Living Like a Local: Authentic Tourism Experiences and the Sharing Economy

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ABSTRACT

Travellers are demanding authentic, experientially-oriented opportunities with more meaningful interactions with locals. The sharing economy has emerged partly as a response to these consumer trends with major potential impacts for tourism. This research investigated the phenomenon of authenticity-seeking tourism and its links to the hospitality sector through consumer choices related to accommodation offered by sharing economy providers. It explored the relationship between perceived authenticity of the "local" experience and its significance when purchasing accommodation. The three themes of unique accommodation interiors and atmosphere, interactions with hosts, and interactions with local culture were found to be important to Airbnb users.

KEY WORDS: Airbnb, authenticity, experience co-creation, experience economy, peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodations, sharing economy

INTRODUCTION

Does the sharing economy offer the traveller a way to experience a destination in a more authentic way? Is that the basis of the appeal of enablers such as Airbnb, or is there something else which is worthy of consideration in evaluating the company's undoubted impact and success? Such questions must also address what is meant by an "authentic" experience and evaluate how achievable that is in the context of tourism.

Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory enquiry was to consider hitherto unanswered questions relevant to exploring these issues and offer recommendations for future research. It addressed several specific research questions; namely:

1. What influences customers to select Airbnb accommodations?
2. What are customer perceptions of their experiences after using peer-to-peer accommodations?
3. How would the introduction of more hotel-like options at Airbnb affect users' experiences and feelings of authenticity?

SEEKING AUTHENTICITY AND EXPERIENCES: FROM TOURIST TO TRAVELLER

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There is much discussion about the shift from tourist to traveller and this has increased interest in offers based on experiences rather than commodity-based goods (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 2011; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016a; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016b). Travellers are increasingly demanding authentic, experientially-oriented opportunities involving more meaningful interactions with locals (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, Pine & Gilmore, 2011; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016a; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016b).

As a response to the new economic era, the sharing or collaborative economy emerged, in which companies such as Airbnb are growing at phenomenal rates and arguably changing tourism (Guttentag, 2015; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016a; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016b). Pine and Gilmore (1998) regarded this moment as a step towards a new era, or the experience economy. Experiences are ways of understanding interactions between people and places, essentially internally produced as each individual understands and interprets them differently (Jennings & Weiler, 2006; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Morgan, Elbe, and Curiel (2009) suggest that the experience economy is a view of consumer behaviour that emphasises emotional, aspirational, and participative experiences over functional and rational attributes.

Authenticity is a core feature of the sharing and experience economies. It is a mixture of philosophical, psychological, and spiritual concepts that can then be placed in objective, constructive, and existential typologies (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2016; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999). Arguably, a prominent trend directly relatable to the tourist-to-traveller shift is the search for authenticity within experiences.

Authenticity may simply be considered as something real or genuine (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Kolar & Zabkar, 2010; Ram, Bjork, & Weidenfeld, 2016), but when placed in an experiential field of study, the topic becomes more difficult to understand, thus requiring a more in-depth approach. Many scholars relate this to the concept of traveller self-actualization, or the search to find a sense of one's own authentic self (Maslow, 1970; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999). Nevertheless, as this research demonstrated, the subjective topic cannot be easily defined and it can be a complex and intricate concept dependent on individual internal conceptualisations. By exploring the cognitive journey of individual reflection on experiences with peer-to-peer (P2P) accommodation, this research aims to develop a thick and detailed essence of authentic experiences strengthened by theoretical propositions on the influential factors.

MAKING TOURISM EXPERIENCES MEMORABLE

Walls et al. (2011) found a large number of alternative definitions of consumer experiences. In keeping with this research's themes, Pine and Gilmore's (1998) definition seems the most appropriate. They define successful experiences as *those that the customer finds unique, memorable and sustainable over time, would want to repeat and build upon, and enthusiastically promotes via word of mouth* (Walls et al., 2011, p. 11).

In addition to the search for greater authenticity, researchers are probing more into tourism experiences and their "memorability." Ritchie and Hudson (2009) found six major "research streams" on consumer/tourist experiences; the third of which was methodologies for understanding the tourism experience. The Memorable Tourism Experience Scale (MTES) is one of these methodologies and is suggested for measuring memorability (Kim, 2010; Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Kim, 2014; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Tsai, 2016). The seven factors within MTES are hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge. The factors are represented by 24 items; for example, local culture is comprised of three items (good impressions about the local people; closely experienced the local culture; and local people in destination were friendly). Although this research did not test MTES with the respondents, it was expected that their comments on P2P accommodations would positively correspond to several items on the scale, especially local culture, meaningfulness (doing something meaningful and important), involvement (personal relevance), and knowledge (obtaining knowledge and learning a new culture) (Kim & Ritchie, 2014).

The Destination Emotion Scale (DES) is a conceptual approach for measuring the emotional content of tourism destination experiences (Hosany & Gilbert, 2010; Hosany & Witham, 2010; Hosany, Prayag, Deesilatham, Cauševic, & Odeh, 2015). The DES has the three dimensions of joy, love, and positive surprise, and is measured by 15 items. Joy is represented by cheerful, delight, enthusiasm, joy, and pleasure; love is comprised of affection, caring, love, tenderness, and warmhearted; and positive surprise consists of amazement, astonishment, fascinated, inspired, and surprise (Hosany *et al*., 2015). Some of these emotional items may be reflected in the perceptions of P2P accommodation guests, which could be revealed in their personal accounts about stays.

There have been several previous studies that looked at experiences in various accommodation settings, as well as at attractions and festivals. For example, Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung (2007) analysed experiences with bed-and-breakfasts in the U.S. by applying Pine & Gilmore's (1998) four realms of experience (education, entertainment, escapism, and

esthetics). Ali, Hussain, and Ragavan (2014) applied Pine and Gilmore's "4Es" to measure the impacts of experiences on guests' memories and loyalty for Malaysian resorts. For example, the four measurement items for education were: *the experience has made me more knowledgeable*; *I learned a lot during my experience*; *it stimulated my curiosity to learn new things*; and *it was a real learning experience*. The researchers found that the four elements of the service experience (4Es) had significant positive impacts on resort guest memories and loyalty intentions. Loureiro (2014) surveyed guests of rural accommodation properties in South Portugal about their experiences. She found that an excited and pleased guest was more likely to memorise the experience. Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) surveyed visitors to a festival and a museum in Norway, again adopting the 4Es to define the experience variables. They found that education (learning), entertainment (feeling), escapism (doing), and esthetics (being) significantly affected visitor satisfaction, although in differing ways for the festival and museum.

It is noteworthy that all of the approaches described above were based on quantitative methodologies where respondents rated lists of items that were predetermined by the researchers. The current study was qualitative and allowed respondents to recount travel experiences in their own words.

Other aspects of tourism experiences that are highly relevant for Airbnb encounters are the impacts of experience co-creation and information communication technologies (ICTs). Co-creation is where value is jointly produced through the interaction of the tourist and the company or destination (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) interestingly cite the co-creation of experiences by tourists and locals, and provide examples of online platforms that facilitate them in European cities. Neuhofer, Buhalis, and Ladkin (2014), based on an analysis of five case studies, concluded that technology unquestionably enhanced tourism experiences. Some of these co-created experiences are what can be called "living like a local" and local people are now much more involved in engineering these experiences for visitors (Richards, 2014; Rosso and Richards, 2016).

ASSESSING THE PROS AND CONS OF THE SHARING ECONOMY FOR TOURISM

The volume of research on the sharing and collaborative economy impacts on tourism has surged in recent years (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Guttentag, 2015; Cheng, 2016a; Cheng, 2016b; Möhlmann, 2015; Chathoth *et al.*, 2016; Ert *et al.*, 2016; Fang *et al.*, 2016; Fernández *et al.*, 2016; Gant, 2016; Heo, 2016; Richard & Cleveland,

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2016; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016a; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016b). This research suggests that the impacts are both positive and negative.

According to the company's website, Airbnb had 60 million guests in 2016, with over 2 million listings in 34,000 cities in 191 countries (Airbnb, 2016a). Airbnb was launched in 2008 in San Francisco and in a short time has drawn much praise and criticism. In its promotions, Airbnb promises a sense of belongingness ("feeling at home") and uniqueness ("atypical places to stay") (Liu & Mattila, 2017). Affordability is a third customer benefit from using Airbnb when compared with traditional hotels (Folger, 2016). Koopman, Mitchell, and Thierer (2015) argue that the sharing economy improve consumers' welfare by providing new innovations, more choices and service differentiation, better prices, and higher-quality services. On the other side of the transaction, Goodman (2016) suggests "*hosting has been a great boon for individuals to make a little extra money, for neighborhoods to see tourist dollars, and for cities to promote tourism*."

The addition of Airbnb accommodations has had a major impact of several destinations. Sheivachman (2016) reported that Airbnb had doubled the room capacity in Reykjavik, Iceland since 2010. According to Airbnb itself, the company generated $824 million in economic activity and supported 11,600 jobs in the UK in 2013 (Airbnb, 2016b). It is not surprising, therefore, that several destinations (including Aruba, Dubai, Guangzhou, Jamaica, San Francisco), airlines, attractions, and other tourism suppliers have entered into joint-marketing partnerships with Airbnb.

The business model applied by Airbnb and its marketing approaches receive acclaim from many observers and experts (e.g., Davis, 2016; Leaver, 2014; Monllos, 2016). Davis (2016) cites Airbnb's 2016 *Live There* campaign as brilliantly capturing the company's brand proposition of travel, communities, people and experiences, which are in contrast with "*more traditional, more inauthentic travel*." In 2016, Airbnb introduced a new set of experiences for its customers within a new product offering, *Welcome to the world of trips* (Monllos, 2016). This introduces another set of people in destinations who "*host experiences*" for tourists.

On the negative side, the lack of specific government policy and regulations for sharing economy providers like Airbnb remains a major bone of contention in some circles. As networked hospitality businesses (Oskam &Boswijk, 2016), companies like Airbnb are an innovation that was largely unanticipated by governments and the tourism sector. The focus of the negative impacts in the context of Airbnb has been with respect to the effects on traditional hotels and on the capacity of destinations to handle more tourists in non-traditional accommodations. In an analysis of the impacts of Airbnb on hotels in Austin, Texas, it was

estimated that the company had taken about 8-10% of the revenues of the lower-priced hotels that did not cater to business travellers (Zervas, Proserpio, & Byers, 2016). Bashir and Verma (2016) quote that Airbnb has caused a $2 billion deficit for hotels in New York City. However, the evidence is mixed on this issue. For example, Varma, Jukic, Pestek, Shultz, and Nestorov (2016) found that the "major players" in the hospitality industry did not consider Airbnb as a significant disruptor or competitor. Choi, Jung, Ryu, Kim, and Yoon (2015) found that Airbnb listings had no effect on hotel revenues in Seoul, Busan, and Jeju in South Korea.

Even a cursory scan of online platforms shows a significant level of complaints about Airbnb accommodations and its customer service. These include a site titled airbnb.pissedconsumer.com. Additionally, there are allegations of racial discrimination among Airbnb hosts (Edelman & Luca, 2014).

Despite the considerable public attention that Airbnb has attracted, Liu and Mattila (2017) suggest there is scant research investigating Airbnb from the marketing perspective. It was the intention of this research to partially fill this gap by exploring the perceived authenticity of experiences among Airbnb experiences.

BLENDING AUTHENTICITY, EXPERIENCES AND THE SHARING ECONOMY

The nexus of authenticity, tourism experiences, and the sharing economy was the focus of this research and a conceptual model is shown in Figure 1. This concept recognises that the Airbnb travel experience has at least two stages, at the guest's origin and within the destination. Of course, remembering and sharing the experiences also occur post-trip. At the point of origin, the guest engages in digital dialogue experiences with Airbnb and the host. Others may also be involved in providing recommendations to the guest, online and offline. Digital communications can continue among the participants in travelling from the origin and destination, while within the destination, and on the return trip. While within the destination, it is suggested that the main interactions are among the guest, host, and local community.

The main research gap addressed lay in the lack of conceptual knowledge of what authentic experiences are in the modern day traveller's eyes with particular regard to non-traditional, P2P accommodation at destinations. Existing research can be found on consumer perceptions and demands for authenticity within museum settings (Chhabra, 2007; Crang, 1996; Grayson & Martinec, 2004); heritage sites (Apostolakis, 2003; Chhabra *et al*., 2003; Halewood & Hannam, 2001); souvenirs and shopping experiences (Littrell *et al*., 1993);

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marketing strategies for developing countries (Silver, 1993); dance performances (Daniel, 1996); theme parks (McIntosh & Prentice, 1999); seaside resorts (Sedmak, 2008), and even topics with only tangential relation to tourism such as regional foods (Groves, 2008; Tregear *et al.*, 2007) and car ownership experiences (Leigh *et al.*, 2006). With such common use of the term, authenticity is being applied in multiple ways, implying various meanings, but lacking a more concrete definition, and thus allowing limited applicability of the concept to alternative tourism platforms, such as P2P accommodation. Arguably, the term can have different meanings to different customers depending on the context (Grayson & Martinec, 2004), in which case, to find the essence behind the phenomenon, a study needs to be conducted on sector-specific customers.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Few researchers have looked at authenticity in P2P accommodation. Authors such as Yeoman *et al.* (2007) have highlighted the significance of authenticity in today's tourism markets, identifying it as a key consumer-driver for tourism in Scotland and as a significant promotional tool for Australia, China and Canada, suggesting the practical importance of the topic. Successful delivery of authentic experiences is difficult to achieve without a good understanding of what such a thing might actually be.

METHODS

Authenticity and experiences are topics which require appropriate research methods in order to develop rich, detailed, and accurate results. The qualitative method was chosen in order to develop a deeper level of understanding of the central meaning behind authenticity and customer experiences. Qualitative methods help to examine these experiences thoroughly, and to understand meaning and interpretations of individuals through the empirical and analytical view of the findings (Hennink *et al.*, 2011; Sandelowski, 2004). Post-positivism methodology can be defined as reintroducing discovery by conducting enquiry actions to assist in determining meanings that individuals ascribe to their own actions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Phenomenon events are subjective, creating meaning through experiences (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

To achieve the purpose and objectives of this research, developing a complex understanding of perceptions required experienced and knowledgeable participants who were able to provide insight on their personal experiences with Airbnb. Choosing participants in a non-random manner allowed a more attentive and particular approach to achieve just that. Furthermore, a convenience, or availability sampling method, was chosen to collect data based on accessibility constraints to Airbnb users. This method allowed the data to be quickly collected from easily accessible interviewees. Convenience sampling may also establish new findings when viewing attitudes (Ozdemir *et al.*, 2011) or in this case, perceptions of lived experiences, as it can yield thoughtful and relevant sample selection criteria. Participants were contacted through online platforms, briefly informed of the purpose of the study and asked to fill out the online questionnaire in their own time. Data were collected using open-ended interview questions that the participants were asked to answer individually, in written form. The open-ended interview questions include the following:

- Why did you choose Airbnb?
- What makes the Airbnb experience authentic?
- Can you identify a specific authentic experience that you had with Airbnb?
- How would more hotel-like options influence the overall authentic experience?
- What context and situations influenced or affected your authentic experience?

Saturation of data was reached after the collection of 15 questionnaires from the respondents. Emerging themes and new categories ceased to appear, and a judgment was made for reaching saturation levels and no further participants were contacted. However, it is acknowledged that a much larger sample group will yield more robust data. To allow reflective and thoughtful responses, the participants completed the questionnaires in a written manner. This also allowed them to do so in their own chosen environment, on their own personal time. This was done so that they would provide more personal, detailed, and rich responses.

RESULTS

Respondent demographics

The participants were from various countries and backgrounds, and they stayed in Airbnb accommodations in several different nations, including Italy, Poland, Spain, U.S., and potentially others. They were repeat guests of Airbnb, varying in gender and in the 18-54 age

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group. Some 60% were female and 40% were male. The age groups varied from 18-54, 60% of whom were in the 16-24 age bracket.

Perceptions of authenticity and experiences

Unsurprisingly most data displayed a clear choice of using Airbnb because of its cost-effectiveness, but 100% of the participants agreed that it was also an authentic accommodation option. Significant written statements offered by the respondents are shown in Tables 1-6. The genders and age ranges of the respondents are indicated along with the statements in Tables 1-3.

Table 1 suggests that Airbnb users find the accommodations to have more distinct characteristics and personality than standard hotels. As such, using Airbnb properties tends to produce more memorable travel experiences because of the uniqueness of stays. One respondent stated that standard hotels, in contrast, cannot be recollected after trips:

"*I noticed, that looking back to wonderful trips I had, I can't recall what hotels I was staying in, because they are too generic and similar to each other*" [F45-54]

[Insert Table 1 about here]

As Table 2 shows, not all the comments about Airbnb accommodations were positive; however, the unique touches found in these properties and the sharing of information by their owners were emphasized:

"*The kitchen was filled with colorful and mismatched cups, [the place] felt unpretentious and in sync with laid back atmosphere of the city*" [F45-54]

"[the host] *shared their interests and details about the location, it was a way to get inside information instead of a generic one (or none)*" [M45-54]

"*We enjoyed having fresh fruit with the hosts every morning, they told us all the best places to go, good places to eat and any deals or special offers to get*" [M25-34]

[Insert Table 2 about here]

The respondents did not relish the prospect of more hotel-like options within Airbnb, as reflected in Table 3:

"*If they were more like hotels, then the experience would be completely not authentic*"

[F18-24]

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[Insert Table 3 about here]

Tables 1-3 also show the researchers' interpretations of the meanings of respondents' statements (formulated meanings). For example, in Table 1 it is inferred that Airbnb accommodations appeal more to curious and adventurous travellers, or in other words to people who are seeking greater variety. In Table 2, reference is made to Airbnb accommodations being more like home, and elsewhere respondents talk about the family atmosphere and feeling part of the family. Table 3 underlines that customers feel better cared for in Airbnb accommodations rather than in traditional hotels, and there are references in other statements of hosts going further "out of their way" to please and look after their guests.

Authenticity themes

Three themes emerged which serve to illuminate key markers of perceived authenticity and these are shown in Tables 4-6. These were the interior and atmosphere (of the accommodations) (Theme 1); interaction with hosts (Theme 2); and interaction in local culture (Theme 3).

Theme 1: Interior and atmosphere (of accommodations)

The first theme highlighted the features that guests considered more home-like and authentic, presenting a better lens with which to view the local communities and cultures:

"*It felt more real, the fridge was packed with the host's food, was fascinating to see what they actually ate*"

The genuine experience of the accommodations was also cited by one respondent:

[the flat] "*was a genuine Italian home, felt really homely*"

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Theme 2: Interaction with hosts

Based upon the responses from these guests, interacting with their hosts enhanced the authenticity of their travel experiences, and left a deeper impression of the communities in which they stayed. The roles of hosts as information providers, as "teachers" about things local, and as guides were stressed in the comments:

"*The hosts showed me how to make a Spanish omelette*"

"*We gained insight into the average life of a local by sharing space with them*"

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<div align="center">"*The owner showed me around the city*"</div>

<div align="center">[Insert Table 5 about here]</div>

Theme 3: Interaction in local culture

The responses for this theme particularly confirmed that Airbnb guests felt they had more authentic experiences with the local culture. They thought they saw and did things that regular tourists staying in hotels would not experience:

<div align="center">"*The owner showed me around the non-touristic places of the city*"</div>

<div align="center">"*I felt like being part of Spain, learning how to cook traditional food from a true local*"</div>

<div align="center">"*I learned how to use one of those Italian coffee makers, felt authentic as I was in Italy*"</div>

<div align="center">[Insert Table 6 about here]</div>

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Authentic experiences in the eyes of Airbnb guests revolve around subjective perceptions of both external and internal factors. First and foremost, the connection made with the host leads to a more personal and companionable experience, sparking feelings of familiarity and sociability. This can be done through sharing the host's living space in particular, thereby establishing a closer relationship with the host and the guest feeling more immersed in the experience. Sociability factors are also important, as they can lead to authentic experiences through exposure to the local culture. Familiarity and contentment is usually engendered through artefacts which reflect the host and the location. In this regard, authenticity relates to how comfortable, homely, and how much individual character the surroundings have. As a tool to build on external authenticity, the interior should reflect the host's individuality and personality. "Living like a local" appears to be key to the authenticity of Airbnb stays and experience co-creation is certainly an enabler of these feelings of authenticity.

In the absence of agreement on a clear definition of the concept of authenticity, the inherently subjective nature of this issue is likely to remain a point of contention in academic discourse for the foreseeable future, particularly within the context of the lived tourist experience. Similarly, the nature of perceptions and experiential cognitive maps of customers of tourism destinations will remain a growing body of knowledge in the tourism literature as their role in discerning the complex nuances of what an authentic experience means gains further recognition among scholars.

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The exploratory, qualitative research carried out as part of this analysis aimed to depict the phenomenological essence of the lived experiences by a growing market share of tourism – customers of the sharing economy (Airbnb in this particular study) and their motivations to engage with the hospitality services offered by P2P accommodations. The themes developed as part of this research echo the subjectivity of the authenticity in experiences first highlighted by Erickson (1995) with a prevalence of words linked to personal feelings of familiarity (e.g., "cosy", "homely") related to a personal and companionable experience when describing perceptions of the accommodation secured through Airbnb's services. This first contact between the tourist and their Airbnb host, often sharing a living space as well as local information, may precede a closer relationship leading to an immersive visitor experience. In spite of these apparent perceptions of reassurance and familiarity upon arrival, it is difficult to establish to what extent they may be potentially influenced by earlier feelings of travel anxiety (Lenton *et al.*, 2013; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999) and merit further research, though it would appear that a standardised hotel-like atmosphere remains a negative influence on tourists' overall experience of a destination. There were also parallels between the findings of this study and Wang's (1999) existential authenticity typology, specifically in activity-based theorisations as activities such as cooking or sharing a breakfast with their host had a positive influence on tourists' perceptions of authentic lived experiences. However, little evidence was found of a focus on objects or amenities available to Airbnb customers, which appeared to contradict earlier work in this arena by Cohen (1979). Instead, immersion with the local culture of the destination was rated highly by interviewees in line with work by MacCannell (1973).

Additionally, this research found that Airbnb users may share similar traits of character, which corresponds to the findings of a study by Fleeson and Wilt (2010) where a clear connection was made between subjective authenticity and extroverted individuals. Further research should explore whether the sharing economy in general and Airbnb would tend to attract more extroverted individuals for whom subjective authenticity is more heavily influenced by interaction with their hosts, local residents and by participating in activities of a more immersive nature such as cooking local recipes. All in all, understanding how tourists perceive and experience authenticity is essential for the development of a new generation of tourism policy makers, researchers and practitioners. However, there is a danger that the concept of authenticity could be effectively monopolised by considering it solely through the prism of the tourism experience. This would result in a dangerous oversimplification of what

remains a complex issue, to which the wealth of literature on the social impact of tourism on host communities testifies (Allen *et al.*, 1988; Kim & Petrick, 2005; King *et al.*, 1993; Pearce *et al.*, 1996; Tosun, 2006). Moreover, and in spite of the arguably altruistic principles behind the sharing economy, there is already evidence (albeit somewhat anecdotal) that services such as those offered by Airbnb may be contributing to a widening rift between tourists and host communities, particularly in mass tourism urban destinations. This was exemplified in recent times in Barcelona through the access that the sharing economy - and Airbnb in particular - has offered to tourists hitherto 'unspoilt' residential areas where locals could seek refuge from the crowds of visitors descending on their cities, particularly in the summer. The heavy concentration of tourists in some areas is negatively affecting neighbouring residents' quality of life (Aznar *et al.*, 2016). This has also resulted in property rental prices increasingly beyond the reach of local communities who often contribute to local growth in less seasonal sectors of the economy and even cases of 'tourist phobia' in Barcelona (Burgen, 2015; McMah, 2016). In turn, as recent news reports from New York and Berlin suggest (Cockburn, 2016; Major, 2016), this could result in an adverse impact on the sharing economy itself as it becomes apparent that a growing number of property rentals may be solely on the basis of a business investment rather than the original idea of renting a room in one's home.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDS

The sample size for this research was small although the data yielded rich perspectives on the topic of authenticity from Airbnb users. Qualitative data alone on authentic experiences do not provide sufficient evidence and should be supplemented with quantitative data in the future, gathered presumably through a questionnaire survey of Airbnb customers. For example, there is an opportunity for further testing of the three themes derived from this research (interior and atmosphere; interaction with hosts; and interaction with local culture), and to test cause-and-effect models of the relationship of these and other factors to dependent variables such as satisfaction, memorability, loyalty, repeat visit intention, and willingness to recommend.

The researchers suggest that customers' perceptions of their stays at P2P accommodations can add value to their overall experiences with tourism destinations and their broader

perceptions of the authenticity of places visited. However, this was not tested in the current study, and represents an opportunity for future research.

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