

Spring 5-22-2020

Individual Hosts Vs. Company Hosts on Airbnb: Role of Authenticity and Trust on Consumers' Behavioral Intentions

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Individual Hosts Vs. Company Hosts on Airbnb:
Role of Authenticity and Trust on Consumers' Behavioral Intentions

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Hospitality and Tourism Management

by

Joyce Han

B.S. Louisiana State University, 2018

May, 2020

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Han Chen, my major advisor, for all of her hard work and support that helped me to push through with this research thesis. This work truly would not have been possible without her guidance and patience. I am greatly honored to have you as my professor and a mentor. While working with her, I learned not only specific details about research, but also meaning and reason of doing research. I appreciate Dr. Chen for her time and genuine care throughout the research period. I would also like to extend my thanks to my lovely committee members, Dr. Yvette Green and Dr. Bridget Bordelon for their feedbacks and inspiration in regards to this project. I want to thank my family and friends for continuously motivating me with kind words during struggling moments in this process. I could not have this without each and every one of you.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	vii
Abstract	viii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Background	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Significance of the Study	4
Definition of Key Terms	5
Organization of the Study	6
Chapter 2. Literature Review	8
Authenticity	8
Trust in Hosts	11
Trust and Behavioral Intentions	13
Moderating Effect of Types of Hosts	14
Chapter 3. Methods	19
Sampling and Data Collection	19
Measurement Scales	20
Data Analysis	22
Chapter 4. Results	24
Profile of Respondents	24

Construct Reliability	26
Descriptive Statistics.....	27
Independent Samples t-test	28
Correlation Analysis	29
Regression Analysis.....	31
Chapter 5. Discussion and Implications.....	35
Discussion.....	35
Theoretical Implications	38
Practical Implications.....	39
Limitations and Future Research	42
Conclusion	43
References.....	45
Appendix A: Approved IRB	56
Appendix B: Individual Host Survey.....	58
Appendix C: Company Host Survey.....	67
VITA.....	77

List of Figures

Figure 2.1	18
Figure 4.1	34

List of Tables

Table 3.1	21
Table 4.1	25
Table 4.2	27
Table 4.3	28
Table 4.4	30
Table 4.5	31
Table 4.6	32
Table 4.7	34

Abstract

Airbnb has become a dominant player in the sharing economy. Authenticity is one of Airbnb's fundamental key factor, but recent hospitality studies lack addressing types of hosts and how they compare in terms of different dimensions of authenticity affecting consumers' trust in hosts. The current study identifies two types of Airbnb hosts, individual hosts and company hosts, and aims to examine the role of authenticity and trust in hosts on consumer's intention to revisit and recommend Airbnb. The findings suggest that there exist positive relationships between dimensions of authenticity and trust in hosts and between trust in hosts and behavioral intentions. The relationship between existential authenticity and trust in hosts is strengthened for company hosts than for individual hosts. The study may contribute to P2P literature portfolio in terms of types of hosts and provide implications to both P2P individual hosts and company hosts.

Keywords: P2P accommodations, authenticity, trust, intention to revisit, intention to recommend, Airbnb host

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the past decade, advancements in technology and changes in travel behavior led to the rise of the sharing economy. Massive accommodation market became possible when Airbnb launched its platform in 2008 allowing Peer-to-Peer (P2P) renting (Yale, 2018). Along with Homeaway and VRBO's similar models, Airbnb paved the way for homeowners to easily enter the business of hosting (Ting, 2019). With over 7 million listings worldwide, Airbnb has more than the six largest hotel groups have rooms, combined (Airbnb, 2019). The booming of this specific market challenged traditional hotels like Marriott and inspired competitive startups such as Sonder, Stay Alfred, and Lyric (Ting, 2019).

Airbnb mainly allows individual hosts to rent out residences and provide accommodation services to tourists (Guttentag, 2016). Individual hosts are distinct from corporate-based entities, who provide bedrooms and properties to various types of travelers (Tussyadiah, 2016). Airbnb also allows companies such as Sonder, Lyric, and Domio to provide different properties of apartments or entire homes as accommodations to travelers. The current study refers to these companies as Airbnb company hosts. Compared to individual hosts who independently own and manage the apartments, company hosts lease in commercial or residential buildings, stock up with comfy furnishings, and manage the properties themselves (Clever, 2019; Putzier, 2019). These company hosts are viewed as operators who work through careful partnerships with the landlords for securing inventory (Clever, 2019; Crook, 2019). Company hosts stand in between hotels and individual hosts as a new player in the lodging industry. The two different types of hosts on Airbnb, individual and company, are categorized separately and embody different accommodation characteristics consumers prefer.

Travelers are no longer satisfied with just touristy activities, but rather seek in-depth understanding and interaction with authentic local lifestyles and culture. With the rising demand for more authentic and engaging travel experiences, Airbnb has gained popularity with the authenticity of consumption experience by using real stories, real imagery and interaction between a host and a guest which establish a unique experience (Riordan, 2017). Studies showed that authenticity is a determining trait that the tourists consider in choosing Airbnb stays (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2017; Paulauskaite et al., 2017; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016), leading to higher level of behavioral intentions (Liang et al., 2018; So et al., 2018). Mody and Hanks (2019) proposed the concept of consumption authenticity as a major generator for brand loyalty and brand love in the accommodation brand. The components of consumption authenticity were compared across hotels and Airbnb where each draw upon different sources of authenticity to create brand love (Mody & Hanks, 2019). Related Airbnb studies significantly emphasize that authentic consumption experience is a key factor not only Airbnb should embody, but also traditional hotels should incorporate given the rising dynamics of the accommodations industry (Mody & Hanks, 2019; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). Despite the fact that authenticity plays a contributing role in the accommodation experience, especially for Airbnb, the hospitality literature is scant specifically in terms of distinguishing differences of authenticity impact on the two types of accommodation hosts mentioned.

Perceived trust is confirmed to be a positive indicator for tourists in online purchase intentions (Ponte et al., 2014). Although little is known about the relationship between authenticity and trust in the accommodations sector, Ya-Ping (2019) showed the mediating effects of perceived authenticity between tourists' trust and their intention to revisit and to recommend destinations to others. A study in the context of craft beer concluded that higher

consumers' perception of brand authenticity resulted in higher brand trust (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2017). Furthermore, researchers have found that trust positively influences Airbnb repurchase intentions (Liang et al., 2018) and contribute to consumer loyalty (Erciş et al., 2012; Park et al., 2017; Zboja & Voorhees, 2006).

1.2 Problem Statement

The majority of the studies in hospitality literature only examined P2P accommodation in general without specifying the differences between individual hosts and company hosts, which have distinguishing features from each other. Although company hosts such as Sonder, Lyric and Domio may not have high awareness, many consumers have been exposed to the names as their properties are listed on Airbnb. Their presence continues to grow sufficiently and deserves a closer investigation with potential threats to all existing types of accommodations. Previous studies were mainly conducted in the context of Airbnb focusing on consumer behavioral intentions and motivation (Guttentag & Smith, 2017; Mao & Lyu, 2017; Rimer, 2017). However, no existing research have explored company hosts on Airbnb due to its newly introduced business model.

Although numerous studies discussed the role of authenticity in behavioral intentions of Airbnb (Bucher et al., 2018; Lalicic & Weismayer, 2017; Liang et al., 2018), the hospitality literature lack studies on multiple dimensions of authenticity until Mody et al. (2019) first incorporated the three components (brand authenticity, existential authenticity, and intrapersonal) into their research studies. More research on consumers' consumption authenticity are needed, especially across a variety of moderators (e.g., between different segments of hotels and Airbnb) (Mody et al., 2019; Mody & Hanks, 2019). Moreover, relationship between

authenticity and trust in Airbnb hosts as well as the moderating roles of types of hosts on this specific relationship have never been discussed or researched in the past.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the roles of different components of authenticity (brand authenticity and existential authenticity) on consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts, which may further impact their intention to revisit and intention to recommend. The study also aims to investigate the moderating effect of types of hosts on the relationships between authenticity and trust in hosts. More specifically, the following research questions will be answered:

1. To what extent are there differences in consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity, existential authenticity, trust in hosts and behavioral intentions between Airbnb individual hosts and company hosts?
2. Are brand authenticity and existential authenticity both associated with consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts?
3. Do consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts lead to intentions to revisit and recommend?
4. Are there differences between individual and company hosts on Airbnb in terms of the relationships between brand authenticity and consumers' trust in hosts and between existential authenticity and trust in Airbnb hosts?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Different from most of the existent studies that examined Airbnb as a P2P accommodation platform in general, the current study focuses on specific types of hosts presented on Airbnb and how their authenticity can potentially impact consumers' trust and behavioral intentions. With company hosts introduced as a new business model with the potential

of being the next hospitality generation in the accommodation industry, this study will further fill the gap in the literature of P2P accommodation in terms of specifying company hosts.

Moreover, previous studies have limited their scope to only one dimension of authenticity or generalized the concept of authenticity without classifying. Mody et al. (2019) have identified the role of different dimensions of authenticity on consumer behavior. The current study responds to Mody et al.'s (2019) call for more research on consumption authenticity in the context of Airbnb by investigating the role of multiple dimensions of authenticity in Airbnb experience on consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts. In addition, the study will fill the literature gap by examining the moderating role of types of Airbnb hosts on the relationships between consumers' consumption authenticity and their trust in Airbnb hosts.

The results of this study will provide practical implications to both Airbnb individual hosts and company hosts. More specifically, individual host may draw upon different sources of authenticity compared to company hosts. Depending on the results, the study may provide implications on which dimensions each type of Airbnb hosts should emphasize on and how they will be able to benefit from encouraging more revisit and recommendations. With Airbnb being the main platform of this study, the analysis of the results can be generally applied to all similar P2P platforms including Homeaway and VRBO.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Peer-to-peer Accommodation – allow regular people, who are distinct from typical business entities, to offer hospitality (by renting out their spare bedrooms or unoccupied properties) to their peers (i.e., tourists) (Tussyadiah, 2016).

Individual host – independently own and manage the properties themselves from entire apartments, homes, private rooms, treehouses to castles (Airbnb, 2020).

Company host – lease in commercial or residential buildings, stock up with comfy furnishings, and manage the properties themselves through careful contracted relationships with landlords (Cleaver, 2019; Putzier, 2019).

Brand Authenticity – when a brand is characterized by being original and genuine, perceived as unique and not derivative, and truthful to what it claims to be (Akbar & Wymer, 2017).

Originality – speaks to the brand’s lack of imitation and uniqueness of offering (Akbar & Wymer, 2017).

Genuineness – indicates the degree to which a brand is perceived to be legitimate and undisguised in its claims (Akbar & Wymer, 2017).

Existential Authenticity – rooted in the experiential connections between objects and people that give meaning to the tourists’ experience and allow people to see what things mean, what things can be useful, and how things may be used, and how these objects relate to their sense of self (Heidegger, 1962).

Object Authenticity – determined by the extent to which the tourist experience enables access to objects such as art, architecture, nature, shows, and other parts of the culture (Mody & Hanks, 2019).

Interpersonal Authenticity – revolves around interacting with other people in a natural way, free from the constraints of the existent hierarchies in daily lives (Yi et al., 2016).

1.6 Organization of Study

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the general background of the topic and addresses the problem statement of the study. Purpose and significance of the study are emphasized accordingly. Chapter 1 also includes definition of key terms frequently used in the study. Chapter 2 delivers an extensive review of literature on different variables in this study,

including authenticity, trust in hosts, and behavioral intentions. Hypotheses are developed, and the research framework is presented. Chapter 3 carefully describes the methods part. It speaks to how sampling is decided and how data collection will be conducted. Measurement scales and details on how data will be analyzed are presented in Chapter 3. Followed by methods, results are reported in Chapter 4. The study concludes with discussion and implications in Chapter 5, not only providing both theoretical and practical implications, but also suggesting limitations and future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Authenticity

The concept of authenticity was first introduced by MacCannell (1973) in the travel and tourism sector. Authenticity is viewed as the presence of the original and conventional in tourism (Taylor, 2001). Wang (1999) argues that differentiation of “authenticity of tourist experiences” and “authenticity of toured objects” is crucial, and that nature tourism is an existential authenticity which is an alternative source for authentic experience. In the context of travel, Guttentag (2015) states that tourists’ authenticity often involves a desire to escape from tourist establishments and have personal interaction with the locals. Previous studies suggested that authentic features such as accommodation interior, interactions with the host, and interactions with the local culture are found to be key contributing elements of an authentic experience for the guests (Paulauskaite et al., 2017), which positively impact attitudes towards Airbnb and further enhance the intention to use Airbnb (Liang et al., 2018; Poon & Huang, 2017). Authenticity has increasingly become a widely studied topic as it developed and divided into different dimensions.

Mody and Hanks (2019) argued that consumer’s travel experience is comprised of several components such as encountering objects, interacting with others, creating sense of self and staying at a branded accommodation during the trip. Their study explored how Airbnb and traditional hotel brands are facilitating these components of authentic travel experiences and their impact on brand love and brand loyalty. Due to results indicating that hotels and Airbnb draw upon three different components of authenticity (brand authenticity, existential authenticity, intrapersonal authenticity), Mody and Hanks (2019) have concluded that creating consumers’ brand love may differ from creating consumers’ brand loyalty. A number of academic scholars

has approached existential authenticity as having included the intrapersonal aspects, supporting the idea of self-knowledge, self-identity, and self-realization (Berman, 1970; Kierkegaard, 1985; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Therefore, the current study particularly focuses on the two proposed components of authenticity: branded authenticity and existential authenticity. It aims to correspondingly conduct an assessment of the components of authenticity and compare the impact across individual hosts and company hosts on Airbnb. In the following paragraphs, a review of literature for brand authenticity is presented followed by a review of literature for existential authenticity.

Despite the lack of unifying definition in a variety of literature, brand authenticity refers to “the degree to which a brand is considered original and genuine, meaning it is unique and not derivative, and truthful to what it claims to be” (Akbar & Wymer, 2017). Alexander (2009) states that characteristics of brand authenticity can be based on “original, genuine, and unaffected” associations. In a comprehensive analysis (Akbar & Wymer, 2017), dimensions of originality and genuineness were confirmed to be two key factors in conceptualizing brand authenticity. Originality speaks to a lack of imitation of other brands and the uniqueness of offering and genuineness is established when a brand is perceived to be legitimate and undisguised in its claims (Akbar & Wymer, 2017; Mody & Hanks, 2019). Among various research in the body of authenticity literature, Morhart et al. (2015) found positive effects of different constructs of brand authenticity on emotional brand attachments and positive word-of-mouth. Brand authenticity has become a relevant focus in the discussion as brands like Lego and Patagonia carry out the practice of originality and genuineness in their services. Essentially, both Airbnb individual hosts and company hosts can be considered as a body or entity of operations that consumers set certain expectations for. While company hosts are branding their services whether

the focus is on technology or standardization, individual hosts can also be perceived as a service provider where guests are exposed to the stories specific to the host consuming original and genuine experience during their stay.

The notion of existential authenticity in the tourism context has been discussed by various researchers. The concept of existential authenticity originated in Heidegger's study (1962), which describes it as being experience-oriented. The connections between objects and people give meaning to the tourists' experience and allow people to see what things mean, what things can be useful, and how things may be used (Heidegger, 1962; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). This idea is supported by Brown (2013) who notes that the environment and surroundings of a tourism experience can serve as a catalyst for existential authenticity. Existential authenticity focuses on the surroundings of a travel experience, which includes object authenticity and interpersonal authenticity (Mody & Hanks, 2019). Specifically, in the accommodations sector, object authenticity is determined by the extent to which the tourist experience enables access to the "local" while interpersonal authenticity is formed from relating to other people naturally (Mody & Hanks, 2019; Yi et al., 2017). Object authenticity, as an inclusive measure of existential authenticity, stands as an important concept as people connect with objects such as art, architecture, nature, shows, and other parts of the culture during the travel experience. In addition to object authenticity, interpersonal authenticity revolves around interacting with other people in a natural way, free from the constraints of the existent hierarchies in daily lives (Yi et al., 2016). Tourists tend to seek emotional connection with others through the interactions in which they are able to create a new level of authenticity (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). This is particularly applicable to Airbnb experience as it embodies a highly social element in its platform.

2.2 Trust in Hosts

The notion of trust has been studied extensively by researchers in a variety of disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics, management and marketing. Trust refers to “an individual’s belief in, and willingness to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another” (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000). Barber (1983) suggests that trust is based on social exchanges that creates an expectation of the persistence and fulfillment of the social order, an expectation of the competent role performance from those involved, and an expectation that partners in social interactions will carry out their obligations and responsibilities. Trust is centered on moral duties that essentially forms the expectations of all parties involved in the service system, implying that the hosts and the company behind the online platform (e.g., Airbnb) will act competently and dutifully (Tussyadiah & Park, 2018). In the context of sharing economy, Coleman (1988, 1990) argued that, if someone does something for someone else, trust refers to the expectation and obligation that the exchange is reciprocated in the future. Due to specific features in the form of sharing economy exchange, building and maintaining trust can embody a very complicated association. For example, transactions among peers on Airbnb not only involve an online coordination but also an offline interactive component, which is staying at someone else’s apartment or having a conversation with someone else about a destination (Hawlitschek et al., 2016; Möhlmann, 2016). This study adapts the previously mentioned definition of trust as the extent to which an Airbnb consumer displays a tendency to be willing to trust different types of Airbnb hosts.

The relationship between brand authenticity and trust has been specified on brands in past studies. Ya-Ping (2019) indicated a positive correlation between perceived authenticity and tourists’ trust. When consumers perceive a higher level of brand authenticity, they are likely to

have higher level of brand trust (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2017). Coary (2013) also investigated the relationship between brand authenticity and brand trust and confirmed that brand trust mediates the effects of authenticity on attitudes towards a brand. Participants with higher perception of authenticity resulted in significantly higher perception of brand trust than those with lower perception of authenticity (Coary, 2013). Other studies also have shown brand authenticity to have a strong correlation with brand trust (Eggers et al., 2013; Schallehn et al., 2014). Therefore, these findings suggest that consumer perception of brand authenticity are highly associated with consumers' trust in the brand. As both individual hosts and company hosts on Airbnb can be considered as a body or entity of operations that consumers set certain expectations for, brand authenticity will be positively related to consumers' trust in both types of Airbnb hosts. We proposed the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand authenticity is positively associated with consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts.

Existential authenticity revolves around contact and interaction with the "local". Given existential authenticity's experience-oriented and interactive component, a body of research speaks to this dimension being the center of Airbnb experience (Guttentag, 2015; Lalicic & Weismayer, 2017). Recent studies have shown that existential authenticity can influence tourists' behavior. Kolar and Zabkar (2010) and Bryce et al. (2015) concluded that existential authenticity positively influences tourist loyalty. Moreover, Jiang et al. (2016) confirmed that existential authenticity is positively correlated with place attachment which implied that it is necessary to emphasize the experiential authenticity of a destination. Tourists tend to encounter interaction throughout every step of the travel process, including places they stay at a certain destination. Regarding tourism activities, Steiner and Reisinger (2006) state that tourists seek emotional connection with others through interaction. Additionally, customer's trust toward a firm is

identified to be a critical predictor of emotional attachment (Vlachos et al., 2010). In the context of Airbnb in which existential authenticity is dominantly being practiced, trust in Airbnb hosts was found to have a positive impact on consumers' repurchase intention (Liang et al., 2018). Because trust involves expectations of parties engaged in the service and interactive components in the context of sharing economy, the understanding of existential authenticity may be associated with trust in Airbnb hosts.

H2: Existential authenticity is positively associated with consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts.

2.3 Trust and Behavioral Intentions

Previous findings support trust as a very important factor in predicting behavioral intentions in an online environment (Fang et al., 2014; Wen et al., 2011). According to the Trust-Based Marketing Theory, practitioners should engage in trustworthy dialogue and provide unbiased information to build relationships with customers. Trust factor has been studied in a variety of disciplines, especially in the lodging industry. Loyalty was proven to be affected by trust on consumers of hotels through social media marketing (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğan, 2016). In a study conducted on upscale hotels, consumers' trust has found to have an impact on their revisit intentions (Kim et al., 2009). This finding is consistent with results from Kim et al. (2001) and Sadeghi et al. (2016) which suggested positive relationship between trust and revisit intentions. Guests with deeper trust in hotels will have higher levels of commitment and be more likely to return to the hotel along with spreading positive word of mouth (Kim et al., 2001). Customer satisfaction and trust that are positively affected by perceived service quality indicated positive and direct relation to intention to revisit the hotel (Sadeghi et al., 2016). In the context of green hotels, Chen et al. (2018) also underscore trust as an important factor in stimulating

customer's revisit intentions. Moreover, Liang et al. (2018) have determined that trust plays a significant role in customer repurchase intentions of Airbnb. Urban (2003) suggests that practitioner can build customer trust through being open and honest which will further develop a loyal customer base. Therefore, if the service provider stays true to the quality of the authentic experience and discloses information consistent with the lodging environment, this would lead to higher trust and consequently higher intention to recommend and revisit the Airbnb hosts.

H3: Trust in host is positively associated with consumers' intention to recommend the Airbnb host.

H4: Trust in host is positively associated with consumers' intention to revisit the Airbnb host.

2.4 Moderating Effect of Types of Host

Although there are a number of studies that have looked into customer experience and behavioral intentions of Airbnb (e.g. Guttentag et al., 2018; Poon & Huang, 2017), specific types of hosts on Airbnb platform in terms of operational models have not been distinctively investigated. With the uprising trend of sharing economy and increasing use of Airbnb, various companies have also established businesses of shared workspaces, shared rides, shared parking, and shared apartments. However, the Airbnb platform has evolved tremendously with continuous improvements to service and widen Airbnb's customer base (Guttentag & Smith, 2017). Consequently, Airbnb has allowed professional hospitality businesses that provide different property types including serviced apartments to present their listings. For example, Sonder has been introduced as a new unicorn in the hospitality industry by offering apartment-styled units that provide consistent service of a hotel (Carson, 2019). With a vision of high technology embedded in their operations, Sonder has raised \$225 million so far with 3,000 live units across

26 locations (Carson, 2019). Other competitors like Domio and Lyric follow similar models providing the comfort of a home with modern design, full amenities, and 24/7 customer support. Airbnb has adapted to embrace the diverse demand of customers by welcoming listings of corporate-based entities as hospitality businesses in addition to the original individual hosts. The company hosts are branded short-term rental companies that differentiate themselves from both hotels and owner-hosted units which can be quirky and erratic (Clever, 2019). These company hosts are growing with the focus on app-driven technology, simple and modern yet thoughtfully designed spaces, and consistent customer service which make up distinguishable features from the individual hosts. Therefore, this study further aims to examine the moderating effects of types of hosts between authenticity and consumers' trust.

Brand authenticity has been thoroughly studied in terms of its antecedents and consequences (e.g. Fritz et al., 2017). As opposed to individual hosts who can vary across the board and are more focused on in-person interactive components, company hosts like Sonder and Lyric are focused on standardizing their brand image with the consistency in their services like the hotels. Brand name can trigger a certain image or promise to the consumer as it is perceived unique to a particular brand (Mody et al., 2018). Additionally, Mody et al. (2018) confirmed that for hotel guests, a high level of brand authenticity led to higher brand love, which subsequently resulted in brand loyalty. According to a study by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), brand loyalty derives from greater trust in the brand reliability, meaning brands high in consumer trust and affect are linked through behavioral brand loyalty. As hotel brands market themselves as providing a standardized, consistent accommodation designed to engage consumers with a particular brand (Back & Parks, 2003), the company hosts with the vision of being the next

hospitality leader can be viewed as following the steps of traditional hotels in building a brand name and image.

As for the individual hosts who represents the traditional P2P accommodation model, personal branding comes with storytelling displayed on social media. Clement (2019) claims that stories of silly Superhost on Airbnb, other hosts' one-of-a-kind home, heartwarming stories of the community all contribute to making individual hosts' image. However, individual hosts' personal branding may not be as strong as company hosts in building brand image since they are small, independent entities that essentially belong to the brand of Airbnb. Guests will be likely to associate their stay with Airbnb rather than the individual hosts when booking on Airbnb platform whereas company hosts identify themselves as a distinctive brand with an image that differentiate themselves from Airbnb and hotels. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H5: Types of host will moderate the positive relationship between brand authenticity and consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts so that the relationship will be stronger for company hosts than for individual hosts.

Travelers are able to have direct interactions with hosts (local residents) and to interact with local communities by using P2P accommodations (Guttentag, 2015). With Airbnb introducing the original P2P accommodation business model, the hosts offering characteristics described above have dominated the Airbnb market. Lalicic and Weismayer (2017) argued that existential authenticity was perceived as a way to understand and experience local life and culture. Hosts' assurance and responsiveness as well as warm and welcoming were discovered to be most effective aspects for consumers to experience Airbnb's authentic feelings (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2017). Moreover, staying at an Airbnb facilitate an authentic experience between the traveler, relevant objects, and others in the environment (Mody et al., 2018). As these

characteristics have originated in and maintained by individual hosts on Airbnb platform, existential authenticity indicating “living the local life culture” serves as an important motivation in choosing individual hosts, the traditional form of P2P accommodation, over company hosts. This is due to company hosts like Sonder and Lyric are lacking the physical interaction with the guests. The operation of company hosts practices self check-in and online communication unless major issues or requests occur during their stay. Accordingly, existential authenticity which embodies the local component will not show significance in trust in company hosts. In the context of Airbnb, existential authenticity further contributes to consumer brand loyalty and serves as an indicator for better understanding satisfaction and loyalty (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2017; Mody et al., 2018).

H6: Types of host will moderate the positive relationship between existential authenticity and consumers’ trust in Airbnb hosts so that the relationship will be stronger for individual hosts than for company hosts.

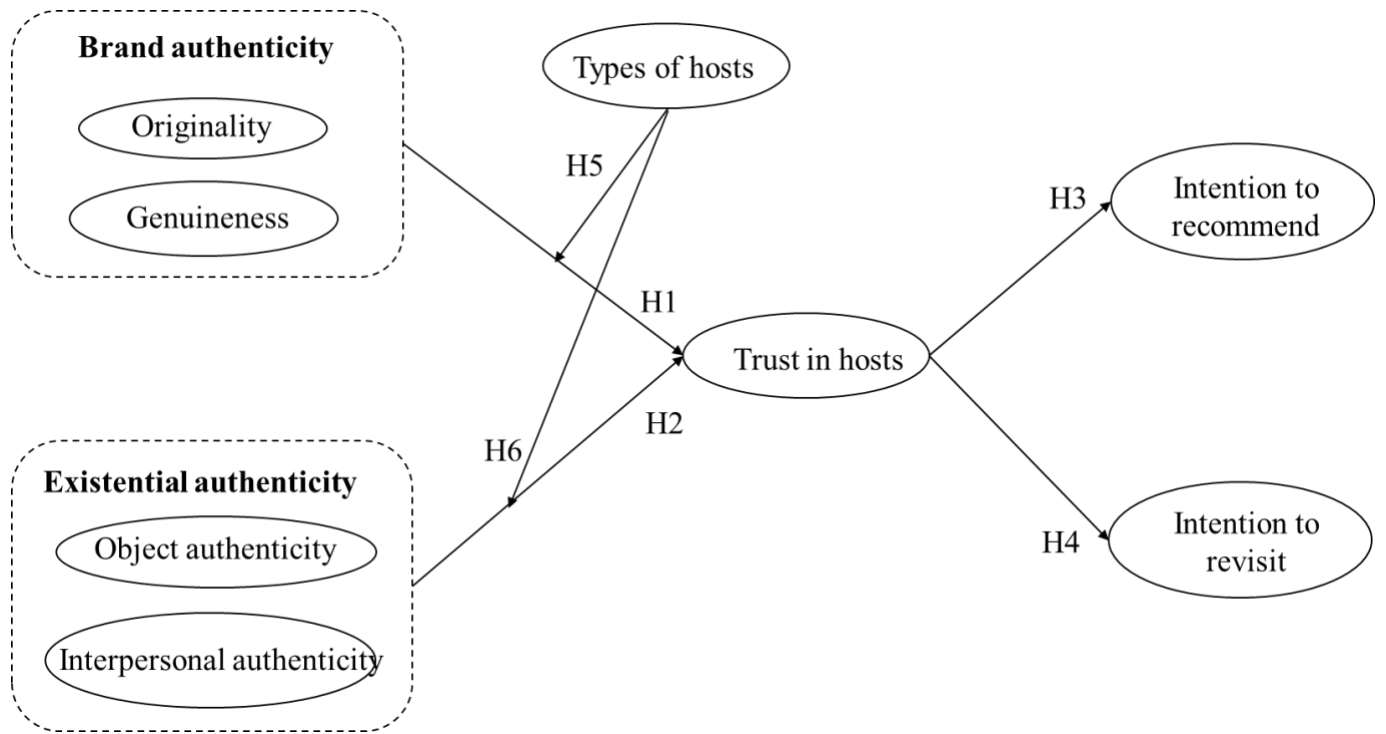


Figure 2.1 Proposed research model

Chapter 3 Methods

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

The research employed a sample of U.S. consumers who have stayed at an Airbnb for leisure purposes during the past 12 months. Leisure travelers were selected because they choose Airbnb for primary reasons such as price, location, and home-like environment which were found to be in relation with authenticity (Jang, 2019). The researcher obtained IRB approval for data collection in December 2019. A self-report online survey prepared via Qualtrics was posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk) for data collection in January 2020. Amazon Mturk is a crowd-sourcing platform in which tasks, known as hits, are allocated to a population of unidentified workers for completion in exchange for compensation (Downs, 2018).

The survey started with a screening question asking if participants have stayed at an Airbnb for leisure purposes during the past 12 months. People who answered “No” were automatically taken to the end of the survey. Participants were asked to indicate if their most recent experience with Airbnb has been with an individual host or a company host. A brief description and examples of individual hosts and company hosts were provided to the participants for clarification. Participants were then instructed to recall their most recent experience with Airbnb for leisure purpose and complete the survey based on that experience. Several attention check questions were incorporated in the survey to ensure the quality of the responses. For example, participants were asked to select a certain number choice to indicate that they are reading the questions thoroughly. Those who failed the attention check questions were removed from data analysis. The participants were compensated for completing the survey which would go through Amazon Mturk.

3.2 Measurement Scales

The survey of this study consists of two parts. Part one of the survey consists of brand authenticity, existential authenticity, trusts in hosts, intention to revisit and intention to recommend. The measurement scales for all constructs are based on previously validated scales and were modified to fit into this study. Brand authenticity is measured by a scale consisting of 9 items which is adopted from Akbar and Wymer (2017). A sample item includes “This Airbnb host is pioneer” and “This Airbnb host is unpretentious”. Existential authenticity is measured by a scale consisting of 2 items from Lalicic and Weismayer (2017), 2 items from Ramkissoon and Uysal (2011), and 3 items from Yi et al. (2016) including object and interpersonal authenticity. Sample items include “Staying at this Airbnb helped me understand local culture” and “Staying at this Airbnb helped me experience local life”.

Measurement of trust in host is based on a scale consisting of 5 items from Liang et al. (2018). Example questions are “I think the host was honest” “I think the host cared about their customers” “I believe the host was trustworthy”. Scale of two items for intention to revisit is adopted from Mattila (2001) and Maxham III and Netemeyer (2002). Scale of two items for intention to recommend is adopted from Mattila (2001) and Wong and Sohal (2002). Questions for intention to revisit are “For my next trip, I will consider this Airbnb host as my first choice, rather than other Airbnb space” and “I have a strong intention to stay with this Airbnb host again in the future”. Questions for intention to recommend are “I would recommend this Airbnb host to other people” and “I would tell other people positive things about this Airbnb host”. All scales were measured using seven-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Part two of the survey consists of demographic information such as gender, age, ethnicity, and educational level. Please see Table 3.1 for a complete list of measurement scales used in the current study.

Table 3.1 Measurement items of the constructs

Constructs	Measurement items	References
Brand Authenticity	Pioneer	<i>Akbar & Wymer (2017)</i>
	Innovative	
	Unique	
	Unpretentious	
	Sincere	
	Real	
	Honest	
	Undisguised	
Existential Authenticity	Understand local culture	<i>Lalicic and Weismayer, (2017); Ramkissoon and Uysal (2011); Yi et al. (2016)</i>
	Experience local life	
	Experience the local community	
	Interact with the local community	
	Authentic contact with local people	
	Authentic contact with members of travel group	
	Authentic contact with members outside of travel group	

Trust in Hosts	I think the host was honest I think the host cared about their customers I believe the host was consistent in quality and service I believe the host was trustworthy I believe the host was dependable	<i>Liang et al. (2018)</i>
Intention to Recommend	I would recommend this host to other people I would tell other people positive things about this host	<i>Mattila (2001); Wong & Sohal (2002)</i>
Intention to Revisit	I consider this host as my first choice compared to other hotels I have a strong intention to visit this host again	<i>Mattila (2001); Maxham III & Netemeyer (2002)</i>

3.3 Data Analysis

The research used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 23.0 to analyze the collected data. Descriptive analysis was used to provide a brief summary of the samples, including the demographic information. Reliability analysis was used to test the internal consistency of the measurement scales. Independent t-test was conducted to determine whether there were significant differences in perceived brand authenticity, existential authenticity, trust in Airbnb hosts and behavioral intentions between individual hosts and company hosts (Research Question

1). Pearson correlation was conducted to assess the relationships between brand authenticity, existential authenticity, trust in hosts, intention to revisit and intention to recommend (H1 to H4). Furthermore, hierarchical multiple regression was used to examine the moderating effect of types of hosts on the relationship between brand authenticity, existential authenticity, and trust in hosts (H5 to H6).

Chapter 4 Results

4.1 Profile of Respondents

This study obtained a total of 429 responses. Rushed answers and responses that failed the attention check questions were deleted from the analysis. As a result, 388 out of 429 responses were usable. Out of the 388 participants, 220 were male participants (56.7%) and 168 were female participants (43.3%). Most participants were within the ages of 25 – 34 (n=182, 46.9%) followed by ages of 35 – 44 (n=102, 26.3%). Most frequent ethnicity was white comprising 294 of the sample (75.8%). The majority of the participants have obtained a bachelor's degree (n=192, 49.5%) and earned household income of \$50,000 - \$74,999 (n=163, 42%). More participants stayed with individual host (n=209, 53.9%) than company host (n=179, 46.1%). On their most recent stay with Airbnb, a total of 29.1% (n=113) paid \$51-\$100 per night and a total of 29.1% (n=113) paid \$101-\$150 per night.

More than one third of the participants who have stayed with individual hosts (n=72, 34.4%) paid \$51 – \$100 for their most recent stay on Airbnb. About thirty percent of the participants who have stayed company hosts (n=54, 30.2%) paid \$101 - \$150 for their most recent stay on Airbnb. For recent stays with individual hosts, there were more male participants than female (n=120, 57.4%). There were also more male participants than female for recent stays with company hosts (n=100, 55.9%). Out of the 179 participants who have stayed with company hosts, 98.9% of the participants (n=177) indicated that they would consider booking directly on the company host website in the future if it has its own website for booking. One of the two participants, who indicated they would not consider booking directly on the website, explained that he or she likes seeing the competition on Airbnb site. The other participant claimed that he or she probably can find better deals on other websites than on the company host website. Some

of the company hosts the participants have stayed with on their most recent stay on Airbnb are Lyric (n=58, 32.4%), Sonder (n=37, 20.7%), Stay Alfred (n=31, 17.3%), Domio (n=27, 15.1%), and The Guilde (n=23, 12.8%). Demographic information collected from the respondents are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Demographic Information

	Individual Host (n=209)		Company Host (n=179)	
	frequency	%	frequency	%
Gender				
Male	120	57.4	100	55.9
Female	89	42.6	79	44.1
Age				
18-24	30	14.4	14	8.0
25-34	86	41.1	96	54.9
35-44	57	27.3	45	25.7
45-54	24	11.5	14	8.0
≥55	11	5.3	6	3.4
Ethnicity				
White	156	74.6	138	77.1
Black or African American	21	10.0	17	9.5
American Indian or Alaska Native	5	2.4	7	3.9

Asian	19	9.1	14	7.8
Other	8	3.8	3	1.7
Education				
High school or equivalent	46	22.0	15	8.4
Associate degree	18	8.6	11	6.1
Bachelor's degree	96	45.9	96	53.6
Graduate degree	48	23.0	57	31.8
Other	1	0.5	--	
Income				
< \$25,000	20	9.6	10	5.6
\$25,000 to \$49,999	50	23.9	43	24.0
\$50,000 to \$74,999	78	37.3	85	47.5
\$75,000 to \$99,999	39	18.7	31	17.3
≥\$100,000	22	10.5	10	5.6

4.2 Construct Reliability

The reliability analysis of the measurement items was conducted using the Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the scales. The alpha value for brand authenticity reported .81 followed by existential authenticity with .87 (see Table 4.2). Trust in hosts reported an alpha value of .86. Intention to revisit has an alpha value of .76 while intention to recommend

has an alpha value of .71. All reported values exceeded the .70 cutoff point (Hair et al., 1998), indicating good internal consistency.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

The overall mean scores and descriptive statistics for each variable were computed to have a better understanding of how consumers perceived Airbnb hosts' brand authenticity, existential authenticity, their trust in hosts, and their intention to recommend and revisit. The respondents perceive Airbnb host to have a moderately high level of brand authenticity (M=5.49, SD=.80) and existential authenticity (M=5.52, SD=.85). The respondents generally trust in the Airbnb hosts (M=5.89, SD=.77). Their intention to revisit had the highest mean score (M=5.92, SD=.90) and their intention to recommend was moderately high (M=5.52, SD=1.01). This indicates that the respondents had a relatively high level of behavioral intentions. Existential authenticity had a slightly higher mean (M=5.52, SD=.85) than brand authenticity (M=5.49, SD=.80) which implies that the respondents acquire higher perception of existential authenticity for Airbnb hosts. Intention to revisit had a higher mean which shows that respondents had higher level of revisit intentions (M=5.92, SD=.90) than recommend intentions (M=5.52, SD=1.01). Standard deviation was the highest in intention to recommend (SD=1.01) implying more variance in the ratings.

Table 4.2 Mean, Standard Deviations, and Reliability (N=388)

Measure	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand authenticity	5.49	.80	.81
Existential authenticity	5.52	.85	.87
Trust in hosts	5.89	.77	.86

Intention to revisit	5.92	.90	.76
Intention to recommend	5.52	1.01	.71

4.3 Independent Samples t-test

An independent samples t-test was conducted to answer Research Question 1 and to compare the means of the participants' answers from individual hosts and company hosts (Table 4.3). It is important to note that although not statistically significant, both brand authenticity and existential authenticity scored higher means on company hosts than individual hosts. Consumers perceived a higher level of brand authenticity for company host (M= 5.54, SD=.83) compared to individual host (M=5.45, SD=.78), $t(386) = -1.19, p > .05$. Similarly, consumers perceived a higher level of existential authenticity for company host (M=5.62, SD=.83) compared to individual host (M=5.44, SD =.87), $t(386) = -2.08, p > .05$. It can be implied that consumers exhibited a higher level of trust in individual host (M= 5.98, SD=.80) than for company host (M=5.80, SD=.73), $t(386) = 2.30, p > .05$. Moreover, there is a statistically significant difference in consumers' intention to recommend Airbnb between individual hosts and company hosts. Results indicated that participants who stayed with company hosts (M=5.65, SD=.84) had a significantly higher level of intention to recommend than those who stayed with individual hosts (M=5.40 SD=1.12), $t(386) = 2.30, p < .01$. However, there is no statistically significant difference in consumers' intention to revisit Airbnb between individual hosts and company hosts. Although the comparison came out to be not significant, participants who stayed with individual host (M=5.99, SD=.97) had a higher intention to revisit the host than those who stayed with company host (M=5.84, SD=.82), $t(386) = 1.62, p > .05$.

Table 4.3 Independent Sample t-Test Individual Host vs. Company Host (N=388)

Variable	Individual Host (n=209)		Company Host (n=179)		t	df
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
BA	5.45	.78	5.54	.83	-1.19	386
EA	5.44	.87	5.62	.83	-2.08	386
TAH	5.98	.80	5.80	.73	2.30	386
IR	5.40	1.12	5.65	.84	-2.45**	386
IV	5.99	.97	5.84	.82	1.62	386

Note: BA – brand authenticity; EA – existential authenticity; TAH – trust in Airbnb host; IR – intention to recommend; IV – intention to revisit

** $p < .01$

4.4 Correlation Analysis

As shown in Table 4.4, Pearson correlation analyses were used to illustrate correlations between brand authenticity, existential authenticity, trust in hosts and future behavioral intentions as indicated by “intention to recommend” and “intention to revisit” for participants. Brand authenticity was significantly correlated with trust in hosts ($r = 0.51, p < .01$), therefore, hypothesis 1 is supported. Existential authenticity was also positively associated with trust in Airbnb hosts ($r = 0.47, p < .01$), hypothesis 2 is supported. It can be concluded that brand authenticity has a stronger correlation with trust in Airbnb hosts than existential authenticity. Furthermore, trust in Airbnb hosts had a positive relationship with intention to recommend ($r =$

0.55, $p < .01$), supporting hypothesis 3. Trust in Airbnb hosts was positively correlated with intention to revisit ($r = 0.73$, $p < .01$), also supporting hypothesis 4. Intention to recommend was less significantly influenced by trust in Airbnb hosts compared to intention to revisit.

Given the results indicating all hypotheses are supported, there exist positive relationships between both types of authenticity and consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts and between trust in hosts and consumers' behavioral intentions. It can be suggested that for combined results of individual and company hosts, brand authenticity and existential authenticity are positively associated with consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts, meaning higher the perception of authenticity they have towards the hosts, higher the level of trust in the hosts. The consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts is significantly positively correlated with intention to recommend and intention to revisit the hosts. The more consumers trust in the Airbnb host they have stayed with, higher the chance that they would recommend the host to others and stay with the same Airbnb host in the future.

Table 4.4 Pearson Correlation Coefficients (N=388)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1 Brand authenticity	1				
2 Existential authenticity	.53**	1			
3 Trust in hosts	.51**	.47**	1		
4 Intention to revisit	.42**	.42**	.73**	1	
5 Intention to recommend	.45**	.511**	.55**	.57**	1

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

4.5 Regression Analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the moderation hypotheses 5 and 6. Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) suggestion, the main effects of the predictors (Brand Authenticity and Existential Authenticity) and the hypothesized moderator (Host type) in each test were standardized before determining the moderating effect of host type on the predictor-outcome association.

For hypothesis 5 testing, brand authenticity (BA) and host type were standardized before multiplying to create the interaction terms. Average daily rate (ADR) paid for the stay was controlled for the analysis and was entered into the equation in the first step. BA and host type were entered into the equation in step 2. Afterwards, the interaction term (BA \times host type) was entered in the last step. Table 4.5 shows the regression analyses for the moderation effect of host type on the relationship between brand authenticity and trust in Airbnb hosts. The interaction of BA and host type did not have a significant effect on consumers' trust in hosts ($\beta=.04, p > .05$), not supporting hypothesis 5.

Table 4.5 Moderation test results (N=388)

Variables	Trust in Hosts
Step 1	
ADR	-.10
R ²	.03*
Step 2	
BA	.41**
Host Type	-.09*

ΔR_2	.29**
Step 3	
BA \times Host Type	.04
ΔR_2	.003
F	94.46*
Total R ₂	.32

Similarly, existential authenticity (EA) and host type were standardized before multiplying to create the interaction terms for the test of hypothesis 6. ADR paid for the stay was controlled for the analysis and was entered into the equation in the first step. EA and host type were then entered into the equation in step 2. Afterwards, the interaction term (EA \times host type) was entered in step 3. Table 4.6 indicated that the interaction of EA and host type was significant for trust in hosts ($\beta=.10, p < .05$). The interaction added significant incremental variance of trust in hosts ($\Delta R_2=.02, p < .05$).

Table 4.6 Moderation test results (N=388)

Variables	Trust in Hosts
Step 1	
ADR	-.10
R ₂	.03*
Step 2	
EA	.38**
Host Type	-.11*

ΔR_2	.25**
Step 3	
EA \times Host Type	.10*
ΔR_2	.02*
F	84.55*
Total R ₂	.29

To better understand the interaction effects, trust in hosts scores were plotted at combination of the mean ± 1 SD (high and low levels) for both EA and host type. The plot demonstrates that the effect of EA on trust in hosts was positive for consumers stayed both with individual hosts and company hosts (Figure 4.1). The positive relationship between EA and trust in hosts was strengthened for consumers who stayed with company hosts than for individual hosts, contradicting the hypothesized direction. Hence, hypothesis 6 was not supported. Table 4.7 summarizes the results of hypotheses testing.

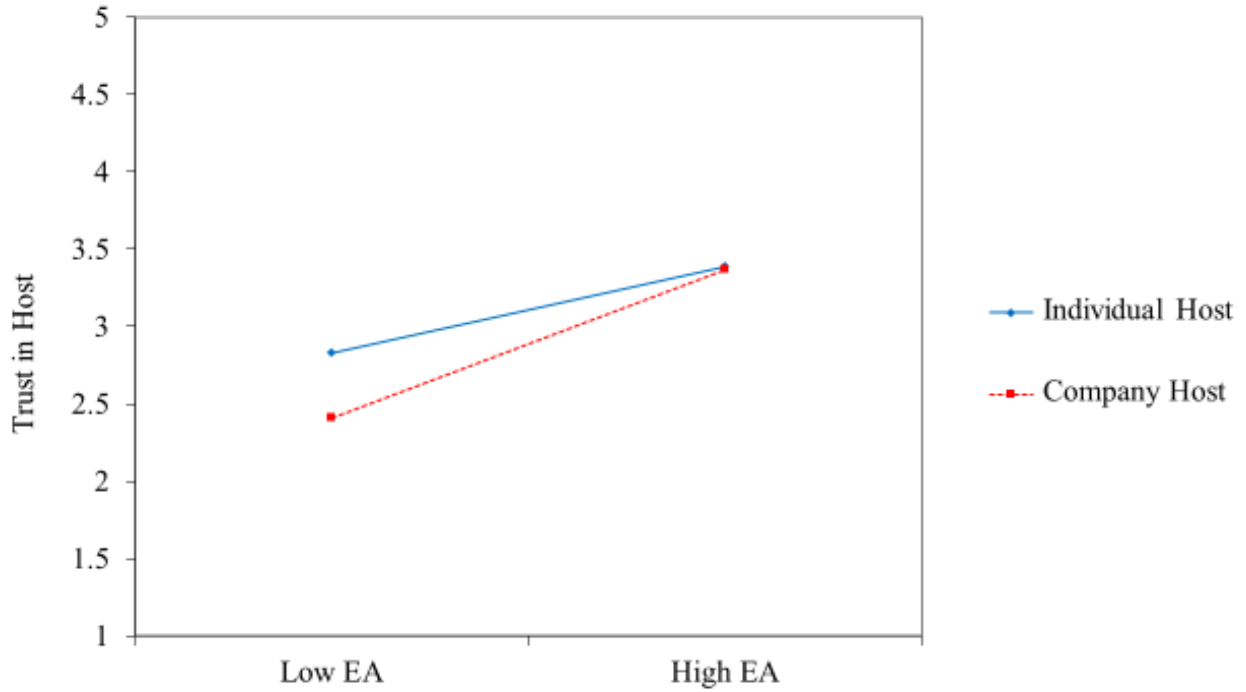


Figure 4.1 Effect of existential authenticity and host type on trust in hosts

Table 4.7 Hypotheses Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Brand Authenticity → Trust in Hosts	Supported
H2: Existential Authenticity → Trust in Hosts	Supported
H3: Trust in Hosts → Intention to Recommend	Supported
H4: Trust in Hosts → Intention to Revisit	Supported
H5: Moderation effect on Brand Authenticity → Trust in Hosts	Not Supported
H6: Moderation effect on Existential Authenticity → Trust in Hosts	Not Supported

Chapter 5 Discussion and Implications

5.1 Discussion

The concept of authenticity has been thoroughly studied in the tourism context, especially in the accommodation industry. However, scarce research exists examining different dimensions of authenticity and focusing on specific types of hosts presented on Airbnb. First, this study aimed to investigate the effects of different dimensions of authenticity on trust in Airbnb hosts and further the impacts on the behavioral intentions. More importantly, this study differentiated two types of Airbnb hosts and how they moderate the relationship between authenticity and trust in Airbnb hosts. In response to the first research question that was asked in the beginning of the study, there are slight differences in participants' perceptions of studied variables between Airbnb individual hosts and company hosts. Results show there exists a significant difference between two types of hosts only in consumers' intention to recommend. Guests who have stayed with company hosts showed higher level of intention to recommend than guests who have stayed with individual hosts. Since company hosts are more likely to have locations in other cities compared to individual hosts who are likely to own one or few properties limited to one city, guests may perceive company hosts as an entity worthwhile and impactful to recommend to other potential guests. In addition, company hosts may have convenient built-in system for guests to recommend whether it is just through one-click survey or inviting friends via app or email. Although Airbnb platform enables the review system on both types of hosts, company hosts who are dedicated to branding and increasing sales may be more likely to separately practice this marketing better than individual hosts.

Regarding Hypothesis 1, it has been predicted that brand authenticity would be positively associated with consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts. The results supported the positive relationship

between brand authenticity and consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts. We proffer that this aspect of results may have occurred due to the nature of Airbnb hosts setting a certain image through their services. Both individual and company hosts on Airbnb can be perceived as a provider of authentic services consumers set certain expectations for. It would be natural for guests to determine if the host was carrying out original and genuine practices while providing the services that the guests had a certain level of expectations for. As Morhart et al. (2015) confirmed brand authenticity's positive association with emotional brand attachments, consumers may trust the Airbnb hosts as they perceive higher level of brand authenticity in that host. The findings are strengthened by previous studies that demonstrated consumer perception of brand authenticity is highly associated with consumers' trust in the brand (Coary, 2013; Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2017).

Hypothesis 2 assumes that existential authenticity is positively associated with consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts. It was found that existential authenticity is also positively related to trust in Airbnb hosts. As consumers perceive a higher level of existential authenticity, it will be more likely for consumers to build trust in Airbnb hosts that they have chosen. One reasoning for this finding could be emotional connection being key behind the trust factor (Vlachos et al., 2010). Tourists continue to encounter interaction with the local aspects and seek emotional connection during their travel experience (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Given the underlying factor that existential authenticity revolves around object and interpersonal components, Airbnb guests develop emotional attachment throughout the interactive experience further leading into trust toward the host.

It has been hypothesized that trust in Airbnb hosts is positively associated with intention to recommend and intention to revisit. The results regarding the two relationships are significant,

thus supporting hypothesis 3 and 4. As mentioned before, trust has been verified to be a crucial factor in predicting behavioral intentions (Fang et al., 2014; Wen et al., 2011). Numerous findings support that there exists a positive relationship between trust and revisit intentions at hotel settings (Kim et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2009; Sadeghi et al., 2016). Especially in the context of sharing economy, the level of support can be strengthened by a previous study by Liang et al. (2018) which confirmed trust to be a significant indicator of repurchase intentions of Airbnb. The findings suggest that guests who trust the selected Airbnb hosts are likely to have intentions of recommending or revisiting the host in the future.

Moderation was used to examine two different types of hosts on Airbnb in this study, individual and company hosts. It has been hypothesized that the type of host will moderate the relationship between brand authenticity and consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts so that the relationship will be stronger for company hosts than for individual hosts. However, this prediction was not supported according to the results. The interaction of brand authenticity and host type did not have a significant effect on consumers' trust in hosts, meaning strength of the relationship between brand authenticity and trust in hosts does not vary on different types of host. One reasoning behind this could be that consumers may picture Airbnb as a whole brand rather than identifying different types of hosts on Airbnb. Airbnb's efforts did not stop on just being a travel platform but were extended to building a strong brand. Given the resources from the hosts and experiences of the guests, Airbnb's essence of humanity created strong and emotional brand associations planting such image in the forefront of the consumers' minds. Since there is variation in the services each type of host provides, consumers may tend to perceive each host differently and set personal expectations for each one, regardless of individual or company hosts. Although company hosts are definitely stepping up their game on

standardizing the services and building brand image, consumers are mostly exposed to those company hosts on OTA platforms, Airbnb being the main one. Hence, it would be reasonable for consumers to link their experiences with Airbnb rather than the company hosts.

Moderating effect of types of hosts was also applied to the relationship between existential authenticity and trust in Airbnb hosts. Hypothesis 6 predicts that types of hosts will moderate the relationship between existential authenticity and consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts so that the relationship will be stronger for individual hosts than for company hosts. The results did not support this hypothesis. However, it did indicate that the positive relationship between existential authenticity and trust in hosts was strengthened for consumers who stayed with company hosts than for individual hosts. This may be due to company hosts being proactive on providing recommendations of what to see and eat around the destination right on their website and their app. Company hosts are conducting practices such as suggesting guests to download their own company apps, fill out pre-stay surveys, place guest requests on certain items. The interaction between the host and the guest has gone beyond the platform of Airbnb encouraging the guests to use the company apps which not only increases brand awareness, but also enhancing the interpersonal aspect of the experience. Meanwhile, Airbnb individual hosts may be reactive in terms of putting existential and experiential aspect in place since they are responding to the guests' needs through single platform that may have limitations on creative technology.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The findings of the study make a significant contribution to the peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation literature in terms of identifying different types of hosts. In contrast to the mainstream lodging literature, the P2P accommodation research in hospitality is limited to

Airbnb in general and its comparison with hotels or other platforms (Guttentag, 2017; Mittendorf, 2016; Mody et al., 2019; Yannopoulou, 2013). The current study fills the gap by identifying two different types of hosts on Airbnb, individual and company hosts, and how they could moderate the relationship between consumers' perceived authenticity and trust in host. It is crucial to point out that the current study was among one of the first to assess company hosts and their authenticity. Secondly, the study expands current knowledge of P2P accommodation with the investigation of existential authenticity, brand authenticity and their association with trust in hosts, which responds to the call for more research on consumption authenticity by Mody and Hanks (2019). The study confirms the positive relationship between brand authenticity and consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts and between existential authenticity and consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts. In addition, the results from the moderating role of types of hosts provide a contribution. This study particularly focused on determining which type of relationship would be strengthened for which type of host. The findings suggested that stronger relationship occurred between existential authenticity and trust in hosts for company hosts than for individual hosts. The present study advances the understanding of moderation in terms of types of Airbnb hosts on the relationship between authenticity and trust.

5.3 Practical Implications

Authenticity and its different dimensions are found to be underlying factors that lead to consumers' trust in Airbnb hosts. Since the essence of authenticity is consumer-based and subjective, understanding what consumers look for in experiential travel and meeting their needs will be critical in today's dynamic marketing environment (Oates, 2014). The findings indicate that brand authenticity and existential authenticity each have a positive association with trust in Airbnb hosts. Individual and company hosts on Airbnb should incorporate these authentic

measures into marketing and consumer experiences to build trusting relationship with consumers.

In terms of brand authenticity, Airbnb hosts should seed authentic experiences into their perceived image through social media. For example, individual and company hosts can utilize user-generated content marketing to tell their stories and further build their image (Puzzle Partner, 2018). Modern travelers love to share their travel experiences through various forms such as Instagram posts, stories, videos, vlog, blogs and more. Individual hosts can create accounts on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, or both to create their own content and interact with potential consumers. Since individual hosts can be perceived highly personable, they can leverage their image as closely as interactive and caring providers of authentic stay. Company hosts are suggested to build core brand image on their own website and effectively transfer them over to other platforms. Considering that the companies are being exposed to guests on Airbnb, their messages and core values must be presented on the platform. It will also be important for company hosts to incorporate technology and social media. For example, a tech-driven company called “Sonder” recommend their guests to use their website for booking and their mobile apps for enhanced experience from check-in to check-out (O’Neill, 2019). Triggering the consumers to take a step further into downloading mobile apps will be key to building brand awareness. Company hosts can focus on unique and modern user experience designs in their Airbnb bookings and check-in emails.

Existential authenticity can be practiced by both types of Airbnb hosts in the extended form of using online interaction. Existential dimension is essentially being delivered during the guest stay which indicates that whatever the guests are in contact with from the moment they book the unit to the moment they receive a feedback survey need to be all considered. Individual

hosts should carefully give thought-out messages and tone that deliver sincerity and genuineness, not only on online setting, but also during in-person experiences during the stay. Company hosts should focus on the basics that the guests are expecting when walking into a unit, including cleanliness, essentials, furniture, design, etc. The interactive aspect can be boosted through in-person deliveries or encounter whether they are standard item requests or maintenance issues. Company hosts should really pay closer attention to training their employees in delivering the right branded experience to the guests. With this study being focused on the idea of interacting with the “local”, company hosts could also highlight local content about music, food, arts, activities, both on-site and off-site. Providing recommendations through the mobile app would be highly suggested to make the technological experience convenient.

The rise of short-term rental companies has been recently documented. “Branded short-term rental management companies — such as Sonder, Stay Alfred, Lyric, and Domio — can better compete with individual operators’ by consolidating multiple units, branding them to elicit consumer trust, scaling faster, and operating purpose-built buildings and converting them” (Schaal, 2020). Regarding moderation results, our findings confirm that host type does not moderate the relationship between brand authenticity and consumers’ trust in hosts. However, the host type does moderate the relationship between existential authenticity and consumers’ trust in hosts so that the relationship is stronger for company hosts than for individual hosts. From the study findings, we learn that company hosts should be aware of focusing on existential authenticity, facilitating the guests to interact with the local culture and local community as mentioned. Essentially, industry practitioners should put in efforts to adopt strategic approach to content marketing and creative, yet interactive communication that establish brand and existential authenticity, which may further develop consumer trust.

Once the trust in Airbnb hosts is established, it would be recommended for both types of hosts to maintain that trust so that consumers may be able to revisit and recommend the hosts. Presence on social media and interactive online communication can be practiced serving as reminders for consumers to remember their great experiences with the hosts. For example, frequent updates about business goals or city spaces on social media like Instagram or Facebook depending on their target customers would be considered. Airbnb hosts can also encourage previous guests to share their experiences on social media and even include promo codes that offer discounts or free stays to promote positive word of mouth. Other things could include building point system or loyalty programs where guests would be able to consider revisits more beneficial.

5.4 Limitation and Future Research

This study, just like any other research, has its limitations. The survey was conducted on Amazon Mturk. Lack of control as well as rushed and deceptive responses due to limitation of the platform might be an issue. However, screening questions and attention check questions were added throughout the survey to ensure the quality of the responses. Future research can initiate collaboration with Airbnb hosts for data collection that can reflect more real-time responses. In addition, the study utilized a self-report survey. Social desirability bias might be an issue. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, it may be hard to decide the direction of the causal relationship. After conducting extensive review of literature in the accommodation, it has been evident that there is an underrepresentation of company-host related research in the context of accommodation. Future research can be dedicated to in-depth analysis of the roles of company hosts play in the sharing economy and its comparison with hotels. Moreover, current research has focused on mainly two dimensions of authenticity, brand and existential. Therefore, future

researchers can include intrapersonal authenticity and its relationship with brand trust or brand love into the research model and compare the differences between company host and individual host.

5.5 Conclusion

Sharing economy has enabled the disruptive operators to step up their games in the travel industry. Many hospitality companies have developed an evolved short-term rental model delivering services of a hotel and providing amenities of an apartment. While companies like Sonder, Lyric, Domio, and Stay Alfred are already gaining attention from the industry critics, hospitality literature lack academic studies related to this business model and its comparison with hotels which are viewed as more traditional. Considering the fact that company hosts are newly introduced, this study used Airbnb platform to investigate the differences in the experiences between with individual hosts and with company hosts. Due to the rising focus of authenticity in various aspects of travel, the current study also provides how different dimensions of authenticity are associated with trust in Airbnb hosts. Furthermore, the relationships between trust in hosts and intention to recommend and revisit were measured and assessed.

The results of the study proved positive association between brand authenticity and trust in hosts as well as existential authenticity and trust in hosts. Consumers are likely to associate brand authenticity and existential authenticity with trust in Airbnb hosts they stay with. Trust in hosts had a positive relationship with consumer intention to recommend the host and revisit the properties operated by the host. The hypotheses regarding moderation effect of different types of hosts were not supported. However, the host type did moderate the relationship between existential authenticity and consumers' trust in hosts so that the relationship is stronger for company hosts than for individual hosts. It would be suggested that company hosts may utilize

the existential aspect to form a stronger bond with their consumers. As a result of these findings, it is extremely important to note that Airbnb hosts should focus on understanding the mechanisms of brand and existential authenticity to build trusting relationship and further strengthen consumer behavioral intentions.

Overall, the current study highlights positive relationships between brand, existential authenticity and trust in Airbnb hosts and the influence trust has on consumer behavioral intentions. Another major contribution resides with exploring different types of hosts in the accommodation sector, providing a foundation for future studies to be conducted.

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Appendix A

Approved IRB

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research University of New Orleans

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Han Chen

Co-Principal Investigator: Joyce Han

Date: December 3, 2019

Protocol Title: Individual hosts vs. Company hosts on Airbnb: Role of authenticity and trust on consumers' behavioral intentions

IRB#: 05Nov19

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures of the above-named protocol are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines and meets the standard for being exempt from further IRB review according to:

CFR 46.104 (d)(2): Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) and at least one of the following criteria is met:

- (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;*
- (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or*
- (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and the IRB has conducted a **limited IRB review** and determined that there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and maintain the confidentiality of data.*

Researchers maintain the responsibility of ethical research practices in exempt research. Any changes to the procedures or protocols that change the eligibility of the study or exemption must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

I wish you much success with your research project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ann O'Hanlon", is placed on a light blue rectangular background.

Ann O'Hanlon, Chair

UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Appendix B

Individual Host Survey

Are you 18 or older?

Yes

No

This survey is designed to examine the role of authenticity and trust in consumer behavioral intentions towards Airbnb hosts. To complete this survey you must be 18 or older and have stayed at an Airbnb before. This survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for your contribution to this study.

Are you willing to participate in this study?

Yes

No

Have you ever stayed at an Airbnb for **leisure purposes** during the last 12 months?

Yes

No

For your **most recent stay** at an Airbnb for **leisure purposes**, was it an individual host or a company host? An **individual host** is a person who typically owns, manages, or lives on the property. Individual hosts list the space on their personal Airbnb accounts and directly communicate with the guests themselves. A **company host** is a brand that typically leases in commercial or residential buildings, furnishes and manages the properties themselves with

corporate-based standards. Some examples include Sonder, Lyric, Stay Alfred, Domio, The Guild.. etc.

- Individual host
- Company host

Approximately how much did you pay **per night** on your **most recent stay** at Airbnb?

- ≤ \$50
- \$51-\$100
- \$101-\$150
- \$151-\$200
- \$201-\$250
- \$251-\$300
- ≥ \$301

Think about the **Airbnb host** you most recently stayed with, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

This **Airbnb host** is...

	<i>1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Pioneer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Innovate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unique	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unpretentious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Real	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Undisguised	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Legitimate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Think about your **most recent stay** with this **Airbnb host**, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Staying at this Airbnb helped me ...

	<i>1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
understand local culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
experience local life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
experience the local community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
interact with the local community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Think about your **most recent stay** with this **Airbnb host**, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Staying at this Airbnb allowed me ...

	<i>1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

to have authentic contact with local people

to have authentic contact with members of travel group

to have authentic contact with members outside of travel group

Think about the **Airbnb host** you most recently stayed with, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

I think the
host was
honest

I think the
host cared
about their
customers

I believe
the host
was
consistent
in quality
and service

I believe
the host
was
trustworthy

I believe
the host
was
dependable

Think about the most recent stay with this **Airbnb host**, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
For my next trip, I will consider this Airbnb host as my first choice, rather than other Airbnb space	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a strong intention to stay with this Airbnb host again in the future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend this Airbnb host to other people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would tell other people positive things about this Airbnb host	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other, please specify _____

What year were you born in?

What is your highest level of education?

- High School Graduate/equivalent
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate Degree
- Other, please specify _____

What is your household income?

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000 to \$49,000
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 and above

Appendix C

Company Host Survey

Are you 18 or older?

Yes

No

This survey is designed to examine the the role of authenticity and trust in consumer behavioral intentions towards Airbnb hosts. To complete this survey you must be 18 or older and have stayed at an Airbnb before. This survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for your contribution to this study.

Are you willing to participate in this study?

Yes

No

Have you ever stayed at an Airbnb for **leisure purposes** during the last 12 months?

Yes

No

For your **most recent stay** at an Airbnb for **leisure purposes**, was it an individual host or a company host? An **individual host** is a person who typically owns, manages, or lives on the property. Individual hosts list the space on their personal Airbnb accounts and directly communicate with the guests themselves. A **company host** is a brand that typically leases in commercial or residential buildings, furnishes and manages the properties themselves with

corporate-based standards. Some examples include Sonder, Lyric, Stay Alfred, Domio, The Guild.. etc.

- Individual host
- Company host

Approximately how much did you pay **per night** on your **most recent stay** at Airbnb?

- ≤ \$50
- \$51-\$100
- \$101-\$150
- \$151-\$200
- \$201-\$250
- \$251-\$300
- ≥ \$301
-

Think about the **Airbnb company host** you selected, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. This **Airbnb company host** is...

1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
--	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Pioneer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Innovative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unique	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unpretentious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Real	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Undisguised	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Legitimate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Think about your **most recent stay** with this **company host**, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Staying at this Airbnb helped me...

1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
understand local culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
experience local life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
experience the local community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
interact with the local community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Think about your **most recent stay** with this **company host**, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. Staying at this this Airbnb allowed me...

1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

to have authentic contact with local people



to have authentic contact with members of travel group



to have authentic contact with members outside of travel group



Think about your **most recent stay** with this **company host**, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree, 5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I think the host was honest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think the host cared about their customers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe the host was consistent in quality and service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe the host was trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe the host was dependable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Think about your **most recent stay** with this **company host**, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

*1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: somewhat disagree, 4: neither disagree nor agree,
5: somewhat agree, 6: agree, 7: strongly agree*

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

For my next trip, I will consider this company host as my first choice, rather than other Airbnb space

I have a strong intention to stay with this company host again in the future

I would recommend this company host to other people

I would tell other people positive things about this company host

If this **company host** has its own website for booking, would you consider booking directly on their website in the future?

Yes

No, please provide explanations here.

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to answer

What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other, please specify _____

What year were you born in?

What is your highest level of education?

- High School Graduate/equivalent
- Associate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate Degree
- Other, please specify _____

What is your household income?

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000 to \$49,000
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 and above

VITA

The author was born in Seoul, South Korea and was raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, United States. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in Accounting from Louisiana State University in 2018. She joined the University of New Orleans graduate program to pursue a Master of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management.