

The sharing economy

Read about the sharing economy to practise and improve your reading skills.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to facilitate
2. inconsistent
3. underutilised
4. lucrative
5. to make a quick buck
6. to not bother with something
7. consumerist society
8. an asset

Definitions

- a. not used a lot or enough
- b. something you own that has value if sold
- c. to make a process or action easier
- d. to make money quickly
- e. to not want to do something because it's too much trouble
- f. something that can make you a lot of money
- g. something that keeps and is not always the same
- h. a society where people who love owning things and are always buying new goods

Reading text: The sharing economy

If we look around us at the things we have purchased at some point in our lives, we would no doubt notice that not everything we own is being put to good use: the thick woollen coat which we thought looked trendy despite the fact that we live in a tropical country, the smartphone that got put away when we bought ourselves the newest model, the car that only gets used at the weekends, or even the guest room in our house that somehow got turned into a storeroom.

Those underutilised items may seem useless to some, but could be an asset to others. With the advent of the internet, online communities have figured out a way to generate profit from the sharing of those underused assets. Using websites and social media groups that facilitate the buying and selling of second-hand goods, it is now easier than ever for peer-to-peer sharing activities to take place. And this is known as the sharing economy.

These democratised online platforms are providing a chance for people to make a quick buck or two. To give an example, busy parents previously might not have bothered with setting up a stall at the local market or car boot sale to sell their children's old equipment, but with online marketplaces, parents are now able to sell on those hardly worn baby clothes that their

children have outgrown and the expensive pushchairs and baby equipment they have invested in, so as to put some cash back into their pockets.

Businesses have also caught on to the profitability of the sharing economy and are seeking to gain from making use of those underutilised resources. A business model that has rapidly risen in popularity sees companies providing an online platform that puts customers in contact with those who can provide a particular product or service. Companies like Airbnb act as a middleman for people to cash in on their unused rooms and houses and let them out as lucrative accommodation. Another example is Uber, which encourages people to use their own personal cars as taxis to make some extra cash in their free time.

This move towards a sharing economy is not without criticisms. Unlike businesses, unregulated individuals do not have to follow certain regulations and this can lead to poorer and inconsistent quality of goods and services and a higher risk of fraud. Nevertheless, in the consumerist society we live in today, the increased opportunities to sell on our unwanted and underused goods can lead to a lesser impact on our environment.

Tasks

Task 1

Circle the best answer.

1. The sharing economy does not involve ...
 - a. people selling their used things to others.
 - b. people offering their services to others.
 - c. businesses selling their goods to people.
 - d. businesses acting as a middleman for people who want to sell a product and people who want to buy it.

2. People can now sell things more easily because ...
 - a. people nowadays buy more things.
 - b. businesses want to buy the things they don't use.
 - c. there are now more market stalls and car boot sales.
 - d. there are now online platforms where they can meet people who want to buy their goods and services.

3. Parents might want to sell their baby clothes and baby equipment because ...
 - a. they want to make back some of the money some of the money they spent on those baby purchases.
 - b. they don't like the baby items they have bought.
 - c. the baby clothes and equipment are old and worn out.
 - d. they need the money for other investments.

4. Which of these is something that the author says we might underutilise?
- A thick coat in a cold country
 - The latest smartphone
 - Clothes our babies don't or can't wear any more
 - The storeroom in our house
5. It might be a problem for unregulated individuals to sell to others because ...
- they have to follow certain regulations.
 - what they sell might be of a lower quality.
 - they don't have a business licence.
 - they like to criticise their buyers.
6. What might be a good title for this article?
- The consumerist society
 - Parents who need money
 - The rise of the sharing economy
 - Why we buy things we don't need

Task 2

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. We don't always use everything we buy.	True	False
2. By offering our goods and services online, we can make a profit.	True	False
3. Things that are useless to you will also be useless to others.	True	False
4. Businesses have realized that they can make money by buying people's unwanted goods.	True	False
5. Airbnb is a company that sells people's unwanted houses.	True	False
6. The chance to buy other people's unwanted goods can lead to a greener lifestyle.	True	False

Discussion

Do you participate in the sharing economy?