis, it is recommendable for future research to use qualitative content analysis to study social media posts. In this way, the researcher can compare what practitioners have said with what they actually practice on social media, and users' responses under certain post can also indicate how the strategies evolve.

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Appendix A: Topic list of the interview

Topic	Sub-topic	Elements	Questions like
Introductory	Demographics	Gender, age, position	What is your current position in your platform?
Organization	Motivation		Why do you start this knowledge sharing initiative?
	Vision		How do you see your platform in the sharing economy?
	Evaluation		What do you think of your platform doing so far?
			On a scale 1-10, what do you think of your online communities so far in general?
The following question all relate to one particular platform, interviewees are from the same platform.			
Knowledge sharing initiatives	Platform initiatives	Types	What kinds of sharing initiatives do your platform usually propose to members?
	Participation	Advocate	What are your objectives proposing these initiatives?
	Evaluation	Involvement	What part of your initiative is the most popular among your members (e.g: subsection of your services)?
Strategic engagement on social media	Introduction		What motivate you as an individual to use social media on a regular basis?
	Expectation		How do you see social media as engagement tools? Now that you are a practitioner , are there any difference when you use social media to engage others instead of being an audience?
	Content-oriented (Informational needs)	Platform accessibility	How do you get member started with your platform? Through which social media channel do you usually interact with them?

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		Knowledge self-efficacy	As a platform, how do you ensure your members are updated to new knowledge? How do you use social media to do so?
	Social-relation oriented (Relational needs)	Norm of reciprocity	How do you maintain the “sharing flow” among members? What is the sense of community you are looking for?
		Enjoyment of sharing	We talked about the sense of community, on that note, do you feel like people enjoy sharing on your platform? Yes -> Please explain how? No -> Why not?
	Personal-need oriented (Personal needs)	Perceived benefit	On scale 1-10, how important do you think a member should also give back after receiving help from others? How do you encourage such behavior via social media?
		Organizational rewards	Do your platform reward community members? Yes -> How? No -> Why not? Any alternatives?
	Evaluation		Could you please summarize your social media engagement standpoint in one sentence (few keywords) ?
You told me you use social media to engage members, following questions are about the members.			
Active/less active community members	Introduction		To what extent do you feel there is a obvious difference between your members in terms of activity?
	Determinants of a contributor or lurker	Individual difference	On a scale 1-10, how active (and less active) do you think your members are? What distinguish them and how do you identify?
		Social group process	Is there any efforts on social media that you try to mingle with less active

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			members? How do you see active members' role in this?
		Technological settings	Do you think technical infrastructure of your digital media system (not only your website) also influence a member's motivation to participate? Yes-> How? What do you do to ensure that? No -> Why not?
	Targeted engagement	Different strategies	To what extent do you engage active/less active members differently? Yes-> Please explain how? (refer to three-dimensional strategy) No -> Why not? Any alternatives?
That was the end of this interview, appreciate your time, thank you! Do you have any addition information to share? Are there still things I should know or do you have any questions for me?			

Appendix B: Information of interview participants

- **050 Groningen**
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