

Sharing economy can help financial struggles

November 24 2015, by Rob Kidd

The power of the sharing economy in shaking up traditional industries can be harnessed to help financially struggling Queenslanders, according to QUT research.

Dr Dhaval Vyas, from QUT's Science and Engineering Faculty, found the model that has brought success to companies like Uber and Airbnb could be developed to support [people](#) experiencing financial hardship.

Over five months, the researchers made several visits to an emergency food relief facility run by Brisbane community organisation Communitify Qld to interview clients and volunteers.

Dr Vyas said people visiting the relief facility recognised it as a valuable and essential service, but there was a stigma attached to being there and being seen as 'poor'.

"There was a tendency in some participants not to interact with others and leave the centre as soon as they collected their food because of the shame of being there," he said.

"But we also found that clients who did have interactions with one another appreciated the social value of visiting the centre and gained useful knowledge and tips. For example, Communitify Qld volunteers frequently spoke about and advertised different offers for things like free educational classes or reduced housing.

"Using a peer-to-peer sharing infrastructure, clients can also directly

connect and agree to reciprocal exchanges that benefit them both. For example a client who's a single mum may offer a lift to the centre to an older lady without a car in return for the older lady looking after her daughter while she goes to work."

Dr Vyas said the research had identified an opportunity to create "community-centric technology" to "empower people and help them co-create meaningful experiences".

"The [sharing economy](#) or peer economy, led by companies like Uber and Airbnb, is transforming industries as people directly share goods and services," he said.

"Sharing is a powerful mechanism within communities and it doesn't have to be for profit."

As part of the research, Dr Vyas and QUT students have established ShareThat, an online community classifieds service that helps build community through the sharing of goods, services and deals, without any monetary exchange.

And they are also planning a "do and tell" website that encourages users to post simple tasks they need help with, for example borrowing a suit for a job interview. Other users would provide the help if possible and write a short note about the experience aimed at encouraging others.

"A recent Foodbank Hunger Report found there was an 8 per cent increase in the number of people seeking food assistance in 2014. The clients we spoke to were diverse in terms of age, gender and ethnicity and their reasons for seeking support from CommuniFY," Dr Vyas said.

"Services like food relief centres are very valuable and people need to be encouraged to use them, and feel comfortable about using them, when

needed.

"Our research indicates that having a socially inclusive sharing community for people, like ShareThat and Do and Tell, will enable empowerment and alleviate stigma."

More information: More than just food: Field visits to an emergency relief centre. eprints.qut.edu.au/90106/

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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