

**MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF AN
AIRBNB HOST: AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY
IN UMEÅ, SWEDEN**

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a new wave power of sharing economy, or known as collaborative consumption has emerged in accommodation, and tourism marketplaces (Guttentag, 2015). Airbnb is one of the most talked-about among the sharing hospitality companies, which is an online marketplace and a platform connecting worldwide travelers with local hosts somewhere. Although Airbnb has two types of users, guests and hosts, in current studies of Airbnb hosts, most researchers focus on the hosts from a business perspective. This study aimed to identify and understand hosts' motivations to start the Airbnb business, and the benefits and challenges in a host's experience. The informal interview was the method for the study, and data were processed by thematic analysis. The results find that motivations varied from host to host when sharing nature in common. The benefits outweighed the challenges in each host's experience since participants could gain economic benefits (extra income), mental health (brain exercise for old hosts) and well-being (cross-cultural social learning) in sharing economy. Worries about security and extra physical work did not bother most hosts, and the effects of a tax on Airbnb hosts were not obvious.

KEYWORDS: sharing economy, Airbnb hosts, motivations and experiences, Sweden

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1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a new wave power of sharing economy, or known as collaborative consumption has emerged in accommodation and tourism marketplaces (Guttentag, 2015). In short, the development and innovation of information and communication technology (ICT), together with other dynamics, enable this new socio-economic model of online peer-to-peer communities (Tussyadiah and Pesonen, 2018). The increasing connectivity by internet on social network platforms allows access for people to share their products and services among each other.

Airbnb is one of the most talked-about among the sharing hospitality companies. Airbnb is an online marketplace and a platform connecting worldwide travelers with local hosts somewhere. At one end, the platform enables suppliers (hosts) to list their available space and earn extra income in the form of a short-term rental. At the other end, Airbnb allows customers to book real homestays from local hosts, saving money on staying and sometimes giving customers a chance to interact with hosts, for example, by chatting and cooking. In the business of linking these two ends, the Airbnb company gains the profit by charging hosts for management fees in each trade (Jungleworks, 2018). The meaningful role Airbnb plays is to serve the excess capacity of housing resource to the travelers that search for a short-time dwelling from all over the world (Airbnb, 2016; Birinci et al., 2017). Making access to various and widespread housing resources is one key point for Airbnb's growth.

Only having ten-year history, Airbnb grows up at high speed in its room listing and registered users (Chafkin and Newcomer, 2016). Offering 4.5 million rooms/homes in 81,000 cities and more than 300 million check-ins, Airbnb has become one of the largest accommodation platforms in the world (Tech. qq., 2018). During 2010 and 2015 in 150 countries summer travel on Airbnb grew 353 times over from 47,000 to 17 million guests who stayed in Airbnb homes (Airbnb, 2015). In 2015 the revenue growth of Airbnb reached 113%, which is much higher than publicly traded hotel companies such as Marriott and Wyndham at a growth rate of 8% and 6% respectively (CB Insights, 2015). With its potential to continue, Airbnb has brought changes to the whole hospitality industry and the stakeholders in this business.

Airbnb not only has changed the long-standing models of the hospitality industry but also has reshaped the relationships between suppliers and customers (Belk, 2014; Bostman and Rogers, 2011). In the traditional hospitality industry, a guest books on a hotel's homepage, by phone or through a service agency. Rooms, facilities and services are constructed or managed under a set of standards, and usually, the ownership and management are separated in operation. The relationship between suppliers (hosts) and customers (guests) on the Airbnb platform is reshaped through peer-to-peer accommodation. From sending a booking email to a host, the interaction between a host and a guest begins. Generally, a host is the owner and manager of his/her Airbnb home. When a guest books a room in a host's home, the host and the guest will stay under one roof sharing the public spaces, for example, the kitchen, the bathroom and the laundry. The relationship between Airbnb hosts and guests is not as easy as the one between suppliers and customers in the traditional hospitality industry. In the sharing hospitality, the influence of the interaction between hosts and guests is bidirectional, which means

that people affect others while being affected.

In Airbnb homes, diversity and authenticity of the stay experience are increased to guests while the pros and cons are brought to the hosts (Paulauskaite et al., 2017). Airbnb hosts are different from traditional entrepreneurs of the hospitality industry. Due to the business model of Airbnb, hosts are usually the owners living in where the guests stay (except when the entire home is supplied on the list), the housekeepers in charge of the piecemeal service in person, the executors of Airbnb's regulations, and sometimes the guides introducing the guests to the local activities. Without participation and support from the hosts, both the Airbnb company and guests can do nothing for their pursuits. To be specific, whether a host is willing to start an Airbnb business, how the host promotes his/her home by advertising and what service the host offers to the guest all impact the quality of staying experience and the development of Airbnb. The host group of Airbnb business is worthy of focusing and researching.

Although Airbnb has two types of users, guests and hosts, in current studies of Airbnb hosts, most researchers focus on the hosts from a business perspective. For example, Gunter (2018) surveyed to explore what made an Airbnb host a super host and found that 'the commercial Airbnb providers' were more likely to obtain the super host status because this reward meant more guests and a higher price of the home. Guests' experiences were researched in bulk for marketing, ICT development and sustainability of sharing economy, while the pros and cons of being an Airbnb host were mentioned usually as a side-finding instead of a research focus. Studies of motivations were concentrated on the hosts of couchsurfer and small family hotels, since these two business models started earlier than Airbnb.

Therefore, the research gap emerges because little research has been done to explore hosts' motivations to participate in the Airbnb business, and little research presents the experience of being an Airbnb host by comparing the pros and cons. Especially, few qualitative analyses have been done to an individual Airbnb host.

2 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

It is the aim of this study to identify the motivations to enter the Airbnb business and to find out the pros and cons in Airbnb hosts' experiences. To fulfill this aim, it addresses several research questions namely,

1. What is the motivation for entering the Airbnb business as a host?
2. What have been the benefits associated with being a host?
3. What have been the challenges associated with being a host?

The motivation in Q1 refers to any person, any event, or any chance to facilitate a potential host's decision to enter the Airbnb business. This motivation just occurs before the host starts the business. The benefits and challenges in Q2 and Q3 are constituted of what a host has experienced when doing the business.

It is not desired to deliver any normative statements as a result of this study. Instead, such an aim engages in evaluating motives and feelings of the hosts as participants in the sharing economy (e.g., their sense of security and protection from the Airbnb regulations and the local tax policies, and their understanding and trust from the customers or the Airbnb company). Therefore, from this case study, it assumes that the

results may be of particular interest of the Airbnb company, to-be hosts and local community administrators to have a preliminary profile of Airbnb hosts. By deepening and detailing the study on the experience of sharing economy from host-side, the findings may drive the official organization's or the Airbnb company's attention to Airbnb hosts. These stakeholders will take consideration to motivate potential hosts, better the hosts' situation and enhance the quality of the sharing hospitality industry for sustainable development.

This paper is structured as follows: firstly, identify the term of sharing economy, explain the four factors in the development of sharing economy, review the literature about the Airbnb business, and propose the conceptional framework for the study by addressing the motivations and the pros and cons of being an Airbnb host in current studies. After that, the methodology in this study is discussed. The results and main findings are organized and presented based on the three research questions. In the final parts, discussion, conclusion and suggestions for future study are presented.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide a full picture of the research conducted on the sharing economy and to present critical issues related to Airbnb hosts, the following section in this chapter lays out relevant research on these topics.

3.1 The sharing economy

Sharing economy, also named as share economy, collaborative consumption, collaborative economy or peer economy, is academically defined to be a hybrid market model of peer-to-peer exchange (Laurell and Sandström, 2017). Sharing economy does not have a commonly shared definition, preferably, it is applied as an umbrella concept (Spencer et al., 2017) to cover characteristics such as digital technologies and access-based economic behavior (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2012). Belk (2014) offered a specific definition that 'Collaborative consumption is people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation.' In essence, one on hand, the notion of a sharing economy has emerged as a description of online activities such as content sharing, collaborative encyclopedias such as Wikipedia, file sharing and open-source software. On the other hand, sharing economy has been increasingly related to a form of platform capitalism where a two-sided market is created by entrant firms such as Uber and Airbnb.

The fast rise of sharing economy is fueled by many factors, including technological factors (e.g. smart mobile devices, social networking, payment software, etc.), economic factors (e.g. monetized excess inventory, diverse source of income, etc.), societal factors (e.g. population increase, occupational variety, lifestyle change, etc.) and environmental factors (e.g. sharing rather than owning, enhancing efficiency of existing resource, etc.) (Owyang et al., 2013).

3.1.1 Technological factors

The development of information and communication technology (ICT), especially the Web 2.0, has laid the foundation of sharing economy and thereby has impacted the

hospitality and tourism industries by facilitating convergences among suppliers and consumers (Tussyadiah and Pesonen, 2018). Internet access has combined the host who desires to share the home with the guest who is seeking for accommodation. Mobile internet is the product of the integration of mobile communication and the internet. By using intelligent wireless terminals (mobile phones, PDA, tablet computers, car-mounted GPS, smartwatches, etc.), users can obtain and process information as freely as they want. Mobile internet and terminals are essential preconditions for human information input and output. The network security system protects the security of personal profiles. Cloud service system supplies safe and real-time storage of trade information and statistics. Using modern ICT, sharing economies such as Airbnb or Uber establishes trust between suppliers and customers through personal profiles and review mechanisms for both parties involved. Due to the developing social media, both the host and customer accounts are verified by multiple methods, such as the real picture ID or a Facebook account (Birinci et al., 2017). Further, enhanced financial flexibility in new ways on digital sharing platforms encouraged freelancing and micro-entrepreneurs to step in to host business (Spencer et al., 2017).

3.1.2 Economic factors

The unevenness in the development of capitalist-economy causes the imbalance in ownership of different resources (Coe et al., 2012). In other words, some people own extra resources beyond everyday needs, such as living space and vehicles to monetize. In such, Airbnb is a lodging-industry sharing economy example, which forms such a platform benefiting hosts and guests. Goodman (2016) states that “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.” According to the Norwegian Renters' Association, there was an increasing number of people buying apartments only to rent them out on Airbnb (Business Insider, 2016). Actually, in 2016, Airbnb launched the project 'experiences' to extend the guest's choices from living to more activities, which again diversifies the approach for the hosts to increase the earning (FORTUNE, 2017).

3.1.3 Environmental factors

The pursuit for a more sustainable society is a tendency for decades because many governments and social organizations begin to calculate the cost of environmental impacts into the expense of social-economic development (Coe et al., 2012). Companies and individuals are encouraged to produce and consume resources in an eco-friendly way (Albinsson and Perera, 2012; Gansky, 2010; Luchs et al., 2011). The sharing economy explores the approach of resource redistribution that enhances sustainability by deploying the excess capacity of the resource. Take Uber, for example, when four guests are willing to share a car in the same direction, the emission of carbon dioxide gas is reduced. For Airbnb, it is the housing resource. By reducing the production of new products or the construction of new houses, the sharing economy helps reduce the negative impacts on the local environment especially from the development of tourism (Birinci et al., 2017). Thus, for hosts and customers with the strong sense of green consumption, Airbnb can be considered a manifestation of

environment-friendly behavior and a way to contribute to sustainable living (Luchs et al., 2011).

3.1.4 Societal factors

In the standardization of modernization, demanding consumers pursue more freedom of choice and more customization of supply. The vast global social network makes it possible for participants of collaborative consumption to interact directly and share personal experiences. Different types of population mobility (e.g., exchange programs in education, mobile elites and seasonal workers) enhance the cross-cultural communication and understanding among different groups of people which fuels the sharing economy in a global scale. Moreover, and in turn, sharing economy increases the chance to create and maintain more social connections with each other from online to offline. For example, with the launch of Airbnb's new product TRIPS, more stakeholders will be engaged in this co-creation activity. TRIPS may create more extensive material and non-material relationship in the place. Consistent with that, Airbnb promotes itself from "Book unique accommodations around the world" to "Book unique homes and experiences all over the world" which implies its strategy to involve experience from online access to offline products.

3.2 Airbnb as a lodging-industry sharing economy example

Researchers have studied Airbnb business from three perspectives: the social economy, suppliers and customers. From a socio-economic perspective, Airbnb is taken to demonstrate how the value is co-created by participants in sharing economy (Zhang et al., 2018), and Airbnb is also related to the discussion on sharing economy's prospects in tourism research (Heo, 2016). From a supplier's perspective, Airbnb's development makes a range of effects on both hotel sales growth (Blal et al., 2018) and local community involvement (Füller and Michel, 2014). Constructing trust and reputation is one of the critical points in the collaborative economy (Ert et al., 2016). Also, there are experimental factors as determinants to be an attractive host (Gunter, 2018; Liang et al., 2017; Roelofsen and Minca, 2018). From a customer's perspective, plus and minus are compared between traditional hotels and peer-to-peer accommodation (Birinci et al., 2017), and authenticity is the most value of Airbnb in guests' eyes (Dogru and Pekin, 2017).

In previous studies, some researchers voice Airbnb as a threat to the traditional hospitality industry by applying the theory of disruptive innovation. Because Airbnb is often cheaper (Guttentag, 2015; Haywood et al., 2016; Hockenson, 2013) the horizontal competition causes a decrease in revenues of specific hotels (Zervas et al., 2015). Also, based on the rent gap theory, the higher rents have pushed out the permanent residents who throw a negative effect on the housing function (Dredge et al., 2016; Guttentag, 2015). In the case of Barcelona, the government has banned the spread of Airbnb due to the expanding pressure from the traditional tourist gathering areas into local residential areas (Gutierrez et al., 2017; Molas, 2017).

By contrast, Airbnb is welcomed in some areas and countries as a diverse source to develop tourism and increase employment. For example, in Sweden, the number of

accommodations on Airbnb's website increased from 8000 to 13000 between 2015 and 2016 (Jakobsson, 2016). In 2017 a news report caught the eyes by the title "To make this home available for everyone, Sweden has listed the entire country on Airbnb." (Airbnb, 2017; Visit Sweden, 2017) Although obviously, it was an exaggerated metaphor as a marketing approach, it could also imply an official attitude to the development of Airbnb.

3.3 A host's perspective-the conceptual framework

3.3.1 Motivations

The host type of the hospitality business varied upon what estate resource they have and what business model they select. While a single-room apartment is just right for running a Couchsurfer, a multi-room house enables the host to run a B&B accommodation or a family hotel. Hosts are motivated by diversified factors to enter their business. A Couchsurfer host's decision was facilitated with social, cultural, self-development, community, reward, reciprocity and other motivative factors in Pietilä's research (2011). Because Couchsurfer is totally free to guests, hosts have no monetary motivations to accept guests to their homes. Instead, the hosts desired communication, social learning, reputation and reward from sharing experience or contributing to community. A host of a small family hotel or a B&B accommodation had a combination of economic and societal considerations. Either a family hotel or a B&B accommodation is a commercial model rather than sharing behavior, so the hosts pursue economic growth and profits. Ollenburg and Buckley (2007) established that neither economic nor social motivations are uniformly dominant across all the tourism operators. Different operators have different motives, and many individual operators have multiple motives.

Airbnb can be positioned between Couchsurfer and small family hotels. Airbnb is based on online sharing platform as the same as couchsurfer, and has a commercial nature shared with a traditional family hotel. So that, according to the motivations above, motivations of the Airbnb hosts can be framed into two types: monetary motivations and non-monetary motivations.

-Monetary motivations

Monetary motivations refer to a financial incentive that fulfill a host's needs for extra money from doing the business.

-Non-monetary motivations

Non-monetary motivations contain social communication, cross-cultural learning, self-development and other factors.

3.3.2 The pros of running the Airbnb business

-Economic benefits

Airbnb business broadens the income source of the hosts, and it helps the unemployed hosts with self-employment, for example, housewives, students, the retired and freelancers. For the hosts who are employed, the extra money from renting out their homes through Airbnb could help cover the rentals or daily expenses.

-Socio-psychological needs

By running the Airbnb business, hosts can enlarge the social circle if desired. In some cases, hosts and guests made friends and developed long-time connections after staying together for a few days (The Guardian, 2017). Hosts who live alone expected to communicate with people and enjoy interacting with guests who came to their homes.

-Institutional and technical mechanism

A recent study with more than 90,000 individuals by Felländer et al. (2015) showed that convenience was the top one reason why people choose to participate in the sharing economy, while sustainability and local connection were relatively low factors (Spencer et al., 2017). This kind of self-employment gives the possibility of free time and free options because the Airbnb company does not set a rule of uniform decoration or time limitation of a home being available on the list. A home can be booked for sure only when the host makes a confirmation reply to a guest's reservation. Hosts' priorities are fully considered. Still, it does not require a considerable investment to start the business on the Airbnb platform as long as a to-be host has a living space to share. In other words, the threshold of being a host is not high or much capital-requiring. Also, When the guests' feedbacks are positive and encouraging, not only can hosts gain a sense of achievement of running the business but also the feedbacks will be a natural advertisement for the home, which also saves hosts' money in advertising. Further, a super host can get bonus or rewards from the Airbnb company.

3.3.3 *The cons of running the Airbnb business*

However, the pros and cons coincide in the Airbnb business for hosts. Malazizi et al. (2018) revealed the perceived risks for Airbnb hosts and investigated the effects of service, financial, safety and security, psychological and political risks on their satisfaction of running the business.

-Security and trust

As suggested by Botsman and Rogers (2011), collaborative consumption implies trusting strangers to a varying degree. For customers, using peer-to-peer accommodation means to believe that it is safe to stay in the home of a stranger, while for the hosts it implies that they have the confidence to have a stranger live together. ICT has transferred the mutual trust from offline to online, which is called "trust through technology." Some contrary news evidence that lack of confidence can be rooted from relations between guests and hosts, between users and technology and between users and the Airbnb company. For example, in China, the regulation of deposit and compensation have never been carried out to prevent the right of hosts (Tech.163, 2015).

-Competition

Another challenge is that with the consumers becoming demanding and Airbnb's room listing getting longer, the hosts have to invest more to make their home appealing to win the competition. Sometimes, the investment for improvement and maintaining has unexpectedly exceeded the budget and the payback period takes a long time, both of which leaves the host under pressure.

-Tax

In some areas, the tax leverage continues to burden the hosts with more stress of

running the business. For example, it is reported that the Swedish Tax Agency was currently increasing its scrutiny of people who have let out apartments on Airbnb. 'People who have earnings from Airbnb exceeding SEK 50,000 (~\$5,800) or have let out on Airbnb for a total of 16 weeks or more also face an obligation to pay the VAT of 12%' (Business Insider, 2016).

-Other challenges

Finally, hosts have struggled in handling other problems. Since guests come from all over the world, there may exist the unexpected conflict in respect of the cultural beliefs and privacy issues. When sharing the same space in some Airbnb homes, the hosts have to adapt to the customers' lifestyle and etiquette overtimes to ensure positive feedback and a higher rating given by the guests. As Pinkster and Boterman (2017) stated in their study on gentrification and urban tourism, from the local community's perspective, short-term rentals were perceived to change everyday interactions and renters broke the balance between privacy and proximity. At this moment, again, the hosts have to take responsibility for mediating the tense relationship between their renters and their everyday neighbors (Füller and Michel, 2014).

4 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach is a helpful complement to other available studies that address Airbnb as a question of consumption, hospitality production, policy and ideological struggle (Guttentag, 2015; Dredge and Gyimóthy, 2015; Dredge et al., 2016; Ert et al., 2016; Mody et al., 2017). A quantitative method could be useful for identifying general patterns or properties, but it is not convincing when it comes to understanding people's feelings and experiences. In previous studies on marketing competition and other business skills of Airbnb hosts, the quantitative approach was applied to make statistical analysis (Gunter, 2018; Martinez et al., 2017; Tussyadiah and Park, 2018). The business performance can be measured and presented by quantitative and visual statistics. Comparatively, Airbnb hosts have not received much attention on other personal issues, for example, the impacts on their life patterns, and these issues are not possible to be counted in formula. This paper focuses on perceptions and feelings that play as drivers and barriers of being an Airbnb host with the result varying from individual to individual. Therefore, a qualitative method was selected for this study.

4.1 Method

4.1.1 Interview study

Interacting and talking to people may take many forms, ranging from formal survey instruments to participant observation (Eyles and Smith, 1988). Moser and Kalton (1971) divided interviewing into formal and informal types. Without a prepared list of structured questions or an answer recorded in a standardized form which is both required in a formal interview (Eyles and Smith, 1988), an informal interview makes it possible to elicit the detailed and comprehensive respondents' experiences and understand ways of thinking and reasoning around the statement. In an informal interview, the interviewer is supposed to be an empathetic listener but a good

conversationalist while the interviewee takes the role of an expert (Eyles and Smith, 1988; Kitchin, 2000). 'Without allowing people to speak freely, we will never know what their real intentions are, and what the true meaning of their words might be'(Cottle, 1978).

An informal interview does not imply that the researcher approaches the task without any framework or assumption. Instead, a semi-structured open-ended interview template of targeted topics is prepared in advance to be covered by the free communication with all the respondents. A semi-structured interview supplies a possibility for interviewees to express themselves freely. For interviewers, it is possible to steer around the research purpose and to compare the answers from different respondents (Edwards and Holland, 2013). The template is formulated based on previous studies on feelings and experience, as well as previous informal conversations with people who run or know of Airbnb business. Interviews also provide the opportunity for the respondents to identify new issues that are of high importance for them beyond the template (Patterson et al., 2012).

Both drivers and barriers are included in the research questions in this paper, but for a better ambiance for communication between two strangers (the researcher and the interviewee) or more if any, the interview will start with some relaxing, positive and pleasant questions such as beautiful memory, benefits and harvest, and then gradually transit to some relatively unpleasant issues such as difficulties, loss and embarrassing experiences. The interviewees have priorities to quit at any time during interviews.

4.1.2 Study location

The sharing economy has grown fast across the world, but for Sweden, it has been less developed (Spencer et al., 2017). The public sector has pushed the sharing economy, and the policies in Sweden for hosting such ideas are ahead of the curve.

The choice of Umeå is considered relevant in this study, and the reason is two-unfolded. **Firstly**, Umeå is one of Sweden's fastest-growing cities. In 2016 the population in Umeå grew by 1.72% higher than 1.61% in Stockholm (Bergström, 2017). Previous research in Airbnb concentrates on big cities/areas such as Los Angeles, Berlin, Barcelona and London (respectively with the population of 10, 3.6, 1.7 and 0.4 million) rather than small cities. Growing small municipalities/cities such as Umeå take a more substantial proportion than big cities in Sweden as well as on the map of Airbnb. In such, a case study in a small city is significant. **Secondly**, also relevant to tourism, as the capital of Västerbotten County and the largest municipality of Northern Sweden, Umeå owns two universities, branches of international corporations, and the largest hospital of Northern Sweden. A considerable proportion of visitors coming to Umeå are students, business tourists, public sector workers and people for health care. However, both the hospitality infrastructure and the student accommodation in Umeå are limited and expensive to meet the demands of the visitor flow, which drives guests out of hotels into Airbnb homes. This gap between the supply and demand brings potentials to the Airbnb business in a student and business city like Umeå. Therefore, it makes sense to do this study in Umeå.



Figure 1: Study location by Google Map

On Airbnb’s list of Umeå region (Jan 1st, 2019), there were 113 homes, including 53 entire homes, 50 private rooms, and 10 shared rooms (Figure2). 6 entire homes had a label of "family-friendly" which meant the guest's families could own the whole home while the facilities for family-life were in good condition. 8 homes had a label of "business-friendly" which offered an efficient environment for office work such as wireless network and fast self-service check-in/out. The price ranged from SEK105 to SEK3002 per night according to the space attributes with an average price of SEK550 per night within the area. It was possible to check over 2,700 comments made by the previous guests. On average, the homes in Umeå had gained a rating of 4.8 stars (the total being 5 stars), which was a high score. See the detailed categorizing in Table 1 as below.

Table 1 shows three available home types including entire place, private room, and shared room. In an "entire place" a host rents the entire home to guests with little interaction other than at check in/out. In some cases, if the check in/out is totally automatic, the host has no face-to-face contact with their guests. "Private room" and "shared room" are similar types. "Private room" means that a host provides a separate room to guests while still sharing common spaces and actually hosting the guests. "Shared room" is between a private room and a hostel where different guests share the room together.

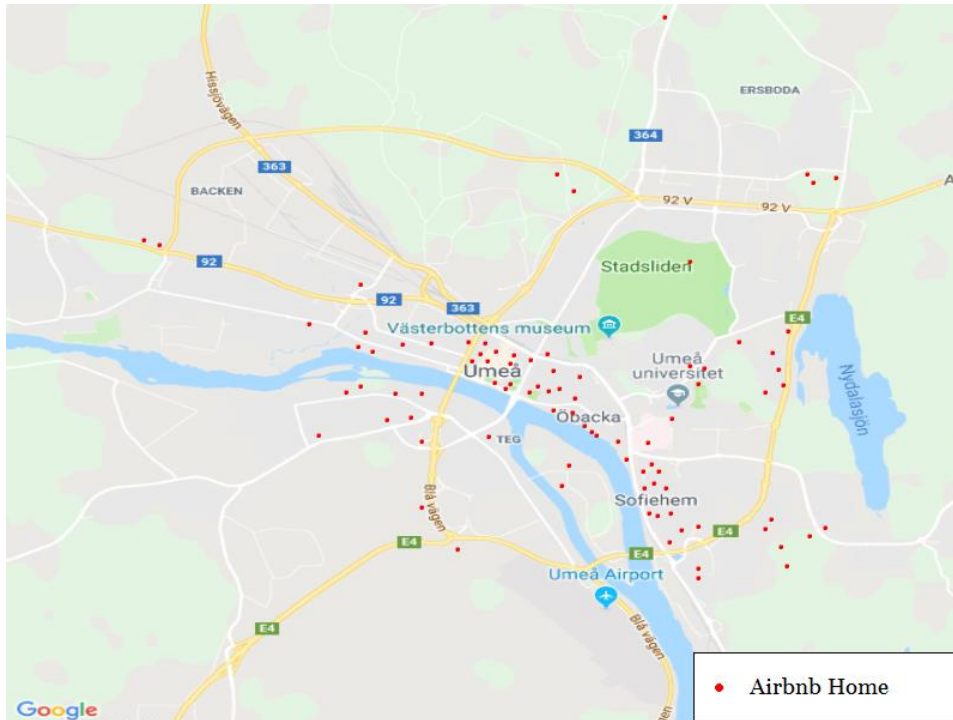


Figure 2: The distribution of Airbnb homes in Umeå marked on Google map

Table 1: Available categories of Airbnb homes in Umeå on the booking page

Home type	Entire place/ Private room/ Shared room
Location	Urban area/ Suburban area
'Super host' badge	Yes/ No
Property type	House/ Apartment/ Bed & Breakfast/ Cabin/ Cottage/ Guest suite Guesthouse/ Loft/ Townhouse
Price	Above the average price/ Below the average price
Trip type	Family trip/ Business trip

4.1.3 Data collection

Because of the time limitation and research conditions, around 5 interviews were conducted during the research time. The samples were initially accessed by sending invitation emails to hosts' email addresses which were available on the booking link of each Airbnb home. Although it was ideal for collecting diversified data from the hosts at a wide range of Airbnb homes in Umeå, because the interview was voluntary, it was difficult to control the samples to cover all the types. In order to get examples of as many types as possible, the sequence of delivery of the invitation emails was based on the Airbnb home's profile (e.g., home type and location).

However, the mailbox and the message box on the booking page were designed only for the booking process. When the first ten emails and messages were sent and left to the potential respondents, no one replied. Even the staff in the backstage of Airbnb warned by email not using the mailbox or message box to do anything else except booking a home. In such, the interviewer had to book different Airbnb homes and

invited the hosts for an interview while staying overnight there physically.

Table 2: Interviewee’s information

Respondent No.	Job role	Home type	Age	Duration
1	Freelancer	Entire house	20+	1 hour
2	Retired	Private room	70+	45 min
3	Nurse	Private room	40+	1 hour
4	Student	Private room	30+	1 hour
5	Journalist	Private room	60+	45 min

4.1.4 Data analysis

The data were analyzed thematically concerning the aim (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process of data analyzing included transcribing the recorded materials and sorting data into different codes line-by-line manually. The theme-driven deductive approaches were incorporated in the data analysis. A deductive coding approach was applied for the conceptual framework of the host perspective was provided in the literature review (see Figure 3).

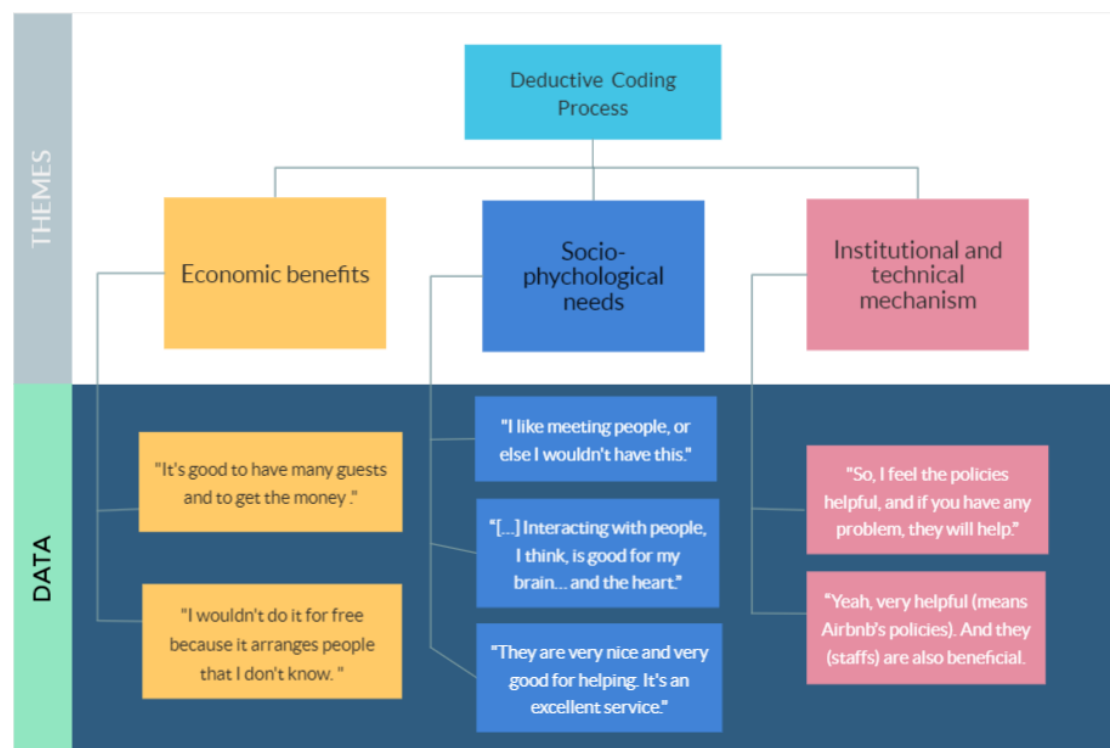


Figure 3: Deductive coding process

4.2 Limitations and solutions

All the research procedures will be conducted in English, which is not the mother tongue of either the researcher or the respondents excluding exceptions if any. Therefore, distortion of information and individual bias may exist in the communication and translation process because of language barriers in multilingual understanding. The language barrier may threat three types of quality of qualitative research: credibility of

the study (which requires the findings to reflect the true results from the survey), dependability (which requires that the findings are consistent and that it is possible for other researchers to repeat the same study) and confirmability (which requires that the findings should reflect the interests of the respondents, rather than the personal interests of the researcher) (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In order to ensure the quality of this study, in the invitation email, the language issue will be fully informed to the hosts. Each step of the interview will be recorded and stored for future reference. The data processing will be done with careful consideration and done transparently to readers as much as possible.

4.3 Ethical considerations

This paper will design and conduct the interviews with the Airbnb hosts in Umeå. Responses and especially some socio-geographical information will involve hosts' privacy, so the data were collected after fully informing the interviewees of the aim and method in using these data in the invitation emails and before the interview. The promise will be made to use the information of interviews in stringent confidentiality. Because the invitation of the interview was made during the real stay, the hosts may not reject due to guest pressure for the hosts wanted positive feedbacks from guests. The potential respondents were informed that the interview was voluntary, and they would not be impacted in any way if they didn't participate. In this way, they would be a respondent entirely out of their will rather than be forced.

5 MAIN FINDINGS

In this part, the main findings from the interviews are presented in consistence with the research questions. Thus, this result part is unfolded into three sections: 'Motivations for entering the Airbnb business', 'Benefits associated with being a host', and 'Challenges in the experience of being a host'.

In general, experiences of running the Airbnb business, either drivers or barriers, were found to be similar among the respondents, albeit with only a few varying.

5.1 Motivations for entering the Airbnb business

5.1.1 Having extra space to share

The prerequisite to be an Airbnb host was that someone had a spare room or place to share with others. In turn, having extra space in their homes or second homes near their living homes had the hosts consider renting these 'goods in stock.' The older hosts had extra space to share, usually, because their children had moved out at that time for studying, working or marriage, while the younger hosts just owned/rent the multiroom homes that were underused by themselves. The hosts all considered that leaving the space idle at home was a kind of waste.

“Well, I know that he lived in this house while he was studying at Umeå University. And then he wanted to do something else or made some development of something, and then he moved to Stockholm. But well, it's still his house. He didn't sell it.” (Respondent 1).

5.1.2 Taking advantages of Airbnb “a global agent”

When asked why they chose Airbnb as the agent to rent their homes instead of well-known local agents such as Bostaden, the respondents thought that compared to the traditional housing agent, Airbnb was much easier to join in as a beginner because the registration process was pretty user-friendly. Procedures only included filling necessary personal information, uploading relevant documents and photos of the home, and waiting to pass the manual check by the Airbnb company. When the registration was given, Airbnb business started on its way:

“The first two pictures I took of the room, they were not so good. I will see if someone will book it. It was consistently ‘Bing, Bing’ on the phone and I got a lot of bookings. And the first three or four were guys, and I said ‘Oh, I want some girls!’ and my boyfriend, I told him I was starting an Airbnb.”
(Respondent 3).

Also, the hosts preferred that Airbnb was able to sell their homes to a much bigger group of guests who may come from around the world than local housing agents. One of the reasons was that The Airbnb has an advanced digital platform both on the website and on APP for smart mobiles to reach global guests/hosts.

5.1.3 Making extra money

Four of the five hosts said that gaining extra income was the major to drive the interviewees' decisions to start Airbnb business at the beginning, but no host lived only on this business. Instead, all the respondents had other income from their routine jobs or pension. One of the co-hosts was a freelancer who said that he would not stop freelancing to be a full-time host. Two respondents felt satisfied with the income, which could fitly cover the rent of their homes while the other three thought few profits were better than nothing.

5.1.4 Encouraged by friends

However, although all the hosts trusted and used the Airbnb platform, it was not Airbnb itself but the hosts' friends that pushed them into the business. In their social network, all the hosts knew someone that was running the Airbnb business and advised the business. One host explained that even though she had heard Airbnb for quite a time, she still thought Airbnb was such a new thing and too far from her life, so she hesitated before her friend persuaded her to try the business. It was the brand of mouth by friends that encouraged her to make the decision because she got to know the real experience in running the business and the 'easy success' in making money from it.

"I moved here just a couple of months ago. I am still tidying up everything...Yeah, the room is in a mess. But it's good sometimes you have people here and sometimes not. It's nice, and I like it. My friends are just like ‘Do the Airbnb, do the Airbnb!’ I just felt like the room had not fixed. But now I regret I didn't do it at the beginning because it's good to meet a lot of people and the money. It's good, so I get half of the rent.” (Respondent 4).

In such, two hosts answered in the most straightforward words but a firm tone: "Why not?" Especially one host just tried to explore what Airbnb was when following some

suggestion from others:

"It was just...curiosity! Yeah, yeah. I was in a meeting with politicians. And he told me 'Well, I have a friend who is doing Airbnb.' I asked, 'When is it?' It was six years ago, perhaps. And my daughter was moving out. That was her room. I said, 'Why not? I will try, let me try.' And at first, you know, some few people were coming, but now it is booked full." (Respondent 5).

5.1.5 Other personal reasons

One host stated a different particular reason for being a host that she stayed in an Airbnb home for the first time when she was traveling in Thailand. She spent an unforgettable time there because the beach located the home and her host was pretty lovely. So that she was touched to consider to be a host to communicate with guests and offered an enjoyable experience of staying in her own home. One host just would like to meet people: *"I like meeting people, or else I wouldn't have this. I just love to meet people from different culture, Yeah. I have had no problem." (Respondent 5).*

One host started renting her home for the first time quite casually through social media, not Airbnb. She just saw a message searching for a place in a chatting group:

"[...] It's a girl from the South of Sweden who wrote in an apartment group on [social media] that she was studying and she needed someplace to stay in Umeå for some time. I wrote to her, and she liked my apartment when I had even not moved in. I just sent her pictures of the empty one. She thought it looked nice. At the beginning of September, she came in for the first time. [...] I found that she was nice, and it was nice to have her there. And... Mm, Airbnb, I can try that." (Respondent 3).

5.2 Benefits in the experience of being a host

5.2.1 Economic benefits

According to how the hosts decided to start the Airbnb business, extra-economic benefits are the first-place drivers to 3 of 5 hosts. As stated in the section 5.1.3 making money was a significant reason for the hosts to engage in the Airbnb business, and also it was the primary reason to keep the hosts running the business. One host who rent a big apartment said it was too expensive for her to live only on her salary, and she rent such a big apartment for her and her son, but her son decided to study in another city just after she had signed the contract with the landlord. Incomes from the Airbnb business saved her out of the dilemma:

"It's a popular room, and I did not think it would be so popular. It's good to have many guests, and to get the money for the rent. Because it's a big apartment in the city center, so it is quite expensive to live in." (Respondent 3).

Even though the host had other drivers (e.g., meeting people) to keep her in Airbnb business, the economic need was the top one:

"I think it's a bit the both (here means making money and meeting people). It's mixed. Of course, I like meeting people, and I like to socialize with them, but I wouldn't do it for free. If I didn't get a pay [...], I think it's fun to meet

people. I wouldn't do it for free because it arranges people that I don't know. My friends can stay here for free if I have a friend who needs a room. (laughed) But it's the people that I don't know, I need to clean, and I need to do the bedding washing.” (Respondent 3).

Another host just moved to Umeå to study after she had worked in Stockholm for several years, because she would like to gain the knowledge for her new career plan. She felt that although she had some savings to live on, income from Airbnb was a must to cover the rent of her apartment.

5.2.2 Socio-psychological needs

5.2.2.1 Motivate or diversify the social communication

Social and psychological drivers played an essential role in attracting and encouraging the hosts in the Airbnb business. One significant benefit was meeting and communicating with different people from around the world. Before starting Airbnb business, 3 of 5 respondents were introverts who expressed like that “[...] I’m interested in my thoughts, and I don’t usually spend time with others”; “I live a routine life within a small social circle consisted of only colleagues and close friends...it’s enough for me”. Every time the hosts got contacted with a guest from a request for order and then made a judge from the previous reviews in the guest’s profile. Then, they stayed together for a couple of days (at least one night) under the same roof (only for the hosts of shared/private rooms) and got to know a little more about each other. Guests from different countries to their home brought the hosts various ideas or stories and broadened the small social circle to a larger one. All the hosts said that they would like to offer guests check-in service in person with a welcome guide of the home as long as the time allowed. Over time, the hosts became extrovert and considered that it was natural to meet and chat with strangers. Their worries or fear of being together with strangers went away. One host said:

“You don't know who you will meet as a guest. For me, when I started it in September here, my father told me that you couldn't do that, you don't know the people. I think it's not the random people who go to Airbnb, and it will be safe. All my guests are grown-up, studying. They are not here in Umeå for parties. They are studying so I feel safe with it.” (Respondent 3).

Most hosts said that if they didn’t run Airbnb homes, they would not have had any chance to meet so many people, especially to live together with them for at least one night. Since most hosts lived a routine life, talking with not every but a few, guests opened hosts’ eyes and brought something fresh to their mind:

“At the beginning, I thought of this and this...Before I didn't have people other than my family in this house. Now I have had 75 persons who have lived here in all. Everyone is so nice. It's a good experience.” (Respondent 2).

The hosts all stated that guests were so friendly and easy-going no matter where they came from and what background they had. Guests’ good gesture and behavior erased the hosts’ hesitation of doing the business and strengthened the hosts’ confidence in doing the business. Even more, some hosts had a deeper interaction with the guests because of sickness or loneliness. They had never expected the guests who came would

be so supportive or warm, which gave the hosts spiritual encourages:

"I like Airbnb. They are excellent. In September and October, I was sick, and I did a big operation. I could not lock the door, and they (guests) helped me a lot, people who booked the nights here. They are very nice and very good for helping. It's an excellent service. At first, I thought of Airbnb that they wanted to make money. They make money since they are so big in the whole world. But it's not only money. It also wants the best of people who own rooms. I trust them." (Respondent 2).

"Everything went well, and she studied. She is young, 24. She is like my sons, between their ages. When she came here, she said, 'Oh, it's my second home. You are my second mother!' So, we like each other. It works well between us. I feel safe with her, so that's why I thought Airbnb was good. I have good guests. Most guests are from the South of Sweden." (Respondent 3).

"[...] I have never thought about that way, but I learned a lot from other people from other countries, you know. Diverse cultures...yeah, that's interesting. I'm always curious about new things." (Respondent 5).

Also, the hosts reflected that students and people related to school took up an original proportion of their guests who came to Umeå for a test, a meeting, or a research project. Guests of this kind went to school during the daytime and came back late at night. Even though some guests spent a long time staying in the home, they kept studying in their private rooms. In this way, the hosts said their life was not bothered at all, and they went along with each other quite well.

5.2.2.2 Benefit the mental health

For some specific host such as someone who was retired and was living alone, starting the Airbnb business was like opening another window to the current life. The host thought Airbnb was worthy of a try for all the old because meeting guests had helped open her mind after her husband passed away, and live a real life:

"Before my husband was sick for ten years almost. The last four years before he died, everything was around him and his illness. I had not contacted so many people. After Airbnb, I always talk! The friend who came yesterday and we went shopping together, and she said 'Oh, you talk the whole time with every person.' I think it's because of Airbnb I trust people more today." (Respondent 2).

5.2.2.3 Inspire a career choice

Furthermore, one host stated that Airbnb business had not changed him because he didn't think he had engaged in too much as a co-host. But out of his expectation through helping his friend in running Airbnb business, he gradually found his interest in hotel career:

"Not so deeply, but actually I am kind of starting to think about an idea may be to become a hotel manager at some point. I need some education probably for this, but maybe I need to go to some hotels and start working there. [...] I

think it's super interesting, to meet people, to greet them, to help them, and to accommodate them. It's very interesting. Here we have 4 rooms but, in a hotel, there will be all... hundreds. That might be a good goal for my life. I am super a young man, and I can educate myself.” (Respondent 1).

5.2.3 Institutional and technical mechanism

5.2.3.1 Flexibility in the business model

The other important factor regarding social and psychological driver was the freedom that Airbnb business could ensure to the hosts. The liberty was due to the policy that Airbnb company permitted hosts to block their homes freely just as they wanted. The freedom was explained and preferred by the hosts in different situations. First, the host may have a plan for holidays or be away from home for several days, and the host was able to block the home from the Airbnb platform until he/she was back:

“I had many people in January and February. Now it's March. I will be free for the whole month, and I will go to my son's in Malmo, and it's then closed here.” (Respondent 2).

Second, Airbnb company did not restrict the ownership of the homes as long as the host could ensure the usufruct. When the host signed a temporary contract of renting an apartment or flat, he/she could jump into and quit from Airbnb business immediately just according to the valid period of the contract.

Third, as a career, the Airbnb business had a lot of flexibility. A host could run the business as a full-time or part-time job. A host could decide to accommodate how many guests per month or sell how many nights per week. The host adjusted the degree of engagement on his/her own:

“For me, it's good like this. I have perhaps about 12 nights every month, and I don't like to have more. Sometimes I go to block the nights I don't need. I cannot have guests every day. It is too much for me. It will be kind of a burden, Yes.” (Respondent 2).

Furthermore, one host suggested that running Airbnb business pushed her to learn using the digital platform from registering at the beginning to processing orders and writing reviews of her guests. This activity was a way to exercise her brain because otherwise, she only did very simple physical housework. She told that “[...] *Interacting with people, I think, is good for my brain... and the heart.*”

5.2.3.2 Support from technique and human service

The advanced and fully considerate technology also worked as a driver for the hosts. Accommodating different strangers was a risky try that hesitated the hosts. By developing a mechanism to build mutual trust Airbnb company technically helped judge a stranger according to reviews which kept the hosts going on the business:

“When I leave my comments, you can't see my comments before you write your own. I write my comments about your stay. You can't see it until you write your comments. And you have to post your comments about me before you can see what I have written. I think you can also report the guest to Airbnb that I have a problem with this guest.” (Respondent 4).

Another technical driver was that the hosts felt free to write any requirement online, for example, no smoking, no pets, no party, no infants, or no alcohol. In this way, the hosts could avoid the troubles or conflicts with guests during staying together.

The human service of Airbnb company complemented the techniques by dealing with emergent cases. Staff responded fast and processed the case effectively when hosts encountered some problems. The human service offered the hosts great support and made their experience fluent in being a host. One host gave an example of how the 24/7 staff service had help her out of trouble. When one guest wanted to shorten his stay for two nights after two-night stays, the staff handled the issue fast by returning the prepaid money to the guest quickly and balancing the host's money with her next order. The host was worried about her oral English at the first, but the staff understood her immediately and had her released from any pressure. Also, when another host called the staff to cancel an order due to the airplane's delay, the order was fixed within five minutes.

5.3 Challenges in the experience of being a host

5.3.1 Security and trust

When the hosts were asked what kind of barriers they had met, they all had encountered different obstacles. These barriers were tangible or intangible and occurred in either starting or running Airbnb business. When considering beginning the Airbnb business, the utmost worry was the security. To be specific, the hosts felt worried about what kind of guests would come and how to stay with a stranger together and share almost everything:

"Since Airbnb is an agency, I think I feel it's safe to rent out. But when I had my first guest of Airbnb, I felt nervous because I didn't know who he/she was. Everything is unclear. But I got the first girl from (social media). The first time she came, I was nervous. 'Will we like each other?'" (Respondent 3).

If a host ran a home type of 'private room' it meant that the host only rent out one or more bedrooms and the host and guests would share the other space of the home. One host said since she had a boyfriend Airbnb business had a little impact on their intimate space:

"The thing, of course, my boyfriend is not here in my apartment very often because I have guests very often and he feels a little bit uncomfortable. If we are sitting on the sofa, I have a guest in the room. That's... but I can go since we live so close. If we want to see each other, I can go to him even when I have a guest. He likes people, too, to meet new people. [...] But not in this way...I think it's a little strange to him. Most of the guests are Swedish, and they speak Swedish. If we sit here on the sofa and have a talk, the guest listens. It's ... So, it's better to go to him." (Respondent 3).

One host raised a big dog, and she said that some guests were an allergy to furs, some guests were not used to being together with pets, and some guests just felt scared to dogs. She could not live without her dog but raising a dog had definitely blocked some guests outside and therefore reduced the sales of her home.

"Yeah, maybe they think if you have dogs, it's not clean. I don't know. I guess

someone feels sensitive to the smell of dogs. Some people get angry and scared with (dog's name). I said, sorry..." (Respondent 4).

The hosts just had the right to write down their requirements in the profile of the home such like no smoking, no drinking or no infants, but still, some guests broke the rules somehow even though they said yes when making the order:

"No, I have written it in my rules. I have no smokers. I had a woman, and she was a smoker. But she went down and smoked outside. And it was OK. You can still smell she has smoked out but it doesn't speak in the warns. I don't like it." (Respondent 3).

"...There is one guy. He probably had some drugs. And my son, he was in the city and I called him 'Hello, can you please come to live with me tonight because he is a little...?' ...Yes, he was a guest. But that's the only one. [...] Yeah, I went to bed, locked the door with my son around. But he was a little bit, you know, he was just...going around." (Respondent 5)

5.3.2 Pressure from the tax policy

Although similar barriers can be found among respondents, some respondents mentioned some others. As Swedish governments decided to impose levies on Airbnb hosts, all the respondents already got the information from different channels. Since all the hosts had not reached the threshold, they were not sure about to what extent the tax would impact their income and whether or not the lower income would drive them out of Airbnb business.

5.3.3 Extra physical work

When the hosts felt much safer in doing Airbnb business over time, there were other barriers emerging. One host complained that *"I hate cleaning but I must do it so just do it."* Especially when she got sick, she described the usual cleaning work as a 'mountain' to her.

6 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the results presented in the last chapter will be analyzed and discussed based on the literature review to answer the research questions. In the section of research questions, three questions were raised. In such, this chapter is structured into four sections: motivations, benefits, challenges, and limitations and recommendations.

6.1 Motivations

The results partly echoed the motivations of couchsurfer hosts on non-monetary factors including social communication with guests and cross-cultural learning. The convenience of entering the Airbnb business encouraged most respondents to take a consideration of renting the space in stock to make extra money which was different from the hosts of traditional family hotels. Because family hotel hosts need to run their hotels in a more formal and commercial way for while Airbnb hosts just shared rooms for a little income as they want. The word-of-mouth effect due to Airbnb's fast development and influential power was a remarkable motive to fuel the hosts'

confidence and interest in doing the business. All the respondents were pushed into the business somewhat by their friends who were the Airbnb hosts at the moment. Another significant motive was also located in the fact that Airbnb was a global agency by reaching users all over the world which strengthened the hosts' expectation of the business.

6.2 Benefits

6.2.1 Economic benefits

Results evidenced that Airbnb had a house as the primary sharing asset and human relationships as the secondary (Sperling, 2015). For most hosts, making extra money was the primary driver either to start Airbnb business or to continue being a host. Some hosts were actually under stress caused by high rents of their homes. In fact, by doing Airbnb business, the income helped cover at least half of hosts' rent. Even for one host, the occupancy rate was high in some months, and then the pay was enough to cover the whole rent.

Some older hosts in this study who had a good saving or pension for a living still thought it was exciting to have extra income by sharing their homes and doing some easy jobs at home. This finding echoes the statement by Sperling (2015) that the Airbnb platform could make a positive difference in helping families overcome income stagnation.

Results showed that all the hosts happened to own extra space to share for various reasons before they started Airbnb business. No respondent in this study bought or rent a house/flat/apartment on purpose of doing Airbnb business.

6.2.2 Socio-psychological needs

Word of mouth was a primary dynamic for the host to start the business. Although the Airbnb company launched advertisement in mainstream social media to attract more hosts and guests as Airbnb users, all the respondents considered being a host because of their friends' suggestions. Some of these friends were hosts themselves, and some just reported the stories of other hosts who they knew. It seemed that experience told by friends or acquaintances was reliable and appealing to the potential hosts. Even though one host had stayed in an Airbnb home before and had a wonderful time there, she still decided due to her friend's suggestion. Furthermore, when being a host, the respondents had extra stories to share with their friends

The hosts had not expected as much as social communication with guests before they tried the business. Even most hosts expressed they felt nervous and a little fearful for the first guest to their homes. But after that, every host became relaxed in meeting different guests to his/her home. The respondents enjoyed communicating with people who were "intimate strangers" in their couches. Guests from all around the world brought the hosts various culture over free conversations, which increased pleasures and a feeling of freshness to the respondents' routine life. In one case, the guests helped with some housework when the host was not so mobile after an operation. Little simple help from strangers touched the host a lot and encouraged her to engage in the business. For the old respondent, doing Airbnb business made a positive effect on her physical

and mental health. Communicating with guests pushed her out of the sadness of losing his husband and processing the order on the Airbnb platform exercised her brain because she needed to work on her laptop and speak English as a foreign language.

6.2.3 Institutional and technical drivers

If the two drivers analyzed above were from the hosts themselves, institutional and technical drivers were from the Airbnb business system and its regulations. It was easy to start for a beginner because someone was just required to take pictures and set up a personal profile and a profile of his/her home. Up to the date of this study, Airbnb did not ask for the type of ownership of a shared home. Also, hosts could decide to share their home for many kinds, such as an entire house/villa/flat, a shared room, or a private room. Compared to traditional housing business, Airbnb supplied more options for hosts to start. This finding supported that sharing economy entered the market without consultation with massive informal economic resources compared to most economic sectors, where new products were required to be legally cleared (Darbi et al., 2018).

Airbnb also supplied favorable flexibility as a small business. When the hosts had started the business, it was free to pause or quit at any time once they had a new schedule of a business trip or a plan for a coming holiday. The hosts only needed to block their homes on Airbnb platform and put them back online when they came back. Sometimes when the hosts received a new career offer and settled down in another place, they could restart Airbnb business in the new home as they wanted. The flexibility also made Airbnb possible as a transition business when someone did not have other things to do for a period (Sperling, 2015).

All the hosts in this study felt satisfied with technical design and human services offered by Airbnb company. One outstanding mechanical design was the comment and review system. Hosts could review the comments on a guest from other hosts, which helped know more real information of the guest. It was also possible for hosts to set their mode to help decide whether to say yes to an order. For example, some hosts set a further question such as "Why do you come to Umeå?" In this way, the user-oriented technical design just eliminated hosts' worry of security and enhanced hosts' sense of safety.

Human/staff services worked efficiently when the hosts encountered some problems, as shown in section 6.3.1.4. The hosts gave positive comments on the human services for its timeliness, convenience, effectiveness, and friendliness. Human services were considered as a supplemental approach for solving emergent problems. Therefore, technical designs for all and human services for individual needs enabled the hosts to deal with any issues.

6.3 Challenges

The barriers that the respondents had to overcome in order for doing Airbnb business were mainly conflicts between the business and daily life, the burden of extra physical work and potential financial stress.

Whether it was problematic to have a guest to stay together depended on individuals, both hosts and guests. To cushion the conflicts between the business and private life,

the hosts compromised by changing original life patterns (e.g., meet in her boyfriend' home or adjust private time schedule according to check-in/out) and by tacitly approving guests to do certain things (e.g., smoking and drinking). Even the hosts had claimed their requirements in the profile of their homes, but some guests did not keep the promise. In this way, the results of this study reflected a similar problem related to mutual trust which was addressed in many studies (Dredge and Gyimóthy, 2015; Botsman and Rogers, 2011; Dogru and Pekin, 2017).

The burden of physical work was not an exact burden for each host. Only when a host was old, sick, or full-time employed, preparation work was troublesome. The hosts expressed that they preferred renting their rooms for many nights to one guest rather than one night to different guests. Because there was no need to change beddings and empty the trash for the same guest so frequently, but if for a new guest' coming, the host had to repeat the preparation work every day. This preference implied the hosts were avoiding doing extra work as much as possible.

All the hosts did not say a positive or negative word of the tax policy that was collecting tax from Airbnb hosts. The main reason was all the respondents in this study had not reached the yearly threshold of the tax. The hosts implied they would see how the tax would affect their economic benefits in the future and then made a decision to continue or quit the sharing business. In such, at least in this study, the tax was playing as a potential barrier in the future.

Although different hosts had encountered various barriers and solved problems in their ways, for each host, the challenges were closely related and intertwined to each other. That meant that a host might meet not only one obstacle but two or more and the difficulty could occur in changing patterns from one guest to another.

The hosts felt not much but a little bit of competition because they reflected the willingness to gain the title badge of 'super host,' which was the most important attribute determining the price. If a host rejects several orders or receives adverse reports from a guest, the host will fail to become a 'super host' shortly. Sales in the sharing economy were closely related to business ratings (Baka, 2016; Gössling and Hall, 2018). And to become a super host, the host was likely to compromise in some cases. They didn't reject order requests as they wanted and they didn't show a negative attitude even though some guests had broken the rules. Guest assessment played as a source of potential stress which pushes the hosts to perform well (Prayag et al., 2018).

Sharing was traditionally intrinsic to the private or familial sector. The results implied that the hosts had adapted themselves to shift share from the private sector to the public sector that was to share with strangers. They suggested to system designers the ways to build successful sharing economy services; users participate in a sharing economy to fulfill convenience and needs, while service providers have altruistic and idealistic motivations.

6.4 Limitations and Recommendations

6.4.1 Limitations

In this case study, only five hosts were sampled which constitutes a small sample size. On one hand, this small sample size makes sense to do an exploratory study which seeks

to identify different motivations and experiences of the hosts in Umeå. The interviews with these respondents were used to develop a deep understanding of the complicated motivational and experiential factors that vary from one respondent to another, instead of portraying an overview of Airbnb host perspectives. On the other hand, the sampled hosts shared common features, a significant one of which is that the respondents mostly (4/5) rented private rooms to their guests instead of renting out the entire homes. So that, the outcome of this study should be limited to interpret the 'private room' hosts, and a shared living experience.

6.4.2 Recommendations

Since Airbnb is a company as well as a business model of sharing economy, the recommendation for future work is for both further research and the Airbnb company.

For academic researchers, the motivational and experiential factors of being an Airbnb host in this case reflected specific natures in Airbnb and the sharing accommodation. The results may be referred to and only be compared to other cities with similar cultural and geographical characteristics and size to Umeå. According to official statistics of Airbnb, the bigger was a place and the more popular was the place as a tourism destination, the more Airbnb hosts and guests there would be. When economic and cultural conditions change, drivers and barriers may increase or decrease and differentiate from place to place. Further, many issues of the sharing economy remain and emerge to be studied because the sharing economy as a contemporary economic system evolves over time.

For the Airbnb company, the competence in sharing economy is increasing when similar companies (e.g., Couchsurfing or Xiaozhu.com) have entered the same market to take a share. Research on drivers and barriers of their users, hosts, and guests, is one key to the strategy for sustainable development. Although the Airbnb company invested in analyzing statistics extracted from Airbnb's digital platform, the company didn't pay enough attention to middle and small cities or areas such as Umeå. In comparison to big cities such as London and Shanghai, the alternative activities for tourists in Umeå on the Airbnb platform are limited both in number and diversity. Since Umeå is a fast-developing city engaged in tourism, Airbnb had dynamics to grow bigger either for the tourism industry or for the local outstripping supply of accommodation. The Airbnb company and tourism policy makers are expected to cooperate and develop more participative projects based on local resources, which may attract more guests to live in Airbnb homes and encourage more interaction between hosts and guests. Also, the hosts can be encouraged to supply business-friendly homes to the underserved market of business visitors.

From the results, it is not sufficient to attract guests only on the hosts' efforts. In this study, the Airbnb platform was the only access to the guests and took market share for the hosts. Based on the hosts' experiences, guests and hosts were likely only to give positive comments which didn't reflect all the facts. If the Airbnb company could encourage users to post both positive and negative experiences as Booking did (Gössling et al., 2018), the comments will be more trustworthy and helpful.

7 CONCLUSIONS

This study portrayed a picture of the status of Airbnb hosts by identifying and understanding the drivers and barriers of being an Airbnb host in Umeå. At the macro level Airbnb, an example of sharing economy, has faced severe problems in terms of public policies related to legal liability, insurance, and taxation, but at the micro-level, motivational and experiential factors of the hosts varied. For example, no one mentioned about legal liability or guarantee, and neither would the hosts consider much about the taxation until they reached the threshold.

To summarize from the different responses, the benefits outweighed the challenges in each host's experience. An encouraging finding reflects that participants could gain economic benefits (extra income), mental health (brain exercise for old hosts), and well-being (cross-cultural social learning) in the sharing economy. The motivations were mixed for each host, both meeting friendly guests and making extra money. To isolate one driver from others may, therefore, seem arbitrary. In comparison to the benefits, challenges varied more from one host to another. It is not clear whether the host will give up the business one day if the local policies change, for example, the tax is too high as a burden.

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APPENDIX

Interview Guideline

1 Motivations

The alternative questions can be:

- How did you decide to be an Airbnb host?
- How did you know Airbnb?
- What happened at that time?
- What did you expect from doing the Airbnb business?

Transition questions to open the next section

- In general, how do you feel this business as a host?
- Is there anything interesting in this experience?
- Is there any guest who impressed you most?

2 Benefits

The alternative questions can be:

- What did you enjoy/like in running the Airbnb business?
- What are the advantages of being a host?
- What are the benefits of being a host?

3 Challenges

The alternative questions can be:

- Have you met anything unhappy when you running the business?
(What is that?)
- Is there any challenge you met as a host?
- Did you feel any kind of pressure as a host?